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Authentic and Unapologetic:
Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by
California Community College Senior-Level Leaders of Color
A Dissertation by
Renee Craig-Marius

University of Massachusetts Global
A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts
Irvine, California
School of Education


Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
January 2023

Committee in charge:
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January 2023

Authentic and Unapologetic Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by
California Community College Senior-Level Leaders of Color

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ABSTRACT

Authentic and Unapologetic: Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by

California Community College Senior-Level Leaders of Color

by Renee Craig-Marius

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe how California Community College senior-level leaders of color are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework.

Methodology: This qualitative ethnographic study identified and described the culturally responsive leadership practices utilized by 15 senior-level leaders of color within California Community Colleges and explored how their lived experiences and identities influence their ability to lead their institutions using the four dimensions of Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework: political context, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and professional duty. Participants were purposefully selected based on specific criteria. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Findings: Data analysis led to 10 major findings. These findings revealed that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color: (a) engender self-authenticity amidst disparate expectations, (b) leverage situations to advance equity, (c) embed equity within college structures, (d) build community and collaboration, (e) engage diverse voices in critical conversations, (f) ensure the learning environment meets student needs, (g) draw upon their identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment,

(h) practice reflexive leadership, (i) manifest self-actualization in their professional life, and (j) challenge structural injustices.

Conclusions: Supported by and based on the research findings of this study and connected to the literature, 11 conclusions were drawn that offered deeper insight into the culturally responsive leadership strategies used by senior-level leaders of color. These conclusions have significant implications for district governing boards, college presidents, faculty senates, and participatory governance groups to center equity in policy and decision-making, embed anti-racist practices in curriculum and pedagogy, and recognize the cultural wealth and unique competencies that leaders of color bring to the institution.

Recommendations: Further research is needed to explore the unique experiences of women and/or first-year senior-level leaders of color, examine higher education leadership programs that include aspects of lived experience and identity in leadership practice and its impact on cultural responsiveness, and investigate the extent to which a leader's culturally responsive leadership approach improves the learning environment for students of color.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Society has come to a place of racial reckoning. As history has taught us, racial conflict and tension are not a new phenomenon, but our nation's response must be new and drastically different from the past. The aftermath of events that occurred in the United States in 2020 revealed the racial violence that African Americans continue to experience, what can occur when civil and political unrest is left to simmer, and the impact that protests for racial equity can have in raising the urgency to achieve justice for Black lives and minds. For those in leadership positions, the words of the late John Lewis (as cited in Bote, 2020) should ring loud as senior-level leaders in higher education contemplate how to lead their institutions moving forward:

When you see something that is not right, not just, not fair, you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, "What did you do? What did you say?" If there was any time more important, then time is now to not "be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble." (p. 3)

Higher education leaders continue to grapple with ways to address the challenges their institutions face regarding access and completion gaps between underserved students, many of whom are disproportionately students of color, and White students. Pervasive and systemic educational disparities and achievement gaps for students of color also tint the California Community College (CCC) landscape, a rapidly evolving ecosystem impacted by changes in student demographics, legislative regulations, and fiscal challenges. In a research brief published by the Center for Community College Leadership and Research at UC Davis that focused on "Reflections from California

Community College Leaders on Racism, Anti-Blackness and Implicit Bias,” one CCC President summarized the critical questions facing leaders who serve in these educational settings:

Are we willing to revamp the curriculum? Are we willing to diversify our adjunct pools and hire colleagues from those pools? Will we restructure the institution to meet the diverse needs of our communities, or will we continue to require them to assimilate to what we think is best based on a system that was not designed for the new demographic? (Bush, Cooper, Kurlaender, & Rodriguez, 2020, p. 6)

Systemic institutional change will require leaders who hold positions of power to lead in a manner that is attentive and responsive to the needs of the communities and students they serve. These leaders must leverage their positions to interrupt the status quo and lead for equity to improve outcomes for historically racially marginalized student populations. Indeed, a growing area of discussion in the CCC system recognizes that the ethnic and racial backgrounds of college personnel, particularly administrators, do not represent the student populations and communities they aim to serve. The lack of demographic representation among college staff creates several challenges. This representational disconnect can signal to stakeholders a lack of institutional commitment to diversity and inclusivity, influencing the extent to which senior level leaders manifest an understanding of issues of equity and possess the cultural awareness and competency to address stubborn achievement gaps effectively. More importantly, it would stand to reason that the extent to which decisions related to policy, practice, and resource prioritization either foster or inhibit successful outcomes for marginalized student groups is also related to who is in charge. Representation at the senior level matters because

those leaders make decisions that fundamentally change institutional structures for years to come.

Unlike their predecessors, senior-level leaders in community colleges today face myriad challenges. Although these difficulties can be multifaceted and complex, perhaps the biggest challenge lies in the intersection of leadership and diversity. Senior-level leaders who respond to the needs of racially and culturally diverse student populations face matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on a daily basis. Often, these leaders must find ways to navigate politically charged institutional environments that may be polarized and controversial. Although many senior-level leaders have had some leadership training and have experience in a previous role, some may lack the necessary knowledge and ability to be culturally competent and responsive. For others, uncertainty, or a sense of discomfort with navigating race-related conversations may contribute to their challenges. However, for senior leaders of color, it may not be so much a lack of competency, but the challenge of navigating an institutional culture that expects assimilation and dismisses their identity and lived experience while simultaneously striving to lead in a way that affirms the diversity of perspectives and identities of others within their institutions.

Placed in a dilemma between their professional and personal status, it is not unreasonable that senior leaders of color may ask themselves: How do I attend and respond to the needs of racially minoritized students and navigate the political and historical institutional context that is designed to maintain the status quo and resist social change? How can I foster a campus environment dedicated to high quality teaching and learning that recognizes and honors the cultural experiences of all students, so they feel

welcomed, affirmed, and supported? How do I build teams that have the capacity to embrace the diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities of all their members? And as a leader of color, how do my lived experiences, cultural, and other identities shape and influence my responsiveness to culturally sensitive issues as I lead my institution?

Inevitably, leaders are left with a resolve to lead differently, but with uncertainty about how to do so within the context of their institutions. What remains for leaders of color is finding ways to strike a balance among the political, professional, and personal factors that influence their leadership practices and lead for social justice and equity for students from diverse backgrounds.

Background

Higher education is an essential source of educational attainment to fill the needed workforce for the 21st century. As the racial, ethnic, and cultural composition of the United States population increased substantially over the last 20 years, so too have students enrolled in higher education hoping to achieve greater social and economic mobility. And yet, racially minoritized people of color have historically been excluded from accessing higher education. This pattern of exclusion has been foundational to the educational disparities that continue to exist for students of color compared to White students. Although inequities remain in all higher education levels, achievement, and completion gaps for students of color enrolled in community colleges are particularly dismal (Lumina Foundation, 2019). These ongoing challenges continue to stymie community college leaders as they try different approaches, without significant success, to address systemic racial inequities within their institutions.

Community College Mission

Based on their mission and purpose, community colleges create the necessary access to educational opportunities and attainment for students from diverse backgrounds. Community colleges, originally called junior colleges, did not begin to take root until the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land Grant Act, which established inclusion of a vast majority of people into higher education, followed by the first junior college founded in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois (Drury, 2003). For years, the role of community colleges has evolved in response to the growing workforce demands in agriculture, business industry, and education to address the needs of local communities. Almost anyone who wishes to pursue an education can do so at the community college due to its open access, financial accessibility, wide-ranging academic programs, and job skills training. Consequently, community colleges tend to serve a disproportionate number of students with more significant social, economic, and educational obstacles. Unfortunately, completion rates for the most vulnerable students are dismal. In fact, most students who enter the community college do not finish with a certificate or degree, and the small percentage of those who do take up to 8 years to complete (Bailey & Morest, 2006).

Current Landscape of Community Colleges

Myriad changes in the political, demographic, fiscal, and technological landscape of community colleges over the last several years have made it challenging for leaders to advance an equity agenda and contribute to the persistent and systemic inequities in achievement and completion rates for students of color. Although various factors drive inequities in access and opportunity for students of color who attend community colleges

across the United States, the view from California is even bleaker. As the largest system of post-secondary educational institutions in the United States, CCCs need leaders at senior and executive levels who know how to cultivate institutional conditions to mitigate these achievement disparities.

California Community Colleges

The CCC system serves over 2 million students from diverse backgrounds and plays a large role in facilitating social mobility and educational opportunity for underrepresented students. The CCC provides students with educational opportunities to achieve their career and employment goals through certificates, degrees, or transfer to baccalaureate institutions. Despite this access to higher education, only 48% of underrepresented minority students who enter a community college complete a degree, certificate, or transfer within 6 years (California Community College Chancellors Office [CCCCO], 2020). Hence, educators at the community college level have increasingly turned their focus to include not only access but also the improvement of student outcomes.

Leadership Call to Action

If closing achievement gaps is a priority of the CCC system, then questions must be raised about who is educating and leading in these institutions. Issues of equity and access raise awareness for increased inclusivity on campuses and challenge leaders to focus more closely on addressing systemic inequities historically present within the institutional structure. Hence, to effectively meet the needs of their institutions, college leaders must be culturally responsive and take a multidimensional approach to addressing DEI (Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, 2017). Accordingly, the California

Community College Chancellors Office (CCCCO, 2020) established the Vision for Success Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce to set goals to improve outcomes for students of color. This call to action, grounded in a “clear equity imperative” (p.14), compelled the CCCs to make substantial institutional shifts to increase degree completion and transfer rates, increase employment attainment, and close equity gaps for students on a regional scale.

Leadership Representation and Influence on Institutional Climate

The path to addressing DEI in the CCC system must also include an examination of and expectation for increased inclusivity on campuses. Over 50% of CCC students are from racial minority groups. However, the percentages of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds of faculty, staff, and administrators employed in the CCCs are not representative of the communities and students they serve. Numerous pieces of research and literature (Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018; CCCCCO, 2020; Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Santamaria, 2016) confirm that there is a representation divide between leaders and educators of color and students in higher education institutions. Equally important is how significant faculty diversity is to the retention and success of students of color and their sense of belonging to the institution (Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018). Accordingly, colleges have an opportunity to take a more culturally responsive approach to address racial equity issues and demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion by diversifying their administrative ranks.

Intersection of Race and Culture in Leadership Practice

The student demographics in higher education have become more culturally diverse, making it necessary for educational leaders to lead transformational change

through a social justice and equity lens. But what does it mean for a senior-level leader to have the capacity to engage in a reflective and culturally responsive praxis as they make decisions about policy and practice and lead institutional change? Some literature has emphasized that identity and lived experience influence how individuals lead, make decisions, and negotiate the educational environment. Moreover, ample research elaborates on the notion that the personal experiences and culturally significant stories, particularly those of leaders of color, enrich and add depth to educational leadership practice (C. A. M. Banks & Banks, 2001; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Jean-Marie, 2006; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

Cultural Responsiveness

Although research on the most effective ways to serve and educate culturally diverse student populations have focused primarily on culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching, and K12 classroom environments (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 1994, 2010), the use of cultural responsiveness as a lens to inform leadership practices in higher education has begun to emerge only now (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Santamaria, & Santamaria, 2012). Theoretical foundations that have shaped the emerging examination of culturally responsive education leadership, particularly for leaders of color, include critical race theory (CRT), culturally responsive leadership, and applied critical leadership (ACL) all of which provide context and support the saliency of race and culture in leadership practice.

Conceptual Framework

Given the complexity of the CCC environment where senior leaders are situated, culturally responsive leadership strategies need to be viewed in context of the mitigating

factors that influence those strategies. The greatest hope for disrupting systemic barriers to the success of diverse students is the activation and implementation of culturally relevant and anti-racist policy and practice. The potential consequence of a lack of culturally responsive leadership practices that are centered on equity and social justice is the continued lack of achievement and attainment of educational equity for future generations of diverse community college students. Hence, the four dimensions described in Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's (2011) culturally relevant leadership model provides an opportunity to explore the leadership practices of senior-level leaders of color as they lead equity efforts and interrupt systems of oppression and racism in their institutions.

Statement of the Research Problem

Culturally responsive higher education leadership appears to be an area of interest, based on four recent research trends. Although there seems to be no specific research to date that points directly to senior-level CCC leaders of color leading in a culturally responsive fashion, the nexus of four critical factors—(a) the growing importance of cultural responsiveness in school environments; (b) the need for more diverse educational leaders in representation and voice; (c) the limited research on cultural responsiveness in higher education; and (d) the CCC call to executive leadership to move swiftly to address DEI in their institutions—points to the unique need for this study.

First, the importance of cultural responsiveness in education is primarily centered around ways to promote inclusive educational environments and the pedagogical practices that support the learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds in K12

school settings (Gay, 1994, 2010, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, research and literature are now emerging that extend the concepts of cultural responsiveness to educational leadership (Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Second, the significant amount of research that has surfaced about the urgency of addressing equity in student outcomes in higher education aligns with the emerging literature pointing to the need for higher education leaders to be more responsive to the diverse needs of their institutions (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Bailey, Jenkins, & Smith Jaggars, 2015; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). A key finding from Nevarez and Wood (2010), in their book titled *Community College Leadership and Administration: Theory, Practice, and Change*, indicates that community college leaders must lead in a more critically conscious way that interrupts the institutional status quo and creates a more socially just and inclusive environment. Although there exists an important focus on transformational leadership practices in the academy, the work of Nevarez and Wood does illuminate a lack of attention given to the development and utilization of culturally responsive practices of community college leaders.

The third trend in the research concentrates on the diversity and representation of educational leaders. While research strongly suggests that the presence of leaders of color in community colleges positively affects campus climate and sense of belonging felt by students from historically minoritized communities, it also reveals the repeated failure of colleges to achieve proportional representation of leadership to the student population in community colleges (Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018; CCCCCO, 2020; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Furthermore, research on senior-level leaders of color in the CCCs mostly centers on their challenges in negotiating the

intersectionality of race and gender or the conditions that inhibit their path to leadership (Braxton, 2018; Campo, 2018; Delgadillo, 2017; Monosov, 2019; Reynolds, 2020). Yet, little research explicitly describes how they draw upon their multiple identities and culture wealth as part of employing culturally responsive leadership practices. Although the early seminal studies of Santamaria and Santamaria (2012; Santamaria, 2014) contend that the lived experiences of educational leaders of color do shape leadership practice, findings from their subsequent research (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016) conclude that a critical leadership approach that elevates the multiplicity of perspectives leaders from historically marginalized communities of color is an area for more in-depth inquiry.

A fourth trend that has emerged pointing to the interest in culturally responsive leadership in community colleges is the recent impetus by the CCCCCO (2020) to advance and scale diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism efforts on a statewide level. CCC senior-level leaders are expected to lead the charge to address the systemic institutional racism that is deeply embedded in policy, process, and practice (Oakley, 2020).

Recent trends in the literature have focused primarily on the importance of creating equity-minded intuitions by diversifying faculty and staff employed in community colleges, advancing the use of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches, and creating anti-racist policies and practices to better serve the increasingly diverse student population who arrive at the door. However, there exists a gap in knowledge exploring the most effective ways senior-level leaders can execute these recent changes within the context of the CCC. More importantly and of significance to this study is the lack of research that focuses on senior-level leaders' lived experiences and personal

identities as mitigating factors in their approach to lead in a culturally responsive way within their institutions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe how CCC senior-level leaders of color are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework.

Research Questions

The research was guided by one central research question and four sub-questions, one aligned with each of Horsford et al.'s (2011) four domains. The central research question was: How are CCC senior-level leaders of color culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership?

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework:

1. How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of college senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Significance of the Study

This study focused on culturally responsive leadership strategies that CCC senior-level leaders of color use to lead their institutions. Three overarching reasons supported this study's significance. The first reason this study is significant relates to the published work of Khalifa et al. (2016) titled *Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature*. In this extensive review of literature, Khalifa et al. concluded that the topic of culturally responsive leadership in academia is undertheorized. These findings can be significant because they shed light on the practice of culturally responsive leadership of senior leaders of color in higher education.

Secondly, this study contributes to leadership practice by building upon the work of Hollowell (2019) and extending the research of Santamaria and Santamaria (Santamaria, 2012, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Research conducted by Hollowell found that principals, leaders with the highest level of decision-making authority in K12 settings, create inclusive school climates that support all students through culturally responsive leadership practices. These findings are significant because of their potential generalization to higher education settings.

Additionally, the emerging work of Santamaria and Santamaria (Santamaria, 2012, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016), who focused on an ACL approach and built upon the connection between CRT and education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998), can be extended by this study. The ACL framework substantiates the value of a multiplicity of perspectives and cultural wealth of knowledge that leaders from historically marginalized communities bring to leadership practice in higher education. This study's findings will help to critically examine the traditional

leadership paradigm and inspire new thinking about how lived experience, attributes of one's identity, and the value of voice can enhance educational leadership practice to address the equity and social justice imperatives in community colleges.

The third and final reason this study is significant is its impact on the current momentum and urgency within the CCC system to enact bold changes in college policy and practice to more effectively address the persistent achievement gaps that disproportionately affect underserved students of color. Leaders at the senior and executive level are specifically called out to collaborate with key stakeholder groups and lead their institutions in an intentional way to address structural racism, improve campus climate, create equity-minded hiring and retention practices to achieve diverse representation of college employees, and ensure that curriculum and pedagogy is culturally relevant and anti-racist (CCCCO, 2020).

It is no small task to dismantle the institutional structures that perpetuate cycles of oppression for students of color and advance DEI on a college campus. However, an in-depth examination of the leadership practices used by senior-level leaders of color in the CCC system that guide this study can contribute to the need for more robust dialogue about the use of culturally responsive educational leadership strategies within the CCC context.

Definitions

The following operational definitions of terms are used throughout this study.

Anti-Racism: Actively identifying and challenging policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist inequities, actions, and ideas. Further, anti-racist ideas suggest “racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences; that there is nothing right or

wrong with any racial group,” and that anti-racist policies lead to racial equity (Kendi, 2019, p. 20).

Bias: An inclination, feeling, preference, or opinion, about a social group that is preconceived or unreasoned and grounded in stereotypes and prejudices.

BIPOC: An abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

California Community Colleges (CCC): A 2-year post-secondary education system, also known as *junior colleges*. The CCC is a statewide public education system of 116 colleges and is the “largest system of higher education” in the country, with more than 1.8 million students (California Community Colleges, n.d., p.1).

Color blindness: This racial ideology promotes that all individuals be treated equally without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. This approach negates the impact that race and/or ethnicity have had on the lived experiences or identities of individuals and can result in perpetuating institutional or systemic racism (CCCCO, n.d.).

Community College: “Community colleges in America, originally termed junior colleges or two-year colleges, have their roots dating back to the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), which essentially expanded access into public higher education” (Drury, 2003, p.1).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): An academic and legal framework developed by activists and legal scholars in the 1970s that challenged the ways in which race and racial power are represented in American society. CRT asserts that racism permeates all parts of American society. It is based on the premise that race is a social construct, not a biological one, and is inherent in legal systems and policies designed to maintain social, political, and economic inequalities between the dominant White population and people

of color (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2017).

Critical Theory: A social theory perspective that seeks to critique and change society as a whole and is concerned with empowering people to “transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.62).

Cultural Capital: In the context of this study, “the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged, such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 69).

Culturally Relevant Leadership: Horsford et al. (2011) identified four domains of Culturally Relevant Leadership: professional duty, personal journey, pedagogical approach, political context:

- Professional duty: Characterized by a sense of duty to lead for equity, engagement and excellence.
- Personal journey: Refers to a commitment to cultural proficiency gained through self-reflection, life experiences, and the intersection of multiple personal identities.
- Pedagogical approach: Refers to the pedagogical strategies utilized to build a culturally relevant and antiracist school culture.
- Political context: Incorporates the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which the institution and leader operate and recognizes that competing values, ideologies, and perspectives may exist.

Culturally Responsive Leadership: A theory and leadership practice that considers race, ethnicity, language, culture, and gender (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016).

Characteristics of culturally responsive leaders can include self-awareness, creating inclusive environments, courage to have critical conversations, intersectionality, and operating through a CRT lens.

Culture (institutional, ethnic): Values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, customs, behavioral norms, language, and collective identities shared by a group of individuals and serve as a pattern for interpreting reality (CCCCO, n.d.; Noe-Bustamante, Mora, & Lopez, 2020).

De facto segregation: “Racial, ethnic, or other segregation resulting from societal differences between groups, as socioeconomic or political disparity, without institutionalized legislation intended to segregate” (“De Facto Segregation,” n.d., para. 1).

Deficit-mindedness: Blaming students for their inequitable outcomes rather than examine the systemic factors that contribute to their challenges. A deficit mindset places the responsibility for failure on the student rather than the systemic factors that contribute to these outcomes. The term has traditionally been used to describe marginalized student groups (Cabrera, 2018; CCCCCO, n.d.).

Diversity: The ways in which people differ, including all the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another – such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance, as well as different ideas, perspectives, and values (UC Berkeley, Division of Equity & Inclusion, 2009).

Equity: Conditions under which individuals are given the resources they need to access the same opportunities as the general population. Equity accounts for systematic inequalities, meaning the distribution of resources provides more for those who need it most. In contrast, equality assumes even distribution (CCCCO, n.d.).

Equity-mindedness: Calling for an affirmative race-consciousness and an awareness of the systemic nature of racial inequities. It is an understanding that inequities in student outcomes are a signal that practices are not working as intended. Equity mindedness encompasses being (a) race conscious, (b) institutionally focused, (c) evidence based, (d) systemically aware, and (e) action oriented (Bensimon, 2007; CCCCCO, 2020.; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017).

First-Generation College Student (FGCS): College students whose parents do not have more than a high school education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Gender Identity: An internal, and personally defined, sense of being a man, woman, both, in between, or, non-binary (CCCCO, n.d.).

Higher Education: Education beyond high school, traditionally grades 9-12 in the U.S. Also known as higher ed or HE or post-secondary education.

Hispanic or Latino/a: Panethnic labels, often used interchangeably, for people of Spanish or Latin American descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI): Defined as an accredited 2- or 4-year, post-secondary institution that enrolls at least 25% Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Inclusion: “Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policymaking in a way that shares power” (CCCCO, n.d.).

Institutional Racism: Refers to the ways in which systems of power, institutional policies, practices, and structures create varied outcomes for different racial groups. The policies may refer to any racial group, but their effect is to create benefits for Whites and oppression and disadvantage for people of color (Potapchuk et al., 2005, p. 39). It is also referred to as systemic racism.

Intersectionality: Crenshaw (1989) defined intersectionality as how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other characteristics converge and overlap. Intersectionality allows researchers, leaders, and educators to critically examine how multiple identities can uniquely affect lived experiences, inequalities, and power (Barnett & Felten, 2016).

Latina/o or Latinx: Although the U.S. Census Bureau tallies Latinos or Hispanics under one umbrella term, it is meant to capture all individuals who identify with the following ethnicities, regardless of race: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Salvadoran, Other Central American, Argentinian, Bolivian, Chilean, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Uruguayan, Venezuelan, Other South American, or all other Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Latinx is a term used to describe people who are of or relate to Latin American origin or descent. It is a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

Leadership: “A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Within the context of community

colleges, Nevarez et al. (2013) noted that “current leadership theories used to contextualize and resolve dilemmas facing community colleges [...] are guided by notions of equity, access, diversity, ethics, critical inquiry, transformational change, and social justice” (p. xvii).

Marginalized: Individuals, groups, and communities (including but not limited to ethnicity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age) have historically been restricted in their access to resources, services, and power relationships across economic, political, and cultural dimensions because of systemic racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. In different contexts, marginalized people are also referred to as underrepresented or underserved (CCCCO, n.d.).

Mid-level Leader: In higher education, mid-level leaders can be found among faculty, staff, and administrator ranks. Although position titles are not consistent across campuses, common titles may include but are not limited to director, dean, manager, supervisor, lead, coordinator, or chair (Amey, Garza Mitchell, Rosales, & Giardello, 2020).

Minoritized: Describes the process of “minoritization” whereby individuals are afforded less power and representation based on their social identities. These social identities, such as race and ethnicity, are socially constructed concepts that are created and accepted by society (CCCCO, n.d.).

Pedagogy: The practice of educating, instructing, or teaching: the activities that impart knowledge or skill.

Racial Microaggressions: Within the context of higher education, racial microaggressions are subtle and oftentimes unconscious, yet commonplace acts of

racism. These acts may take form verbally, nonverbally, and/or visually, yet all have a negative impact on campus climate and the well-being of the individual target (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Racially Minoritized: The process by which groups of students or individuals are *othered* and thereby disenfranchised based on race by the dominant group (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

Senior-Level Leader: For this study, senior-level leaders work at the campus level and hold the role of president, superintendent/president, executive vice president, and vice president. Senior-level leaders at the district level include, but are not limited to, chancellor and vice chancellor.

Student services: Divisions or departments such as financial aid, counseling, admissions, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), library, food pantry, etc., that provide services and support to students in higher education. The purpose of these departments is to support student growth, development, academic success, wellness, and referrals to college and community resources during the academic experience.

URM: An abbreviation for underrepresented minority.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the confines of the study that the researcher can control (Patton, 2015). This study explored the culturally responsive leadership strategies that CCC senior-level leaders of color utilize when leading their institutions. There are 116 public community colleges in California. The population of the study was delimited to participants serving as a president, superintendent/president, executive vice president, or vice president at one of the CCCs for at least 3 years. Given the focus on senior-level

leaders of color, the study was further delimited to leaders who identify as non-White and a member of one or more of the following racial/ethnic groups: African-American/Black, Native American, Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or multi-ethnic.

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction, background information, statement of the research problem and research question, the significance of the study, gaps in the literature, key definitions of terms, and delimitations of the study. Chapter II examines the literature on race and racism in American higher education, a historical overview of the community college system in general and specifically CCCs, leadership approaches to address equity, and senior-level leaders' role in leading DEI efforts. The chapter also explored the influence of race and cultural identity on leadership practice, described the general theoretical foundations undergirding the study, and the conceptual framework used to guide the research conducted in this study. Chapter III describes the methodology used, defines the population and sample, and describes data collection and analysis strategies used to formulate the findings. Chapter IV synthesizes the data and presents the findings of the study, and Chapter V includes implications for policy, practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter II of this study reviews the literature and research related to culturally responsive leadership practices utilized by senior-level leaders of color as they lead their institutions within the diverse and complex landscape of the CCC system. The chapter begins with a historical overview of American higher education in relation to its role in the national completion agenda, changes in student demographics and educational landscape, subsequent impact on equitable outcomes for racially diverse student populations, and challenges of educational institutions to ensure access and opportunity. The next section focuses on community colleges' critical role in ensuring economic and social mobility for students and communities of color, challenges in meeting the equity imperative, and role of leadership in the disruption of systemic racial inequities to achieve student success. The CCC system, complete with its mission to serve the most diverse in student population in the nation, is then examined in terms of its historical and current commitment and role of senior leadership to advance DEI efforts that are culturally responsive to students' needs. Subsequent sections of this study examine culturally responsive leadership, grounded in CRT, and situated within the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of culturally relevant and ACL dimensions. These frameworks provide a foundation through which to explore the development and application of culturally responsive leadership practices more deeply by senior educational leaders in the CCC system. The final section will focus on the literature as it relates specifically to the intersection of political context, pedagogical approach, and personal identity on the culturally responsive leadership praxis of senior-level leaders of color to make systemic

changes in outcomes for students of color at their institutions. The literature review will illuminate significant themes and research gaps in culturally responsive leadership and its application to community college leadership practices.

Historical Overview of American Higher Education

This study focused on the intersection and influence of senior-level leaders' cultural identity and personal and professional perspective on their utilization of culturally responsive strategies to lead equity efforts in the complex environment of the CCC setting. To fully explore culturally responsive leadership approaches regarding senior-level leaders of color within the context of their community colleges, it is important to review the historical context of higher education as it relates to race. For this reason, this section briefly describes the racial inequities caused by systemic patterns of structural racism that have been present historically in higher education and have led to the exclusion of racially minoritized people of color from opportunities. These histories have been formative in the persistent inequities in access and opportunity for people of color, including students and higher education professionals. The inequity of access to education and training to a particular group contrast with the American narrative that boasts its role in filling the need for an educated and skilled workforce to compete effectively in a global economy and promises of a better tomorrow for all people. This historical background sets the stage for understanding how the cultural and racial foundations within education have influenced the importance of cultural responsiveness of leadership in higher education.

Foundations of Race in Higher Education

Race and racism have been a keystone element embedded in American higher education since its foundation. The belief in an inherent hierarchy of human value has been pervasive in American ideology and practice and has shaped our systems, structures, and processes (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). Most United States systems of power—such as the legal, political, and education system—are based on the historical foundations of the White majority having certain indisputable rights to property, wealth, and resources over people of color (E. Taylor, 2016). The view that people who do not fit the majoritarian White male identity are marginal or lesser than has derivations from the tribal invasion and subjugation of Native Americans and indigenous people, the forced servitude and appropriation of people of Mexican descent, and the labor exploitation of the Chinese (Valverde, 2003). An explicitly visible example of marginalization and oppression in American society is slavery. One tactic to maintain subordination of enslaved Blacks was states' adoption of policies that made it a crime to teach slaves to read and write. According to Colon (1991), maintaining the illiteracy of Black slaves supported the practice of compulsory ignorance whereby to control one's mind meant the ability to control one's actions. To safeguard the economic benefits of slavery and promulgate White supremacy, Blacks and other indigenous people of color were not educated but instead stripped of their culture of origin and native languages. Despite the American motto that is the land of equal opportunity, the history of the United States depicted in educational curriculum and texts dilutes its history of eradicating the indigenous Indian population and violently enslaving Black people (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Understanding this historical context of race and racism provides a

lens through which to view the educational context through the eyes of people of color and how this history shapes their experiences in the educational environment.

Racism and exclusion in higher education are steeped in Colonial America, where wealthy White males were the only ones admitted to colleges and universities perpetuating White dominance thought and ideology (Ash, Hill, Risdon, & Jun, 2020). Historical accounts describing the beginnings of higher education indicate that the structure of the educational institution was not built for or intended to educate people of color unless it was to appease philanthropic donors interested in educating the *heathens* through conversion of Native Americans to Christianity (Thelin, 2019). Moreover, college leadership and officials demonstrated little to no commitment to the collegiate education of Blacks, mirroring the same attitude and action toward race relations and slavery as the colonists. This early ideology served to strengthen the roots of racial exclusion and institutional racism still present in current structures of higher education. In fact, the advent of the first colleges and universities in British colonies—among them Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, and University of Virginia—was designed to expand Christianity and benefitted substantially from slavery (Ash et al., 2020; Thelin, 2019; Wilder, 2013). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) emerged, partially in response to the desire of Black Americans to be educated but lack of access to predominantly White institutions (Sissoko & Shiau, 2005).

Although slavery was abolished in the 19th century, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Lewis, 2020b) and Jim Crow laws legalized the continuance of racial segregation through the *separate but equal* doctrine. This de facto segregation led to an unequal social system that maintained widespread norms supporting White supremacy and exclusionary

practices of minorities in all social structures of America. Community de facto segregation by race and culture was essentially normalized, creating localities that propagated the marginalization of people of color in accessing affordable housing, health care, and other opportunities enjoyed by the privileged. These practices ~~also~~ served to extend and connect anti-racist ideology and perspectives to education. In addition, the concept of *whiteness as property*, which was initially framed by Harris (1993) and later linked to education as a property right by scholars and in literature (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), eventually undergirding one of the central tenets of CRT.

Despite the landmark Supreme Court decision in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* (Lewis, 2020a), which found segregation on the basis of race to be unconstitutional and required public schools to take action to remove past discrimination, substantial desegregation did not occur until the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Moreover, the post-Civil Rights era ushered in what Altbach (1991) called the “legacy of Reaganism” (p. 10) and national policy that resulted in a lack of enforcement of Civil Rights laws, growing opposition to anti-bias initiatives, and little concern for the challenges experienced by people of color. During this time, Altbach argued, access to higher education for students of color became increasingly difficult due to weakening affirmative action policies, restrictions placed on financial aid programs, and the tempering of programs to support students of color. Under these conditions, faced with fiscal challenges and no real consequences to the lack to focus on programs for minority students, academic administrators turned their attention away from campus based racial issues. A general “white middle-class resentment against special programs for minorities in higher education and against affirmative action in general could be expressed in

public,” which influenced the climate of race relations on college campuses (Altbach, 1991, p. 8).

Although access to higher education improved and attempts have been made to alter the American education system, the structures and policies that uphold institutions continue to influence opportunity and success of people of color. Commonly cited in the literature by scholars (Wilder, 2013), the historical laws and policies that intentionally sustained the unequal education of Whites and people of color contribute to the complexity of racial inequities in academic achievement seen among students of color in the present day. Given the political and economic context that perpetuated racial oppression and marginalization of students of color, educational disparities are not unexpected. Hence, these factors contribute to the ongoing focus of educational leaders on strategies to mitigate these challenges as more individuals of color seek higher education opportunities to achieve upward mobility and compete equitably with their White counterparts for high wage, high demand jobs.

Changing Demographics

The racial and ethnic composition of the United States has evolved and changed post World War II with the non-White population growing substantially. Between 1997-2017, the population increased by more than 50 million people, many of whom were people of color (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). Trends in census data show a pattern of decline in the aging and White population and an increase in minority children from 0-9 years old (Frey, 2018a). Additionally, data projections indicate that by 2045, Whites will comprise 49.7% of the American population, setting the stage for racial minorities, particularly America’s younger generations, to be the “primary demographic

engine of the nation's future growth" (Frey, 2018b, p. 1). These demographic changes, coupled with the prediction of a global innovation economy, built on the ongoing development of new manufacturing processes, communication systems, sustainable products, greater customer service, and international market expansion, requiring leaders to facilitate work environments that support new talent from diverse backgrounds.

In the same way, increases in the racial and ethnic composition of the United States' population over the last 20 years show parallel increases in the enrollment of students of color into higher education hoping for access to greater social and economic mobility. From 1996-2016, there has been an increase from 30-45% in the share of high school graduates enrolling in higher education among Hispanic, Asian, and Black populations (Espinosa et al., 2019). By 2016, 45% of all undergraduate students enrolled in post-secondary institutions identified themselves as non-White, representing an increase from 29.6% in 1996 (Espinosa et al., 2019).

As a result of the changing demographics within both business and education in America, attention to diversity is considered good business practice if organizations are to respond effectively to the growth of multinational institutions and globalism overall (Chin & Trimble, 2015). As diversity in the workplace and in educational institutions enhance productivity, innovation, and cultural competency, there is a need for leaders to employ cultural intelligence skills that involve building relationships through an appreciation of differences, communicating authentically, and fostering a positive organizational culture, so people feel valued regardless of their cultural backgrounds (Moua, 2010).

Attainment and Completion Agenda

To compete effectively in a global and rapidly changing economy, completion of post-secondary education within the United States is critical for the population. This need for post-secondary educational attainment in the United States stemmed from the global change away from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy. It has been acknowledged that as the American economy and technological landscape evolved, access to and completion of some college became necessary (Bailey et al., 2015). Jobs requiring a post-secondary education grew to the point that in the early 2000s, more than half of all jobs required higher education credentials, making college degree attainment more important. Additionally, the average earnings of those with college degrees were two times higher than for high school graduates (The White House, n.d.). Hence, access to higher education has become increasingly more important to help individuals achieve access to family supporting, living wage jobs.

The various systems of higher education—such as public, private, 4-year universities, and community colleges—become an essential source of educational attainment to fill the needed workforce for the 21st century, especially in helping individuals from underserved communities achieve access to living wage jobs. And yet, according to a national report published by the Lumina Foundation (2019) about the urgent need for skilled workers, only about half of Americans hold such credentials. Whereas the U.S. was once ranked first in the world in providing 4-year college degree attainment in the early 1990s, other countries have now outpaced the American higher education system in producing a highly educated workforce over the last 20 years.

Although higher education is seen as the gateway for attaining living-wage jobs and a key to economic mobility, the system has not provided equitable opportunity by leveling the playing field for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who seek to fully participate in the American dream. College access, completion, and educational attainment gaps have continued to exist between underserved students of color and White students across all sectors of public institutions of higher education (Price & Wohlford, 2005). Nevertheless, in the community college setting, where students of color are more likely to enroll than any other institution type, in their study on the importance of higher education as a strategy for social mobility, Karen and Dougherty (2005) pointed out that the same students remain less likely to earn fewer credentials than their White counterparts even when background and educational goals are relatively equal. Similarly, more recent findings in the 2019 report on *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education* published by the American Council on Education, one of the leading organizations in public policy formation in higher education, substantiate the continued disparity in educational outcomes with race being the predominant factor (Espinosa et al., 2019). Hence, although it is essential, access to post-secondary education does not necessarily result in equitable opportunity to the economic benefits that can lead to social mobility.

Racial Equity in Education

The racial inequities within institutional structures and systems created out of slavery and other forms of colonization that legalized exclusion of people of color do not go away easily. Nor does the legacy of oppression or exclusionary policies and practices

suddenly disappear, leaving access and opportunity to education for those marginalized.

McNair et al. (2020) asserted that you cannot:

take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, “you are free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. (p. 33)

Freedom and access to educational opportunity alone are insufficient. Instead, the attention educational leaders and practitioners give to eradicating racial inequity in education for people of color must manifest as an act of justice that requires a change in response to institutionalized and structural racism.

The challenge then becomes how higher education institutions ready themselves to achieve these ambitious goals while improving educational outcomes and closing equity gaps for students of color. If the majority of students of color enroll in community colleges, what role does it play in the equity and completion agenda? Moreover, how do leaders, especially executive leaders foster inclusive institutional climate and conditions to address and improve racial equity and positive student outcomes?

Community College in the United States

To provide context for this study as it relates to CCC senior leaders, it is important to gain an understanding of the history and role of community colleges in serving the diverse student population that it enrolls as well as approaches in leading these institutions to achieve equitable student outcomes.

Historical Context of Community Colleges

According to Nevarez and Wood (2010), two separate ideologies motivated the development of community colleges in the United States. One, the populist movement of

the late 1800s, embraced the idea of expanding educational access to others and not just the affluent, White, and male who historically enjoyed the privilege of access to higher education. The second school of thought, held by elitists (primarily university professors and presidents), centered around exclusivity and restriction to higher education to the wealthy. This perspective served to sustain the privileged White male dominant thought and ideology previously established in colonial America in the 1600s. With the increase in graduates from secondary school, coupled with their demand for higher education, a separate system of education, community colleges, was supported by the elitists that would preserve social and class segregation, thus maintaining their intellectual and economic privileges.

Although myriad factors have contributed to the rise and growth of community college, such as workforce demands and meeting the needs of local communities, the major drive for the establishment of junior colleges was the result of efforts by William Rainey Harper, University of Chicago president, and other university chief executive officers who envisioned a differentiation of university and junior colleges. University and junior colleges were differentiated based on upper and lower division programs, with the university focusing on research and major programs of study, and junior colleges focusing primarily on general education and transfer preparation to upper division programs at the university level. Although this enabled junior colleges to be more access-focused, stand-alone institutions, Drury (2003) argued that this movement supported practices to limit *unprepared* students, those who tend to be from lower socio-economic status backgrounds and communities of color, from entering the university, thus further perpetuating racial and economic stratification within higher education

institutions. Harper's concept and efforts to expand college level courses into secondary schools to expand opportunity eventually resulted in the establishment of the first junior college in the United States in 1901. In the early 1900s, junior colleges expanded as private institutions, but between the 1940s and 1950s, public institutions began to outnumber privates as the nation placed greater importance on post-secondary education (Smith, 2019). In addition, the concept that community colleges would serve as an extension of high school was supported by legislation passed in California between 1907-1917, allowing the various districts within the state some local control over the internal and external structure of the community college, including governing boards, organizational hierarchies, budgets, and policies (Druly, 2003).

Structure and Mission

Community colleges serve multiple missions but are ultimately built to provide open access to higher education for a broad range of individuals. Through the provision of a variety of programs and educational experiences, community colleges serve the needs of their local communities through lifelong learning opportunities, non-credit courses, vocational training, and employment skills, English as a second language (ESL) instruction, associate degrees and certificates, and pathways to transfer to 4-year universities to attain a baccalaureate degree. Community colleges cannot fulfill these multiple missions without the provision of support services to meet both the academic and non-academic needs of diverse learners.

Just as community colleges serve diverse communities and espouse multiple missions to meet student needs, they also vary in organizational structure and operations. Cohen and Brawer (1994) described the traditional or typical community college

structure and operations as hierarchical in nature with separate divisions focused on executive level cabinet, academic affairs (instruction), student affairs (student services), and business affairs (budget and human resources).

The history of administration and organizational structure in the community college is a product of the connection to and extension of high school with college management often reflecting secondary school administration (Cohen & Brawer, 1994). The president serves as the chief executive officer of the college and has formal authority over all functions within the college. These functions span the academic, student services, and business sections of the college. The president is typically advised by a cabinet consisting of other senior-level administrators, including vice presidents, provosts, and deans in some cases. Each senior level administrator generally possesses expertise in one of many of the various divisions within the college and can provide advice to the president on matters concerning their respective area of the college. Mid-level leaders such as deans will have oversight regarding more specialized academic and student services departments and programs, although faculty leaders typically have purview over matters of curriculum and academic standards. It is the nature of participatory governance between faculty, staff, students, and administration in the community college environment that sets it apart from many other organizational systems. Unlike the management structure and environment in the business sector, administration, faculty, staff, and students are to consult collegially and make good faith effort in reaching mutual agreement in decision-making over many operational functions within the college. For example, in California, Assembly Bill 1725 ensures that the role faculty have in institutional governance and decision-making does not conflict with

employment rights or bargaining agreements (Smith, 2019). This level of participation of faculty and staff in college-wide decision-making requires administrators, particularly senior-level leaders, to work collegially with all stakeholders in matters related to curriculum, programs, and services (Cohen & Brawer, 1994). Doing so requires finding balance among stakeholder interests and the responsibility of administrative oversight while demonstrating responsiveness to organizational culture as well as diversity of thought, perspectives, and backgrounds of all constituents.

Role in Completion Agenda

Although inequities remain at all levels of higher education, community colleges are particularly affected because of the considerable role they play in educating diverse student populations. Community colleges create open access to educational opportunities and consequently tend to serve a disproportionate number of students with more significant social, economic, and educational challenges and obstacles, yet they must do so with the fewest resources to serve those students (Bailey & Morest, 2006).

This predicament lends to the important responsibility community colleges have to advance educational equity that will uplift their surrounding communities and equip students to prosper economically and socially. Moreover, it makes them uniquely positioned to support the ambitious graduation goals outlined by the Obama administration in 2009 that called upon community colleges to take the lead. It is important to point out that the landscape of community colleges has changed dramatically in recent decades, specifically in the area of diversity and inclusion. To serve an increasingly more diverse student population, leaders will need to utilize strategies that facilitate and promote an inclusive environment for all students.

Student Demographics

As attainment of college-level credentials becomes particularly important for individuals from underserved communities to achieve access to living-wage jobs, community colleges are poised to create the necessary access to educational opportunities and attainment for students from diverse backgrounds. There are a total of 1,044 community colleges in the United States, with 936 being public institutions, 35 tribal, and 73 independent (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2021). Recent integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) data, as referenced by the American Association of Community Colleges in its *2021 Fast Facts Report* (AACC, 2021), indicates that the more than 11.8 million students enrolled in community colleges in the United States in Fall 2019 represent 41% of all post-secondary undergraduate students. Furthermore, of the 11.8 million students, approximately 35% attend part-time and 65% attend full-time, over 50% are under the age of 22, and close to 60% receive some type of financial aid. Additionally, the data reveals that of the students enrolled in community colleges in 2019, 56% were Native American, 53% Hispanic, 43% Black, and 38% were Asian/Pacific Islander (AACC, 2021).

Access But Not Equity

Although these statistics indicate that community colleges serve as a pipeline to post-secondary education for students from diverse backgrounds, it is important to note that open access also brings individuals who have various needs and social, economic, and educational obstacles to which college leaders must attend. Nevertheless, even with the attention given to meet student needs, it has been widely documented that success and completion rates for students of color continue to be dismal (Bailey & Morest, 2006,

Juszkiewicz, 2020). Significant research contributions by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University supported the compelling reality described by Bailey et al. (2015) in their book titled *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, that most students who enter the community college do not finish with a certificate or degree, and the small percentage of those who do take up to 8 years to complete. Commonly, progress toward the advancement of the equity and completion agenda, in large part, relies on students being able to circumnavigate on their own the application and enrollment process, persist from term to term with little support, complete the program, and earn the credential.

Hence, access without educational attainment becomes an increasingly troubling reality faced by many colleges now under pressure to improve in outcomes and not just focus on access. For this reason, community college leaders shoulder the responsibility to focus intentionally on diversity and inclusion to ensure their institutions provide equitable access, opportunity, and successful completion for students. However, leading a community college in a rapidly changing environment to support equity requires a unique set of skills and strategies.

Institutional and Leadership Challenges in Addressing Equity Gaps

The efficacy of higher education academic leadership to effect change within their institutions and exercise authority is influenced by a variety of factors. Some factors exist within the institution whereas others are external influencers. Moreover, the institutional and organizational structure of most higher education institutions, as in the case of community colleges, creates a dichotomy of control and authority (Birnbaum, 2011). This phenomenon is often attributed to the shared governance and decision-

making processes put into place by legislative mandates to control for abuses of power over faculty by administration. Furthermore, the dynamically evolving changes in the political, demographic, fiscal, and technological landscape of community colleges over the last few years have made it difficult for leaders to improve achievement and completion rates for students of color.

Factors such as housing inequality, limited access to well-resourced public K12 schools, and disparities in family wealth generation often contribute to high financial aid loan debt of students of color. One example is in the rising cost of education, which has increased between 1997-2008 by 30% for public undergraduate institutions and 23% for private institutions (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2012). This trend bars many students from communities of color from attending 4-year institutions, making community colleges a viable option in the pathway to college degree attainment. Equally important, the disproportionate placement of students of color in non-college preparatory tracks and developmental college courses result in students entering college unprepared in mathematics and English based on data from the *2020 Supplement Report on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education* (M. Taylor, Turk, Chessman, & Espinosa, 2020). Most recently, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, during which overall community college enrollment declined significantly, Black/African American and Latinx student enrollment, success, and completion plummeted, mirroring the impact these communities experienced on an economic, health, and social level.

Community colleges will face many challenges as they attempt to address the needs of their evolving and rapidly changing institutions such as the complexity of the administrative position, the political landscape from which to navigate, and improving

academic success of underserved student populations. According to Santamaria (2012), because more barriers to success exist for students of color in the community college, it is imperative that leadership fosters an institutional culture that promotes and supports critical conversations about race as they attempt to change inequitable practices. One theme that has emerged in the literature regarding factors that influence institutional culture is the disproportionate representation of diverse leaders within administration as compared to the population served (Bustillos & Siqueros, 2018; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Santamaria, 2012).

The fact that diverse representation of faculty, staff, and administrators within higher education has not kept up pace to mirror student demographics is well documented in the literature (Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015, p. 60). Higher education institutions remain predominantly White and maintain the cultural values and interests of the dominant group (Aguirre & Martinez, 2016). From the viewpoint of students of color, the disproportionate exposure to the White population on campuses and minimal exposure to diverse racial and ethnic college personnel often results in a lack of connection to and affiliation with the campus environment. Given the current community college landscape, Nevarez and Wood (2010) asserted that the paucity of diverse representation of college leadership within community colleges must be addressed. In considering how to address the representational divide, it is important to explore the historical and current landscape of CCCs and how the CCC system and its leaders are currently approaching equity gaps in student outcomes and achievement. This situation offers an opportunity to explore the significance of culturally responsive leadership in advancing an equity agenda in CCCs.

California Community Colleges

The Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960 is considered the bedrock of California's public higher education systems and has been seen as one of the most successful models for higher education (Oxendine, 2017). With the creation of the Master Plan, CCCs were declared an essential part of the tri-system of higher education, which includes the UC and CSU systems.

Key features of the plan include the differentiation of function among the CCCs, CSUs, and UCs; universal access and opportunity to pursue higher education by means of variance in admissions criteria and pools and streamline the transfer pipeline; commitment to a tuition-free education to residents of California; provisions for student financial assistance; and the establishment of a governance structure for each of the systems of higher education. The plan was also the state's solution to preserve limited resources by diverting some students to the CCCs to complete their lower division coursework, which freed up space at universities to focus on providing upper division coursework to students. In this respect, the Master Plan was successful in increasing access to an affordable college education (California Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education, 1987, p.3).

Conversely, the California Master Plan also resulted in the categorization of students across educational systems by limiting access to the university to those students who had achieved a certain level of academic success and were motivated to transfer and complete a baccalaureate degree (Knoell, 1997). Accordingly, community colleges took on and continue to take on the responsibility of remedial education for students who are not prepared for college-level work. More important and germane to the backdrop of this

study is the racial and social stratification that resulted from the implementation of the Master Plan, which upheld the historical exclusionary practices that contribute to the equity gaps seen today (Rueda, 2012). To further these challenges, funding structures for CCCs were also an outgrowth of the Master Plan, with primary revenue coming from local property taxes and limits to what the state would provide. Funding limitations were supported by community college leadership because of their desire to avoid governmental centralization and instead maintain local control and focus on the mission of each college. Over time, the CCCs have experienced challenges in sustaining fiscal health due to changes in the economy, resulting in an overall increase in the cost of community college.

Although the Master Plan was noble in its intent to promote access and opportunity, its historical roots framed the notion of who was deserving of a college education and at what level. With California's current demographics and economic conditions, the plan's initial relevancy in many respects will not help meet the educational needs of the state's diverse student population (California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, 2018). The plan has been revised many times since 1960, but one notable change in 1985 focused on a commitment to achieve greater equity in opportunity. Moreover, it was important that governing boards and college administration take the lead in this effort, as described in the California Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Education's 1987 document, titled, *The Master Plan Renewed*:

The most important lesson to be learned from past failures is that programs to achieve equity cannot be treated as the responsibility of just another group or office.

Institutional barriers such as faculty and administrator attitudes, differential treatment, discriminatory curricula, and indifference must be addressed. Equity must be incorporated into every function of every educational institution. (p. 21)

In the 1987 revision of the Master Plan, efforts of all California public systems of higher education were tasked to focus on enhancing “the quality, diversity, supply, and recruitment of candidates for faculty and administrative positions” (California Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education, 1987, p.23). Yet, for CCCs, strategies and practices to achieve this directive have not been well coordinated, resulting in ineffective leadership approaches to implementing equity efforts at each campus.

Mission and Purpose of CCCs

Not unlike the mission of community colleges across the United States, the CCCs’ primary goal is to provide students a clear path to achieving a certificate, associate degree, or transferring to a 4-year university to earn a baccalaureate degree. In addition to its open access focus, the CCCs offer students an array of academic programming leading to a certificate, associate degree, or transfer to a 4-year university to earn a baccalaureate degree, as well as skills necessary to obtain living-wage employment. However, unlike other community colleges, CCCs’ expanded opportunities may also include non-credit courses, ESL courses, community service classes to meet a vast array of educational or cultural needs, contract education to support the professional development needs of local business and industry partners, and job training or apprenticeship programs (Knoell, 1997). In addition to providing broad array of programs and courses, community colleges offer comprehensive support services to

ensure student access, equity, and success. These include matriculation services, educational planning, career and employment services, financial aid, health services, childcare, support for re-entry students, academic and tutorial support, and specialized programs and services to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students (Smith, 2019). The CCCs' mission and recognition of its value to foster the economic and social mobility of surrounding communities has grown over time to be more comprehensive in meeting the needs of students. Therefore, it will be important for leaders of these institutions to be responsive to the needs of their communities and lead in ways that foster equity-minded and culturally inclusive campus environments.

Current Context of CCCs

The CCC system consists of 73 community college districts inclusive of 116 independent, accredited colleges. The system serves approximately 2.2 million students from varied racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, thus playing a pivotal role in promoting the nation's equity agenda (Oakley, 2019). Furthermore, over the past 10 years, the percentage of underrepresented students of color in the CCC system has climbed to 51% (CCCCO, 2020), increasing educational access to underserved communities. Although the CCCs have made strides in student access to education, student success reform efforts, and policy implementation that support DEI, there remain significant challenges that the system, and leaders specifically, must face and contend.

In a foundational step to address these challenges, the CCCs' Board of Governors (BOG) adopted an equity policy in 1992 to address access, success, and transfer disparities for students from historically underrepresented in higher education with the expectation that colleges advance this work. However, it was not until 2014 when

California Governor Jerry Brown proposed an unparalleled budget for student equity in the community colleges, subsequently approved by the California Legislature, that provided \$155 million to the colleges to focus on equity in 2015-2016 (Nguyen, Skeen, Mize, Navarette, & McElhinney, 2015). With this surge of funding, the Board of Governors of the CCCs set system-wide goals and metrics and required colleges to develop student equity plans to eliminate educational equity gaps for students from historically disadvantaged populations. Despite the influx of funding and due to numerous factors, CCCs have been inconsistent in producing measurable changes in student outcomes. The compounding pain points for CCC leaders are many. Lagging completion rates, the failure to keep up with the demands of an educated workforce in California, persistent educational disparities between students of color and their White peers, and lack of diversity among the ranks of college personnel continue to challenge leaders in their work to accelerate institutional improvement. Because funding is tied to equity outcomes, colleges are responsible for demonstrating progress, which requires leaders to review racial equity data and take evidence-based action to address achievement gaps. According to Nguyen et al. (2015), the only way forward is for leaders to engage in the challenging conversations that require their institutions to reflect on their “shortcomings and the dynamic that race, ethnicity, and gender may play in policies and practices” (p. 23). These discussions must take priority and be continuous in order to make effective changes.

Educational Disparities. Although there is a widespread need to meet the demand for an educated California workforce, projections indicate that by 2025, California will have a shortage of approximately 1.5 million workers who have attained

some college education but not the credentials to fill critical job openings promptly (Bohn, 2014). In the 2017 report titled *Increasing Equity and Diversity*, published by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), data indicate that the majority of California's future workforce will be individuals from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in higher education, including those who are African American, Latinx, or from low-income communities. Hence, increases in the number of students of color who graduate from college are needed to fill the workforce gap.

However, access to college, completion, and graduation rates among students of color continue to be uneven across the various California systems of higher education. More students of color enroll in community colleges as opposed to one-third and one-half of students accepted at the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems, respectively (PPIC, 2017). This is in part due to the selective admission process and higher cost of education at CSU and UC, which limits access to underrepresented and low-income students who come from families struggling to cover basic need expenses as compared to their well-represented, well-resourced peers. The Lumina Foundation corroborated this same theme in the findings of their 2019 data study entitled *A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent*, which pointed to the fact that Community colleges in California, considered to be very diverse in terms of student demographics, still struggle to close achievement and completion gaps for students of color. Data showed that most students take over 6 years to complete a community college credential, with only 48% of all CCC students completing within 6 years (CCCCO, 2020). Furthermore, those who do reach the goal of a degree or transfer often have accumulated many excess units, which costs them extra time and money. And

yet, those students from historically marginalized groups representing more than 50% of the enrolled CCC student population succeed and complete at even lower rates (CCCCO, 2020, p. 7).

This gap between access and educational attainment has put pressure on CCC faculty and key leaders to focus on both access and elimination of achievement gaps while navigating rapid changes in student demographics, legislative regulation, and fiscal uncertainties. To respond effectively to the need for increased accountability, college personnel must embrace a more culturally responsive approach. Senior-level leaders must heighten the sense of urgency within their institutions and find ways to ensure the educational experience is more inclusive by viewing students' diverse racial and cultural backgrounds as assets to the institution.

Vision for Success: DEI Focus

The urgency to lead equity and access efforts at CCCs increases the need for senior-level leaders to focus on inclusivity and diversity and challenge systemic inequities historically present within the institutional structure. To address inequities, the CCC Vision for Success (VFS) was created in 2017 and challenged CCCs to achieve six goals by 2022:

- Increase student completion of degrees, certificates, credentials, or specific skills by 20%
- Increase transfer rates to 4-year institutions by 35%
- Reduce excess unit accumulation from an average 87 total units to 79 total units
- Increase the percentage of students who leave the community college and are employed in their declared field of study

- Reduce equity gaps among underrepresented student groups across all measures by 40% within 5 years and fully close those gaps within 10 years
- Close regional achievement gaps across all measures within 10 years

Grounded in the premise that the success of California’s higher education system to address the state’s workforce needs will rise or fall with the CCCs, the CCCCO VFS taskforce emphasized that CCC leaders are critical actors in transforming their institutions to close these achievement gaps. Moreover, the taskforce noted that increasing faculty and staff diversity in the CCC system, which is the purview of educational leadership, plays a role in improving campus culture and inclusivity.

The 2017 VFS went on to assert that in order to achieve the VFS goals, community college leaders must “think differently and take unrelenting action toward improving outcomes for students and communities” (CCCCO, 2020, p.13).

Demonstrated by a series of commitments, leaders were called to lead their institutions centered on the following principles:

- Focus relentlessly on students’ end goals
- Always design and decide with the student in mind
- Pair high expectations with high support
- Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence
- Take ownership of goals and performance
- Enable action and thoughtful innovation
- Lead the work of partnering across systems

The priority the CCCCO places on DEI prompts leaders to lead with a race-conscious lens if substantial and long-lasting changes in equity efforts are to take root in

the community college. Nevertheless, possessing leadership competencies alone still does not address the full scope of the issue, especially when most of those who hold administrative power may not understand the experiences and perspectives of the majority student population who come from communities of color. This is largely because many college leaders do not represent the racial and ethnic composition of the student population.

Diversity and Representation

Educators play a significant role in positive educational experiences for students of color. Various studies have emphasized the benefits of diversity in higher education and the role diversity plays in the enrichment of campus climate (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007) and that educators, including faculty and administrators, from backgrounds that resemble the student population contribute to a more culturally relevant and responsive educational experiences for students of color (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002; Arday, 2018; Center for Community College student Engagement [CCCSE], 2009; Kohli, 2009). However, diversity among the ranks of administrators across the United States has not improved much over the last 10 years. In an article in the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* titled “Diversity and Senior Leadership at Elite Institutions of Higher Education,” Gasman et al. (2015) discovered that less than 20% of leaders of color held senior-level positions at Ivy League colleges and universities. This same trend plagues not only the United States but also other countries such as the United Kingdom, where Arday (2018) examined the significant underrepresentation of Black and other ethnic minority senior level leaders in higher education institutions and how a lack of leadership diversity limits cultural relevancy in

curriculum and negatively affects the educational experience for minority students. Moreover, the lack of diversification visibly demonstrated a marginalization of minority leaders, which undermined their own leadership approach to advance equity efforts.

Lack of representation can be found beyond private institutions of higher education; public colleges and universities have not made much progress either. Nevarez and Wood's (2010) examination of the impending shortage of community college leaders in the United States over the next decade due to retirement and turnover revealed a stark imbalance between the percentage of students of color in community colleges and that of leaders of color. Correspondingly, this gap in representation can create the opportunity to diversify senior-level leadership, demonstrate college commitment to equity and inclusion, and open the door to new perspectives and a more culturally responsive approach to addressing racial equity issues.

Whereas over half of CCC students are from marginalized groups, the ethnic, racial, and gender identities of faculty, staff, and administrators often do not represent the diversity in the student populations they serve, giving rise to issues of inclusivity and belonging. As highlighted in their recent report, the CCCCCO VFS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce indicated that of the employees in CCCs, 30% of faculty, 40% of staff, and just shy of 30% of administrators identify as underrepresented minorities (CCCCCO, 2020). As in their 2018 report titled *Left Out: How Exclusion in California's Colleges and Universities Hurt our Values, Our Students, and Our Economy*, Bustillos and Siqueiros indicated that the scarcity of leaders of color underscores the lack of inclusivity on college campuses. The findings further confirm that the composition of senior leadership in California's public systems of higher education is not sufficiently

diverse to mirror the racial and gender identities of the students. Representation of individuals of color in prominent and influential positions was overwhelmingly low compared to Whites across the full leadership spectrum, from board members to senior leaders, to faculty and staff leadership ranks. Bustillos and Siqueiros suggested that faculty and senior level leaders whose experiences and identities resemble the student population they serve contribute to equitable opportunity and outcomes for students because it promotes their sense of belonging and helps students to thrive and succeed.

As senior-level community college leaders endeavor to dismantle historical structures of oppression within their institutions, an equity-minded and culturally responsive approach is an essential element in their leadership practice. A different type of leadership practice employed by senior-level leaders is long overdue in the CCC system. According to Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010), leading with intentionality and a “conscious awareness” (p. 86) of oneself releases the leader to embrace multiple perspectives. First, it gives leaders the necessary opportunity to traverse their journey of critical self-reflection and challenge learned values, beliefs, biases, and attitudes—what Bensimon (2005) refers to as an individual’s cognitive frame—that influence assumptions about students. Second, it provides the opportunity to recognize and value the influence of diversity and culture in one’s leadership praxis and, ultimately, positive organizational and student outcomes. Although literature and research on the importance of educational leadership and diversity have been emerging, what is yet to be explored more deeply is how leaders can and do enact culturally responsive leadership strategies within their institutional setting particularly in response to the CCCs’ DEI goals. Now is the time when a culturally responsive leadership

approach used by CCC senior-level leaders who represent their communities can incite change that will have long-lasting policy implications to promote DEI endeavors at the highest levels of an institution.

Community College Leadership

Despite ample studies, essays, and research on leadership, Birnbaum (2011) argued that there is still no definitive consensus among scholars on the specific measurable characteristics of higher education leadership that can be linked to positive student outcomes. To further complicate the process of arriving at a shared definition, there exists a large body of research and literature describing a multitude of approaches specific to diversity leadership in higher education, including multicultural and social justice leadership as well as anti-racist and equity-minded approaches that may influence campus culture. No individual leadership framework can entirely address the complex community college landscape that senior leaders find themselves navigating. Regardless of the theory or approach taken, it is important that leadership, especially at the executive and senior levels, be transformational in nature to change the exclusionary practices and policies borne out of systemic racism in order to improve the institutional climate that will better serve students from historically marginalized communities.

Role of Leadership in Addressing Equity

Second to faculty, executive and other senior-level leaders influence how and to what extent the college views the importance of equity and closing student achievement gaps. A leader's capacity to mobilize and inspire energy and hope in others coupled with strong leadership competencies, qualities, and attributes influence campus climate and

directly impact decision-making, policy development, and implementation of equity initiatives.

According to Santamaria and Santamaria (2012), as barriers to success continue to exist for students of color in the community college, a focus on changes in institutional culture that promote and support critical conversations about race are essential in order to change inequitable practices. Scholars assert that educational leaders can no longer afford to be content with educational inequities. Instead, they must counter against maintaining the status quo, disputing the strongly held dominant and majoritarian beliefs about students and communities of color (Martínez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015).

Leadership and Institutional Culture and Climate

Just as with other organizations, educational institutions are shaped by social and political influences that guide how people within that organization behave, interact, and operate. Ample literature regarding organizational culture points to the significant influence of implicit and explicit forces on behavior, attitudes, and mindset.

According to Schein (2010), the culture of a group or individuals within an organization is composed of “basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration and has worked well enough to be considered valid” (p. 22). Within the educational setting, culture as defined by Kuh and Whitt (1988) is a:

persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a frame of reference from which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus.

(p. iv)

Hence, it is shared beliefs and values that influence behavior and create a mindset and frame of reference that often operate out of awareness but are nonetheless very powerful.

Whereas Schein (2010) argued that the link between leadership and culture lies in ways in which the leader creates and manages culture and their capacity to understand and work within the culture, other authors (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011) believe this perspective does not consider the leader as learner of organizational culture but rather the colonizer. Fraise and Brooks (2015) contended that to manage school culture, rather than understand and respect it, is “violent and disrespectful” and believe it can result in a cultural mismatch or collision (Horsford et al., 2011, p. 585).

Ultimately, leadership plays a role in the development and maintenance of school norms and values, which in turn is reflected in the behaviors and attitudes of faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders (Brooks & Miles, 2010). Within the context of policy and practice, deficit-based biases and assumptions held by educational administrators can influence hiring practices, resource allocation, and DEI efforts (Townsend, 2011). Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) contended that in order for educational leaders to truly transform their schools, they need to lead in different ways within various cultural contexts through the understanding of the norms, values, and beliefs of the students and communities served by the institution.

Several studies point to a variety of factors that contribute to student success, engagement, and completion. Student factors include socio-demographic characteristics, academic preparation (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011), and enrollment status (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). However, the one salient factor most

related to this study is race. As mentioned previously, there is ample research showing that White students have higher retention, success, and completion rates as compared to students of color (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Lumina Foundation, 2019). When looking at the role race and culture play in a student's experience and eventual outcomes, research has also demonstrated differences in how students of color feel a sense of belonging, connectedness, and being valued by the college as compared to White students.

Additionally, racial, and cultural climate, organizational structure and employee characteristics are some of the institutional factors and dynamics that have been noted as important to the success of students of color (Gasman et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2006; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Not only do positive institutional climates support student success, but also, as mentioned earlier, connection with college personnel, particularly those who represent communities of color, is also meaningful (Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018). Colleges that employ high impact practice tend to foster high levels of inclusiveness in the campus environment. According to Townsend (2011), when a leader's assumptions and perspectives about students of color and those from other marginalized background are deficit-based in nature, it can drive the institutional discourse around individuals from those communities and ultimately work against the promotion of a positive campus climate. Therefore, the challenge for higher education leaders, as Aguirre and Martinez (2006) noted, is to "construct and promote practices and strategies that change biases or prejudices toward racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 80) so that institutional environments value and respect the views and lived experiences of students of color. Despite the need for leaders to employ strategies that promote a positive school climate, more research is still needed on how leaders apply their beliefs,

lived experiences, knowledge, and values to their leadership practice for the benefit of improving the learning environment for students (Pendakur, 2010; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

Leadership Approaches

Community college leaders face ongoing challenges as they try different approaches, without whole-scale success, to address systemic racial inequities within their institutions. There are many theories and approaches to higher education leadership that point to the need for more attention to DEI to improve outcomes for students of color. Although some are general like transformational leadership, other leadership frameworks emphasize DEI explicitly and the strategies essential for leaders to support students of color such as leadership for equity-mindedness, social justice, and anti-racism.

Transformational Leadership. The research surrounding community college leadership often points to transformational leadership as the dominant approach used by senior-level leaders and presidents. Transformational leadership is a relational approach in which leaders transform the organization and motivate others using the qualities of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A transformational leader conveys a vision for the institution and inspires and stimulates an organizational culture that is innovative and focused on meeting the needs of its stakeholders (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). According to Valverde (2003), the job for higher education leadership is to help people understand the political and social environment and conditions the institution finds itself in and spur active involvement in trying new ways to doing things

by supporting stakeholder agency in planning and decision-making. This is different from the transactional leader who accepts the organization as it is rather than what it could become. In the changing and dynamic environment of the community college, transformational leadership that is visible, supportive, and collaborative (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2002) is seen as foundational for senior level administrators if the goal is to change the institution so it is more relevant, welcoming, and inclusive for students of color to thrive and succeed.

Leadership Frameworks. In addition to leadership approaches, key organizations have contributed to the field related to community college leadership and DEI practices such as the Aspen Institute, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the University of Southern California (USC) Center for Urban Education. In 2013, the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, in partnership with Achieving the Dream, published a guide for the field on the necessary skills and competencies that presidents and senior-level leaders of community colleges need to possess in order to lead change so their institutions, students, and communities can thrive. Aspen's research and study of 14 presidents who led exemplary community colleges found the following five core leadership qualities are essential for a senior leader:

1. A deep commitment to student access and success
2. The willingness to take important risks to advance student success
3. An ability to create long-lasting change within the college by building urgency, planning, collaborating, and implementing with continuous evaluation and improvement

4. Having a compelling strategic vision for the college and its students that is reflected in the development of external partnerships
5. Procuring and allocating resources in ways that are aligned to student success

Although the presidents and senior leaders in the study who possess these qualities had made gains in improving equitable outcomes for students, in the Aspen Institute's 2017 article called *Renewal and Progress: Strengthening Higher Education Leadership in a Time of Rapid Change* they point out the significant demographic, political, economic and technological challenges community college face and highlight explicitly how leaders must factor diversity and inclusion into their leadership approach to address these changes. More specifically, the Aspen Institute concluded that senior-level college leaders must take a multifaceted approach to address diversity and inclusion to meet their institutions' needs (Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, 2017).

Another organization recognized as an authority in community in the college leadership arena, the AACC, has an established leadership framework composed of the essential competencies aspiring, new and seasoned CEOs and senior leaders need to lead the complex environment of community colleges effectively. In 2018, under the auspices of the Commission on Leadership and Professional Development taskforce, the AACC published the third edition of its *Competencies for Community College Leaders*. The third edition of the leadership competencies was intended to be markedly different than the previous two iterations in its emphasis on guiding the development of CEOs, senior-level, and mid-level leaders and helping colleges select leaders committed to the vision, mission, and purpose of the community college. Competencies were organized under 11 focus areas:

1. Organizational culture;
2. Governance, institutional policy, and legislation;
3. Student success;
4. Institutional leadership;
5. Institutional infrastructure;
6. Information and analytics;
7. Advocacy and mobilizing/motivating others;
8. Fundraising and relationship cultivation;
9. Communication;
10. Collaboration; and
11. Personal traits and skills that facilitate the community college agenda (AACC, 2018).

The AACC leadership competencies document emphasizes that, by virtue of their mission, community colleges must embrace diversity and strive to create an inclusive environment where all students feel welcome. However, the 2018 edition, unlike the 2005 version, does not specifically outline leadership competencies related to cultural competence. As culturally responsive and relevant leadership has become exceedingly more important given the diverse student populations enrolled in community college, future editions of the AACC competencies might find that including this competency once again is warranted.

Social Justice. The concept of social justice has evolved over time, and some have questioned if one single definition or meaning of the concept truly exists (Jean-Marie, 2006). Many believe that, fundamentally, social justice represents actions that

address systems of privilege, marginalization, practices of inequity, power relations, and institutionalized oppression (Freire, 2018; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Peters, Luke, Bernard, & Trepal, 2020; Goodman, 2011). Within the educational environment, social justice has been used as a lens and framework from which to critically examine systems and structures that perpetuate injustice and contribute to inequitable student outcomes based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities of the communities served by educational institutions (K. M. Brown, 2004). According to Jean-Marie (2006), the extension of social justice perspective within the context of education is not only just, but also democratic, as it addresses the pursuit of justice and the interrogation of injustice as part of educational practice.

If social justice in the educational setting means moving beyond acknowledging systemic injustice to taking purposeful and intentional action that addresses oppressive structures and systems, then there must be a critical analysis of how educational leaders who hold the power within an institution, think, act, and make decisions. An illustration of this phenomenon can be found in a study by Carlson (2005), who explored the connection between leadership awareness and understanding of the social justice matters affecting community college students and use of socially justice leadership practices to positively influence student achievement. Ten CCC presidents (CEOs) were interviewed to obtain a deeper understanding of the use social justice leadership strategies that best serve their students and communities. Results revealed the key practices of visibility, earning *citizenship* or becoming part of the community, and intentionality in action on a personal level as well as a pedagogical level by educating and empowering others to act. In addition, Carlson found that the leader's critical consciousness of their positionality

and the role power and privilege can play in either perpetuating racist systems of oppression or dismantling them was essential. The key practices that emerged from the study support what Carlson calls a model of Critical Social Justice Leadership, which aligns with the work of Santamaria's (2014) ACL model, but moves the concepts from a macro level to the institutional level, wielding a potential direct impact on student achievement.

A social justice perspective for educational leadership advances the notion that to foster equitable and socially just and responsible learning for students, it is incumbent on educational leaders to understand the realities of the communities they serve and find ways to change unjust structures, practices, and policies within their schools. Research and literature note that in order to be effective in serving the needs of their students and communities, educational leaders need to engage in critical self-reflection and examine their own identities, privileges, and power so they can employ socially just policy and decision-making practices and strategies that support historically marginalized populations (K. M. Brown, 2004; Carlson, 2005; National Association of School Psychologists, 2016). When leaders move in this direction, advances to dismantle the systemic injustices faced by students will begin to occur, giving rise to more equitable educational experiences and outcomes for students.

Equity Mindedness. Within the context of CCC equity efforts, USC has contributed research and literature specific to the development and utilization of equity-minded practices for both faculty and leaders. The USC (n.d.) Center for Urban Education, now part of the Race and Equity Center, asserts that colleges cannot effectively achieve equity in outcomes unless practitioners “develop critical race

consciousness” (p. 1, which is an awareness of how they teach and lead. Furthermore, USC contends that leaders often do not see transformational change in equity outcomes because they may not understand the role race and racism plays in higher education or do not have the tools and skills to identify and address institutional policies and practices that perpetuate racial inequalities for students of color. According to Bensimon (2007), equity-minded practitioners and leaders are aware that beliefs, expectations, and practices can result in “negative racialization” (p.442) and acknowledge that the policies that guide their practices are not designed to produce racial equity; rather, they need to be reimagined and remediated. Equity-mindedness calls for an affirmative race-consciousness and an awareness of the systemic nature of racial inequities (Bensimon, 2007; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Moreover, equity-minded leaders and practitioners view racial inequities as a problem of practice and feel responsible on a personal and institutional level to address and eliminate them.

The Aspen Institute, AACC, and the USC Race and Equity Center represent some of the few prominent and well-known organizations elevating the importance of higher education leaders being equity-minded and culturally responsive in their approach to leadership. However, possessing leadership competencies alone still does not address the full scope of the issue, especially when senior level leaders, most of whom hold administrative power, may not understand the experiences and perspectives of the majority student population who come from communities of color. This again raises the ongoing issue that many college leaders do not represent the racial and ethnic composition of the student population and the need for racially and culturally diverse leaders on college campuses.

Salience of Race and Culture in Leadership Practice

A great deal of research has focused on the cultural capital that students possess and use during their college experiences as the frame from which to better understand students of color and how to support and advance more equitable outcomes for them. A subject that has not yet been explored sufficiently is how the concepts of cultural capital can also apply to educational leaders: more specifically, how leaders of color draw upon their cultural attributes to lead in culturally responsive ways to serve students of color and advance equity policy, practice, and pedagogy in their community college institutions.

Cultural Wealth/Capital

An individual's culture and identity can influence their experiences, framing how they view the world and others. According to Bernal (2002), the concept of epistemology, which focuses on the nature and production of knowledge, can be used to describe the process by which a person comes to know and understand the world around them. This "way of knowing" (p.106) is tied to one's worldview, which is based on the conditions in which they live, work, and learn. In terms of the educational setting, Bernal asserted that stories, narratives, and folktales are cultural resources or funds of knowledge held by students that display the strengths and strategies they bring to the educational setting. To draw upon and tap into students' cultural strengths would be a step away from a deficit-minded perspective of students and focus on their capacity and potential to influence their school environments and campus climate.

Yosso (2005) defined cultural wealth as an "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). This cultural knowledge may be extremely

valuable to the communities from which students of color come, but it is not seen to carry any capital in the educational setting where the White dominant ideology resides. For example, in exploring the experiences of Chicana/Chicano students from a critical race-gendered epistemological viewpoint, Bernal (2002) found that even though students of color hold and create knowledge based on their culture and lived experiences, they frequently reported feeling that those experiences and their histories, culture, and language are misunderstood, devalued, and neglected in educational settings. The deficit-minded beliefs and perspectives teachers and educational leaders have about students further silence of the voices of students of color in schools.

Cultural Identity and Leadership Practice

Throughout the literature, research has focused on the cultural capital that students possess and use during their college experiences to better understand students of color and how to support and advance more equitable outcomes. Some studies point out how the personal experiences and culturally significant stories, particularly of leaders of color, add worth and depth to educational leadership practice (C. A. M. Banks & Banks, 2001; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Jean-Marie, 2006; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). For example, case study research conducted by Santamaria (2014) and Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) found that culturally responsive leaders draw upon the positive characteristics of their identities, including race, culture, or gender, to influence their practice. Furthermore, some studies have suggested that for leaders of color, aspects of identity tied to themselves, their community, or their family are relevant to leadership effectiveness (L. Brown & Beckett, 2007; Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

However, what needs further exploration is how leaders of color draw upon their cultural attributes to lead in culturally responsive ways to serve students of color and advance equity policy, practice, pedagogy in their community college institutions (Bush et al., 2020; Reyes, 2013). Instead, most research on leaders of color centers the discourse on the barriers and challenges they face working in predominantly White institutions and strategies they should use to navigate the political, social, and emotional terrain (Braxton, 2018; Campo, 2018; Delgadillo, 2017; Monosov, 2019; Reynolds, 2020).

As described earlier, CRL within education has focused on drawing upon and affirming students' cultural backgrounds. Applying a similar perspective to educational leaders would mean viewing a leaders' cultural background as an asset and a factor that contributes to improving outcomes for diverse student populations. In a study that used CRT to explore how African American principals in urban schools are portrayed in the media, Gooden (2012) found that the narrative too often takes on a deficit perspective. Moreover, he found that media coverage was lacking stories that highlighted effective and productive ways in which Black school leaders lead in various school contexts and environments. Gooden argued that even though there is slow movement to consider the construct of race within educational research, leaders of color still must lead in culturally responsive ways to serve their schools and understand how racism manifests within the political, societal, institutional, and individual contexts in which they work.

Theoretical Foundations

This qualitative phenomenological study on CRL in higher education adopted a critical theoretical perspective. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), critical

theory is focused on the empowerment of individuals to move beyond the social constructions of race, gender, and class. Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) identified the extension of critical theory in the field of education was noted as a useful tool to inform effective strategies in teacher education, pedagogy, and educational leadership. Critical theory is increasingly being used as a lens to approach qualitative studies when the focus is centered on understanding the experiences of historically silenced and marginalized groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, an overarching critical theory perspective creates a path for the examination of how community college leaders of color acquire and use CRL skills, as well as the intersection with attributes as race, culture, and gender. Therefore, a review and inclusion of CRT, CRL, and ACL as theoretical foundations help to explore how race and cultural identity may influence how leaders of color practice culturally responsive leadership strategies.

Critical Race Theory

Built upon the shared work of legal scholars and intellectuals of color and other activists, CRT examines and seeks to alter the relationship among race, racism, and power in society (Delgado et al., 2017). It acknowledges that racism, created and maintained by a system of White supremacy, remains a central and entrenched part of the daily life for people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Museus, Ledesman, & Parker, 2015). The basic tenets or hallmarks of CRT, as delineated by Delgado et al. (2017), include:

- Racism is pervasive and not aberrational, but instead normalized within society.

- Interest convergence or material determinism in that racism benefits the interests of both elite Whites and working-class Whites.
- Race is a social construction based on social thought and relations, not scientific foundations.
- Following the notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism, no individual can be sufficiently identified by membership in a single group.
- The “voice of color thesis,” which maintains that people of color who have encountered oppression are uniquely equipped to communicate the stories and perspectives about race and racism that Whites are unlikely to understand.

Supporters of CRT actively pursue the elimination of racism and as well as other forms of group oppression that exist within all aspects of our social context (Delgado et al., 2017). One component of societal context is education. In fact, the extension of CRT to education can be seen in its scholarly origins when in 1980, students at Harvard Law School demanded that faculty of color teach Derrick Bell’s popular class, “Race, Racism and American Law” after he resigned in protest over the college’s failure to hire women of color to teach law (E. Taylor, 2016, p. 2). Student protests over the lack of faculty of color in law schools were prevalent in the 1980s, including the emergence of study groups, informal communication channels and seminars, and the establishment of an intellectual community of scholars. Through critical inquiry, this community of scholars created an awareness around the relationship between knowledge creation and majoritarian power. E. Taylor (2016) explained that these events and perspectives of the early CRT scholars supported a redefinition of racism “not as the acts of individuals, but

the larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group relationships, status, income, and educational attainment” (p. 3).

In terms of the field of education, scholars suggest that in addition to the five hallmark tenets of CRT, supplemental principles that inform educational research, pedagogy, curriculum, policy, and practice include: (a) the challenge to dominant ideology, (b) a commitment to social justice and praxis, (c) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (d) a historical context and interdisciplinary perspective (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso (2005), when taken collectively, these tenets present an opportunity to challenge how race and racism influence educational practices, structures, and dialogue. This assertion is highlighted by the work of Dixson and Rousseau (2005) who, in their review of the development of CRT in education, concluded that the emergent discourse around educational equity must include the recognition that the first-hand knowledge and storytelling of individuals of color—or what Delgado et al. (2017) call the “voice of color thesis” (p. 4)—is important because people of color are uniquely qualified to counter the dominant narrative. Given CRT scholars’ claim that storytelling is a valid expression of knowing, it is reasonable to extend this premise to the assertion that the experiential knowledge and counter stories of leaders of color can be viewed as a strength, rather than a deficit, and can serve to expose deficit-minded approaches embedded in institutional practices.

In contrast, it is important to point out that some scholars argue that CRT literature, most often associated with a Black-White binary, often portray the issues of other racial groups as invisible. Accordingly, other critical race perspectives and outgrowths of CRT have emerged to provide voice to the experiences of various other

minoritized communities of color. Museus et al. (2015) summarized those other perspectives, which include but are not limited to:

- Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), which focuses on the concerns and issues of Latinas and Latinos that often center around issues of language, accent, immigration status, ethnicity, and nation.
- Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit) prioritizes the experiences and histories of Native American and indigenous peoples and within the field of education, examining how colleges and universities might engage in superficial forms of celebration of multiculturalism while still perpetuating forms of colonization and oppression through educational policies that still have the problematic goal of assimilation.
- Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) seeks to raise consciousness around the unique forms of racism that Asians and Asian Americans experience, one of which is to dispel the *model minority* stereotype that all Asians achieve universal academic success and do not experience racism or oppression.

The saliency of race within the context of educational policy and practice is important to consider because these are areas in which educational leaders, particularly those at the executive and senior levels, have the most influence. Some scholars (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parker & Villalpando, 2007) agree that utilizing a CRT lens is valuable in the interrogation of education policy and processes shaped by White supremacy, patterns of exclusion, and racial privilege. According to Gillborn (2016), this view challenges the long-held student deficit approach to solving school-based problems

that focuses on fixing students who do not fit the majoritarian culture while ignoring the structural systems of oppression and dominance that guide policy implementation.

In contrast, critics of CRT claim that it discriminates against White individuals and is destructive because it rejects foundational American ideals on which the United States constitution is based. Sawchuk (2021) contended that the debate surrounding CRT essentially is about differences in conceptions of racism. Extending its application within current educational contexts, CRT has been introduced into the school setting in relation to teaching concepts, curriculum materials, mission statements, and school board resolutions. CRT critics claim it has no place in the school system and exclaim that its presence is damaging to White students by exposing them to harmful, demoralizing ideas that perpetuate the fear or perception that all Whites are racists. Examples of CRT's negative influence according to critics, include the rise of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, diversity training in federal organizations, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) clubs in K12 and higher education institutions, and the debate over free speech rights in higher education institutions.

Cultural Responsiveness

The foundation of cultural responsiveness in education comes from concepts related to multicultural education that maintain that all students regardless of their social class, gender, and racial and ethnic characteristics ought to have an equal opportunity to learn by means of ensuring the school environment is reflective of the diversity of its student population and community (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2009). Cultural responsiveness in a broad sense encompasses instructional philosophies and models that contain elements of culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy practices in

elementary and secondary school systems and research focused on the most effective ways to serve and educate culturally diverse students. Although the discussion of cultural responsiveness has been primarily in the teaching and learning space, some efforts have emerged to relate the framework to educational leadership and how leadership practice can be informed by this body of knowledge.

Pedagogy. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching includes: using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively...assumes that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily. (p. 106)

Gay described culturally responsive teaching as validating, multidimensional, empowering, and emancipatory. Pedagogical practices of culturally responsive teaching encompass five qualities:

- Acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural customs of different ethnic groups that affect students' approach to learning and as valuable content to be taught within the curriculum.
- Build meaning between home, family, and school experiences and connections between abstract academic concepts and students' lived social and cultural experiences.
- Use a variety of teaching strategies that connect to different learning styles.
- Center on students' cultural knowing and validation of their own and others' cultural heritages.

- Integrate multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects taught in school.

The practical impact of culturally relevant and responsive teaching is reflected in the seminal work of Ladson-Billings, who suggests in her book titled, *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), that successful learning environments in which African American students thrive are in classrooms where exemplary teachers employ culturally relevant teaching practices by affirming their cultural backgrounds and identities. Cultural responsiveness authenticates students' ways of knowing and being, creating space and freedom for students to find their own voices, view learning within various cultural perspectives, and empower them to create their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Leadership. Given the importance of leaders ensuring school environments are inclusive, welcoming, and responsive to the educational needs of diverse students, research has emerged describing the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies that are most effective in the K12 setting. In a synthesis of the literature on culturally responsive leadership, Khalifa et al. (2016) found four major themes or behaviors that characterize culturally responsive school leadership practices. The first is the importance of leaders to engage in critical self-reflection to gain awareness of their own implicit biases or acknowledged oppressive attitudes and beliefs about students of color. This must involve continuous learning of cultural knowledge and the challenging of Whiteness as the standard to emulate. The second behavior of a culturally responsive school leader is that they develop teachers' capacity to teach in culturally responsive ways and create an environment that embraces the use of data to critically analyze gaps in

achievement, disciplinary actions, and services. The third behavior is creating a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment. Leadership practices that promote inclusive environments include school-wide acceptance of the indigenous cultures and identities of students, challenging exclusionary policies and procedures, and prioritizing student voices. The final behavior exhibited by culturally responsive school leaders is their proactive engagement of parents and students within the context of their community. This occurs when the leader finds ways to connect school and community spaces and develop positive relationships with the communities from which students reside. Culturally responsive leaders also serve as an advocate for causes that are important to the community. Khalifa et al. asserted that culturally responsive leadership practices are not only liberatory in nature but also affirming of the authentic cultural wealth of students of color. This ultimately supports students of color to succeed, thrive, and reach their fullest potential.

Although research shows that higher education leaders have a profound role in institutional policy and practice, the use of cultural responsiveness as a lens to inform leadership practices has only now begun to emerge. One example is in the recent work of Hollowell (2019), who highlights the need to extend cultural responsiveness into the educational leadership space by exploring how principals in K12 settings create inclusive school climates that support all students. Hollowell found that principals who demonstrate culturally responsive leadership courageously address the historical marginalization of underserved students despite staff pushback. Moreover, they encourage input from students of color, which validates the cultural assets they bring to the school environment. The findings from Hollowell's study appropriately set the stage

for further exploration of culturally responsive leadership in the context of higher education settings.

Applied Critical Leadership

Although findings from some studies hint at the limited research on cultural responsiveness in higher education (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014), the most recent work of Santamaria and Santamaria (2012, 2016; Santamaria, 2014), has illuminated the value of the perspectives and presence of leaders of color and leaders from other historically marginalized groups in answering the call for change and addressing educational inequalities and achievement gaps of students in the school setting. Building upon the connections among CRT, education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical pedagogy, and transformational leadership frameworks, Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) have contributed to the body of educational leadership research and literature by introducing an emerging leadership framework called ACL. The ACL model unpacks the more nuanced way educational leaders from historically marginalized groups express their intersecting identities and draws upon the positive attributes of their lived experiences and culture to lead equity efforts to improve access and opportunities for underserved students.

Initial research conducted by Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) that undergirded the ACL framework focused on three central questions: (a) how does the identity of leaders from pre-kindergarten to higher education affect their leadership practices and decisions, (b) what are the effective leadership strategies they use on a daily basis and how might those strategies from traditional educational leadership practices, and (c) in what ways do their leadership practices contribute to changes in their schools?

Santamaria and Santamaria studied 11 educational leaders who identified as Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), African American, Chicana, European American, Latino, Mexican, Native American, Jamaican, Jewish, gay, and transgender working across systems from Pre-K to higher education in the Southern California region.

Findings from the study provided the foundation and premise of the ACL framework. An asset and strength-based leadership model, ACL is described as:

a model of leadership practice where educational leaders consider the social context of their educational communities and empower individual members of these communities based on the educational leaders' identities (i.e. subjectivity, biases, assumptions, race, class, gender, and traditions) as perceived through a CRT lens. (p. 5)

ACL counters the current deficit-based perspective that focuses on the strategies and practices that leaders of color do not possess or are unable to enact in order to effect transformational change in their schools. Instead, it considers the positive attributes and lived experiences that contribute to their leadership practice and the unique value they bring their institutions by choosing to look through a CRT lens to lead more effectively.

Strategies of applied critical leaders, according to subsequent research conducted by Santamaria and Santamaria (2016; Santamaria, 2014), appear to be grounded in their cultural identity from a community perspective as well as their own experiences with oppression. The experience of growing up in a marginalized community and being vulnerable in the school setting was foundational to the leaders' commitment to give back and work to meet the unresolved educational needs of their communities. Additionally, oppression and discrimination experienced by these leaders on a personal level fueled the decisions they made relative to educational policy changes in their professional life. The

ACL model presented by Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) suggests the following nine characteristics as indicative of applied critical leaders:

1. Willingness to initiate and engage in critical conversations for the greater good of the group even when the topic is not popular.
2. Assuming a CRT lens to consider various perspectives on critical issues.
3. Using a consensus building approach to decision-making while still being conscious of stereotype threat or of fulfilling negative stereotypes often associated with the groups with whom they identify and instead engaging in way to counter the negative narrative.
4. Desire to contribute and add authentic, empirically based research and information to academic discourse as it relates to underserved populations.
5. Need to honor all members of their constituencies and stakeholder groups.
6. Leading by example to meet an unresolved educational challenge or need to give back to the marginalized community with which they affiliate and who supported their educational and career success.
7. Sense of responsibility to bring issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class to their constituencies for advocacy and resolution.
8. Need to build trusting relationships with mainstream constituencies or those who do not display allyship or share an affinity for issues of educational equity.
9. Often reporting they lead by “spirit” or a calling to serve the greater good and lead in a way that is transformational.

The ACL framework serves to highlight the value of a multiplicity of perspectives and the cultural wealth of knowledge leaders from historically underserved and marginalized communities bring to their roles. A leader's cultural identity and lived experience can shape and contribute to their approach to leadership practice. As noted by Bush et al. (2020) placing a priority on the voices, life experiences, and cultural attributes of leaders of color as a leadership competency, rather than focusing on deficits, would build upon and fill overall gaps in knowledge related to the practice of culturally responsive leadership.

Although it is still evolving, research from Santamaria and Santamaria (2012, 2016; Santamaria, 2014), is one of few areas of the literature that highlights how leaders of color who draw upon the positive qualities of their multicultural perspectives as a competency or asset are more likely to recognize and use the power of identity and experience to advance social justice and educational equity efforts in their institutional settings. Although the intersection of personal, professional, and political factors can have a substantial impact on the critical work of closing equity and achievement gaps for students, their use of positional power to address equity gaps can be complicated for senior level leaders of color. The fact remains that the complexity of navigating their personal narrative and journey, sense of calling and commitment to their profession, and the political context in which their college is situated is often incompatible with the predominantly White institutional context in which they work.

Conceptual Framework

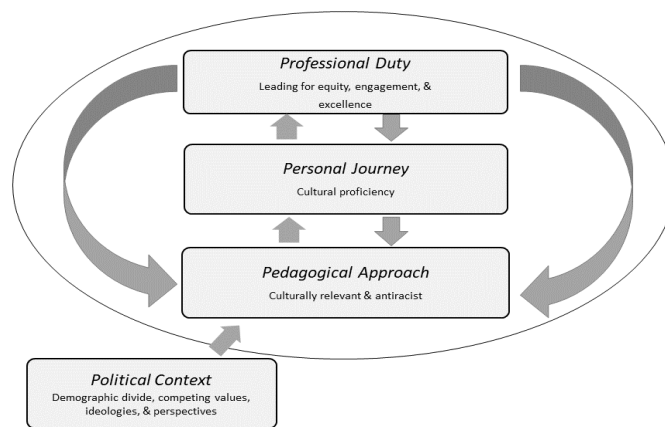
Given the current landscape of the CCC system and the urgency around issues of DEI, particularly with respect to closing racial equity gaps in opportunity and

achievement for students, senior level leaders are faced with the need to respond to these challenges and employ a leadership approach that prioritizes the needs, perspectives, cultural wealth, and values of students from diverse communities. Senior-level leaders who come from historically marginalized communities of color tap into their lived experience and cultural attributes as a source of wealth from which they draw as they lead on a daily basis. The literature review in this study revealed numerous leadership approaches that support the type of leadership necessary to lead a diverse CCC (transformational, social justice, and equity-mindedness) and the various theoretical frames that form the lens through which such leadership practice is enacted. After examining these models and concepts, it appears that an approach that encompasses a blend of tenets would best address the holistic approach to culturally responsive leadership needed to take into account the current racial climate in the CCCs with which leaders must contend today.

The Culturally Relevant Leadership model proposed by Horsford et al. (2011), built on the body of literature and research from culturally relevant and anti-racist pedagogy, culturally proficient, and culturally responsive leadership, was the framework used for this study. The framework consists of four dimensions that are critical to the effective leadership in education settings as seen in Figure 1: (a) the political context, (b) a pedagogical approach, (c) the personal journey, and (d) professional duty. Horsford et al. (2011) asserted that given the unique needs of diverse social and cultural student populations in schools today, the increased demand to close achievement gaps for disproportionately impacted students, and the high accountability standards faced by educational institutions, leaders must possess the capacity and skills across these

dimensions in order to be effective. These dimensions provide a theoretical foundation for this study while also providing a frame to explore deeply how the lived experiences and multiple identities of leaders of color influence how they lead their CCCs in culturally responsive ways.

Figure 1: Culturally relevant leadership model



Note. Adapted from “Pedagogy of the Personal and Professional: Toward a Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership,” by S. D. Horsford, T. Grosland, & K. M. Gunn, 2011, *Journal of School Leadership*, 21(4), 582–606.

Political Context

CCC leaders face a multitude of issues and challenges from a political, demographic, fiscal, technological, and social perspective. Senior leaders are at the forefront of this dynamically changing environment as they try to navigate internal and external factors. Responsible for high-level policy changes and implementation, senior leaders must attend to these factors and the political climate in which they are situated. According to Horsford et al. (2011), culturally relevant leadership requires educational leaders to possess a “consciousness of the political context in which they are operating” (p. 595). Similarly, White, Harvey, and Fox (2016) contended that politics and power,

external and internal to an organization, are pervasive and leaders must understand how they affect their decision-making patterns, interpersonal relationships, and how resources are used and shared.

As Mize (2020) contended in the *2020 CCC CEO Tenure & Retention Study* published by the Community College League of California (CCLC), the California landscape is such that executive leaders are expected to be multidimensional because they not only serve as fiscal stewards of their institution, but also navigate:

internal and external constituent relations, student basic needs and success, district and campus climate, accreditation, and reporting requirements, strategic planning, campus infrastructure, fundraising and community relations, local, state, and federal advocacy, and a host of unanticipated exigencies (p. 7)

An example of an unexpected but urgent change that educational leaders faced in 2020 was the global COVID-19 pandemic that shut down the economic, social, and educational systems abruptly. The health crisis brought on by COVID-19 shuttered schools, leaving leaders to grapple with how to manage health risks and the financial instability of many of the students and communities served by institutions that were the most accessible to them. Moreover, the economic upheaval illuminated and intensified the long-standing inequities and disparities in digital access, employment, income, education, and basic health care experienced by people of color, in addition to unearthing the systemic racism and ideology that has existed in America since its founding. In California specifically, recovering from the pandemic from an enrollment and fiscal standpoint while also leaning into the intricacies of race and ethnicity is no simple task. According to Dr. Lande Ajose, the Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education with the

California Governor's Office, doing so will require leaders to make "progress on many fronts requiring collaboration with California's students, faculty, K12 system, political leaders, business community, and philanthropy" (Education First, 2021, p.5).

Leaders must exercise discernment of the various political and philosophical ideologies, and assumptions that form policy and practice, especially when the discourse around contemporaneous issues is becoming increasingly racially polarized. Thrust into the public eye, senior level leaders are expected to serve as advocates for the myriad voices within their communities, exhibit persuasiveness in their coalition building, and form alliances with individuals and organizations who may have interests that are different than their own. This takes political acumen, or political intelligence, according to White et al. (2016), wherein leaders use a "moral compass to lead the organization in the right direction while considering the wants, needs, values, motivations, and emotions of followers and stakeholders" (p.3). In the case of senior-level educational leaders of color, it also involves how they navigate and negotiate the delicate political terrain and at the same time meet the needs of their diverse student populations. Horsford et al. (2011) further contended that leaders who are "engaging in culturally relevant and antiracist work in their schools" (p.596) must also be aware of not only its political significance but pedagogical import as well.

Pedagogical Approach

Expanding on the field of knowledge regarding culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and anti-racist pedagogy that emphasizes teacher awareness of culture in fostering supportive learning environments for students from diverse backgrounds, Horsford et al. (2011) suggested that leaders must possess this awareness to create a

culturally affirming and inclusive campus climate. Although senior leaders may often be more removed from daily interaction with students, their role as instructional leaders is no less vital within the context of teaching and learning. The call for leaders to be accountable for improving the educational outcomes for students of color within their institutions is an imperative that is front and center within the CCC system.

An example of the role leaders will play in changing curricular and pedagogical practices within their institutions is evident in legislation passed in California in 2020 mandating that students in the CSU and UC systems must complete some form of ethnic studies course to graduate with a baccalaureate degree (Sawchuk, 2021). In July 2021, the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) adopted new regulations requiring all CCCs to offer an ethnic studies course as part of the general education requirements to earn an associate degree (Chavez, 2021). According to the CCC BOG President, Pamela Haynes, by building a faculty and staff that look like the students and communities we serve and by putting diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism at the heart of our work, we can help create a system that truly works for all our students. (as cited in Weissman, 2021, p.1). Moreover, in October 2021, California became the first state in the country to pass Assembly Bill 101, requiring K12 schools to offer ethnic studies courses focused on the history and experiences of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, Sikh, Jewish, Arab, and Armenian Americans to present an accurate depiction of history, expand educational opportunities, and raise educational achievement starting in 2025-26 (Fensterwald, 2021). Certainly, the actions taken across all educational systems in California point to the urgency leaders must have in advancing DEI efforts on their

campuses in addition to signaling the challenges they face ahead in leading in complex political and social environments.

As explained in a literature review published by the CCCs' Diversity Taskforce (CCCCO, 2020) examining campus diversity, retention of a diverse student body is connected to "faculty teaching and institutional accountability" (pp. 4-5) in as much as faculty must be supported to teach in ways that expose students to multicultural perspectives, bring relevant social justice issues into their curriculum, and provide professional development to minimize implicit bias in the classroom. This often requires courageous and critical conversations in the academy about the interrelatedness of race, student achievement, and equity gaps. Santamaria (2012) argued that critical leaders must provide space and support for all stakeholders to engage in these conversations and ask critical questions that will challenge the deficit-minded discourse around the capacity and efficacy of students of color as a tool to change inequitable educational and teaching practices. Similarly noted in *Equity-Driven Systems: Student Equity and Achievement in the California Community Colleges*, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (2019), acknowledged that when teachers use culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching practices, it:

- Makes learning relevant to students' lived experiences;
- Deepens understanding of concepts including cultural knowledge and perspectives;
- Engages students in content areas early, leading to better retention and persistence;
- Increases learner confidence; and

- Enhances interest in long-term goals and education. (p. 16)

And yet, the sole responsibility for achieving a culturally inclusive learning environment cannot rest on faculty but instead must stem from strong support and commitment from college leadership to acknowledge and affirm the cultural assets and backgrounds students bring to the institution. Moreover, Horsford et al. (2011) asserted that the ability of educational leaders to embrace the pedagogical practices, ways of knowing, and experiences of all faculty will enable their diverse community to be educated and served in a profound way.

Personal Journey

Whereas it is critical that leaders possess awareness of the political context in which their school is situated, coupled with a pedagogical approach in leading their institutions that is founded on culturally relevant principles, critical self-reflection on an individual and practitioner level and its impact on institutional outcomes is equally significant. Horsford et al. (2011) called this inward reflection a leader's "personal journey" (p.598) to becoming more culturally proficient. Similar to the concept of equity-mindedness, coined by Bensimon (2005) and other scholars (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017), which assert that it is "institutional actors, as a consequence of their beliefs, expectations, values, and practices" (p. 3) that inequalities in outcomes occur. Horsford et al. (2011) draws heavily upon the culturally proficient framework conceptualized by Terrell and Lindsay (2009) in which the authors surmise that for leaders to be personally effective and culturally competent in diverse educational settings, they must engage in five essential practices (a) assess one's own culture; (b) value diversity; (c) manage the dynamics of difference; (d) adapt to diversity; and (e)

institutionalize cultural knowledge. According to Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, and Lindsey (2018), leaders must be willing to assess and interrogate their own assumptions and biases of students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

A study conducted by Amiot, Mayer-Glenn, and Parker (2020) at a racially diverse middle school located in the western region of the United States demonstrated that a leader's awareness of the racialized school context contributed to their ability to employ administrative actions to disrupt institutional barriers to achievement for students of color. Using a "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1993, p.1709) lens to interrogate leadership practices, the middle school leadership team authenticated the counter stories of students by changing the school-wide dialogue from one of cultural inadequacy to one of cultural wealth. By centering the perspectives of the students of color, alternate ways of knowing were elevated and acknowledged. The school leaders' "reflective racial analysis was personal, educational, and societal" as they interrogated White racism in their leadership practice in personal and institutional ways (Amiot et al., 2020, p.206).

Conversely, biases can play out in negative ways if the educator or leader is not consciously aware of them and how they may show up in practice. An example of this, described in a resource document for educators published by the National Association of School Psychologists in 2016 titled *Understanding Race and Privilege*, describes how harmful ways privilege-based bias can manifest in the area of student discipline in schools. It points out that when implicit bias is left unchecked, educational leaders may be prone to making disciplinary decisions that disproportionately affect students from racially minoritized backgrounds and perpetuate stereotypes that African American and

Latinx students are more likely to engage in criminal and hostile behavior than their White peers.

Cultural proficiency is thereby viewed as foundational to a leader's ethical and professional construct for supporting collaborative relationships and effective communication with students and staff from communities and cultures that are different from their own. This can only happen when school leaders are willing to acknowledge that an examination of "self, school, and school district are fundamental to addressing educational access and achievement disparity issues" (Terrell et al., 2018, p.1).

The self-reflection process that accompanies an individual's self-growth and change in leader beliefs and behaviors lends itself to changes in institutional policies and practices that create more equitable and inclusive campus environments for students of color and others from historically marginalized communities. Undoubtedly, as leaders engage in such practices, they will meet with resistance, barriers, and obstacles at the individual and systems level and must lean on their will and skill to dismantle oppressive structures as they exercise their responsibility and professional duty to serve all students.

Professional Duty

Practitioners and leaders who call for social justice and equity often see their work as a moral commitment and responsibility to advocate for students and individuals from communities like their own. These leaders report that their work is a way to give back to their communities and help others as they have been helped. According to Horsford et al. (2011), the impact of a leader's racial and cultural identity and experiences often shapes their deep concern for social justice-informed, culturally

relevant, anti-racist education, making it more than just personal but also a professional duty. Santamaria and Santamaria (2012) found that many of the diverse linguistic, racial, cultural, and gendered educational leaders they studied reported they lead by what they call “spirit” or a “calling” (p. 147) to their profession and were driven by a higher purpose to enact educational change and serve the greater good. According to Santamaria and Santamaria, critical leaders repeatedly expressed a moral and ethical obligation to serve in a leadership role and saw it as way to show how they were able to succeed despite being in a system that was built to “suppress, oppress, and force them into some semblance of assimilation” (p. 148). Furthermore, the leaders who were studied often described that they tapped into the different aspects of their identities as an asset to provide the best and most appropriate leadership based on the context and situation.

In addition to possessing an internal sense of professional responsibility to lead in in culturally responsive ways, adequate leadership preparation and support to lead in a diverse school setting and combat institutional racism are also critical for leaders. Professional associations and organizations often provide guidelines for leadership standards as well as opportunities for professional growth, development, and learning of the necessary skills needed to effectively serve diverse communities (Aho & Quaye, 2018). Within California, several organizations and associations contextualize these professional competencies and skills to the unique needs and landscape of the CCC system, including the Chief Student Services Officer Association (CSSO), the Chief Instructional Officer Association, Association of ACBO, and the CCLC, all of which are

tailored to the needs of senior level leaders working at the local campus level in the CCCs.

The area of student services covers an overarching and multi-faceted range of services and programs to serve students through their experience and journey in the community college. Chief Student Services Officers, also referred to as Vice Presidents of Student Services (VPSS), facilitate their teams to serve the whole student, which, according to the *2021 CSSO Association Handbook*, involves meeting student needs both inside and outside of the classroom while recognizing and effectively addressing the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and educating the institution about the myriad challenges students face (Chief Student Services Officers Association [CSSOA], 2021a). At times when funding sources and new initiatives fluctuate and rapidly shift, CSSOs must have the willingness to embrace change, be able to adapt and be flexible, effectively communicate the extent of the changes, and effectively provide leadership to address such issues as equity, student achievement, and state funding requirements tied to positive student outcomes that come as a result of closing achievement gaps. This perspective is affirmed by the CCC CSSO Association's (CSSOA's) vision, mission, and values centered on advocacy for racial equity, social justice, and student success and seeks to support student service leaders to engage in innovative, equity-minded, and anti-racist practices in their institutions (CSSOA, 2021b). Additionally, the CSSOA has authored several advocacy statements in response to the racial unrest over the past few years publicly denouncing racial violence against Black/African Americans, Asian American Pacific Islanders, LGBTQ+ people, and the efforts to halt the Deferred Action

for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy that protects eligible undocumented youth from deportation, allowing them to stay in the United States for school and work purposes.

The Association of Chief Business Officials (ACBO, n.d.) is the primary vehicle for providing support, professional development, and expertise to Chief Business Officers (CBO), also referred to as Vice Presidents of Administrative Services (VPAS), on matters related to college finance, budgets, facilities, and the overall fiscal viability of the college. ACBO seeks to ensure that CBOs in the CCC adhere to high ethical standards and professional behavior because they are fiscal stewards of the institution and see the imperative to engage in leadership practices that demonstrate “integrity, credibility, objectivity, trustworthiness, collegiality, confidentiality, and devotion to excellence” (para 3). CBOs in community colleges are in a position to make recommendations and decisions that affect how resources are allocated and distributed to serve student needs; without an understanding of the diverse student population served by the college, inequitable distribution of those resources can occur.

As the leader over instructional and academic matters in a community college, the Chief Instructional Officer (CIO) plays an essential role in student success. The CIO is responsible for promoting and advancing teaching and learning, enrollment management, program review and evaluation, accreditation, and working with faculty to ensure students are learning. In 2020, CIOs in the community college system collectively made a call to action to dismantle institutional structures and practices that continue to oppress students from historically marginalized communities. Specific actions under the purview of CIOs to address inequities include practices that support the advancement of educators of color, diversify hiring committees, and create a professional development academy for

aspiring deans of instruction and other instructional leaders (California Community Colleges Chief Instructional Officers Association, n.d.).

CCC Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or college presidents are responsible for all operations of their respective community colleges. The college president is ultimately the final decision-maker on matters related to college governance and policy. The role of the CEO has tremendous impact on college culture and organizational climate because the president sets the tone around DEI for their campus. The CCLC supports CCC CEOs in serving their institutions and students through professional development and legislative advocacy at state and federal levels (CCLC, n.d.). With regard to DEI, the recent update of the *League's 2021-24 Strategic Plan* revised its vision and mission statements and core principles and ideals to include a stronger focus on equity (CCLC, 2021). In addition, with the revision of the strategic plan, the League sought to ensure equity is embedded in the policy and decision-making practices of CEOs. For example, the League developed a goal focused on fostering greater diversity and cultural proficiency of CEOs by including cultural competence in the professional development curriculum.

The deep commitment and urgency senior leaders feel in continuing to challenge the status quo in their institutions, improve the racial climate on campus, and advance equity efforts has not dwindled but rather has been ignited given the current surge of racial unrest in America and on college campuses. After the 2020 killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, among other Black people, Bush et al. (2020) interviewed several CCC CEOs on their reflections of racism, anti-Blackness, and bias. Even as these CEOs acknowledged the continued existence of racism and bias on their campuses and the fatigue and woundedness felt by many of their Black students and other

communities of color, they “welcomed the urgency and embraced the imperative to attack racism and bias, and the role that community colleges can play in shaping society” (p. 9). These leaders’ hope, determination, and strong belief in the power of education to transform lives, particularly the lives of students from historically marginalized backgrounds, grounds them and points to their desire to lead on a personal level and as a professional duty. Horsford et al. (2011) contended that personal and professional recognition and acceptance of this charge to promote engagement, educational equity, and excellence characterize the culturally relevant leadership skills necessary to serve and educate racially and culturally diverse student populations and positively influence their communities.

Implications for Senior Level Leaders of Color

Senior level leaders within an organization, in this case community colleges, hold positional authority and power to shape vision, mission, strategies, and organizational climate and culture. Decision-making practices and policy making at the highest levels influence and drive priorities around DEI, and it is senior leaders who set the tone and expectations regarding whether DEI efforts will be seen as a priority. Martins (2020) noted that senior leaders play a significant role in creating meaning and purpose around diversity and who ultimately is most influential in signaling the institution’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. This commitment and resulting actions do not happen by themselves; rather, senior leaders must serve as stewards of the needed changes and model the value and importance of employing equity-mindedness and culturally relevant practices to serve the diverse needs of their constituencies. Although current literature around institutional diversity has most often been associated with numerical

representation of students and faculty of color, it has not adequately recognized the representation of leaders of color and the value and contribution their cultural identities bring to their leadership practice and impact on DEI efforts.

Summary of Literature Review

With student demographics within higher education and particularly in CCCs becoming even more diverse, it is important that educational leaders are culturally responsive in their approach to serve all students and promote an inclusive campus environment. Because of the current realities and landscape in the CCCs that now focus on equity initiatives and anti-racism, cultural responsiveness of college leaders is necessary to create more equity-minded institutions in an effort to address racial disparities in outcomes for students of color.

This literature review began with an historical review of the impact of race and racism in American higher education, providing a lens from which to understand the historical factors that have shaped the racial inequities that plague higher education institutions, and the resulting challenges educational leaders face today. Next, an overview of the history, mission, and purpose of community colleges in America was presented, with a particular emphasis on the role CCCs play in addressing equity and achievement gaps within a complex socio-political environment. Although the CCC system has made a call to action to leaders within the system to prioritize DEI efforts on their campuses through funding and accountability measures for closing equity gaps, a lack of substantial progress remains. A discussion of the role senior leaders play in changing institutional culture and climate was presented, along with the enduring systemic, institutional barriers, and challenges of practice they face in creating conditions

conducive to change. Although various well-known leadership approaches and models that focus on social justice efforts exist to support and promote culturally responsive practices, these alone cannot dilute the fact that representation within the campus environment matters, as does the necessity of having staff who reflect the student population. Consequently, numerous studies were examined pointing to the salience of the racial and cultural identity of leaders and the influence these attributes have on their leadership practice as they advocate for racial equity in their institutions. However, the literature painted a stark dichotomy of the representational divide between the students who enroll in CCCs and the faculty and administrators who educate, serve, and lead in those colleges.

The theoretical foundations of CRT, Culturally Responsive Leadership and ACL served as a valuable analytical backdrop to center the salience of race and culture in leadership practice. Furthermore, the dimensions of the Culturally Relevant Leadership framework by Horsford et al. (2011) were described and provided a structure for exploring how senior level leaders of color enact their leadership practice from a personal perspective and as part of their professional duty. The value of the lived experiences of educators of color in the academy was highlighted in the review of literature. However, the extension of this to senior level leaders and how aspects of their cultural and other multiple identities affect their leadership practices and decision-making is limited in current research and even more so within the CCC system.

It is intended that through the findings of this study, the culturally responsive leadership strategies used by senior level leaders of color as they draw upon their intersectionality and layers of identity will contribute to the academic discourse on

educational leadership. More importantly, as the voices of leaders of color are acknowledged as valid and worthy, it is hopeful that the academy will lean on their lived experiences for guidance in how to create campus cultures that affirm diversity and provide avenues for action to achieve racial justice and educational equity for all students.

Chapter III will provide an overview of the research design, data collection, and data analysis utilized in this study. The qualitative research design includes an overview of the methodology used, description of the target population, instrumentation, and methods for ensuring validity and reliability. Data collection includes the process by which data was gathered and methods used to analyze the data and ends with a discussion on limitations to the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter I provided an introduction to and background of the focus of this study. Chapter II offered a comprehensive review of the literature as it relates to racial equity in higher education, the structure and mission of CCCs, and the role of CCC leadership in addressing DEI issues. Theoretical foundations that undergird the study were presented, along with the conceptual framework utilized as the lens in which the study was grounded. Chapter III describes the study's methodology as a qualitative ethnographic approach utilizing interviews, observations, and artifacts to collect data on the lived experiences and culturally responsive strategies utilized by 15 senior-level leaders of color serving in the CCC.

This chapter of the study describes the ethnographic methodology used to explore senior-level leaders' use of culturally responsive leadership strategies as they lead in the CCC setting. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, the researcher collected the data through interviews, artifacts, and recorded observations to explore the culture-sharing patterns of senior-level leaders of color as they lead equity efforts in their institutions. The chapter also reiterates the study's purpose and research questions. The use of both models provides not only a conceptual, organizational structure for exploring leadership from different educational contexts, but also its manifestation in the leadership praxis of senior-level leaders who represent historically marginalized communities. This chapter presents an overview of the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis. The final section of this chapter describes the limitations of the research study and concludes the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to identify and describe how CCC senior-level leaders of color are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central question and four sub-questions intended to explore culturally responsive leadership utilized by CCC senior-level leaders of color. The central research question was: How are California community college senior-level leaders of color culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework?

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework:

1. How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of college senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Research Design

The approach taken in research and inquiry serves as a roadmap to collect data, analyze data, present results systematically, and then interpret those findings to draw conclusions. Qualitative and quantitative inquiry are two methods often used by researchers. However, the approaches differ regarding their assumptions about the world or how it is understood, the purpose of research and research methods used, the researcher's role, and the types of conclusions drawn from the data. Qualitative research presupposes that multiple realities are socially constructed from an individual or group's perceptions and experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In contrast, quantitative inquiry assumes a single reality as opposed to individual perceptions and beliefs. This study's purpose statement and research question lent themselves to a qualitative research approach because the research sought to explore and deeply understand the lived experiences, stories, and perspectives of senior-level leaders of color in leading their institutions, which is best obtained from interviews and observations and the collection of artifacts. According to Patton (2015), when the need to explore an emerging topic exists, a qualitative approach is most appropriate. Such was the case in this study, which aimed to extend the emerging research on the topic of culturally responsive leadership strategies used by senior-level leaders in the CCC setting.

The types of qualitative research methods considered for this study included phenomenological, narrative inquiry, and ethnography. Although the characteristics of the phenomenological and narrative inquiry approaches could have contributed to the study, the ethnographic approach most closely aligned with this research study's purpose.

The ethnographic approach was chosen as part of the thematic team of researchers studying culturally responsive leadership strategies used by CCC leaders.

Ethnography

Ethnographic research has origins rooted in the field of anthropology. It focuses on describing and interpreting the shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, values, and language of a “culture-sharing group” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.90). Understanding culture, the collection of beliefs and patterns of behavior defined by a group as the standard way of being, is central to an ethnographic approach. Seminal authors in the field of qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2018) reported that more and more researchers who conduct an ethnographic inquiry employ it as a critical approach to studying the “systems of power, prestige, privilege, and authority that serve to marginalize individuals from different classes, races, and genders” (p. 92). The current lack of administrators of color in senior-level positions within the CCC system creates a void in the representation and voice of minoritized communities when decisions on policy and process are made about how best to serve students from those communities. This study sought to understand the culture-sharing experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and attributes of identity that senior-level leaders of color consider salient to their leadership within the community college environment. Therefore, ethnographic data collection methods, strategies for analysis, and findings were deemed most appropriate to the outcomes defined in this study.

Population

McMillian and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as an entire group that meets specific criteria to which the study results can be generalized. For the purposes of

this study, the researcher identified the population based on the characteristic of senior-level leaders in the CCC system. For this study, a senior level leader was defined as a President, President/Superintendent, Executive Vice President, and Vice President. The organizational structure at most CCC includes one President, one Vice President of Instruction, one Vice President of Student Services, and one Vice President of Administrative Services. Therefore, this study's population included the 464 leaders who hold a senior-level position at each of the 116 CCCs.

Target Population

The population for this study was estimated at 464 senior-level leaders in the CCC system representative of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. To narrow down to the target population, it was necessary to include only those senior-level leaders who identified with a non-White racial/ethnic group. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a target population is the group of individuals within the population that conforms to specific criteria. Because no data published by the CCCCCO accurately identifies how many senior-level leaders of color work in the CCC system, it was necessary to estimate this number based on available information. The researcher examined the racial-ethnic composition of a sample of 23 community colleges and discovered that 20% of senior-level leaders identify as leaders of color. Based on this finding, it could be estimated that the target population for this study was 92, or 20% of 464.

Sample

The sample of a research study refers to those participants from whom the data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Based on the target population of 92, a sample of 15 was taken. These 15 individuals consisted of CCC senior-level leaders who

identify as African-American, Native American, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or multi-ethnic.

Sampling Procedure

Criterion sampling was the procedure used for this study to identify specific individuals within the CCC system. According to Patton (2015), criterion sampling involves the review and study of all cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria or attributes, which provides for a comparison with cases that do not meet the criteria. For this study, only participants who currently serve in the role as president, superintendent/president, or vice president at a CCC and had at least 3 years of experience at the senior level were considered. Of the participants who responded to the invitation to participate and met three of the five following criteria, 15 were selected for an interview:

1. Possess 10 or more years of experience in higher education
2. Experience leading efforts related to social justice, DEI in a CCC.
3. Employed at a CCC comprising a student population in which at least 50% of the students are non-White.
4. Have participated in professional development focused on DEI, cultural competency/proficiency, or other equity-minded concepts
5. Conducted presentations or workshops or other professional development on DEI

The second sampling procedure the researcher was prepared to use was snowball or chain sampling. This approach is useful for identifying “information-rich key informants or critical cases” by asking participants who else to talk to, thus generating

new information-rich cases (Patton, 2015, p.298). Because this study focused on the lived experiences of leaders of color, which had the potential to reveal confidential and deeply personal examples, the researcher was prepared for the possibility that some respondents would not be willing to be interviewed. Therefore, if any of the 15 respondents were not willing to participate, the researcher would use the snowball sampling technique as the method for locating a colleague who fit the criteria but may have had less concern about participating. During the initial participant recruitment process, if the respondent was concerned about participating, the researcher asked for references and sought permission from the individual to connect and introduce potential future participants.

Instrumentation

Qualitative research is interpretative in design and is the most appropriate method for understanding the meaning participants attribute to their experiences. Tools used to conduct this ethnographic study are discussed in this section, including the researcher as the key instrument for the study, semi-structured interviews, recorded observations, and a review of artifacts that collectively explored the participants' lived experiences in this study.

Researcher as Instrument of the Study

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a key characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher's collection and interpretation of data; as a result, the researcher therefore becomes the primary instrument of the study. Similarly, Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) argued that the researcher's ability to facilitate a conversational space during the interview process yields rich data about participant experiences. However, the

intensive and sustained experiences between researcher and participant during the study introduce several potential biases around the researcher's role that must be considered in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. In addressing these challenges, Patton (2015) suggested using appropriate interview questions whereas Creswell and Creswell stressed the importance of transparency of the researcher's positionality within the study and its potential influence on data collection and interpretations.

This researcher brings bias from personal and professional experiences as a senior-level administrator who identifies as a Black woman currently working at a CCC. Therefore, the researcher's positionality, gender, race, and other elements of identity were factors in the study, and the researcher's voice was naturally present. The transparency of this "ethnographic presence," according to Fetterman (2020, p. 136), is a method that contributes additional credibility of research findings by way of describing researcher proximity to the participants and culture. As an educator and administrator in higher education for over 25 years, the researcher was intentional to use a self-reflexive approach throughout the study, which Patton (2015) described as a process that involves "critical self-exploration of one's interpretations" (p. 70). This was done through ongoing awareness and self-analysis of how culture, identity, values, experiences, and perception of power were exhibited throughout the research study. Moreover, as the primary research instrument, the researcher struck a balance between creating a space in which a collaborative partnership with participants could emerge and adhering to semi-structured interview protocols to minimize bias.

Interview Questions

Another instrument used in this study was a series of interview questions that were carefully developed before data collection. Semi-structured interview questions were aligned with the Culturally Relevant Leadership framework by Horsford et al. (2011), which served as the foundation for the study. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), semi-structured interview questions provide flexibility and allow participants to voice their lived experiences while maintaining specificity in intent. An expert panel, composed of individuals who had expertise and knowledge with the research topic, reviewed the interview questions to ensure alignment with the research questions and provide feedback on revisions or modifications.

Interviews were conducted with each participant in the study. Participants were all senior-level leaders and had busy schedules filled with meetings, commitments, and various other obligations. Therefore, it was essential to respect their time and ensure the interview time was spent efficiently while also creating a flexible space to share their stories. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of this study, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as state and institutional guidelines were in place to ensure public safety. Therefore, to comply with the appropriate safety protocols and maintain the safety of all participants, all interviews were conducted virtually via the Zoom platform. An interview guide was utilized for the interview process because it provided the researcher a mechanism to use the limited time available in the best way possible. In ethnographic research, Fetterman (2020) contended that being sensitive to the development and utilization of an appropriate interview protocol shows respect for the person and the group's culture, which in this study was

senior-level leaders of color. As part of the interview, the researcher used follow-up and probing questions if appropriate to gather more in-depth information from the participants (Patton, 2015). The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the degree of similarity or agreement in meaning between the researcher's explanations of the observed phenomenon and participants' reality of those events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Instrument validity refers to the accuracy of and extent to which the instruments used measure what they are intended to measure (Patton, 2015). Interview questions were used as the instrument to gather information-rich data from participants. To increase overall validity of the study, an expert panel and pilot interviews were utilized to ensure the validity of the interview questions and process. An additional strategy to enhance validity in qualitative research is member checking. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), member checking involves providing participants in the study the opportunity to respond to the accuracy of the data collected. In this study, participants were offered the opportunity to confirm the data collected from interviews and recorded observations. In addition, a content analysis of documents and artifacts was employed to identify key consistencies and meanings (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Panel Expert as Instrument

Content of interview questions is critical to ensuring the instrument is measuring what is intended to be measured and is aligned to the study's research question. Content validity refers to whether the questions will elicit responses that address the concept or construct. According to Patten and Newhart (2018), the use of an expert panel to review

interview questions and participant answers is one method to assess instrument validity. Therefore, the researcher formed a panel of three experts who validated the content, structure, and alignment of the questions to the research question. The expert panel reviewed the interview questions and provided feedback to the researcher prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher reviewed various attributes that would constitute expertise in community college leadership and culturally relevant pedagogy and leadership. Based on the review, experts on the panel must have satisfied three of five criteria:

- At least 5 years of leadership experience at a CCC or District
- At least 10 years of overall experience in higher education
- Experience in leading efforts related to social justice, DEI or with culturally relevant leadership or pedagogy
- Have conducted presentations, workshops, or training on higher education leadership
- Experience conducting qualitative research

Pilot Interviews

After the expert panel reviewed interview questions, the researcher conducted a pilot mock interview with a senior-level leader who had experience with social justice issues in higher education but was not a participant in the study. An individual who has experience conducting qualitative research and held the role of an administrator in higher education observed the pilot interview and took notes on interviewing techniques, tone, pacing of interview questions, use of appropriate follow-up questions, and whether overall rapport was present to elicit information-rich data. The observer was not a

participant in the study and was free to provide honest feedback on the interview process. After the pilot interview, the researcher engaged in a debriefing conversation with the observer and gained valuable feedback on improving interviewing skills and modifying interview questions for accuracy to improve the validity of the study.

Content Analysis

The researcher reviewed and analyzed content within documents and other artifacts as a method for internal test consistency. Ethnographic researchers use content analysis to discern patterns within text and salient events recorded in words (Fetterman, 2020). The use of content analysis offered the researcher a mechanism to uncover key terms and phrases that emerged frequently within the text, signifying symbolic importance for the participants as a cultural sharing group. Findings were used to triangulate data with interviews and observations.

Reliability

Reliability is the degree to which a measurement instrument produces stable and consistent results (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In the context of this study, reliability referred to the dependability and degree to which the research procedures such as interview protocols are consistent and replicable.

Internal Reliability

To strengthen confidence and trust in the research findings of this study, the researcher employed the method of triangulation. According to Fetterman (2020), triangulation is fundamental in ethnographic research. It allows the researcher to test the quality of information gathered by comparing various data sources to improve the quality and accuracy of the findings. The researcher followed the suggestion from Patton (2015)

and cross-checked the consistency of information derived from participant interviews, recorded observations, and various artifacts and documents. True to ethnographic research, the researcher looked for patterns of thought, belief, and action of the culture-sharing group of senior-level leaders that surfaced in various situations. This form of analysis was ongoing as themes emerged and allowed for the comparison of patterns.

External Reliability

External reliability is important when findings and results need to be generalized to a larger population (Patton, 2015). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information and findings to a larger population but instead to illuminate the focus of the research. In this study, generalizability was not significant for this ethnographic research study because it was not intended for replication. Rather, this study considered the in-depth lived and culture sharing experiences of senior-level leaders of color as they led DEI efforts at their respective colleges.

Intercoder Reliability

To further enhance the reliability of the study, another researcher who was part of this thematic study participated in a coding exercise to verify that the data collected was reliable. According to Lombard, Snyder-Dutch, and Bracken (2002), intercoder reliability is a commonly used term to describe the extent to which independent coders assess the data and reach agreement or consistency. For this study, an independent coding process was used to attain what Creswell and Poth (2018) refer to as intercoder agreement. Based on the literature reviewed by Lombard et al., a reliability level of 80% or higher is considered acceptable in most situations and therefore was used as the

benchmark for this study. The results of the independent coding process revealed that the data was reliable up to 80%, which falls within acceptable levels.

Data Collection

To present a genuine representation of the essence and lived experiences of senior-level leaders of color who engage in culturally responsive leadership in the CCC system, the researcher utilized three primary methods to collect data: (a) interviews, (b) pre-recorded observations, and (c) artifacts. Before data collection, the researcher completed the training on research with human subjects and earned a certificate from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program (see Appendix K). In addition, the researcher applied to the UMass Global Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. The IRB has the responsibility to ensure safeguards are in place to protect human participants in a research study.

After receiving IRB approval (Appendix E), the researcher began recruiting study participants. An invitational email was sent to the 15 CCC senior-level leaders who self-identify as a member of an African-American/Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, Native American, or multi-racial community. The email included information such as the purpose of the study (Appendix F), the participant Bill of Rights (Appendix H), and the informed consent form (Appendix I). Participants were informed that participating in the study was voluntary, their identity would remain anonymous by removing any identifying information, and their rights and privacy would be protected throughout the study. Additionally, participants were made aware that no compensation would be provided as a result of their participation in the study.

Once participants were identified, the researcher conducted follow-up emails to schedule the initial interviews according to their availability. Data collection took place over several weeks between April and May 2022. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, audio recorded using the Zoom platform and a separate recording device, transcribed, and coded for themes. Data, including interview transcripts, were kept in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer only accessible by the researcher. Upon completion of the study all recordings were destroyed. All other data and informed consents were securely stored for 3 years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

Types of Data

Three types of data were collected to gain a deep understanding of the culturally responsive leadership skills CCC senior leaders of color use to lead efforts at their institutions. The first type of data was gathered through interviews that were intended to yield in-depth responses about the influence lived experiences and personal identities has on the culturally responsive leadership practices used by senior-level leaders of color. The second type of data was gathered via viewing recorded observations of participants to note actions, behaviors, and interpersonal relations. The third data type was digital artifacts and materials relevant to senior leaders' use of culturally responsive leadership skills.

Interviews. This study explored the culturally responsive leadership skills used by senior leaders of color within their institutions. According to Fetterman (2020), when conducting ethnographic research, it is important to understand that words and expressions used by participants represent different values in various cultures and are

therefore essential to capture to deeply understand their connotative and denotative meanings. Interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to gather first-hand accounts from senior leaders of color their lived experiences within the context of their specific institutions.

Prior to data collection, the researcher worked with a panel of three experts to develop interview questions that focused on the four dimensions of Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework. These dimensions focus on leading for equity, engagement, and excellence as a professional duty; a personal journey toward cultural proficiency; use of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches; and the ability to navigate the political context in which they work. The expert panel assisted with the content of the questions and gave the researcher feedback on modifications to the questions to improve the accuracy and validity of the study.

The use of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions allowed participants in the study to share their experiences in their own words and from their unique cultural perspectives. This approach also allowed the researcher to ask additional probing, follow-up, or clarifying questions as appropriate.

Observations. The researcher viewed pre-recorded virtual observations of participants to understand the context in which these senior leaders of color lead in culturally responsive ways. Fetterman (2020) contended that observations conducted as part of ethnographic research are an opportunity for the researcher to be more immersed in the culture of those under study to better understand their use and meaning of language, visible patterns of behavior, and social interactions. Given that data collection took place in Spring 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher viewed open

and publicly accessible recorded observations of senior leaders of color in settings such as workshops, trainings, and presentations. The procedures for viewing recorded observations were parallel to the interview procedures. The researcher followed current health and safety guidelines as provided by the CDC, as well as safety protocols set forth by UMass Global. Therefore, all observations were conducted by viewing recordings captured using the Zoom platform.

Artifacts. This study explored how senior-level leaders of color lead in culturally responsive ways within their institutions. To gain a holistic picture of these culturally responsive strategies, it is essential to view artifacts and other documents that authenticate those strategies. There is widespread agreement among qualitative researchers that documents, artifacts, and materials gathered from a participant's environment can reveal a great deal about organizational culture and historical context as well as illuminate the socially shared conventions and resources that represent personal and cultural value (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fetterman, 2020; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). For this ethnographic study, artifacts included reports, communications prepared and distributed by the leader, websites, social media pages, institutional policies, planning, procedural documents, presentations, and professional development documents. All names and other identifying marks were redacted from artifacts to maintain participant confidentiality. These artifacts supported the researcher in investigating themes and connections between the interviews and observations by triangulating the findings to strengthen the internal reliability of the study further.

Data Collection Procedures

This section describes the data collection procedures used by the researcher to ensure the study could be replicated using a similar methodology. As the primary instrument of data collection, the researcher solicited 15 senior-level leaders who identify as non-White/non-Hispanic and work at one of the 116 CCCs to be part of the study. The study aimed to understand how senior-level leaders of color make sense of their experiences implementing culturally responsive leadership skills within their community colleges by collecting data through interviews, viewing recorded observations, and analysis of artifacts and documents.

Participant Recruitment. An important issue that arises in ethnographic research is recruiting and selecting participants to interview for the study. Gaining access to a cultural community can be challenging, especially if the researcher is considered an outsider or not part of the culture-sharing group. According to Fetterman (2020), having a gatekeeper introduce the researcher to the community is a method that can open doors to recruiting and selecting participants because of the gatekeeper's credibility. When the researcher is part of the culture-sharing group or expects cooperation, entry to the community is primarily about establishing rapport and trust (Patton, 2015). The researcher of this study, who identifies as a Black/African American female employed as a senior-level leader in a CCC, had contacts with individuals in the field, which facilitated access to potential participants for this study. Additionally, the researcher was also able to obtain email addresses and contact information of potential participants from the CCCCCO website. The CCCCCO website provides public access to each of the 116

colleges websites, which includes contact information for senior-level administrators at each college.

In addition, a sponsor who endorsed the study assisted the researcher in participant recruitment. The study's sponsor had access to email addresses and phone numbers for all senior-level CCC leaders from within their professional networks. Upon receiving permission from potential participants to share their contact information, the sponsor sent an invitational email introducing the researcher (Appendix G) to individuals who met the criteria as senior-level leaders through various listservs that target senior-level leaders as well as directly to their professional networks. The sponsor also contacted individuals within their professional associations that specifically focus on African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Native American educational leaders. All correspondence sent out by the sponsor (see Appendix G) included information about the study, purpose, and needs of the study; participant criteria; and the researcher's email and contact information to facilitate a direct connection between the researcher and potential participants.

Upon acknowledgment of the invitation and confirmation to participate, the researcher followed up with individuals by sending a personal video expressing appreciation for their participation and offering an introduction to the study. After the video introduction, the researcher sent an email that included the participant Bill of Rights (Appendix H) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix I). To minimize impact to participants' busy schedules, emails and an online scheduling tool were employed to gain mutual agreement and confirmation of the interview schedule, access to potential

virtual recorded observations, and mechanisms to collect relevant artifacts and documents.

Field Test. Before conducting interviews with participants, an expert panel reviewed the interview questions developed by the researcher and provided input on modifications. After this review, the researcher conducted a pilot interview, otherwise known as a field test, with a colleague who held a senior-level role in the CCC but was not a participant in the study. The pilot interview was used to determine the questions' appropriateness, flow, and tone, and adjustments were made to improve overall interview protocols. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), pilot testing is valuable for assessing the degree and extent of observer bias that may be present in the interview process, all of which help improve the study's validity.

Interview Protocol. Fetterman (2020) suggested three strategies a researcher should employ to set the stage for conducting interviews in ethnographic research: (a) respect the culture by demonstrating sensitivity to cultural norms, (b) demonstrate utmost respect for the people with whom you are interacting, and (c) be mindful and sensitive to appropriate protocols to enhance effectiveness. The following steps were taken concerning the participant interviews:

1. The researcher sent an introductory email requesting the senior-level leader's participation in the study. A copy of the Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix H) and Informed Consent (Appendix I) was also included in the email. Participants were provided information on how to return the signed informed consent form electronically.

2. A follow-up email was sent if a response was not received within 1 week of the initial email.
3. Upon receiving agreement to participate in the study, the researcher sent a video to each participant to express appreciation for their willingness to be part of the study and offer an overview of the purpose of the research study.
4. An online calendaring tool was employed to schedule a date and time for the interview. Emails were utilized to correspond with participants to obtain links to recorded observations and obtain artifacts and documents. Participants were offered to have an initial meeting with the researcher to discuss the study and ask questions if they desired. If participants preferred to have a meeting prior to the interview, the following areas were covered during the initial meeting:
 - a. The researcher encouraged the leader to select a time and date for the interview that best met the scheduling needs of the participant.
 - b. The researcher invited the leader to find a location in which the Zoom interview would be free from distractions to allow the participant to feel comfortable speaking openly.
 - c. The researcher provided time and opportunity for the participant to ask questions about the study and decline from participating. The researcher provided contact information if the participant had more questions after this initial meeting.

- d. If the signed informed consent form was still needed, the researcher helped the participant complete it and provided instructions on how to return it to the researcher.
5. Prior to the interview, the researcher sent an online questionnaire (see Appendix D) requesting participants to provide demographic and general information about themselves and their institutions. This was done to collect demographic information up front to leave ample time for participants to answer questions during the interviews.
6. The researcher also emailed the interview questions to participants to alleviate any concerns and allow for an efficient and smooth interview, given the senior leaders' busy schedules. The researcher provided contact information in the event that participants had questions about the interview process.
7. The researcher sent an email reminder 1 day before the scheduled interview to confirm.
8. On the scheduled date of the interview, before asking any interview questions, the researcher began with introductions to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participant (Appendix C).
 - a. The participant was informed of the purpose and benefits of the study and of the study to the field of community college leadership and DEI efforts within the CCC system.
 - b. A copy of the Participant Bill of Rights and signed informed consent form was provided to the participant. The researcher verbally confirmed the participant's willingness to participate in the Zoom

interview. As part of the introduction to participant rights, the researcher informed participants of their right to stop and/or take a break at any time during the interview process.

- c. Participants were informed that no compensation or inducements were being offered and that the study did not involve any cost to the participant.
 - d. Participants were reminded that the research presented no more than minimal risk of harm to human subjects.
 - e. The researcher reminded the participant that the Zoom interview would be audio-recorded and transcribed.
 - f. Each participant was informed that their participation would be anonymous and confidential. The researcher would keep any physical research materials with identifying information in a locked file drawer available only to the researcher. Furthermore, all electronic data and materials collected would be kept in a password-protected file that was accessible only by the researcher.
 - g. Upon completion of the study, all recordings were destroyed. All other data and informed consent forms were securely stored for 3 years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
9. The researcher conducted a 60-minute semi-structured interview using open-ended questions, allowing for follow-up questions as needed.

10. Recorded interviews were sent to a third-party transcription service to transcribe the interview data.
11. The researcher reviewed all transcribed interviews.
12. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews for accuracy, clarity, and feedback. The approach of member-checking further enhances the validity of the findings by addressing accuracy.
13. If necessary, additional follow-up interviews were arranged and conducted.
14. Aliases were assigned to each participant. All related data collected and stored on the researcher's computer was backed up on an external hard drive and secured in a locked location.
15. Data collected from the interviews were subsequently coded.

Observation Protocol. Upon completion of recruitment, the researcher also asked participants who were selected for interviews for the opportunity to observe their leadership in an open, public virtual setting or to gain access to a recorded observation that was publicly accessible. The procedures for observation were parallel to the interview procedures. The researcher followed current health and safety guidelines as provided by the CDC as well as safety protocols set forth by UMass Global. Due to the busy time in the academic year, none of the participants were able to provide an opportunity for the researcher to conduct a real-time virtual observation. However, three participants provided the researcher links to previously recorded presentations or panel discussions the researcher could view and observe. For the recorded observations that were obtained, the researcher utilized an observational protocol described by Creswell and Poth (2018) to record both descriptive and reflective notes about the experience

(Appendix J). The observation protocol was a tool to help the researcher organize thoughts and ideas using a reflexive practice. The process for viewing the recorded observations was as follows:

1. Upon receipt of agreement to participate in the study and during the initial recruitment meeting with participants, the researcher informed the participant of the desire to conduct an open, public virtual observation and a request to schedule a date and time for the observation or to provide a link to a previously recorded, publicly accessible presentation or session that the researcher could view.
2. A follow-up email was sent if a response was not received within 1 week of the initial email.
3. The researcher designed an observational protocol to use for recording notes during the observation. The protocol guidelines were adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018) to fit the needs of this study.
4. If available, participants emailed the researcher the link to an open, publicly accessible video recording of a presentation or session they conducted.
 - a. Upon completion of the study, all recordings were destroyed. All data and informed consents were securely stored for 3 years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
5. The researcher took descriptive and reflective notes using the observation protocol (Appendix J).
6. The researcher reviewed the observation notes once completed.

7. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Any related data collected and stored on the researcher's computer was backed up on an external hard drive and secured in a locked location.
8. Data collected from the observations were subsequently coded.

Artifacts. The researcher discussed potential artifacts and documents with participants prior to each interview and requested the participant bring suggested data to the interview. Most of the artifacts were public information and did not require informed consent. Examples of public documents included the college equity plan, board reports, and institutional DEI plans in which the participant was involved. The researcher obtained written consent to use the documents in the event that artifacts provided were private. The researcher protected the personal identities of participants and colleges by removing all identifying information. Each artifact was categorized, analyzed, and recorded. Furthermore, the researcher engaged in a critical review and interpretation of the artifact's meaning within the participant's cultural and social context, which was then corroborated with observation and interview data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Artifacts were digitally scanned and stored in secure folders on the researcher's computer and backed up in a password-protected external hard drive. All physical artifacts were kept in a locked storage cabinet to which only the researcher had access. The following steps were taken to acquire artifacts:

1. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher obtained any artifacts from the participant available to validate what was noted in the interview or in observations that the researcher could examine.

2. The researcher removed all identifying information from the artifacts upon receipt.
3. After reviewing the artifacts, the researcher determined if any follow-up was needed and contacted the participant to arrange for further discussion.
4. Aliases were assigned to each artifact, and digital copies of the artifact were stored on the researcher's computer. The digital files were backed up on an external hard drive and secured in a locked location.
5. Preparation was made to code the data collected from the artifacts.

Data Protection and Control

The researcher took steps to protect the data, lessen risk or harm to participants, and ensure all participants' welfare. The researcher provided each participant information concerning the study, was available to answer questions or address concerns, considered participants' busy schedules when arranging for interviews, obtained informed consent to participate, provided a copy of the Participant Bill of Rights, and continued to provide information and assistance as needed. Participants were informed that all identifiable information would be removed to ensure confidentiality and informed of the procedures used to protect all data in password-protected digital storage or locked in a secured file cabinet that only the researcher has access to. Once the study was completed, all recordings were destroyed. Additionally, all other data and informed consents were securely stored for 3 years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data involves multiple interconnected steps and follows a process that Creswell and Poth (2018) described as a “data analysis spiral” (p.181). The process is not always fixed and linear but rather circular and iterative, beginning with managing and organizing data, coding and condensing the data to reduce into themes, representing data in a meaningful way, and then forming an interpretation based on the findings. This iterative approach to data analysis in ethnographic study occurs throughout the research process.

By collecting data gathered from interviews, previously recorded observations, and artifacts, the researcher aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of 15 senior-level leaders of color as they utilized culturally responsive leadership strategies to lead their institutions. In particular, the researcher sought to deeply understand the social and cultural shared meanings that senior leaders of color hold as they evaluate the leadership situations they face, how they see themselves within the sociopolitical context and environment of their institutions, and ultimately how these factors translate to culturally responsive leadership praxis. While analyzing data, the researcher spent considerable time reading and reviewing all data elements to gain overall impressions. This level of review is what Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to as “memoing” (p.188) or the practice of writing notes or memos to assist in the identification of relationships and emerging ideas. An iterative coding process was used, which led first to categorizations based on emerging repetitive patterns and ultimately to themes or what Saldana (2021) described as “narrative memories” (p.8) of human experiences.

Data Coding Procedures

The researcher employed the three fundamental steps for analysis of data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018): (a) organizing and managing the data, (b) reading and reviewing the data for emerging ideas, and (c) describing and coding themes. The primary form of data collection was interviews conducted via the Zoom online videoconferencing platform. After the researcher organized and prepared interview data, it was sent to a third-party transcription service to be transcribed. A copy of the transcribed data was offered to each participant, if desired, to review for accuracy and provide feedback. Codes were identified using Saldana's (2021) characterization of a code as a "word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 5). Artifacts and documentation were examined in the same manner as interview transcripts by reviewing content, organizing, and grouping data to identify themes. The process of triangulation, using multiple types of data, was used to identify consistency in the data and determine if similar patterns would emerge (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015) between documentation and interview data.

Upon identifying codes from within the data, the researcher employed the following coding process for this study:

1. The codes were scanned for themes that aligned with the research questions.

Moreover, in support of the conceptual framework used in this study, the researcher reviewed the themes of codes in light of the four dimensions of Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally relevant Leadership framework:

professional duty, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and political context.

2. Coding for frequencies. The researcher used the NVivo qualitative coding software to extract statements from interview transcripts and data from observations and documentation to identify the frequency of codes to help answer the research questions.
3. Analyzing themes and frequencies. The researcher used the coded data, themes, and frequency information to analyze and understand how CCC senior-level leaders of color use culturally responsive leadership skills.

Limitations

Limitations of a research study are characteristics of design or methodology that set constraints on the interpretation of the findings and results of the study or the ability to generalize the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Typical limitations include sample size, regional or cultural differences, and rate of response from participants. It is important that the researcher of a study is aware of and openly acknowledges to readers the limitations of the study and strategies used to alleviate them. The researcher identified four limitations of the study and employed deliberate strategies to reduce the effects on the findings.

The first limitation was the researcher as the instrument of the study. Patton (2015) argued that the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry combined with the researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection makes the analysis and interpretation of findings susceptible to bias. The researcher of this study identifies as a Black, African-American female who holds a position as a senior-level leader within a

CCC and has experienced racial and gendered inequities, which may create researcher bias. The researcher took preventive measures to minimize bias by making a concerted effort to maximize objectivity during the entire data collection process. Strategies to address bias included utilizing interview protocols, relying upon an expert panel and field testing to ensure the validity of the interview process, and engaging in critical self-reflection while interpreting the data.

The second limitation was the sample size. The sample of 15 participants may not represent the experiences of all senior-level leaders of color who work within the CCC system and therefore may limit the generalization of findings. To address this limitation, triangulation of data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation by comparing the various data sources strengthened the internal reliability of the findings.

The third limitation was time constraints. Extensive and prolonged fieldwork is a fundamental part of ethnographic research. Due to the busy schedules of executive and upper-level administrators in higher education, the researcher could not engage in long-term immersive field study and had limited time for interviews. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview process and employed probing techniques to draw out thick, rich descriptive data and increase efficiency, limiting the need for follow-up interviews. Furthermore, due to the busy time of the academic year in which data collection took place, participants did not have any available opportunities for the researcher to conduct real-time observations. To mitigate this limitation, the researchers obtained links from participants of previously recorded,

publicly accessible videos of presentations and sessions and used these to conduct observations.

The fourth limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to conduct interviews via Zoom, an online video conferencing software platform. The challenge of not being physically present in the same room with participants limited the researcher's ability to note subtle nuances in body language and other nonverbal cues during the interview process. Unfamiliarity with technology and the use of Zoom by participants was also considered a limitation. The researcher addressed these limitations by taking descriptive and reflective notes during interviews to capture other non-verbal cues such as silence or voice intonations. In addition, participants were offered individualized Zoom training sessions to increase their comfort level with the technology.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter III was to outline the overall methodology of the study to include a description of the research design, instrumentation, population, sample, and data collection and analysis. Additionally, this chapter identified the study's limitations and steps the researcher took to address and minimize those limitations. An ethnographic approach was deemed the most appropriate research method for this study, which aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of CCC senior-level leaders of color as they utilize culturally responsive leadership skills within their institutions. Chapters IV and V will present the results and findings from the study and implications of the use of culturally responsive leadership strategies to advance DEI efforts at the highest levels of a community college.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter I provided an introduction and background of the focus of this study, followed by a comprehensive review of the literature in Chapter II as it relates to racial equity in higher education, the structure and mission of CCCs, and the role of CCC leadership in addressing DEI issues. Theoretical foundations that undergird the study were presented along with the conceptual framework that served as the lens in which the study was grounded. Chapter III described the study's methodology as a qualitative ethnographic approach utilizing interviews, observations, and artifacts to collect data on the lived experiences and culturally responsive strategies utilized by 15 senior-level leaders of color serving in the CCC. In this chapter, insights from the participants are described, including an analysis of the data collected and summary of findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe how California community college senior-level leaders of color are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central question and four sub-questions designed to explore the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by CCC senior-level leaders of color. The central research question was: *How are California community college senior-level leaders of color culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework?* There were

four research sub-questions, each focused on one of the four dimensions of the CRL framework.

Research Sub-Questions

Based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework:

1. How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of college senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative ethnographic study was chosen to explore the lived experiences of 15 CCC senior-level leaders of color and identify and describe the culturally responsive leadership practices they utilized to lead their institutions using the four dimensions of Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally relevant Leadership framework: political context, personal journey, pedagogical approach, and professional duty. Participants who currently served in the role as president, superintendent/president, or vice president at a CCC and had at least 3 years of experience at the senior level were considered. Participants came from colleges across the state of California and represented rural, suburban, and urban colleges as well as both single-college and multi-college districts.

Participants were purposefully selected based on specific criteria and data were collected through semi-structured individual one-on-one interviews, observations, and examining documentation. The researcher collected, analyzed, and coded the data to identify themes and draw subsequent findings and recommendations.

Population

For the purposes of this study, the researcher identified the population based on the characteristic of senior-level leaders in the CCC system. For this study, a senior level leader was defined as a President, President/Superintendent, Executive Vice President, and Vice President. This study's population included the 464 leaders who hold a senior-level position at each of the 116 CCCs.

Target Population

The population for this study was estimated at 464 senior-level leaders in the CCC system representative of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. To narrow down to the target population, it was necessary to include only those senior-level leaders who identified with a racial/ethnic group that was non-White. Because no data published by the CCCCCO accurately identifies how many senior-level leaders of color work in the CCC system, it was necessary to estimate this number based on available information. The researcher examined the racial-ethnic composition of a sample of 23 community colleges and discovered that 20% of senior-level leaders identify as leaders of color. Based on this, it was estimated that the target population for this study was 92, or 20% of 464.

Sample

Based on the target population of 92, a sample of 15 participants was selected. These 15 individuals consisted of CCC senior-level leaders who identify as African-American, Native American, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or multi-ethnic.

Sampling Procedure

Criterion sampling was the procedure used for this study to identify specific individuals within the CCC system. Only participants who currently served in the role as president, superintendent/president, or vice president at a CCC and had at least 3 years of experience at the senior level were considered for this study. Of the participants who responded to the invitation to participate and met three of the following five criteria, 15 were selected for an interview:

1. Possess 10 or more years of experience in higher education.
2. Have experience leading efforts related to social justice, DEI in a CCC.
3. Employed at a CCC comprising a student population in which at least 50% of the students are non-White.
4. Have participated in professional development focused on DEI, cultural competency/proficiency, or other equity-minded concepts.
5. Conducted presentations or workshops or other professional development on DEI.

Because this study focused on the lived experiences of leaders of color, deeply personal examples would be shared by participants. Due to the confidential and sensitive nature of stories and examples that respondents would share, the researcher was prepared to utilize snowball or chain sampling as a second technique for locating other participants

who fit the criteria and had less concerns about participating. However, all respondents reported feeling comfortable with participating in the study and snowball sampling method was not utilized.

Demographic Data

The study included 15 participants who met specific criteria to participate. Each signed an informed consent form and completed a demographic questionnaire. Specific demographic information collected included race/ethnicity, gender identity, current position title, total number of years of in a senior-level position, and overall number of years in higher education. Table 1 presents demographic data describing all participants.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Participant Number	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Title	Years in a Sr. Role	Years in Higher Education
1	Asian; Indian	Female	Vice President	3	32
2	Asian; Filipino	Male	Associate Vice Chancellor	10	12
3	Asian	Female	President	5	26
4	Hispanic/Latina	Female	Vice President	10	27
5	Asian	Female	President	5	20
6	Black/African American	Female	President	10	24
7	Hispanic/Latina	Female	Superintendent/President	5	25
8	Black/African American	Male	Superintendent/President	8	34
9	Hispanic/Latino	Male	Superintendent/President	5	22
10	Black/African American/White	Female	Vice President	8	23
11	Non-White	Male	President	15	34
12	Black/African American	Male	President	7	26
13	Hispanic/Latino	Male	President	7	17
14	Hispanic/Latina	Female	Associate Vice Chancellor	4	22
15	Asian; Filipino	Female	President	4	27

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The findings presented in this chapter are the outcome of 15 hours of one-on-one interviews, 5 hours reviewing recorded observations, and 10 hours of reviewing artifacts. Fifteen individuals were interviewed and four pre-recorded virtual observations were reviewed between April 1, 2022 and May 31, 2022. Following data collection, audio transcription, and verification, the researcher reviewed the data and established a preliminary list of themes. Researchers who comprised the CCC thematic study reviewed and refined the formulation of the themes. The preliminary list of 16 themes was used in NVivo as part of the formal coding process. Through an iterative coding process, themes with frequency counts less than 30 were further reviewed and combined with other themes that were more representative of the major concepts revealed in the data, resulting in an overall reduction to ten themes each with strong frequency counts.

After analyzing the data, 10 themes emerged related to the study's central research question—*How are California community college senior-level leaders of color culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework*—that aligned with the conceptual framework and were considered significant. The 10 themes were categorized under the four dimensions outlined in Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework:

- Political context
- Pedagogical approach
- Personal journey
- Professional duty

The major themes that emerged from the data are shown in Table 2 in order of highest frequency rate and associated number of sources.

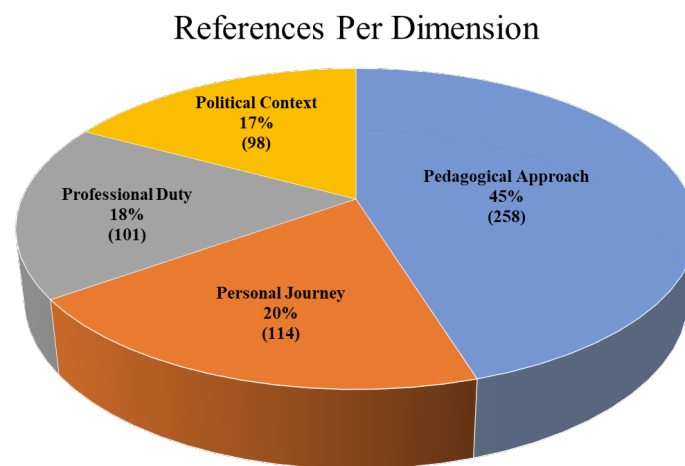
Table 2: Themes, sources, and frequency

Dimension	Theme	Sources	Frequency
Pedagogical Approach (258)	Prioritize equity by embedding it within all area of the institution	22	121
	Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution	16	50
	Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations	17	48
	Ensure the learning environment addresses student need	16	39
Personal Journey (114)	Draw upon one's identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all	17	69
	Practice reflexive leadership	15	45
Professional Duty (101)	Accept the integration of one's personal identity and professional role	16	56
	Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds	16	45
Political Context (98)	Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations	14	62
	Leverage situational contexts to advance equity efforts	13	36

During the course of coding, 571 references emerged from the 10 themes associated with the four dimensions of pedagogical approach, personal journey, professional duty, and political context. Figure 2 displays the dimensions with the number of references identified for each dimension. The total frequency counts for each dimension are further described as a percentage of the whole. Of the culturally responsive

leadership strategies utilized by CCC senior-level leaders of color, 45% lie within the pedagogical approach, 20% reside under personal journey, 18% were associated with professional duty, and 17% were related to political context. These percentages are specific to this study, which focused on senior-level leaders of color. The other studies that are part of the CCC Culturally Responsive Leadership thematic—which focuses on mid-level Latina leaders, library leaders, financial aid leaders, EOPS leaders, and student services mid-level leaders—may have different frequency count percentages for each dimension.

Figure 2: References per dimension



Themes Based on the Four Dimensions of the CRL Framework

The following data are presented as related to each dimension of the CRL framework from transcripts of responses of 15 participants in one-on-one interviews, recorded observations, and documentation. After analyzing the data collected, the researcher found that each of the dimensions was addressed with two to four major themes. Four of the major themes emerged under one of the dimensions, and two major themes emerged under each of the other three dimensions. Figure 3 displays the

researcher’s perspective as to how the themes and the Culturally Relevant Leadership framework align.

Although the findings of the study are presented keeping in line with the aforementioned 10 themes and four dimensions of the CRL framework, some themes are represented in more than one dimension. When there is overlap, mention of the intersection of themes will be discussed briefly. In addition, the description of each major theme will be organized based on supporting concepts and ideas that provide additional narrative to further expand the theme. These supporting concepts and ideas were not significant enough to warrant attention on its own as a major theme but do provide context to understand the nuances of the theme more deeply.

Figure 3: Alignment of themes and theoretical framework

Dimension I: Political Context	Dimension II: Pedagogical Approach	Dimension III: Personal Journey	Dimension IV: Professional Duty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations • Leverage situational contexts to advance equity efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution • Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution • Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations • Ensure learning environment addresses student needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw upon one's identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all • Practice reflective leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept the integration of one's personal identity and professional role • Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds

Political Context

The research sub-question for this dimension—*How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders’ of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*—aimed to explore how leaders attend to the political environments from which they operate as they lead their institution. After examining the data collected (see Table 3), two themes emerged focusing on how senior-level leaders of color negotiate their personal and professional identities amidst diverse expectations inside and outside of their institution, as well as the ways in which they leveraged situational contexts to advance equity efforts. The two themes had frequency rates ranging from 62-36 drawn from at least 13 sources. Each of the two themes is presented in its own section with an introduction and description. Participant quotes are included that demonstrate how the use of culturally responsive leadership strategies took into consideration the political context in which they operated.

Table 3: Dimension I: Political context and major themes

Dimension	Major Themes	
Political Context	Theme 1	Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations
	Theme 2	Leverage situational contexts to advance equity efforts

Political Context: Theme I – Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations. In 14 interviews, participants pointed out that they were conscious of the political environment in which their college was situated and, depending on the situation, had to negotiate their personal and professional identities amid internal and external expectations (Table 4). Participants described situations where they had to navigate the disparity in expectations of their role and position from their college constituencies in comparison to the expectations of members of their own cultural

community. Other participants indicated how they navigated expectations within the external political environment such as with elected governing board members.

Moreover, some participants described being cognizant of the influence that race and/or gender played in their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership approach as they navigated patriarchal and/or predominantly White contexts. It is noteworthy to mention here that the leaders’ strategy of negotiating self-authenticity intersects with the *personal journey* dimension as it relates to their personal identity and lived experiences. However, for the purposes of this theme, the concept of negotiation from a political context will be presented within this dimension.

Table 4: Theme, source, and frequency-Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations	14	62

The findings under this theme will be presented based on supporting ideas that further expand on theme. Areas that influence the ways in which leaders in the study engender self-authenticity include (a) role expectations and (b) intersectionality of race and gender. Each supporting idea will have a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to further expand on the idea.

Role Expectations. Several participants noted that while attending to the diverse needs of their campus community, they had to grapple with the incompatibility of the expectations inherent in their role as a senior-level leader and expectations from members of their own cultural community. Participant 7, a Latina college president, reflected on her past experiences in navigating the political environment and balancing her positional

role while working to advance social justice efforts. As the CEO of a college, she shared that she must represent the entire college while also being continuously aware of the expectations from her own cultural community and the urgency around their desire for her to make visible changes. She stated:

What's difficult about that is that there's a lot of people of color who are like, oh my God, we finally have somebody in that position of power. But then they're like, well nothing's happening. Well, there's stuff happening. I just don't have the privilege of being able to be out there in the front... cause there's a lot of people at the gate who have just been waiting for you to come.

Time, place, and space affect the leader's ability to employ culturally responsive strategies. From the external constituency perspective, the leader contends with the belief from external constituencies that her efforts are not advancing fast enough. However, from the leader's perspective, there is a strategy around cadence as well as the extent to which those strategies are visible to the community.

Another college president, Participant 5, shared that in some political environments, perceptions other people of color have about her as an Asian female in a CEO position are often racialized. An example she shared is the policing of her authenticity and tone by other people of color who believed she did not "sound" like a president. Participant 5 described the dichotomy in that the same cultural attributes that are assets for leaders of color are at the same time manipulated by the leader's own community. She went on to say that within the context of cultural wealth that "for people of color, it is weaponized and also celebrated. And it depends on the space you're in and

it can be painful.” For many leaders of color, it is both difficult and complex to navigate perceptions and expectations as a senior-level leader while still advancing social justice.

Leaders in this study also shared the ways in which they navigated expectations from external constituents such as board members. In the CCC system, governing board members are elected by community members within their geographical district to advocate for their needs and consequently hold board members accountable to ensuring the community college meets those needs. This presents a dynamic whereby the senior-level leader at the college, most often the college president who reports to the governing board, must strike a balance between the directives given by the board with the needs of the students and employees who make up the internal campus community. Particularly for college presidents in this study, effective relationships with board members were seen as critical to their ability to successfully advocate and implement DEI policies and practices at the college level. Participant 3 shared how she must keep in mind that board members are “public, political officials that are elected. They are born to be politicians. We as educators can never underestimate their power.” The researcher found that several participants employed a diverse range of culturally responsive strategies to build alliances with board members in their effort to advance DEI initiatives. These strategies ranged from employing conciliatory measures to advance DEI plans through the board approval process to ensuring board members are recognized in public venues and forums for supporting the college’s equity goals. When asked about her approach to working with board members, Participant 6 shared, “You put it in front of them. Like some good stuff and make them look good because really the board members are politicians, they have to be reelected.”

Although the practice is not necessarily negative, ensuring that board members are highlighted in the best possible way was part of the culturally responsive strategies leaders utilized as they balanced their goals and priorities with those of the external community. In addition, leaders were also aware of upcoming changes in the political landscape, especially during a time of board member elections. This was true for Participant 7, a college president with 25 years of higher education experience, who pondered what it would mean if the current board of her district undergoes drastic changes in membership in the upcoming election. She said,

I also have a board that might flip right now. I have pretty a liberal board with one conservative, but I got three seats that are open. So if those three seats flip to more conservative landscape, I'm in a whole different boat, but I still have to run this institution and I still have to sit in that seat.

As she engages in her daily responsibilities with an eye on the future efforts and changes she wishes to implement, she fully acknowledged that the ways in which she employs culturally responsive strategies is often “underground” and not front and center. This “stealth” approach to leading DEI efforts during a time of competing demands is something senior-level leaders of color utilize in order to balance and navigate contexts so that their efforts will be received and maintained positively.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender. One of the perspectives taken by many participants in the study was that leaders of color often perceive that they must work harder or are held to a higher standard than their White counterparts in similar roles in order to establish credibility. Some leaders, such as Participant 15, explicitly talked

about their conscious awareness of being in White spaces and how this cognizance impacts how they view their leadership approach. She stated,

The space is very, very White. And it's a neutralized space. If you're too strong raising issues of DEI and culturally responsive leadership in their programs or to even do a statement around anti-Asian hate, it was such a struggle for them to even do a statement. So it's in those spaces where I am uncomfortable, I feel like an outsider because an organization like that should be moving this agenda along is not, it's pandering to the White majority.

This awareness involved an acknowledgement that as a leader of color, one must be more strategic in one's approach to equity-minded efforts than White leaders. Participant 6, a female college president, contended that leaders of color do not have the privilege of doing things like White leaders. She shared, "You have to be more strategic than other populations." Another college president offered a similar thought based on his lived experience as a Black/African American male. He revealed that the extent to which his decisions are viewed favorably depends on how he is perceived. He stated:

I think it's particularly for people of color and maybe more so for African Americans. Everybody's happy to have me. They're happy that they have their representation. They want to know what I think. They want to hear my voice until you rub some White people the wrong way, and then you're quickly an outsider. Bad news travels fast and good news doesn't travel at all. So the capital that you build is slow and the erasure of that capital goes fast. So when you move into senior leadership positions, and particularly when you move in this position, you have to know, and I knew this, but I forgot just how lonely it is.

During interviews and when collecting data, the researcher noted another perspective raised by participants related to the theme of negotiating self-authenticity that extended into the intersectionality of race and gender for female leaders in the study. A Latina college president, Participant 7, reflected how there are times when she must be purposeful in working behind the scenes on racial equity efforts rather than being out front. When asked to elaborate on this notion, she described when she competed for the position of president with a White male who had been currently serving in the interim role. She shared,

The interim president was a White man. And so he doubled down and tripled down on diversity, equity and inclusion because he knew the political landscape. So he was able to do all the stuff to support DEI. And here I'm walking in the door, and I can't be seen at that DEI president yet.

Based on the political environment she was navigating, she did not believe she had the same privilege or agency to visibly advance DEI efforts as the White male candidate out of concern that she could not be perceived as the DEI voice. Some female senior-level leaders of color in the study who were within their first year as president mentioned that they were strategic in the nature and extent to which their equity efforts were visible. Participant 7 said that as a leader, her efforts and strategies are “not super flashy,” nor was she going to be extremely vocal in her first year as president. She reported that she often straddles two worlds to advance the work of DEI. In describing this balance, she said, “So a lot of what I'm doing, I'll be honest with you is not super flashy, not super vocal. I'm in year one. I need to stay in my seat, and I need to not alienate folks.”

The female leaders carefully navigate the political waters because, as one of the very few female leaders of color at the highest level of an institution, they see it as their responsibility when they serve in this role to be advocates for the voiceless. In their mind, one of the most important ways to accomplish this goal is to maintain the role of CEO without diminishing oneself. At the same time, some female leaders in the study admitted to the challenges of navigating their cultural and gender identities with social expectations of their role as a president. Along these lines, Participant 7 mentioned later in the interview how sometimes she must ask herself how much she is willing to diminish her identity and sacrifice who she is in order to be accepted. She said,

I have to ask myself, are these nylons I'm wearing gonna alienate that trustee so much. Right? Or you put the damn nylons on when you're dealing with that? You know what I'm saying? Like you have to pick your battles and that line changes depending on what it is.

Female leaders in the study shared that they had to be very mindful of the political climate within which they operate and that negotiating not only race and ethnicity but also gender was a complex and multi-dimensional challenge they encountered on a daily basis.

Although the strategies and approaches used by senior-level leaders of color to navigate political contexts in a culturally responsive manner vary widely, there was a consistent theme related to the importance of striking a balance between being true to oneself and identity, role expectations, and pressures from the external community. Participant 12 encapsulated the culturally responsive leadership strategy of negotiating

self-authenticity amidst diverse expectations when he described what it looked like for him, a Black college president, to navigate the political terrain. He said,

And so I'm navigating a larger extent, knowing the full complexities and atrocities of their histories as it related to Black people in this country. But I still have to find a way to sort through it and to quote unquote, "make it" right. And we've done that generationally, how that applies to my work as president and how it applies as a vice president is the same. I understand that institutions didn't have me in mind when it was created, to run it, to lead it, to teach in it. But I have to navigate and make the best out of that. Cause I know by the very nature of some of the work that I do, that just the function of the work, I am maintaining more of the status quo than I am changing the status quo. It's just a fact. And so I have to grapple with the fact that I am perpetuating it to some extent. But, you know, I find peace that I'm doing the best that I can with what I have to be able to change and transform it at the same time.

The weight of the work is tiring and sometimes the status quo wins out, as further expressed by Participant 12. The act of negotiating authenticity among diverse expectations and demands from internal and external actors is something that all leaders of color in this study experienced. However, many of the leaders still move through this discomfort on the road to unapologetically using their voices and showing up as their authentic selves

Political Context: Theme II – Leverage situational contexts to advance equity efforts. Most participants in the study described instances where they took advantage of external or internal situations and circumstances as momentum points to propel and

further advance their DEI goals. As shown in Table 5, this theme had a frequency rate of 36 from 13 sources, all of which were one-on-one interviews.

Table 5: Theme, source, and frequency-Leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts	13	36

The findings under this theme will be presented based on supporting ideas that further expand the theme. The supporting ideas that arose from the findings and provide context as to how leaders leverage situational contexts to advance equity include (a) capitalizing on socio-cultural changes and events and (b) engaging in community partnerships. Each supporting idea will have a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to further expand on the idea.

Capitalize on Socio-Cultural Changes and Events. Referred to as “opportunity recognition” by Santamaria and Santamaria (2012, p.117), leaders in this study took advantage of organic opportunities to raise awareness or advance efforts around DEI. Participants described ways in which they leveraged political, social, and cultural changes and events such as the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the anti-AAPI hate campaign to advocate for social justice or advance their equity agenda at their institutions. However, to best leverage external opportunities, the researcher noted that leaders in this study first assessed the political landscape to determine the right time to advance culture-changing efforts related to DEI. Participant 3 shared that she saw how the racial and social injustices that were illuminated after the death of George Floyd in 2020 allowed her an opportunity to center DEI in meetings,

one-on-one conversations, and other spaces to raise awareness. In a similar vein, Participant 8, a college president, being keenly aware of the external socio-political environment at the time when he entered his presidency, knew that he “had a finite opportunity with which to come in big in terms of the equity conversation and to play on the White guilt, to try to move the needle.” Participant 11, an interim college president who leads a CCC in a conservative community, said that although it is important to be bold and assertive about his equity agenda, as a senior-level leader, he also must “know when to use boldness, because if I’m not politically savvy, I’m not going to be able to be any good to anybody and that is sad.

Although many participants expressed different circumstances in which they used the strategy of leveraging opportunities, Participant 12, a college president, spent a considerable amount of time describing the intentionality around his approach in taking advantage of opportunities:

And so what I do is I really look at institutional practices and try to gauge which of those status quo institutional practices are the most vulnerable in the organization. Meaning is there are some level of vulnerability that would allow that particular status quo to fall. So for instance, I look around the conditions that is not just external but internal. So, post-George Floyd murder, that is not when I first started thinking about it. I knew what it is that I wanted to do, what may have been politically difficult to do prior to that. And then once folks were open to have the conversation, I immediately knew what levers I wanted to pull. So I knew then it was the time to accelerate the conversation around providing course level disaggregated data and have conversations about that in ways that haven’t

before to be able to talk about how we use that disaggregated data to inform evaluation, who we offer courses to, where we apply our resources. So that was a vulnerability that existed that I personally was trying to exploit because I knew it had been difficult and would be difficult in other environments...So, every lever that I'm gonna spend a lot of capital on creates the vulnerability in the structure, in the system, as opposed to focusing on the, on a program or programmatic.

Understanding that those who may have been unsupportive of equity efforts were more likely to listen and be receptive during these key moments, Participant 12 demonstrated the extent to which a culturally responsive leader must be politically savvy and aware of the landscape in which they operate.

In other instances, leaders described how they took advantage of pivotal moments to leverage internal opportunities to address issues of equity. Participant 11 described a time in which a conservative faction within his college had stacked the membership of the equal opportunity and diversity advisory committee with the intent of rewriting the diversity statement and as he says, "whitewash[ing] it." The committee was advocating for changes to its committee charge so that it reported to the Faculty Senate. In response to and in his effort to be culturally responsive within this political context, Participant 11 described his approach as follows:

I refused to approve that charge because the moment I approve the charge, then it is really a committee of Academic Senate and becomes political rather than something that supports the work that our college needs to do, I guess I took a political risk over there, but I also informed my Academic Senate president, what I was doing and kept him completely in the loop in terms of why I wasn't moving

this forward. It could not be something that reported to Academic Senate in the political environment that it currently sits in. So you find strategies to do what you need to do. Sometimes it's defensive like this one and sometimes it's a little bit bolder.

Other participants sought to seize opportunities to address equity gaps in student success and completion rates at their colleges. Both Participants 8 and 9 referenced their experiences in navigating resistance from faculty senates and unions regarding implementation of AB 705. This recent legislation requires CCCs to stop using placement tests that place low-income and students of color disproportionately into remedial English and mathematics courses, and instead provide all students the opportunity to take college-level English and mathematics. Participants shared that although participatory governance structures are beneficial in many ways, the length of time and the layers of dialogue encountered as part of the process at times limited the extent to which they could implement timely interventions to support students. This is where strong relationships among senior leaders and unions, senates, and other stakeholder groups are key to breaking down silos to achieve consensus on solutions.

Engage in Community Partnerships. Finally, some participants mentioned the importance of leveraging opportunities to build partnerships with the community as a culturally responsive strategy to meet the needs of their students and institutions. In working to establish and implement a binational partnership with an organization across the California-Mexico border, once college president in the study worked with his participatory governance groups, board of trustees, and business partners to increase access for students who were naturally coming to the college even without intentional

marketing or outreach. He saw this as an opportunity to build the educational pipeline for individuals to gain workplace skills that can lead to high wage careers in such areas as drone technology, cyber security, and computer information systems. As a result of his leadership efforts to develop these agreements, he shared the importance of:

building a partnership in a bi-national region, in a community that has been historically marginalized, working class for the most part, a working-class city on the other side of the border, a lot of poverty, we saw this as a social justice way for us to build a pathway, a better living for our students that we know already organically enrolled in the college anyway.

For Participant 3, a college president who came from the corporate sector with strong ties to business/industry, emphasized how in her role, building strategic partnerships with the community benefits students. She remarked,

So basically, in that role, my job was to literally go out into the community work with corporation nonprofit organization. And find that strategic partner so that we can develop career pathways, education, support services for our students. So from that I built out innovative curriculum, so our students can get done early and find a partner to support our student population.

In leading a rural community college, Participant 3 shared numerous examples of times when she had to navigate the political and power dynamics that exist when working with corporate entities, non-profit organizations, and governments to acquire resources and gain access to workforce opportunities for students at her institution who come from under-resourced communities. During the one-on-one interview, Participant 3 described her first week as the new president at her college and how she learned of the limited

exposure to and lack of awareness her students had of opportunities available to them when they obtain a college education. She said:

So when I first came here my first week, I toured the campus, and I came upon my automotive department. I talked to the faculty and students and they literally said to me, if you are able to let us visit Tesla, it would be like going to the White House...so, I reached out my contact at Tesla and said, you have to give my students this tour. 'Cause if they believe that going to Tesla is like going to the White House that is really promoting things that they thought is not reachable. So my whole theme for them is everything is reachable, Google, Yahoo, all of them are reachable.

This experience, among others, fuels her desire to use her networking skills and political acumen to negotiate with community organizations to partner with her institution to meet her students' educational and employment needs. As a culturally responsive leader, she believes her responsibility is to:

work with the environment that I'm in and when I see the need, then I follow and say, we need this policy changed...there's things that you can do to help close the gap. It doesn't require money. So they have to go back and change the policy.

Based on the experiences described by senior-level leaders of color with respect to leveraging situational contexts to advance equity efforts, it was evident this was a culturally responsive strategy used to meet the diverse needs of students.

Pedagogical Approach

The research sub-question for this dimension—*How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive*

in their leadership strategies?—sought to understand how leaders foster a culturally inclusive learning environment across the institution and build capacity within their teams to serve students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. After analyzing the data collected, four major themes surfaced (see Table 6). The four themes had frequency rates ranging from 39-121 drawn from at least 16 sources. Each theme is presented in its own section with an introduction to the theme and narrative describing each theme. Participant quotes are included that support and describe the pedagogical approaches leaders used to be culturally responsive.

Table 6: Dimension II: Pedagogical approaches and major themes

Dimension	Major Themes	
Pedagogical Approach	Theme 1	Prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution
	Theme 2	Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution
	Theme 3	Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations
	Theme 4	Ensure the learning environment addresses student needs

Pedagogical Approach: Theme I – Prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution. This theme had the highest frequency count not only within the pedagogical approach dimension but also across all four dimensions of the culturally relevant leadership framework with references from all 15 interviews, four artifacts, and three recorded observations (Table 7). In this theme, all participants described ways in which they elevated DEI efforts and demonstrated its importance within various facets of their college. Despite institutional challenges and competing interests, equity remained paramount in institutional planning and participatory governance, professional development, as part of hiring, evaluation, and retention practices, as well as in the

allocation of resources. Threaded throughout, leaders relied upon data to inspire a sense of urgency to change practice and policy within the entire institution. Each of the areas in which leaders prioritize equity will be presented with a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to further expand on the idea.

Table 7: Theme, source, and frequency-Prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Prioritize equity by embedded it within all areas of the institution	22	121

The researcher found that several participants were intentional in elevating DEI efforts even in the midst of other important institutional priorities. A few participants explicitly mentioned that although as leaders they were confronted with many competing demands and challenges such as navigating COVID-19 pandemic concerns, low enrollment, and fiscal challenges, they were intentional in keeping equity at the forefront within their institutions by communicating its importance. In reflecting back over the last 3 years since 2019 that were filled with racial unrest and hate crimes as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, Participant 14 expressed that even during times of crisis, transitions, and varied institutional priorities, it is vitally important to maintain a focus on equity:

So when we are thinking about making budget decisions or policy decisions, we need to have an equity framework that we're using so that it's not an afterthought, but it's integral to the way that we make decisions regardless of whatever crisis comes up. Because there's always gonna be a crisis or critical issue of the day that we do not lose focus and that we are centered and anchored in equity. So now

that the pandemic hit and now, we're focused on pandemic operations and we're not moving any of our equity work forward. No. When we're thinking about the pandemic and any of the changes we need to make, we have to do it with an equity minded lens.

Leaders mentioned that it is easy to become distracted by the most pressing issues facing their colleges and then set equity and social justice to the side. As Participant 1, a vice president of instruction shared:

Other work starts to take over, you know, the most pressing matter takes over. So that student that, you know, who acted up or there's a disciplinary issue, that kind of stuff starts to take over our daily lives. It gives us less time to be thoughtful about the big picture, which is why aren't Latinx students succeeding in the STEM pathways.

However, participants were quick to proclaim that advancing equity cannot be seen as just one extra duty added to their long list of other tasks and items. To this end, what stood out as a consistent strategy employed by senior-level leaders of color in the study is centering equity in all work of the institution and communicating its importance. The data showed that one approach participants used to demonstrate equity was a priority was by ensuring that it was a part of college-wide planning.

Institutional Planning. When describing ways to embed equity in all areas of the institution, some participants mentioned that including equity within the college planning processes can be effective in sustaining equity-minded institutional practices. A document provided by Participant 15, a college president, described how she facilitated the creation of a diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, anti-racism (DEIAA) plan for

her college, which ensured that DEIAA was infused into all areas of the institution, including instruction, student services, accessibility, and campus climate. The DEIAA plan clearly articulated an emphasis on “deepening students’ and employees’ sense of belongingness” with a focus on strengthening student success, advancing anti-racism, amplifying accessibility, and improving campus climate which all align with the college’s mission and equity framework. Furthermore, Participant 6, a college president who recently entered her tenure as CEO, intentionally looked for opportunities to examine the extent to the college community utilized an equity lens when determining institutional priorities. She stated:

I came here and our accreditation, we were not doing it. I was like, wait a minute. We gotta do accreditation. And so that gave me space to materialize the work of equity into our accreditation...and then also within the framework of our strategic planning that we’re doing right now. It’s even embedded in our facilities planning. And I realize now, that I’m still cultivating what the vision will look like, how that’s gonna fully internalize, which is my vision is that equity work is embedded in every corner of the campus in a really material way.

Overall, most participants acknowledged the importance of their role as a senior-level leader in ensuring equity-minded policies and practices were reinforced into all institutional planning, further demonstrating their culturally responsive leadership practice of prioritizing equity within their college campuses.

Another way senior-level leaders of color in this study prioritize equity within the institution is through leveraging committee and governance structures. Participants shared that to ensure equity-mindedness is embraced, it is important that members of

faculty senates, classified senates, student government, and unions are part of DEI conversations. Many participants specifically referenced that they created or supported the creation of taskforces, committees, or workgroups comprising members from all stakeholder groups to focus on anti-racism and equity work. Participant 10 excitedly described how she facilitated a structural change at her college with the creation of a cross-functional, shared governance committee that brought together key actors leading student success efforts such as the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), Basic Skills (BSI), Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Program, and Guided Pathways (GP) to ensure goals and objectives were aligned and integrated. Utilizing a broad constituency-based committee structure to conduct an analysis of the progress the college has made and identify gaps, Participant 10 remarked how “phenomenal” it was to see the collaboration result in the identification of key recommendations for improvement and a plan of action for the upcoming year.

In other instances, participants changed the organizational structure of the college and established departments focused on equity. For example, Participant 9 developed an office of student equity programs and services to advance DEI efforts across his institution. Likewise, Participant 4, a vice president of student services, changed organizational structures at her institution by integrating the institutional effectiveness and equity departments together and hired an equity director and professional development director to facilitate data informed equity decisions with the long-term goal of creating a social justice center.

Hiring and Retention Processes. A substantial number of participants shaped the hiring, onboarding, and retention practices at their institutions as a culturally responsive

strategy to ensure DEI was prioritized. A recurring sentiment described by participants was the intentionality around diversifying the employee base with specific strategies to retain faculty, staff, and administrators of color. Several participants mentioned the importance of having a diverse team that reflects the student body and the community they serve. Participant 13 stressed that there must be racial and ethnic representation at all positional levels, “not just the custodians and groundkeepers; it needs to be everyone across the board” as well as “professional staff who serve students and could speak to them in multiple languages.” To achieve this goal, many participants pointed to the need to change policy and practice in the way colleges recruit and hire employees.

When asked to expand on ways senior-level leaders can be intentional in hiring practices, Participant 8 provided details about the culturally responsive approach he takes to ensure DEI is enacted at his college. In describing the changes in hiring practices that he introduced at this college, he stated that he commits to:

making sure everyone has an equal opportunity and an equitable chance at getting the same position, regardless of what you look like, or your background...[and that]...the playing field is equal for everyone to get the chance to get in the door.”

Hence the first change he made was to ensure that the values of equity that the college espouses and expects candidates to hold is explicitly written and communicated to all applicants in job announcements. Secondly, he revealed that transcripts are no longer part of the application packet that hiring committees view, which helps to minimize bias around applicants’ academic grades and type or name of the college or university the applicant attended. Moreover, ensuring diverse representation on hiring committees and advertising positions widely was another tactic he implemented in the hiring processes.

He shared that a future goal is to move toward a blind application process where applicant names are redacted so to further minimize bias related to surnames. Lastly, Participant 8 emphasized intentionality around the type of questions asked of candidates during the interview process. In describing what he does in second level interviews, he stated:

I ask questions when they get to the second level about how a learning college will be a more equity based anti-racist institution with you here. Tell me what it means to be an ally to students. Tell me your ‘why’ and how does your why fit our college.

He reported that he has observed how the community college system often focuses on skills and training people to be allies for students rather than looking for people who have a heart for students and providing the necessary training for them to acquire the technical skills needed for the job. Similarly, Participant 12 alluded to a related concept as Participant 8, that when bringing in new administrators to the institution, he sees the importance of going beyond experience and technical skill and assessing a candidate’s mindset toward the students the college serves and the extent to which their decision-making around resource allocation and student success efforts is grounded in equity. The last approach Participant 8 described was his commitment to carving out time in his schedule to meet each candidate before making an offer of employment. He stated, “It does impact my schedule to see every classified employee we hire. But they’re the frontline people. If they don’t have a why, if they don’t see their connection, then we’ll never change our enrollment process.” Clearly, the schedule of a college president is often very affected, but for Participant 8, the commitment to prioritizing equity is

demonstrated in the time and resources he devotes to the hiring processes to ensure that the campus environment reflects the students he serves.

Perhaps the best example of the culturally responsive strategy of embedding equity in institutional structures such as the hiring process was described by Participant 2, a vice chancellor of human resources at a multi-college district. When examining and triangulating data collected from the individual one-on-one interview, two recorded observations, and one artifact from Participant 2, the researcher found substantial evidence of the utilization of equity-minded hiring and retention practices as a culturally responsive strategy. The artifact provided by Participant 2 described a framework and anti-racism and inclusion action plan that was created by one college in collaboration with the district Human Resources department, of which Participant 2 was the managing administrator. Specific strategies noted in the plan focused on the systematic review of policies and practices aimed at identifying structural and systemic barriers to the recruitment, hiring, onboarding, evaluation, and promotion of historically underrepresented and marginalized communities with an emphasis on the historical barriers for Black/African Americans.

Moreover, recorded observations and the one-on-one interview with Participant 2 elucidated his efforts and advocacy to encourage colleges within his district and across the CCC system to formalize supportive onboarding and retention practices, such as the implementation of faculty and employee diversity internship and mentoring programs to support employees of color so they feel welcomed and a sense of belonging to the college community. Participant 2 repeatedly referenced literature and research indicating that when employees of color are supported through intentional onboarding and retention

processes, they feel more connected to the college and are more likely to be retained. Subsequently, as Participant 2 asserted, retaining employees of color creates more opportunities for those employees to connect with students from diverse backgrounds, allowing students to see themselves represented in the faculty and leadership of the campus, thereby increasing student success and retention.

Resource Allocation. Another practice participants described as a culturally responsive approach to prioritizing equity is in the allocation of resources. In general, participants described various ways they leveraged multiple funding sources to support student success and equity efforts at their campuses. Participants 9 and 10 both mentioned using federal and state emergency funding allocated during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the immediate needs of students who were experiencing housing, food, and transportation insecurities as well as student debt. The researcher took note of how Participant 10, a vice president of student services, was strategic in the use of emergency funding by not just distributing it equally across all students as her college had done in the past. Rather, she saw how the “rising tides raises all boats” mindset at her college in the allocation of support and resources did not help the students who were in greatest need. Instead, she utilized a data-informed approach to change the structure of how the money was distributed so that students with the greatest need were supported with increased resources so they could take more college units, expedite time to completion of their educational goal, and not have to worry about working three jobs to make ends meet.

Moreover, many participants creatively used existing fiscal and physical resources to help establish student retention programs, academic support centers, and dedicated

spaces for affinity groups focused on the needs of Latinxs, Black/African Americans, AAPIs, AB 540/undocumented students, and students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Several participants mentioned how they used one-time funding to support staff to reach out to students who had left college during the pandemic to re-engage them to return to school so they can achieve their educational and career goals.

Finally, the prioritization of fiscal resources to compensate faculty for working on projects specifically to advance DEI efforts was another focus for some participants. Participant 3 was adamant about the value of supporting faculty by compensating them when they go above and beyond the call of duty. She stated, “I’m gonna use my budget to pay the faculty to do the work...to make sure they infuse cultural competency in their curriculum.” Many participants believe it is critical to be mindful about the hard work of equity and the sustained commitment it takes to consistently improve service and pedagogical practices and providing resources to support employees in these efforts in order to promote overall institutional improvement and effectiveness as well as employee morale and motivation.

Strategic Professional Development. The approach of providing professional development on issues of social justice and equity as a strategy in prioritizing equity was described by 13 participants in the study. The researcher found that many participants invited consultants or well-known speakers who were versed in DEI literature, research, and high impact practices within the CCC and at the national level to speak at their colleges and facilitate professional development. Participant 13 shared that his rationale in bringing in outside consultants was to minimize the perception of a top-down approach that may be present if he, as the college president, conducted training on culturally

relevant teaching practices. The nature and extent of the training or professional development participants brought to their colleges varied based on topic and target audience. For example, a few participants chose to focus their training on helping mathematics and English faculty enhance their curriculum to be more culturally relevant or to design and implement strategies to help students succeed in college-level English and math courses. Other leaders focused on training related to the assessment, review, and update of their Student Equity Plans to ensure the strategies within the plan are more equity-minded and race conscious. Still others, like Participant 4, worked through participatory governance channels to change college-level professional development policies as well as procedures related to how faculty earn flex credit. This was an important approach due to the challenges leaders often faced when attempting to require professional development. Overall, participants were quite sure of the value of professional development and training in DEI in building the capacity of their teams as well as the institution on a collective level in addressing the needs of students from historically marginalized populations.

Use of Data to Inspire Urgency. Another approach that senior-level leaders of color in this study adopted to prioritize equity was using data to inspire a sense of urgency to change institutional practices and processes. Some participants described how they engaged others in critical conversations about the student populations most affected. For example, Participant 1, a vice president of instruction, enthusiastically recounted how she facilitated an activity during the college's opening day convocation held right before the semester in which faculty were asked to examine student learning and student

services outcome data for their respective disciplines and departments. She recounted the experience:

We said, “Look for patterns. What do you see in your data? Who’s succeeding, who’s not succeeding, what’s happening there. What trends do you see?” And then I led this activity and walked them through that analysis and then asked them to come up with two or three strategies that they could employ immediately that semester that might help the students who weren’t making it through. So those were good conversations.

The purpose of asking critical questions around data enabled Participant 1 and other leaders in this study to motivate their teams to build capacity in understanding data and think critically about their teaching practice so that change in practice supports better outcomes for students. Participant 5 found that shifting from looking at data on a conceptual level to something more tangible helps her faculty and staff more easily identify and contextualize interventions to serve students better. The same was true for Participant 11 who uses data to help student services staff and counseling faculty identify and address barriers within the matriculation processes that was resulting in high attrition of students who had applied but failed to attend class at the start of the term. Participants were mindful of how important it was to engage their faculty and staff in a critical analysis of and conversation about student outcome data. Meaningful data analysis allowed leaders to leverage the process to make a stronger case for change in teaching practices to improve access and success rates for students of color.

After triangulating the data collected from all 15 interviews, four artifacts, and three recorded observations related to this theme, the data suggests that that senior-level

leaders of color use myriad pedagogical approaches to ensure that DEI is prioritized by centering it in all facets of the institutional structure, planning and policy making, and hiring practices, and relying upon data to inspire a sense of urgency to change practice and policy within the entire institution.

Pedagogical Approach: Theme II – Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution. Further analysis of the data collected in the study resulted in the emergence of a second theme within the pedagogical approach dimension. This theme relates to strategies culturally responsive leaders use to cultivate and build relationships among employees to foster a sense of community and encourage collaboration to progress DEI efforts within the institutions. As shown in Table 8, this theme had a frequency rate of 50 from 16 sources, including 13 interviews, two recorded observations, and one artifact. Specific ways in which leaders build a sense of community and collaboration that arose from the findings within this theme include: (a) humanizing relationships, (b) creating psychological safety, and (c) developing allyship relationships.

Table 8: Theme, source, and frequency-Build a sense of community and collaboration within their institution

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution	16	50

Humanize Relationships. Participants frequently spoke of the importance of building relationships with others on a one-on-one basis, within teams and across the campus with people who represent various constituency groups, as a first step to building community and investment around DEI efforts. Participant 1, a vice president of

instruction, communicated the importance of humanizing the interactions she has with others who have perspectives different than her own to gain trust and lay a foundation for future conversations around equity. During the interview, she described a specific instance in which she attended a presentation on the topic of academic freedom given by a faculty member whom she had awkward interactions with in the past. She stated:

I made it a point of arriving a couple minutes late and then entering through the front. So everybody saw me enter. And then I went to the back of the room and I sat down and then I just listened, which made them really nervous. And I wasn't trying to make people nervous, I genuinely wanted to hear. When it was done, I again engaged him in a conversation. He looks at me at times like "I don't get you. I don't understand what you're trying to do." But you know what? He doesn't hate me. And so when we have a conversation, he'll listen and it's a civil conversation. And so for as many times as he'll look at me, like, "What are you trying to do? What are you up to?" He'll also listen. And so I call that a win. And so in my mind, that's how I help develop a climate where we can do better for our students where if I can get them to see me as someone who has the same interest at heart, then we've got the same footing and we have something in common from which we can then begin to discuss our differences in a civil and respectful manner.

In other instances, participants described strategies they used to build relationships with key stakeholder groups. An example was presented by Participant 9, a Latino college president, upon entering his first few months of his presidency, desired to address the racial tensions between various cultural groups at the college as well as the practice of

campus staff bypassing the president and going straight to the board with issues of concern. In describing his approach to his first planning retreat with the board of trustees, he remarked with a passionate tone in his voice:

We do board retreats and board development, but I didn't want to do that work from your historical colonial approach, like let's get together, let's talk about goals, let's talk about how we're gonna measure those goals. I felt like that was too one-dimensional.

To support his plan, he intentionally sought help from an outside consultant to work with the board of trustees on developing a shared understanding and vision for equity and learn how their role as trustees can support and advance anti-racist and social justice policy and decision-making practices. In detailing his culturally responsive leadership strategy to building a sense of collaboration he went on to emphasize:

And so if we can connect as leaders from a cultural and a personal perspective, then it really does drive and inform how we engage in dialogue with one another, how we interact with one another, how we respect one another and how we remain united against those things that oftentimes seek to disenfranchise and disconnect us from the work that needs to be done as one body. Also allowing the board to really get to know me as their CEO, not in terms of my background and what positions have I fulfilled in the past as a Dean, as a faculty member, as a director, but really know about my own personal journey, my story, who I am, what drives my decision making, you know, what I'm proud of in terms of my family dynamic, how I grew up. And so our retreat was done in a Native American healing circle. So we didn't sit at a dais like your traditional board; we

sat in a healing circle and really connected as human beings, as people, from a cultural identity perspective and a cultural respect perspective. And so, we did our board retreat very, very differently.

The researcher found that the culturally responsive strategies Participant 9 used exemplified the importance of humanizing relationships to approach equity work from a place of humility and trust.

Create Psychological Safety. In an effort to employ culturally responsive practices that cultivate trust, some participants also referred the notion of creating psychologically safe spaces to support the exploration of sensitive issues related to DEI. Participant 5, a college president with a strong background and skill set in the field of psychology and education, believes that humans need connection but often feel unsafe being vulnerable, which can result in a lack of trust, hindering the building of productive relationships. She shared confidently that her strategy of “showing my own vulnerability with my own learning trajectory, like having a sense of cultural humility, you know, standing alongside people in that space” is one way in which she demonstrates the culturally responsive strategy of building an environment of trust and collaboration to tackle racial equity problems. She went on to say,

Nobody changes for racial equity or to be anti-racist unless they’re really feeling safe enough... People aren’t gonna remember the numbers, they’re not gonna remember any of that stuff, they’re gonna remember that they had a moment with me where I actually listened to them, tried to affirm them, tried to be respectful in my response if I disagreed with them. And I think more often than not across my career, I think it’s, worked. I mean, not, everybody’s happy with the decisions

I've made, or not everybody likes me...I think amongst folks they'll say like, "Yeah, I didn't necessarily agree with her decision, but like she didn't belittle me to get to the thing." It wasn't an othering. So I think that's been my biggest learning is going back to that psychology piece. People wanna feel like they're of value and that they're worthy.

Participant 5 also shared that when working with her leaders and teams, she employs myriad strategies to build capacity in people to do "racial justice" and "social justice" work. On an individual level she coaches her executive team members in areas where they need to grow, and when conducting personnel evaluations, she shared in a matter-of-fact tone, she is "radically candid" about where they need to improve and gives "authentic feedback" to them because of how deeply she cares about the work of social justice and investing in others so they are able to build capacity in their political intelligence as well enhance their pedagogical approach to leadership. In contrast, she also affirms her team members in spaces and moments when they step out and confront inequities observed within their spheres of influence. On a collective level, Participant 5 uses strategies to foster a culturally affirming team environment. For example, she carves out time to build relationships when new members join the team by asking people to bring "cultural artifacts" into meetings and spending time getting to know each other. This approach moves the meeting from a transactional to a transformational when team members' diverse backgrounds are acknowledged and affirmed for the value they bring to the working environment. The act of acknowledging and affirming the traditions and cultures of others, as Participant 5 does to build an inclusive environment at her college, and ensuring people feel seen and heard regardless of where they are situated on the

continuum of being equity-minded is a consistent culturally responsive strategy used by leaders in this study.

Develop Allyship. Moreover, data collected from interviews and recorded observations substantiate the practice that developing relationships with others who have different lived experiences than oneself serves to unify diverse groups of people to address the needs of students of color and those from historically marginalized backgrounds. As Participant 15, a female college president, shared in the one-one-interview and re-emphasized in a recorded observation that the work for leaders of color is about the willingness “to build ally-type relationships,” so that when trying to advance the work of social justice for students in the workplace, there is a commitment by White colleagues to be co-conspirators in various spaces “when I’m pushing something so that I’m not the only voice in the room.” Data collected and participant perspectives related to this theme overall suggests that effective strategies to cultivate a sense of community and encourage collaboration among diverse campus groups and populations lies in a senior-level leader of color’s ability to humanize relationships, create safe spaces for critical conversations around race and marginalization, and develop allyships with others who possess experiences different than their own.

Pedagogical Approach: Theme III – Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations. This theme describes the ways in which culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color actively seek opportunities to invite diverse voices into conversations around equity as well as elevate those voices who historically have been absent or silent. Data collected around this theme also points to the practice of modeling an openness to changing one’s leadership practice based on critical input from others. As

shown in Table 9, this theme had the third highest frequency rate of 48 from 17 sources, including all 15 interviews, one recorded observation, and one artifact.

Table 9: Theme, source, and frequency-Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations	17	48

Based on the findings within this theme, specific ways in which leaders actively seek and engage others in critical conversations include: (a) prioritizing historically silenced or excluded voices, and (b) accepting critical input from others.

Prioritize Historically Silenced or Excluded Voices. According to the data collected in this study, to create space to have discussions around equity, social justice, and anti-racism, an environment that supports and encourages the perspective of all voices and opinions is necessary. Although every participant described this culturally responsive strategy as one they use when leading their institutions, many pointed to a variety of different groups of people they chose to highlight as examples of their practice. When asked about strategies used to build a climate of affirmation within her college community, Participant 5 quickly recalled a time in which students who identified with the LGBTQ+ community came to her and shared the hurtful experiences they were having on campus. Not coming from the same lived experience and background as the students but knowing that students did not feel safe on her campus, Participant 5 felt a strong sense of responsibility to listen, learn, and change the campus environment to be more inclusive for students and employees who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. As a result of learning about the needs of LGBTQ+ students, Participant 5 was able to establish an employee and student group for people who identify with the LGBTQ+

community and support the creation of college-hosted events such as a prom for LGBTQ+ identifying students.

Similarly, other participants noted the importance of elevating student voices in all spaces and opportunities. For example, Participant 14, a vice president in student services, cultivates student leaders by ensuring they are represented on shared governance committees and have input on which campus events are offered. Likewise, Participant 15, a college president, says that when confronted with resistance to addressing student basic needs, she says she will “prioritize and privilege student stories and student voices. So, if somebody is resisting say OER [open education resources], I like talk about how affordability as a basic need is a major barrier.” Still other participants in the study, like Participant 6, described ways in which they elevate the voices of staff and faculty of color, affirming them publicly and even on social media at times, for their accomplishments and the good work they do so that others see and can acknowledge it. She reported that this is so important because people of color in academia navigate challenging situations, and as a leader of color who is in a position of privilege, she values the opportunity to privilege others. In short, all participants agreed that groups who have been marginalized historically and contemporarily deserve the opportunity to come to a space and have a seat at the table when it comes to informing the decision-making that would affect them as constituents served by the college.

Critical Input Supports Change in Practices. Some of the participants indicated that their own personal journey, intersecting identities, and lived experiences influenced the voices they prioritized and elevated. Moreover, some participants shared that listening to others’ input and engaging in critical conversations around oppression,

privilege, and difference improved their leadership practice and informed their personal journey to be more equity-minded. Participant 1 openly shared that there are times in which she finds herself changing her approach to solving a problem after listening to and having more dialogue with others. At times, she consciously decided to back down from a particular stance after hearing diverse perspectives on a topic. In reflecting on her practice, she commented:

So I'm okay with saying, "I'm sorry, I didn't think of this. Let's try better." And so I think when you go into those conversations, you have to be able to say, I haven't thought about that, I didn't know that other thing and so making yourself vulnerable. As a leader you get so much about how you shouldn't don't apologize don't but I don't know how to be an effective leader without acknowledging my own humanity as a human being, I am flawed in all kinds of ways.

Several participants also shared that creating space to hear diverse voices and perspectives gave way to institution-wide impact. The researcher found the approach taken by Participant 12, a sitting college president for 7 years at his institution and with 26 years' experience overall in higher education, best exemplified the culturally responsive strategy of engaging diverse voices in critical conversations from a systems- and college-wide perspective. In reflecting back on when he began his presidency, Participant 12 shared how he consistently provided time for individuals who were perceived as disgruntled, naysayers, or anti-administration to share their concerns with him even when some members of his leadership team cautioned him not to do so. In

creating a college culture of inclusivity, he sought to model to the campus community how to invite those who feel marginalized back into the fold. He said:

I spend time building relationships with those who existed at the margins of the institution, the disgruntled folks, the naysayers, those who would blow up on the spot, any chance they get, just because administrators were doing it. Those who were viewed as oppositional, I cultivate the same relationships with them and create soft landing spaces back into the mainstream of the institution. And you know why I focus on that one? I want people know that you would never be discarded by me in the institution even if you could choose to live on the margins. So I did that, not just for them, but for everyone who was watching how I treated them.

This approach Participant 12 took was multi-layered, but those encounters impressed upon him the need to “really try to address the institutional trauma” the college community had been experiencing. In describing how he approached the campus community, he said:

I’m not looking to change the identity of the institution and I wanted to be clear that I’m not saying everything done up to this point is bad. The fact is it’s really good given the context of how we existed. I’m coming in to be a steward of tradition and legacy. But part of being a good steward is to make sure that our college consistently evolves and grows to meet the present needs of the institution. In order to do that, just like we do in our personal life, we wanna get better every day. It’s just about daily improvements that our institutions can make in order to be the very best college for the students that we have. So it was that

series of what I call crucial conversations, where I took third world topics, things that people didn't want to talk about and I said let's openly have conversation about that thing.

Meeting with staff who had been at the college for at least 20 years was a culturally responsive strategy to include all voices that helped Participant 12 build relationships and alleviate fears that he was going to quickly make radical changes as a new president. This approach served to facilitate changes in the campus climate by honoring its past as it makes strides toward continuous improvement in the future.

In summary, while listening to others' input and engaging in critical conversations around oppression, privilege, and difference helped prioritize often silenced voices, there were added benefits. The advantage of being vulnerable to diverse perspectives also served as an opportunity for leaders to improve their leadership practice and informed their journey to be better equity-minded leaders and practitioners for their institutions.

Pedagogical Approach: Theme IV – Ensure the learning environment addresses student needs. The fourth theme under the pedagogical approach dimension relates to how senior-level leaders of color ensure the campus climate and learning environment is responsive to and meets the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. As shown in Table 10, this theme had a total frequency count of 39 references collected from 16 data sources, including 10 interviews, three recorded observations, and three artifacts. The data revealed that participants served student needs in a variety of ways ranging from establishing and supporting cultural affinity programs and services to promoting culturally relevant teaching practices. Each pedagogical approach that leaders

utilize to ensure the learning environment addresses student needs will be presented with a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to provide context to understand the nuances of the theme more deeply. further expand on the idea.

Table 10: Theme, source, and frequency-Ensure the learning environment addresses student needs

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Ensure the learning environment addresses student needs	16	39

Affinity Programs and Specialized Services. A common sentiment shared by many participants was how valuable it was for them to be involved with programs that represented their culture and background during their own educational journey. Many participants recalled from their college experience how connection with affinity groups or programs contributed to a sense of belonging and affirmation of their lived experience and identities. Drawing upon these experiences motivated senior-level leaders to ensure that similar programs are offered to students at their institutions. Long-standing programs such as Umoja and Puente, which emphasize the Black/African American and Latinx experiences respectively, were common at many of the colleges led by the participants. Data collected from documentation and recorded observations showed evidence of leaders demonstrating cultural responsiveness by way of their unwavering focus on establishing programs for neglected student populations. Participant 4, a vice president of student services, described in a recorded observation and in the one-on-one interview her efforts to provide programming for veteran students, formerly incarcerated students, undocumented students, and students from the LGBTQA++ community. Similarly, Participant 2 shared the importance of raising awareness of the mental health needs of student populations, which are prevalent in the AAPI community. He shared

that from his perspective, this area has been ignored for many years due to the model minority myth and stereotype attributed to members of the AAPI community.

Ensuring the provision of comprehensive services and programs to address the needs of students was an additional culturally responsive leadership strategy utilized by participants. Participant 11, a former vice president of student services and current president at the college he has been at for several years, described how he championed a first-year experience (FYE) program to support the academic and social transition from high school to college of an incoming cohort of Black/African American students. In citing data from his own college that revealed low yield rates of Black/African American students from the point of college application to enrollment to successful completion, he says the FYE program, which is grounded in “well-researched, well-documented strategies,” promotes student cohorts that are “vibrant and successful on campus.” The end result, he asserts, are students who have an increased awareness of the “institutional supports” that are available as well as stronger sense of belonging to the campus community.

Another approach described by participants involved the compilation of affinity programs into a centralized space to create an overarching community. This tactic was emphasized by Participant 9 who in recalling how he benefitted from experiences in which communities of color worked together, respected, and supported one another, remarked upon his approach at his current institution:

So we developed a yearlong comprehensive program for our different professionals and student groups on campus that take into account their backgrounds, their cultures, their identities from a place of value and make sure

that the programming reflects their interests. And then, we also have the hub, which is all of our affinity programs. But instead of them being siloed in different offices, they're all under one roof. And, so it really helps with students learning about other identities, other cultures, cross programming, and it's a welcoming space. There's art that really speaks to the students culturally. And so, it's reflective of what students have said how they want to see themselves and they want to feel valued when they walk into the spaces on a college campus. And that's how I believe you build a culture of affirmation and really being consistent in how we deliver that.

Equally important as affinity programs was the consistent reference by participants that addressing students' basic needs was a top priority for them in their role as a senior-level leader within their institution. Participant 10, a vice president of student services, became excited when she shared about her efforts to build a centralized infrastructure to increase basic needs services for students such as the expansion of housing options for homeless students, a center staffed with individuals who can provide mental health services, and access to a food pantry and market to help students with food insecurities. According to Participant 10, this one-stop-shop was intentionally designed to create a space that addresses students' basic needs with "dignity and respect" and normalize services that serve to dismantle the stigma surrounding housing and food insecurity. As a senior-level leader, Participant 10 captured the notion that senior-level leaders have tremendous influence on improving the campus' physical environment to make it more welcoming and inclusive as well as meet the diverse needs of students from varied backgrounds and experiences.

Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning. Data collected from interviews and documentation clearly indicated that promoting cultural competency teaching practices and strongly encouraging faculty to make certain their curriculum and materials are culturally relevant to the student populations being served is another example of culturally responsive leadership. Participant 5 described her approach to this as “humanizing the college experience” for students inclusive of spaces on campus and in services, as well as in the classroom. As a college president with a strong instructional background, Participant 5 detailed her experiences leading semester-long sessions on humanizing curriculum and instruction for faculty learning community cohorts. She described how she conducts it like a class using Canvas, a learning management system, where faculty look at their course content and data and, based on their examination, select a project to demonstrate what they learned regarding humanizing curriculum and instruction, and then implement a strategy in their classroom that will promote an affirming learning environment for students. Participant 5 shared that providing ongoing support and resources to faculty helps them to advance the projects toward implementation.

Several participants also mentioned the role they play in encouraging faculty to enhance their curriculum by including cultural relevant materials, texts, and other elements into their teaching practices. The experiences participants had with exposure to culturally relevant texts and materials in the college classes they took certainly informed their desire to see curriculum that is representative of the backgrounds, lived experiences, and cultural heritages of the students served by the institution. Perhaps the most all-encompassing example of culturally responsive leadership strategies used by senior-level

leaders of color to ensure that student needs are being met in the learning environment was provided by Participant 15. Upon examination of a recorded observation, the DEIAA action plan document and the one-on-one interview with the college president, there was clear evidence that humanizing education within her institution was a strategy she prioritized. The DEIAA action plan led by Participant 15 specifically outlines ways in which the college will “increase institutional capacity to humanize education and dismantle systemic racism.” Action items in the plan that are particularly relevant to culturally relevant teaching and learning include auditing curriculum to evaluate for cultural relevancy, developing DEI library resources to support teaching and learning needs, and increasing support for English language learners. In reviewing the recorded observation of Participant 15 and in the one-on-one interview, the researcher also noted the reference to providing faculty with professional development to infuse cultural responsiveness within their curriculum and ensure that culturally responsive pedagogy is occurring across all disciplines. Based on the perspectives of all participants in the study, the researcher found considerable evidence indicating that promoting culturally responsive teaching and learning was an important facet of the way in which senior-level leaders ensure the learning environment meets students’ needs.

A major finding collected from a total of 22 sources and 258 frequency counts within the pedagogical approach dimension is that senior-level leaders of color are intimately involved in setting vision, providing direction, and modeling ways in which the college community can advance efforts to be equity-minded and anti-racist in service delivery and teaching practices. Moreover, leaders in this study were explicit in their expectation that equity is prioritized and embedded across all structures of the institution

through policy and institutional processes. To accomplish this task, participants in the study shared examples of how they utilized the culturally responsive strategy of engaging diverse voices in critical conversations around racial equity and social justice issues in a way that is inclusive and builds a community of practitioners who collaborate to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Personal Journey

The research sub-question for this dimension—*How does one’s personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership practice?*—sought to understand how the leader’s personal identity and lived experience impact the ways in which they lead for social justice and equity within their institution. Two major themes emerged after analyzing the data collected (Table 11).

The following are the identified themes with frequency rates ranging from 69-45 from at least 15 sources. Each theme is presented in its own section with an introduction to the theme and narrative explaining each theme. Participant quotes are included that support and describe how their personal journey and identity has influenced the manner in which they lead in culturally responsive ways.

Table 11: Dimension III: Personal journey and major themes

Dimension	Major Themes	
Personal Journey	Theme 1	Draw upon one’s identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all
	Theme 2	Practice reflexive leadership

Personal Journey – Theme I: Draw upon one’s identity and lived Experience to create an inclusive environment for all. Analysis of the data revealed this theme to have the highest frequency count, with 69 references from 15 interview sources, two

recorded observations, and one artifact within the personal journey dimension (Table 12). In this theme, all participants reported that the intersectionality of their multiple social identities (including race, ethnicity, and gender, along with their lived experiences with marginalization) were salient in their culturally responsive leadership practice to create inclusive and affirming environments for their campus community. Participants articulated how their personal and educational experiences shaped their leadership and ways in which their identities serve as an asset in their leadership praxis. When examining the data within this theme, three areas surfaced that described specific ways in which participants drew upon their identity and lived experience to lead in a culturally responsive manner: (a) viewing social identity as an asset, (b) influence of early educational experiences, and (c) experiences with marginalization and privilege assisted them in relating to the students they serve. Each area will be presented with a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to further expand on the theme.

Table 12: Theme, source, and frequency-Draw upon one’s identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Draw upon one’s identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all	17	69

View Social Identity as an Asset. All 15 participants shared that their social identity was salient in their ability to be culturally responsive leaders. Participants’ social identities were multidimensional and intersectional in that leaders described their identities as including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and preference, body size, and language, among other attributes. These intersecting parts of their identity were seen as incredibly advantageous to their leadership practice. How identity informs leadership approach overall was perhaps best described by Participant 7 who used the

analogy of photography to describe how the different layers that make up her identities serve as a lens from which she views the world. She shared:

So my husband and I both love photography. And you know, you can take a picture straight on, but as soon as you drop that camera, it's different. Depending on what lens you use, your macro lens or whatever lens, all of it adds a certain flavor to how you're seeing something. And this makes me a better leader, I believe.

Each angle at which the camera lens is situated is akin to a different aspect of her identity, which informs and grounds her leadership practice. The intersectionality of one's various identities emerged as important in the leader's ability to be culturally responsive in her leadership approach.

Other leaders spoke of how their racial and ethnic identities are also centered within a social and political context. Participant 4, who identifies as a Chicana, views her identity from not only a cultural perspective but also that of an activist-scholar. This perspective, she asserted, helps her facilitate transformational changes at her institution. Because involvement in activist efforts was an influential part of her lived experience, it was not uncommon for her to advocate for various equity efforts at her institution such as the implementation of a FYE program. The FYE program enables students to connect with a team of college personnel who guide them through their first year, fostering a sense of belonging and connection of students to the college community. Likewise, Participant 15 views her cultural identity from both a social and political perspective. She identifies first as Pinay, a word used for a Filipina woman, and second as Asian

American. The AAPI movement and the political aspects and racial histories of Asian American communities are key elements that inform her political consciousness.

Additionally, Participant 2 clearly embraces his identity and sees it as a core part of who he is as a leader. He remarked:

I identify as a Filipino American and so that really is the core of what informs how I do my work and how I live my life. It's really a major part of who I am in my personal identity. So as a person of color, I look at it as an asset, as a strength in terms of having a perspective that might not be shared with the dominant culture or the major group of demographic.

Because of his identity and experiences, Participant 2 leads with this lens when he is in various professional settings, such as actively debunking the model minority myth attributed to Asians when it arises or countering the common practice in academia of conflating Asians into one group, which often results in discounting the real educational needs of the AAPI community. Based on the perspectives of the senior-level leaders of color in this study, viewing one's social identity as an asset helps them to lead in culturally responsive ways and brings a different perspective to the discourse around diversity and equity that might not be presented otherwise.

Influence of Early Educational Experiences. Based on the data collected it was evident that the early educational experiences of leaders in this study influenced their desire to create spaces and environments that are affirming for students from diverse backgrounds. Due to the absence or presence of positive educational experiences in their lives, participants reported a deep understanding of the value of cultural affirmation in student success. As a result, these personal experiences served as important drivers that

compelled leaders to employ culturally responsive practices to ensure that the conditions at their campuses mimic supportive, welcoming, and affirming environments for students of color and others from marginalized backgrounds.

In some instances, participants described the impact teachers and staff had on their trajectory and the influence they had on their reasons for wanting to lead in a culturally responsive way. Participant 13 recalled an experience in which he was encouraged by his high school counselor to take classes that would make it easy for him to get his high school diploma instead of taking college preparatory courses. He remembered being perceived as a student who did not have the ability to succeed in college because he came from a low-income family and was upset at being tracked down a path that would not ultimately lead to a college degree and higher earning potential. Hence, his early school experiences influenced his passion as a college leader to address the educational attainment gap for Latino males and males of color.

In contrast, Participant 15 vividly remembered experiences of being mentored and nurtured by White professors who helped her navigate her educational journey and who instilled confidence in her ability to achieve academically. Moreover, in her early professional life when she was hired as a tenured faculty member, senior faculty members of color and White allies embraced her and helped her navigate the tenure process. However, shared instances while in her doctoral program in which she experienced invalidation from professors who were not supportive of the critical lens she used in her writing. In describing one very salient example in her doctoral program that impacted her, she remarked:

I had a really negative experience when I was in my first doctoral program with White male professors wanting me to leave my voice. They wanted me to adopt, like a westernized voice, and my voice was not good enough. They didn't appreciate that I had embraced cultural studies...So they gave me a hard time and wanted to impose another writing requirement on me. I was very deeply devastated and traumatized by how I was treated.

Participant 15 went on to say:

It's because of my lived experience with racial trauma and also sexism and classism, and because of being an immigrant that I feel so passionate about being a leader of an institution. I want to do work to transform that institution so that we don't have students that feel like they don't belong. So that our students don't go into imposter syndrome.

The impact educators and other school staff have on students early in their educational journeys have long-standing positive and negative effects.

During the interviews, many participants shared how that there were very few educators who reflected a similar racial or ethnic background as themselves, and the lack of representation affected their identity development, the extent to which they felt engaged in the educational setting, and their sense of self-efficacy to be successful. Participant 2 shared both during the recorded observation of a panel discussion on improving AAPI student outcomes and the one-on-one interview that at a young age he struggled with identifying and understanding his culture and felt very much like an outsider. During the recorded observation, he explained the reason for feeling this disconnect:

because we didn't see any of the Asian-American stories, we didn't see the content in history classes, and we didn't see anyone that really reflected how we look in here. And so because there was that invisibility, if you will, or that lack of representation, it kind of led me to inquire more and try to go deeper into why and how come, because I too am Filipino-American and very proud of that.

During the one-on-one interview, when asked to describe how his lived experiences in feeling connected or disconnected from his social identities affected him and his ability to be culturally responsive in leading equity efforts, he said:

I felt like an outsider in every educational institution that I was part of and for obvious reasons, you know, our students, our teachers, our faculty, our administrators were all White and there was that lack of relatability. And, also when you look at the curriculum and look at the texts and everything like that, you're yearning for...you say hey, where can I connect?

Reflecting upon his experiences, Participant 2 remarked about making a conscious shift to lead in a culturally responsive manner within his professional context, stating:

I always kind of center everything I do around students, and look at it from a perspective that I decide when I feel these feelings of being an outsider, I kind of refocus or redirect my attention on students and how am I showing up for students? Right. So, I lean into my role, I always think of how students are going to be inspired or motivated by anything that I can do or influence. So that's what centers my work... I see that the greatest thing that I can do with the information about how I feel about being an outsider is to try to make sure that our students do not feel like an outsider.

A substantial number of participants shared that they possessed little knowledge about their culture when growing up and were not exposed to other cultural histories in school. Many participants reported that this lack of exposure was due to a lack of representation of their culture in textbooks or of those who taught them or led the educational institutions they attended. Interestingly, some participants reported that it was during their own educational journey that they stumbled along books, classes, and other narratives related to their culture or other cultures and races that they had never heard of or to which they had not been exposed. Participant 5 recalled learning for the first time in college about different cultures and the mixed emotions this revelation unearthed. She said:

So I think that was a real seminal moment in my life that I was like, the story is not written. Like my story's not written in this textbook. And when I was an undergrad, I was introduced to African American history, Latin Studies, ethnic studies and all of these spaces where I was like, damn, we didn't hear about any of this.

The same was true for Participant 12, who commented that “going to college myself and being exposed to different books and then being exposed with the reality of being Black male in America” was very important because it helped him make connections between his lived experiences and the historical context of marginalization in education and society.

For others, like Participant 15, being exposed to diverse cultural perspectives allowed her to foster a critical social consciousness and planted a seed that would eventually grow her passion to advocate for social justice reforms in educational

institutions. She discussed how her previous educational experiences inspired her to teach ethnic studies and multicultural education. Taking classes in colonial literature, Chicano Studies, and feminist studies created an awareness of her cultural history and sparked a sense of activism that propelled her to challenge the colonial mentality she believes is still present in the educational system. In addition, Asian American/Filipino textbooks and other culturally responsive and multicultural curricula opened her eyes to the experiences of her ancestors and community, inspiring her to pursue education as a profession. She wanted to expose students to various texts and curriculum that reflected their identities and communities.

Finally, the extent to which participants were exposed to or sought culturally affirming spaces during their educational journey also shaped how they see their role in creating a positive climate within their college. Culturally affirming spaces and programs were often seen as one's haven, as Participant 2 explained:

I think one of the things that really helped me throughout my education, because there weren't people like me in the educational systems that I was part of, is there were affinity groups. There was a Filipino club at the college prep that I attended. And I think that actually was my saving grace. There was a Black student union, there was a Latino association, there was an Asian association, but there was also a Filipino specific affinity group. And that is where I think I was able to thrive under the conditions of oppression and racist structures.

In the same way, Participant 13 described how being a part of the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) turned out to be an amazing experience for him, especially being a first-generation, low-income Latino male student. As a current college president,

his early experiences remind him how affinity groups can help students who struggle with being first-generation develop a sense of belonging on campus.

Marginalization and Privilege. When asked how they identify, all participants in the study mentioned being a member of one or more historically marginalized groups. Because the participants in the study identify as leaders of color, they all shared about their racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Interestingly, the researcher noted that participants described other identities that intersect with their racial identities. These other identities included gender, growing up in poverty, being linguistically different from the mainstream or having an accent, growing up in foster care and being adopted, being a dependent of a veteran of the armed forces, being a first-generation college graduate, being a child of immigrant parents, being a parent, marital status, and being raised in a dysfunctional family environment as a child. Confronted with explicit and implicit racism and sexism throughout their lives and in various contexts, several participants poignantly described moments in which they felt “othered” because they were or are the only person of color or the only woman in the room. Participant 15 shared her experience of perceived “otherness” growing up and the imprint it left on her. She said,

And so growing up in the United States as a woman of color, as an immigrant child with an accent, I also knew from a very early age that I was treated differently by different ethnic and racial groups in the different public school settings I grew up. When I was in Los Angeles, up until third grade, after immigrating to the United States, my school was very, very multicultural. Growing up in LA they did have cultural programming, you know, like I got it. I

could get involved in doing like Filipino traditional dances and all of that. But despite that, I had kids make fun of me for my accent and calling me names like “fresh off the boat” or making fun of me because I would smile, listen, and smile. You know, when I was trying to understand what others were trying to tell me, kids say things to me, like, you know, “Why don’t you stop smiling that stupid smile?” So those kinds of experiences as a young child, follow you...all of those different experiences of otherness and observations of otherness they followed me.

Many participants in this study also shared that most settings in which they have served in a leadership role were predominantly White and, as a result, they were frequently the only person of color at the senior level, let alone one of a few in any type of leadership position at the college. Participant 4 described more than one experience she had in which it was explicitly brought to her attention that she was the only leader of color at the campus. In another incident, someone left an article on her chair about how light-skinned Latinas advance in leadership roles more quickly than dark-skinned Latinas. The awareness of being the only person of color, feeling tokenized, or feeling different is something that many leaders of color in this study reported as salient in the way they approach their leadership practice. Consequently, these experiences inform the culturally responsive strategies leaders in this study use to foster inclusivity and promote affirmation of all cultures and backgrounds at their colleges.

Moreover, many participants reported moments during their educational and professional journeys in which they experienced imposter syndrome, a phenomenon in which a person doubts their abilities and believes that they aren’t as competent as others

might think they are and would be found out as a fraud. The researcher noted that some participants recalled experiencing imposter syndrome when they completed their doctorate degree or attained increasingly responsible positions within academia.

Participant 9, a Latino college president, reflected on an instance in his life when he felt like an imposter after securing a senior-level position at his previous college. Describing the extent to which being the only leader of color influenced his feeling of belonging and inclusion, he said,

And I very much experienced imposter syndrome because I was the only executive leader of color at that college. The demographics were the opposite of what they are at my current college...60% White, only person of color period on the executive leadership team. The other members were all White. And oftentimes I felt like I was speaking a different language. Like the way I was communicating and the way they were communicating, the other executive leadership team members, there was a disconnect. So that imposter syndrome is real depending on the environment...I always remember that because I don't ever want anyone to feel like that. So I make sure I'm not a perpetuator of those types of things and spaces with people and our professionals.

Participants discussed how the experiences of marginalization, although painful and traumatic, do allow them to relate to students of color and female students who often report feeling the same way. More importantly, these experiences drive senior-level leaders to lead with a purpose to change their campus environments so that the students, or employees for that matter, do not experience a sense of "otherness" like they did and instead feel valued and a sense of belonging.

Importantly, some participants in the study were very open about the fact that although they experienced marginalization and oppressive conditions in their lives, they also recognized they have privilege based on their position or lived experience.

Participant 6 shared in a heartfelt way about her experience growing up in a hard-working family that possessed a strong belief system and graciously gave to others in need. A recorded observation of a podcast focused on women leaders in the CCC in which Participant 6 was a panelist supported this notion that attention to one's privilege often influences how one leads. During the podcast she said,

It is those discussions at the table with my family that really affirmed my belief and want to commit my life to making sure that people that look like me know that there are spaces for them...And so that's the way that I lead. That's important to me. Those that look like me and others, women, other groups, other communities to recognize that there's space for them.

Still another leader, Participant 12, who currently serves as a college president, recounted a traumatic experience in which he came to realize that despite his privilege, he was still seen as a member of a marginalized community. He painfully described an incident from his childhood when he was chased down, beaten, and mugged by a group of youth affiliated with a far-right political group. In sharing this experience, he said, "That was the first time that I actually recognized that I was from a targeted minority group and also a recognition that I was always a part of a minority community."

The attention to both marginalization and privilege affects how the senior-level leaders of color in this study interact with members of their college community who come from diverse experiences and backgrounds. An example of how a leader's personal

experience with marginalization and privilege informs the ways in which they exhibit cultural responsiveness was best exemplified by Participant 8, a male college president, who described a time when he was a dean and had a discussion with a student who felt intimidated talking to him. He shared that during the discussion with the student, he came to realize that to the student, he was,

this magical administrator dean, almost as though we are born in our positions with our degrees. And so it made me own my story more; recognize my privilege and own my story. So I tell my story openly and try to be vulnerable, not just with our students, but any community, so that they understand that I do understand their journey and can relate to it. Even if I'm far removed from it at the moment, their journey in some cases was my journey. You know, I had bouts of where I was homeless. I had bouts where I didn't have enough. I had bouts where we didn't have money. So I get that journey and I'm here to advocate and fight for their journey. But it's a place of privilege to forget that journey and to forget to share that journey because all people see is the title and the position and the degrees and what they think I have. And so it's really important that to do this work, we make ourselves vulnerable to those spaces where we actually relate to the people we're trying to serve.

What stood out to the researcher was the underlying essence that many leaders of color in this study are conscious of how their lived experiences with marginalization and privilege, particularly given their current leadership role, were salient in their ability to be culturally responsive. They do not take for granted the journey they traveled to get where

they are today and are committed to making that journey easier for others by creating inclusive and affirming environments for everyone in their campus community.

Personal journey – Theme II: Practice reflexive leadership. The second theme within the personal journey dimension refers to the culturally responsive strategy of practicing reflexive leadership. Of the 15 sources in the study, the notion of that senior-level leaders of color acknowledge and honor all parts of themselves as part of their leadership praxis was referenced 45 times during 14 interviews and one recorded observation (see Table 13). This leadership strategy stems from the lifelong process of self-awareness and growth in which leaders utilize all aspects of their lived experiences and social identities to engage in a leadership style that is adaptable to diverse contexts. It is noteworthy to mention here that this theme has crossover with the *political context* dimension because it relates to how leaders negotiate self-authenticity amidst diverse expectations from internal and external constituencies and communities. However, for the purposes of this theme, this concept will be presented within the *personal journey* dimension.

Table 13: Theme, source, and frequency-Practice reflexive leadership

Theme II	Sources	Frequency
Practice reflexive leadership	15	45

Based on the findings within this theme, the ways in which leaders practice reflexive leadership include: (a) self-reflection, (b) adaptive leadership, and (c) authentic leadership. Each of the approaches will be presented with a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to provide context to understand the nuances of the theme more deeply.

Critical Self-reflection. The data collected from participant perspectives in this study suggest that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color look inward and practice critical self-reflection about their positive and challenging life experiences related to race, gender, and other social identities and allow those learnings to build their internal capacity to be culturally responsive leaders. For example, while interviewing Participant 1 the researcher was struck by her reflective approach as she talked about her family, growing up in the United States, being raised with strong ties to her family's cultural values, and her role as an Indian female navigating the American norms of assertive individuality that are inconsistent with the Indian values of group preservation. She commented about times in her life in which her introversion and quiet presence, both very natural for her, were often perceived as a sign of weakness over the more preferred aggressive style traditionally expected from leaders. Over time, she has embraced this part of herself and uses her introversion and cultural communication style that may contrast with Western societal standards as a tool to listen to and build relationships with others to better address issues of equity and diversity. She remarked, "I'm a listener and I learn so much by just shutting up and listening to what people are saying. And then I use those nuggets to help me interact with people." This approach also serves as a way for her process her thoughts and then share them in a way that is non-threatening and inviting of others to have open and direct conversation with her. Life experience has been important in her maturity as a leader, so when asked, in hindsight, if she would do anything differently in terms of culturally responsive leadership, she shared that she would advise other female leaders to share their opinions and speak up more because their voices matter.

In the same way, as Participant 10 reflected upon her personal experiences and leadership journey, she indicated that to be culturally responsive in these current times, leaders of color need to acknowledge “the power in their voice,” which comes from an understanding of “who they are, and how their identities and their personal convictions, values, and experiences inform their professional experiences.”

For one participant, self-reflection on one’s lived experience and identity was particularly salient in his journey to be more equity-minded and culturally responsive in his leadership practices. Participant 11 openly shared during the interview how equity-mindedness was not always a part of how he operated and viewed the world. He said,

I learned how to do this. I learned how to be an equity minded leader. And there’s so many, so many people who guided me along the way and have resulted in that mindset being developed. It was not automatic or natural for me. But once I came to that realization years ago, it certainly became a part of the way that I work. It’s fundamental to who I am now.

For Participant 11, even though leading with an equity lens was not natural for him, he was willing to examine areas of his life and experiences. Moreover, engaging in a cycle of learning and unlearning helped him to grow in his leadership to be more culturally responsive by being conscious of the intersections of race, gender, privilege, and oppression within the educational context and its impact on students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds.

The inner, personal work needed to be a culturally responsive leader is often filled with struggle and hardship, but necessary for growth and improvement to better serve students and the campus community. The iterative cycle of looking inward to manifest

outward equity-minded leadership practice was best expressed by Participant 8, a college president who began his current role at the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Experiencing the end of the “honeymoon” period of being a new CEO and now digging deeper into the work of institutional and individual accountability for student success and equity, he reflected on his leadership, stating,

I have to start with myself and I have to try to model the behavior that I’m expecting others to have. So if I am shutting people down, if I’m being uncommunicative, if I’m being dictatorial. Okay. I don’t see myself. I don’t think I was any of those things. I don’t see that in myself, but that’s okay. We all wear blinders with ourselves.

Being willing to ask others about one’s blind spots and the willingness to acknowledge one’s own bias is hard but important in order to practice culturally responsive leadership effectively.

Leaders of color are not exempt from the need to engage in critical self-reflection about bias and assumptions as suggested by Participant 2. He reminds his team, who are very diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, that when dealing with uncomfortable conversations around race, it is important to embrace the discomfort because “we need to also look at the students we’re serving and check ourselves and monitor ourselves...even as people of color, we must ask if are we giving the best for our students?” In this example, the utilization of critical self-reflection as a culturally responsive leadership strategy can help to support intercultural relationships among Latinx, African American, Asian American, and Indian people within a team, but can also provide the opportunity take this new knowledge and implement a change in leadership praxis.

Sometimes, the inner work may come from difficult and painful early life experiences that only later in one's life turn out to be significant pieces of one's professional journey in becoming a culturally responsive leader. This was the case for Participant 7, who lived in a family with a parent with substance abuse issues. As a child she had to learn how to adjust and adapt herself based on her parent's behavior. She found that in those moments, adapting to the family dynamics and behaviors helped her survive traumatic family experiences. Through her own reflective process about her lived experiences with childhood trauma and what she now knows are skills of adaptability and intuitiveness she acquired early in life, she says,

I can walk into a room where there is all kinds of faculty who are pissed off, administrators who are pissed off, it's a whole thing. I even do it when I'm on zoom. I'm never looking at the PowerPoint. I make the section really big where I can see faces cause I'm reading the room. I guarantee you that the reason I do that, so well now, and can find those win-wins and pull down the anger in a room is because I've been doing it since the age of what 5, right? I can't read that from a book, nobody can. You know, it's a literal survival skill that I developed as a child that is now in my leadership... and it's worked for me so well throughout my career, and it's paid off in spades right now in my current role. So, that's how those multiple identities, like a child of an alcoholic, which some would label as bad and some would label as a deficit, is actually my asset.

Her personal and family experiences have helped her to be empathic to the experiences students bring to the college environment that influence their learning, connection, and engagement. In the case of Participant 7, the ability to engage in a reflexive process by

taking stock of her life experiences, extrapolating the learnings, and applying them to her professional context enables her to be a more compassionate leader who can adapt and be responsive to the needs of a diverse student population.

Adaptive Leadership. According to Chin and Trimble (2015), individuals from historically marginalized and other minority groups often demonstrate a sense of “cognitive flexibility” (p.103), which is the ability to see different perspectives, navigate intergroup and intragroup dynamics, and exercise flexibility in responding to changing contexts. This switching and adapting is sometimes referred to by some as “code-switching” (p.137), which occurs when someone reflexively taps into their different identities and changes how they express themselves in different social, cultural, and linguistic spaces and contexts. The researcher found that although most participants referenced using code-switching and adaptive leadership in an affirmative sense as part of their leadership approach, some saw it as a point of challenge. In some respects, code-switching has been seen as negative and a means of survival by Black, Indigenousness, People of Color (BIPOC) as they navigate between predominantly White spaces and their native ethnic, cultural, and linguistic environments. This survival tactic was salient for Participant 8, a college president who shared with an audible sigh and exhale how he operates on a daily basis:

I still have to show up in a White space as an African American male in a dominant White space. So I have to wear different hats when I show up... code switch. I have to recognize that I don't get to get away with things others get away with. And I don't get the benefit of the doubt that others get. And I think the worst thing we can do, which I learned the hard way, is forget, and think that

we've been accepted and to be wooed into a fantasy of when we show up that the questions aren't there; and that the comments are authentic; the friendships are authentic; the relationships are authentic. And, until you know, you find out the hard way that they're not you, it's easy to forget that.

Moreover, code-switching has also been viewed as the byproduct of internalized racism people of color experience based on societal structures that value Whiteness. For example, to gain acceptance, feel valued, and access the privileges and benefits that Whiteness brings, some BIPOC people felt the need to act, talk, and look White. Participant 2 admitted being challenged with the duality between his personal and professional identities and finding congruence. He stated,

I've had an issue with authentically showing up for all my career. I code switch on the regular, right. I code switch every day at work. People sometimes have a misperception of code switching. Some people view it as...when you go to church, you wear church clothes, you dress nicely, you talk nicely. When you talk to your parents, you talk nicely, you're respectful. You articulate when you're with your friends, your homies, your peeps, you know, the people you were down with, you grew up with, then you might have a different tone, different vernacular, right. And a different way of communicating.

However, Participant 2 went on to distinguish between code-switching that is more situational and contextual and the type that is used to survive in the dominant culture and in response to Whiteness and White privilege. During this part of the interview, Participant 2 recalled an experience with a student who proudly introduced herself during the first day of class as someone from "the 'hood" within a particular part of California.

Participant 2 also grew up in the same area but remarked that he was not ever able to introduce that part of himself to others like his student was able to in an authentic way. Reflecting on the fact that his experiences living in the ‘hood and the resiliency to preserve through difficult situations greatly contributed to his success today, he said that he has never been able to share this. But in a moment of self-reflection during the interview as he remembered this incident, he felt inspired by his student’s courage to share more of his personal story and model this for others who come from marginalized backgrounds.

Although a few participants referenced code-switching as negative due to their early life experiences, the researcher found that many of the participants viewed it as not only a skill but also as an authentic expression and acknowledgement of their intersectional identities. This is the case for Participant 6, who leans into all aspects of herself as she leads across diverse settings. She said,

So here’s my theory on like the double identities and all of that...when being around a lot of people that didn’t look like you, you can fluctuate your voice in all kinds of ways, that’s also me. That’s no less me than when I have more base in my voice. I don’t define myself as any less. Because I actually believe that’s who we are and we need to just accept that you’re not trying to do anything different, it really is you.

Similarly, Participant 3 recalled learning through her experiences that she has been able to adapt her leadership practice and approach to various cultural contexts depending on the geographical areas or in the situation where there are generational differences when interacting with members from her cultural community. She stated,

I knew that I could lead. I just didn't know how I wanted to lead. And I was looking for a formula in this situation...you'd be White in this situation, you'd be Asian in a different situation. But through all that I learned the best way for me to lead is me. Meaning I can customize, or I can adapt to the environment...and now I could say, I'm very comfortable leading in any environment, because I'm comfortable with myself to know how I would like to be addressed or how I'd like to be perceived or how I lead as a leader. So that's wrapped around my identity, but it took a long time. It wasn't overnight. And there were just times when you're like, you know what, I am who I am.

Being attuned to the environment in which one leads, the audience with which the leader interacts, and the influence of race and culture is one way participants in this study lean into all aspects of themselves in their practice of culturally responsive leadership within their professional and community settings.

Authentic Leadership. Some participants in this study practiced reflexive leadership in their approach to being culturally responsive by attempting to bring their full selves when they show up in their roles to serve their institutions and students. They do so by acknowledging their flaws, strengths, and limitations, as well as their moments of agency. Moreover, some participants conveyed that they make a conscious choice about how they show up in diverse spaces, considering carefully which parts of themselves will be explicit and what parts of themselves will be more reserved. For Participant 12, the practice of reflexive leadership allows him to look inward and tap into his experience and identity to gain clarity on issues he is confronted with as a college president. He stated,

So when I felt myself struggling in my role or aspect with my role, what I notice is that when I lean into more of who I am, tap into what I think I innately know what to do, quiet the other voices that will say that this is how you approach solving that particular problem and just do what I believe is the righteous thing to do, it works out.

He went on to share that in his experience as a leader, he gains a sense of centeredness when he grounds himself in who he is and brings his entire self into his leadership practice:

We're bringing our own set of experiences and issues and hang-ups with it. And the extent in which folks may have issues with how I show up, I feel stronger to be able to speak to that resistance, standing on what I know was the right thing to do and standing on who I was. That allowed me to combat the resistance in ways I couldn't if I was trying to show up as something that I'm not. So I'm really saying tap into your own identity, your own frame, your own power and know that people will adjust just as you've had to adjust to different cultural styles in order to get through to people would adjust to me. I'm gonna normalize who I am. I'm gonna give people the real opportunity to respond to me instead of me presenting a projection of who I am.

Finally, for Participant 14, in reframing her experience of being the only leader of color in certain spaces from a negative to an asset is a way she practices reflexive leadership.

To this end, she remarked in her interview,

Sometimes you may be the only person of color in a room and find strength in that. Not so that you don't feel othered or you don't feel that you don't have a

voice, and that you don't have a space at that table because you do, and that your background, your personal experience, your lived experiences add value to those conversations, right. That you're able to contribute in a way that others around that table might not because of who you are and your lived experience as a person of color.

Based on the findings regarding the experiences of senior-level leaders of color in this study, the researcher found substantial evidence indicating that critical self-reflection around one's identity and lived experiences fosters a reflexive and adaptive leadership approach that enables leaders to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies as they lead in diverse institutional contexts. It sets the foundation from which leaders of color examine their own assumptions and biases to unlearn behavioral and mindset patterns that are not supportive for the success of the diverse student populations they serve. In contrast, the ability to bring all aspects of oneself authentically into one's leadership practice helps senior-level leaders of color tap into their intersectional identities to connect with students and employees and lead in more empathic way that leads to a culturally affirming and inclusive learning and working environment.

Professional Duty

The research sub-question for this dimension—*How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of senior-level leaders' of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*—sought to understand senior-level leaders of color's sense of professional duty to lead for social justice and equity within their educational institution and ways this duty manifests in their leadership practice. Two major themes emerged after data analysis. The following are the identified themes with

frequency rates ranging from 15-43 mentions from at least 10 sources (see Table 14). Each theme is presented in its own section with an introduction to the theme and narrative that explains each theme. Participant quotes are included that support and describe leadership practices demonstrative of the leader’s sense of professional duty.

Table 14: Dimension IV: Professional duty and major themes

Dimension	Major Themes	
Professional Duty	Theme 1	Accept the integration of one’s personal identity and professional role
	Theme 2	Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds

Professional Duty – Theme I: Accept the integration of one’s personal identity and professional role. This theme had the highest frequency count within the professional duty dimension, with 43 references from all 15 interview sources (Table 15). This theme refers to the interwoven connection between a leader’s personal and professional worlds. Position and role function was often cited as one way in which the leader demonstrates a sense of responsibility to lead. However, participants also described their sense of professional duty as values-driven and informed by a calling to lead in which their personal and professional personas are inseparable. Data revealed that the sense of professional duty was also manifested by the leader’s desire to give back to their community through service, mentorship, and representation. Areas that influence how leaders in this study accept the integration of their personal identity and professional role include: (a) positionality, (b) interconnectedness of personal and professional personas, (c) a call to lead, (d) giving back, and (e) mentoring and modeling. It is noteworthy to mention that the notion that the personal and professional are closely

knitted together has crossover with the *personal journey* dimension as it relates to leaders' lived experiences. However, for purposes of this theme, this concept will be presented within the *professional duty* dimension.

Table 15: Theme, source, and frequency-Accept the integration of one's personal identity and professional role

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Accept the integration of one's personal identity and professional role	16	56

Positionality. An analysis of the data from a macro view revealed that participants' sense of responsibility to lead for diversity, equity, and social justice is an inherent part of their position and role as an executive administrator. All 15 participants reported that as a college superintendent/president, vice president, or vice chancellor, they feel responsible for cultivating an equity-minded institution and ensuring the campus environment is inclusive and supports the success of every student. However, participants were clear that although their responsibility is to serve all students, they are particularly mindful to work actively to eliminate racial equity gaps specifically for students from marginalized backgrounds. Participants in the study possessed senior-level experience in various areas such as instruction, student services, institutional effectiveness, human resources and labor relations, and business services. Additionally, membership and service in cultural affinity groups, local, state, and national associations and organizations were cited by 13 participants as an essential part of their role as a senior-level leader. Regardless of role function and position, they all saw advancing diversity and equity efforts as part of their overall responsibility. One recurring notion within this theme was the way participants saw their professional duty as inseparable from the core of who they are as people.

Interconnectedness of Personal and Professional Life. All 15 participants in the study described to varying degrees how their life purpose, informed by their personal and professional experiences, was the driving force in how they advocate for educational equity and lead in culturally responsive ways. This sentiment was by shared by Participant 1 who commented that she feels obligated to lead for equity “in every possible way” because it’s “part of who I am and how I see things.” The lens through which leaders view their professional duty to lead in culturally responsive ways is colored by personal experiences, providing a rich context and foundation that deeply informs how they operate within the world. The inseparable link between personal and professional identities was also described by Participant 5 who perceives no distinction between her personal and professional personas as she leads for social justice and equity. Rather, she emphasizes the interconnectedness of the two. A leader who sees herself as both a learner and practitioner, Participant 5 leads from a place of vulnerability, connection, and cultural humility. These professional qualities have been borne from her personal experiences, allowing her to partner with others and create trusting spaces to engage authentically in equity work.

A vivid example of this symbiotic relationship between the personal and professional was described by Participant 15 who remarked that her obligation to lead for social justice is deeply rooted in her core values and is part of her personal mission:

It’s about duty and it’s about obligation. I feel like these issues around equity, social justice, and doing anti-racism work more intentionally is part of my core. I see all of these concepts as a core value for me...and when we talk about leadership and we talk about it as work, it’s actually not work. I look at it as this

is my life passion and if I'm in a different setting, I would be doing the same thing. These are the changes that I wanna see, not just on my campus, but I want to see this in the world that we live in.

Despite the role she held in higher education, whether as a faculty member or administrator, Participant 15 reflected upon her past experiences and noted that she has always engaged in or led projects centered around equity, social justice, and anti-racism. Leaders acknowledge how difficult it is to advance equity work within educational institutions. The work is hard and takes time because of the sustained commitment required to confront, interrupt, and deconstruct practices that are rooted in historical colonization. Therefore, to practice culturally responsive leadership within the current institutional context requires a personal and professional obligation to sustain the commitment for the long haul.

Life Purpose and a Call to Lead. The necessity of possessing a deep level of personal commitment to lead for equity was also described by Participant 10. She shared that her passion informs her deep sense of professional responsibility to lead in culturally responsive ways, stating, "If you don't feel it personally, you are not gonna be effective professionally because it is embedded in the way I navigate my life." Her perspective toward a professional duty to lead for equity is one in which the leader must recognize and accept that to lead in culturally responsive ways will often require sacrifice and willingness to risk the loss of professional relationships or one's job or role. Therefore, she feels that her work at a core, personal level drives her advocacy for equity in her professional life. Similarly, one college president, Participant 6, shedding tears as she

reflected on the values instilled in her from her family, described her work and leadership practice as “higher order work” and a “calling” to serve others for the greater good.

Giving back. Many participants suggested that their sense of professional duty to lead for equity was also connected to their desire to give back that which has been bestowed to them by others who cleared the path for their success. Many of the leaders in the study who, like the students they serve, were first-generation college students, described the role that community college played in their life trajectory as critically important to where they are today. There were many instances in which participants emphasized that leaders of color do not forget about the opportunities and doors that were opened for them and the immense responsibility to ensure they keep the door of opportunity open for others. As a college president, Participant 12 views it as his responsibility to repay his debt to those who made sacrifices so he could be in the position he is in, driving his commitment to create inclusive and “just” spaces for students within his institution.

For another college president, the commitment to the community college mission and her passion to improve learning conditions for students so they are served in equitable ways runs very deep and has roots in her childhood. As a first-generation, low-income student who attended community college herself, Participant 7 remarked that “if it wouldn’t have been for community college, there’s no way I would’ve ever gotten my PhD.” When thinking about the sense of obligation that drives her decision-making, she also reflected on her young adult years and how her life has turned out very different than her family and those in her neighborhood and community only because of the power of a community college education as a vehicle out of generational poverty. She went on to

describe that as a leader, the experience of coming from a disadvantaged background and knowing that many of the students she serves also come from similar backgrounds drives her to “lead in a different way.” She acknowledged that her approach to leadership comes from “such a personal place that I know that if we’re closing the doors on these students, we’re literally could be changing the trajectory of their lives.” One of the most poignant moments during the interviews was when Participant 7 shared a recent example where she participated in her presidential installation ceremony and how surreal the experience was for her, framing a sense of obligation to lead. She explained her full circle experience that has connected her personal experiences with the magnitude of her current role as president:

So just recently they did like an installation for me and I’m sitting there, and I told myself, remember this moment. This is a place where I used to play. This bookstore is the same place where I used to ask my mom and dad to buy me a pencil, you know? And now I’m sitting there as the first Latina superintendent president of this school. So it’s a very full circle moment.

Her sense of obligation to lead a community college is so personal because it is tied to the very system of education that changed the trajectory of her own life. It was apparent to the researcher that for the senior-level leaders of color in this study, their sense of responsibility to lead in culturally responsive ways often stems from a personal place but is inescapably intertwined with their professional role. Undoubtedly, although the work to lead institutions to be more equity-minded is difficult, the participants in the study clearly expressed the sentiment that who they are personally is instinctually portrayed in their professional life, making it both personal and professional.

Mentoring and Modeling. Several participants also noted the importance of diverse representation in leadership roles in higher education. As such, participants shared that serving as a mentor and role model to others was another way in which they demonstrate a sense of professional duty. The catalyst to serve as a role model and mentor was external for some participants. In contrast, others intentionally positioned themselves in the mentor role to help others along their professional and personal journeys. Participant 1 shared an example that occurred years ago when she was a dean and considered stepping down from the position. She described how a female faculty member approached her with concern that if she left her position as a dean, it would equate to one less woman of color in an arena where others really need to see women of color in leadership roles. Participant 1 said that the words of this faculty member:

have always stayed with me. And so, I always am reminded if it needs to be me stepping out of my comfort zone, to do things for this community where I tend, where I am committing myself, then that's what I need to do.

Participants 2, 7, 12, and 14 noted a keen awareness that their positionality and role have a positive impact on others with similar identities and experiences. As a result, they position themselves in mentoring roles. Participant 14, a vice president who identifies as a Latina, intentionally finds opportunities to mentor aspiring leaders of color as they navigate job-seeking and hiring processes. As a leader of color, she believes it is her responsibility to guide and support other leaders through a job-seeking terrain that is often tainted with implicit and unwritten rules and norms not traditionally known by individuals from underserved backgrounds.

Other participants clearly expressed that part of their professional duty is to represent their cultural communities by virtue of their positionality and academic achievements. Participant 2 cited how receiving his doctorate degree and serving in a senior-level role counters the stereotype that Latino males from “the ‘hood” are not supposed to be in positions of power. The understanding that he represents to students of color what is attainable inspires and guides his work.

In the same way, Participant 7, a first-generation college student and now a college president, acknowledged the immense privilege and responsibility she carries as a Latina college president. For that reason, she sees it as her professional and personal responsibility to lead as a woman of color not only for herself but also emphatically “for the next Latina that walks in the door, the next woman of color who walks in the door.” Finally, Participant 12, a Black college president, remarked about being mindful to model behavior and leadership decisions that demonstrate to current and future administrators that it is possible to “maintain your identity and essence of purpose” without compromising “who you are and how you operate and how your serve.”

While most of the senior-level leaders of color in the study mentioned a sense of leading for equity to impact educational outcomes for students of color, some participants emphasized that their feeling of obligation also extends to communities that are different than themselves. Participant 10 shared,

one of my biggest pet peeves, if you want me to be honest, is I do not like when senior level or in any position, only advocates for your own identities. I think that’s an injustice in itself and I take it personally that my job is to advocate for all and to create a space for all.

Similarly, Participant 3 shared a surprising revelation that the economic disadvantages and inequities experienced by students in her community are not always centered on race and ethnicity. As a community college that is open access to all, she noted that although her college is closely situated near affluent communities, many White students who are socio-economically disadvantaged and lack exposure to opportunities outside of their rural community are:

not making enough money to feed the family. So, it really opened my eyes...it could be color, it could be race, ethnicity, but in my case, it's social economics [sic]. And I feel that no matter what my position is, my professional duty is to close the equity gaps. And for me in my heart, I truly believe that economic mobility is one of the most effective ways to eradicate poverty.

The sense of professional duty felt by Participant 3 centered on closing economic equity gaps to eradicate poverty, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.

Based on the perspectives of all participants in the study, the researcher found substantial evidence indicating that self-actualization in one's profession is a culturally responsive leadership strategy senior-level that leaders of color use as they demonstrate a sense of professional duty to lead for social justice and equity. Culturally responsive leaders see their professional responsibility to DEI as deeply rooted in who they are as individuals, a means by which their life purpose and values manifest in their position, and how significant their role is in the positive representation of diverse communities.

Professional Duty – Theme II: Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds. The second theme within the professional duty dimension refers to the culturally responsive leadership

practice of disrupting the status quo by confronting and interrogating inequitable systems, structures, and practices that affect students from historically marginalized backgrounds. This theme had the second highest frequencies with 45 references from a total of 16 sources: 13 interviews, two recorded observations, and one artifact (see Table 16).

Table 16: Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds

Theme	Sources	Frequency
Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds	16	45

The data revealed a compelling desire on the part of leaders to confront racist or exclusionary practices, deficit-minded approaches, and color-blind mindsets from a critical perspective. The ways in which leaders challenge inequitable constructs by: (a) seeking opportunities to challenge the status quo, (b) possessing a systemic awareness of structural and institutional racism, (c) challenging inequities at the structural, system, and policy level, and (d) using inquiry to develop a critical consciousness in others. Each of these methods will have a descriptive title followed by additional narrative to provide context to understand the nuances of the theme more deeply.

Seek Opportunities to Challenge Status Quo. During the semi-structured interviews, participants spoke of ways in which they build an equity-minded culture so that the campus environment ensures student success. Participants reported feeling compelled as part of their professional duty and responsibility to exercise the culturally responsive strategy of confronting unjust and exclusionary practices, policies, and mindsets. This obligation to dispute inequitable practices was described by Participant 1 in this way:

Whether it's on a personal level, one-on-one interactions with people, I feel the obligation to call out behavior or comments that are inappropriate, that I think create a space that is not inviting and welcoming for all of us...I almost look for opportunities where I can sort of become a part of the conversations.

As she explained how she looks for opportunities to speak up and speak out about inequities, she recounted a time when she was listening to a student panel made up of Black/African American students at her college who were sharing with the campus community their experiences with racism and microaggressions. With a heaviness in her voice, she said the students described multiple incidents in which they heard the N-word around the campus, in the classroom, and in the hallways. Horrified and heartbroken at hearing how the students experienced such hurtful acts of racism, she also recalled being in awe that they were willing to be vulnerable and share openly with others. She shared that at that moment she was compelled to raise her hand and say to the students, "You hold us responsible. That is unacceptable." Participant 1, like other participants, believe their role as a senior-level leader is to create an inclusive campus environment by "doing our part to make this better and stronger so that the next generation of students aren't sitting up there talking about how they hear the N-word in the hallways." It was evident to the researcher as the participant described this story her sense of obligation and responsibility as a leader of the institution to ensure the campus is a space that welcomes, honors, and affirms the dignity of all.

Systemic Awareness. Being aware of the historical roots of structural racism and its contemporaneous impact on students from marginalized communities was foundational in employing the culturally responsive leadership strategy of confronting

unjust institutional practices for some of the participants. This systemic awareness was evident to the researcher in seven of the interviews when leaders, regardless of the cultural community with which they identified, spoke of how they relied on their knowledge of historical patterns of structural racism to challenge unjust institutional policies and practices that maintain inequities in student outcomes. Participant 9 described how his journey in becoming more aware of the process of systemic racialization that undergirds institutional racism and oppression has informed his obligation to lead in culturally responsive ways:

My professional duty is strong and based on a comprehensive view of understanding the history that have impacted our communities, particularly as it relates to opportunities to education, educational access, early childhood education, and how the systems that have served our communities have not been designed for us. It's been an evolutionary process in my own journey of understanding those historical elements that have negatively impacted our communities of color, for example, redlining and understanding that historically communities of color Black, Latinx, and Asian Pacific Islander communities have been denied access to home loans and how for a long time that impacted family's trajectory for economic prosperity. In addition, when you take that and understand how our schools are financed through property taxes, through state taxes and how essentially these underperforming and under resourced schools are historically located in communities of color, understanding all of those things really is what drives my sense of purpose in terms of leading a major, post-secondary college that has 72% of our student body are students of color.

For Participant 4, recognition of systemic injustices experienced by communities of color propels her to lead from a place of advocacy and activism. For her, being a Chicana represents someone who is “historically aware of the systemic racism and institutionalized racism” experienced by her community, which then translates to a sense of political activism. She assesses the extent to which she can employ culturally responsive strategies and practices based on her knowledge about the historical discriminatory practices that shape the community perspective. For example, early on in her role a senior-level leader at her college, she learned how many of the areas surrounding the college were once “sundown towns where people of color had to be in their homes by the time the sun went down or they’d be arrested,” as well as the legacy of “redlining” that occurred near and around the college that prevented Blacks and Latinos from being buying homes in that area, resulting in housing segregation between Whites and people of color. Understanding this historical context has helped her better navigate the socio-political context within and around her institution and be more culturally responsive in her leadership practice.

Participant 12 succinctly described how he approaches challenging the status quo, which to him means “understanding that structurally to maintain the status quo is to perpetuate an unfair, unjust system of inequities that’s rooted in racism.” He operates from a place of urgency and sees it as his professional and personal obligation as a college president to “agitate” the system in strategic ways that will remove or keep the stain of racism from being embedded in the fabric of community college institutions. This worldview and understanding of systemic racism and inequity was an important element of being culturally responsive that drives his leadership approach.

For Participants 2 and 15, who self-identify as Asian American, their sense of professional duty is demonstrated by the culturally responsive practice of countering stereotypes of Asian Americans within their institutional contexts. Along these lines, Participant 2 asserted that it is important for him to be aware that colonization has resulted in a type of “colonial mentality” within the Asian community that affects not only intergroup relations but also how individuals from AAPI backgrounds see themselves. Moreover, Participant 15 emphasized that racial structures perpetuate false assumptions about Asians and that her understanding of the racial history for different AAPI communities helps her as she deconstructs and challenges negative stereotypes of Asian Americans in her work. She declared,

I think in understanding that our institutions were set up as colonized institutions and set up to not be equitable and that’s over hundreds and hundreds of years of culture. It’s about understanding the racial history of the different Asian American communities...in the United States and its connection to the quest for liberation. Then tackling all the issues that we continue to experience around xenophobia, anti-Asian hate, scapegoating, exoticization, Orientalism, the model minority myth, all of that and it’s interrogating and debunking it.

The researcher noted that participants’ conscious awareness of inequities and the historical underpinnings that formed those inequities was seen as an important springboard from which leaders in this study take action to challenge unjust practices and policies.

Challenge Structures, Systems, and Policies. Several perspectives shared by participants suggested that the culturally responsive leadership strategy of challenging

unjust constructs throughout the different levels of the institution and system is another way leaders demonstrate a sense of professional duty to lead for equity. Participant 10 went so far as to explain that she feels like,

We are promising these students access to an American dream, but really not committed to their success. They're getting in there. And we literally are weeding them out with our organizational structures, with our policies and procedures whether we are intentionally doing that or not.

She went on to share that, from her perspective, there exists an elitism within institutions that inhibits the system from changing fast enough to ensure students are succeeding. As a result, she feels a great sense of obligation to address problems within the current structure so they are more conducive to supporting the success of students.

An example of confronting inequitable practices that demonstrate a sense of professional duty was described by Participant 8 who said with great resolve that “you have to change structure with structure if you really want to make a difference.” To be a leader who consistently employs culturally responsive practices, Participant 8 described his thought process when examining institutional practices from a critical perspective, stating,

It's the constant lens of saying where's the equity in this? So, when we look at policy, when we look at procedures, we say, okay, why do we have this? Is this just a barrier? Why does a student need to do X? They don't. But somewhere along the line, we decided we wanted this extra hurdle. What this extra hurdle means that some people aren't gonna get through.

He shared an example of a situation when he was reviewing the college budget with a senior member of his staff and discussing requests for positions. As he listened to the justification for positions in the business and admissions and records offices related to improved processes, he recalled being shocked at how many different offices and staff a student members had to engage with in order to register for a class and then pay for the class, whether by credit card or cash. The ping-pong process for a student was daunting, and he described thinking to himself during the conversation with his staff,

I'm like, why? In life, you go to the store and they ring you up and take your money. You don't go to a different window with your receipt to pay. So, I said what we're creating is another barrier, another person a student has to go see which is another opportunity for them to get lost, to not finish the process, to not seal the deal with one person, one transaction, to get out. So, to finish things, I have to go stand in that line over there. It's those types of conversations you have and look at what you're doing and say, why are we doing this? This isn't equitable to students. This doesn't serve students.

Leaders like Participant 8 believe it is their responsibility to challenge the all too familiar mindset of, "that's the way we have always done things." By using the culturally responsive practice of confronting unjust and exclusionary practices and policies, many of the participants in this study sought to break down structural barriers so that students who have historically encountered the most challenges with inequitable constructs can come to college feeling welcomed and included.

This confrontation of the status quo is not limited to practice but also policy. Making changes at the policy level is where senior-level leaders often have the most

influence and power. Data collected from documents show evidence that an acknowledgement of the existence of institutional racism in structures as an important step toward remediating policy. This was clearly articulated in a document provided by Participant 2, which describes the college's commitment to reviewing district policies and identifying structural and systemic barriers in the hiring, evaluation, and promotion of historically underrepresented and marginalized communities, and in particular barriers experienced by Black/African Americans. In another example of addressing structural barriers, Participant 14 was able to embed the principles of equity and diversity into state-wide regulations and education code in her previous role by ensuring that through accountability mechanisms, colleges were supported through funding to implement their student equity and success practices at the local level. This was not met without some resistance because it meant there were strong policies in place to prioritize equity efforts at a state-wide level that would be harder to change than just at the system or local level. This is where structural change must occur to interrupt and deconstruct systemic racial inequities.

Confronting deficit-minded perspectives and mindsets is another method of employing culturally responsive strategy that participants in this study felt was their obligation as a senior-level leader. The notion that "rising tides lifts all boats," which presumes that implementing practices in the name of serving "all" students will equally benefit students from racially minoritized backgrounds, was a mindset that Participant 10 faced at her institution. As a senior-level leader who worked at a college with a student population that is 70% Latinx, Participant 10 was emphatic in her frustration with a

color-blind and competitive mindset that she believed was preventing the equitable provision of services to the largest percentage of students who needed it. She stated,

We are 70% Latinx. Why are we afraid to acknowledge that and show and feel that? I understand my black brothers and sisters, you all feel like we should be equitable across that acknowledgement, but this is not a competition. There is a way to acknowledge all our identities, right. But we're 70% Latinx. So, what we've done is we've recognized no one and you feel no culture. And everybody feels like what you do for one, you have to do for other. And I will tell you that is in the psyche of the campus, and it has to change.

In contrast, some leaders described ways in which they confronted a more explicit and negative race-conscious mindset. A few participants who are college presidents remarked that they received questions or comments from some at their campus about having a cabinet of all Black vice presidents. Moreover, one participant recalled hearing comments in his district, such as “why is X college hiring only Black people,” or the idea that employees are resigning because of the perception that the college is favorable to Black people. In another situation, he had heard that a White employee did not feel safe at the college because “you guys are hiring too many people of color.” Having to address these types of questions and attacks associated with the validity of diversity representation of leadership or staff are situations that leaders in the study have found themselves challenging as part of their responsibility to lead for social justice and anti-racism.

Depending on the timing and environmental context, some participants had to be very strategic in how they exercised the culturally responsive leadership strategy of

addressing issues of racial inequities and unjust practices. Understanding the political environment while balancing the professional duty and obligation to advocate for social justice was very important, as described by Participant 11. As a senior-level leader in a conservative rural community college, Participant 11 reported that he is willing to challenge the status quo but mindful he cannot always do it a public way. Rather, he finds ways to support change in structures by providing resources to student programs and supporting those equity champions, individuals within the college who have social capital to influence others who might not be as favorable to change. Similarly, Participant 10 asserted that despite the risk of being misperceived or misunderstood, being true to what you know is right while also being strategic in how injustices are addressed is critical. At times you must walk the tightrope, but at the end of the day, Participant 10 contended that ultimately her job and responsibility as a senior-level leader is to create a safe learning environment for all.

Use Inquiry to Develop Critical Consciousness. The researcher also found that using inquiry as part of the culturally responsive leadership practice in challenging inequitable constructs helped leaders to foster a critical consciousness in others by presenting a counter narrative. Participant 5 explained how she draws upon her background in psychology to create a space where the use of critical questioning is palatable and inviting for others to consider alternative perspectives. For example, to confront stereotypes about Asian Americans or Black/African Americans, Participant 5 relies upon evidence-based research on those communities where stereotypes about people of color may surface in academic discourse. She described her strategy of:

giving counter information that they can actually consume and say, oh my God, I need to change my mind about all Asians aren't alike. Or, all Black people are not like X or Y. So having enough facility to have anecdotes and information through my own study and research and my own lived experience helps to do that.

Infusing one's voice and raising critical questions in conversations is a method by which culturally responsive leaders seek to increase the cultural awareness of others when advancing equity efforts.

Senior-level leaders found it part of their duty and responsibility to leverage opportunities to challenge unjust and inequitable policies and practices at their institution. As leaders of color who identify with marginalized communities, they drew upon their knowledge of the history of institutional and structural racism to counter the status quo and stereotypes attributed to people of color. Moreover, the practice of confronting deficit-minded perspectives and mindsets about students in a strategic way was a method participants described that helped them in their ability to be culturally responsive. Leaders believed that part of their obligation not only as senior-level leaders but also people of color is to facilitate a deeper level of critical thinking in others so that structures, processes, policies, and practices are viewed with a critical lens and disrupted and re-envisioned to better support students. Overall, the leaders in the study recognize the courage it takes to continue to carry the banner of equity, despite the resistance they will face. However, they all accept this challenge and see it has part of their personal and professional obligation to change minds and hearts for the benefit of student success.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter I provided an overview of this study, the purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, and described the study's delimitations and overall organization. Chapter II presented a summary of literature and research related to culturally responsive leadership, its application to higher education and use by senior-level leaders leading CCCs, and current and emerging research pointing to the need of this study as described in the problem statement. Chapter II also described how the research findings from this study would extend the body of work related to leadership and diversity in the higher education setting and contribute to the need for culturally responsive leadership in CCCs. Chapter III described the ethnographic methodology used, target population and sample, instrumentation, data collection process, study limitations, and an analysis and summary of findings. Chapter IV identified and described the study's findings from an analysis of one-on-one interviews, recorded observations, and a review of artifacts reflecting the lived experiences of 15 CCC senior-level leaders of color in utilizing culturally responsive leadership strategies within their institution. In Chapter V, the researcher describes the findings, conclusions, and implications for action resulting from examining the data collected.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify and describe how CCC senior-level leaders of color are culturally responsive in their leadership strategies, based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework. The framework consists of four dimensions: (a) political context, (b) pedagogical approach, (c) personal

journey, and (d) professional duty. The study was guided by one central research question and four sub-questions intended to explore the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by senior-level leaders of color. The central research question was: How are CCC senior-level leaders of color culturally responsive in their leadership strategies based on Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework? There were four research sub-questions, each focused on one of the four dimensions of the CRL framework. The sub-questions were:

1. How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
2. How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
3. How does one's personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?
4. How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of college senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?

This study is part of a larger thematic research study focused on investigating culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by leaders in the CCC system using Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework. While the area of focus of this study was on senior-level leaders of color in the CCC, target populations for the other thematic studies include Latina mid-level leaders, financial aid leaders, library leaders, Student Services mid-level leaders, and EOPS leaders.

Population, Target Population, and Sample

The entire population for this study was 464 leaders who hold senior-level positions at each of the 116 CCCs. The target population was CCC senior-level leaders who identify with a racial/ethnic group that is non-White. Because no data published by the CCCCCO accurately identified how many senior-level leaders of color work in the CCC system, it was necessary to estimate this number based on available information. The estimated target population for this study was determined to be 92. For this study, criterion sampling was used to identify participants who currently serve in the role of president, superintendent/president, or vice president at a CCC and have at least 3 years of experience at the senior level. Based on the target population, a sample of 15 participants were selected who met three of the following five criteria:

1. Possess 10 or more years of experience in higher education.
2. Experience leading efforts related to social justice, DEI in a CCC.
3. Employed at a CCC comprising a student population in which at least 60% of the students are non-White.
4. Have participated in professional development focused on DEI, cultural competency/proficiency, or other equity-minded concepts.
5. Conducted presentations or workshops or other professional development on DEI.

Data Collection Procedures

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher followed the health and safety guidelines provided at that time by the CDC as well as safety protocols set forth by UMass Global, and therefore all one-on-one interviews and viewings of recorded

observations were conducted in a virtual format. The virtual interviews, viewings of recorded observations, and examination of artifacts occurred between April 1, 2022 and August 30, 2022.

Major Findings

Based on the data collected during the interviews, from recorded observations, and during examination of documentation, and using Horsford et al.'s (2011) Culturally Relevant Leadership framework, the researcher made 10 key findings. A summary of the major findings is presented with respect to each for the four CRL dimensions and aligned to each of the research sub-questions. The results of the sub-questions showed that senior-level leaders of color utilized pedagogical approaches at a greater frequency based on 45% of the respondents as compared to strategies related to personal journey (20%), professional duty (18%), and political context (17%).

Dimension I: Political Context

Research sub-question: *How do political contexts influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*

Major Finding 1: Engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations. Based on responses from all 15 participants in one-on-one interviews, this study found that culturally responsive CCC senior-level leaders of color were deliberate in navigating tensions between self-identity amidst expectations from internal and external constituents. Leaders in the study reported that being authentic can come at a cost. In many cases, the tension for leaders manifested as a delicate balancing act between speaking and advocating on behalf of their communities of color versus attending to the interests of their institution or governing board members. To elaborate,

for college presidents in particular, effective relationships with board members were seen as critical to their ability to successfully advocate for and implement DEI policies and practices at the college level. Moreover, leaders were mindful of the influence that race and/or gender had on their ability to be culturally responsive in their leadership approach because of the frequency with which they found themselves having to navigate patriarchal and predominantly White contexts. Furthermore, leaders in the study often experienced the feeling that they had to work harder than their White peers to establish credibility. In addition, being the only person of color in a leadership position fueled an obligation to advocate and lead for racial justice despite the political risk to their job or their credibility. Overall, the findings from this study revealed the important tasks that senior-level leaders of color continuously navigate to reach a balance between authentic leadership and expectations from the internal and external communities they serve.

Major Finding 2: Leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts. Senior-level leaders of color in this study were acutely aware of the conditions and political landscape in which they were situated. A key finding of this study found that leaders employed the culturally responsive strategy of leveraging internal and external situations and utilizing them as levers to advance culture-changing efforts. Similar to case study research by Santamaria and Santamaria (2012), which suggested that applied critical leaders recognize opportunities to support and facilitate courageous conversations, leaders in this study seized opportunities to intentionally engage with internal stakeholder groups to find timely and relevant solutions to address equity gaps in student outcomes. Moreover, leaders capitalized on external partnerships with the

community to meet their diverse student population's emerging and evolving social and economic needs.

Dimension II: Pedagogical Approach

Research sub-question: *Pedagogical Approach - How does one's pedagogical approach influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*

Major Finding 3: Prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution. The finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color in the CCC system prioritize equity by ensuring it is embedded within all areas of the institution had the highest frequency count among all four domains of Horsford et al.'s (2011) culturally relevant leadership framework. The data in this study found that despite institutional challenges and competing interests, senior-level leaders of color centered and embedded equity within the highest levels of college planning and governance processes and in the prioritization of resource allocation. Leaders used evidence and data to inspire urgency to change practice and make meaningful decisions on how to serve students of color, in addition to using an equity-minded approach to the hiring and retaining of a diverse employee base. Additionally, culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color were strategic in providing professional development to practitioners on topics related to social justice, anti-racist pedagogy, and service delivery to equip and empower them to modify their programs and services to positively influence the student experience.

Major Finding 4: Build a sense of community and collaboration within the institution. The culturally responsive leadership strategy of building a sense of

community and collaboration within their institution used by senior-level leaders of color was a key finding based on the data collected in this study. Findings point to the importance of senior-level leaders of color demonstrating an intentional commitment and ability to humanize relationships; creating psychologically safe and brave spaces for courageous conversations around race, racism, and privilege; and building strong allyship with others from backgrounds different from one's own. Utilizing a cultural humility approach helps senior leaders foster an environment in which the campus community can collectively tackle deep-rooted and systemic racial equity problems.

Major Finding 5: Actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations. Based on responses from all 15 participants in one-on-one interviews and in recorded observations and documentation, this study found that culturally responsive CCC senior-level leaders of color actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations around issues of equity, social justice, and anti-racism. According to Chin and Trimble (2015), an evolving leadership paradigm that is “inclusive of all voices and of varying leadership styles that intersect with the social identities and cultural value orientations across diverse groups” (p. 256) is needed in order for leaders to operate effectively in a diverse and global society. For that reason, it is important that leaders create an environment that encourages and supports all voices and opinions and fosters stakeholder engagement. Listening to others' input and developing rapport with constituents offers leaders valuable insight into how to address long-standing institutional issues and facilitate positive changes in organizational culture and climate.

Major Finding 6: Ensure the Learning Environment Addresses Student Needs. Based on data collected from interviews, recorded observations, and

documentation, this study found that senior-level leaders of color are intimately involved in setting vision, providing direction, and modeling ways in which the college community can advance efforts to be equity-minded and anti-racist in service delivery and teaching practices. Each leader emphasized how his/her own educational experiences, membership in cultural affinity programs, and exposure to instructors who infused culturally relevant materials and texts into their classes contributed to his/her sense of belonging in college. Drawing upon these experiences inspired and motivated senior-level leaders of color in their quest to promote the development of culturally affirming programs and services, advocate for culturally responsive teaching practices, and strongly encourage faculty to make certain their curriculum and materials are culturally relevant to the student populations being served.

Dimension III: Personal Journey

Research sub-question: *How does one's personal journey influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*

Major Finding 7: Draw upon one's identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment for all. Based on the responses of all 15 participants, the study found that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color draw upon their identity and lived experience in their attempt to create an inclusive and affirming campus environment for all. The intersectionality of a leader's social identities—described by participants as including race, ethnicity, and gender, along with their lived experiences with marginalization—was reported to be significant in shaping and informing their use of culturally responsive leadership strategies. The ways in which participants drew upon their identity and lived experience to lead in a culturally responsive manner included

embracing their social identity as an asset, using early educational experiences as frames to guide them in promoting and facilitating welcoming and affirming learning environments, and relying upon their experiences of marginalization to serve their communities. Lived experience and identity were salient to a leader's ability to be culturally responsive in their approach to supporting each member of their teams in meaningful ways. A leader's lived experiences were also seen as invaluable in preparing them to be successful as they were promoted to higher levels of leadership in the community college setting.

Major Finding 8: Practice reflexive leadership. A key finding of this study was that the majority of senior-level leaders of color interviewed employed the practice of reflexive leadership by engaging in critical self-reflection around their life experiences related to race, gender, and their other social identities and use what they learned to build their capacity to lead in a culturally responsive way. A synthesis of literature conducted by Khalifa et al. (2016) found that one important behavioral trait of culturally responsive school leaders is their willingness to continuously reflect and identify any implicit biases and deficit-minded attitudes they have about students of color that are rooted in the ideology and practice of Whiteness as a standard. The findings also indicated that not only did leaders in the study honor all aspects of themselves through their leadership style, but they also contextualized their leadership approach based on environment and audience. Leaders in the study saw the practice of self-reflection as a foundation that facilitated their ability to lead their institutions from a place of empathy and compassion that fostered a culturally affirming and inclusive learning and working environment.

Dimension IV: Professional Duty

Research sub-question: *How does one's sense of professional duty influence the ability of senior-level leaders of color to be culturally responsive in their leadership strategies?*

Major Finding 9: Accept the integration of one's personal identity and professional role. Based on responses from all 15 participants, this study found that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color accept the integration of their personal identity and professional role. All leaders in the study described how their personal values, mission, and a “calling” to lead were tightly interwoven with their sense of professional duty. In essence, leaders viewed their professional duty as inseparable from their personal journey, which included both positive and challenging experiences. Moreover, overcoming barriers in their life along with the privilege of serving as a leader was a driving force in how they navigated and promoted social justice and equity in their institutions and fueled their desire to be mentors and serve as positive representations of their communities.

Major Finding 10: Challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that impact students from historically marginalized backgrounds. A key finding of this study revealed that senior-level leaders of color were willing to challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that have an impact on students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Using a critical perspective and drawing upon their knowledge of the history of structural racism, leaders felt both a personal and professional responsibility to call out racist or exclusionary practices, deficit-minded approaches, and color-blind mindsets when they arose. Leaders in the study leveraged opportunities to challenge the

status quo and were aware of the influence and power their role affords in changing institutional policy and practice. As a result, they were strategic in how they navigated resistance within the socio-political context and orchestrated change to break down barriers that inhibited student success.

Unexpected Findings

In addition to the major findings revealed in this study, the researcher found two unexpected findings following examination of the data collected. The first unexpected finding was that senior-level women leaders have to intentionally navigate their intersectionality as they lead equity efforts at their institutions. Women leaders of color in the study shared that they had to be ultra-cognizant of the political climate within which they operate and that negotiating not only race and ethnicity but also gender was a complex and multi-dimensional aspect they encountered on a daily basis. Moreover, some women presidents of color in the study who had been in their roles for less than 2 years mentioned that they had to be strategic in the nature and extent to which their equity efforts were visible to the campus and community. They did not feel they could always display their advocacy for racial equity and social justice for fear of being seen as rocking the boat and instead had to work both underground and in the forefront, depending on the situation. Although this type of experience primarily applied to only a few participants, the finding was significant in that the pattern of this phenomenon was uniquely present among women presidents who were new to their role.

The second unexpected finding was that the CCC senior-level leaders of color in this study utilized culturally responsive leadership strategies within the pedagogical approach dimension at a greater frequency rate. Out of a total of 571 frequency counts,

45% of the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by CCC senior-level leaders of color resided within the pedagogical approach dimension. This is compared to culturally responsive leadership strategies related to personal journey (20%), professional duty (18%), and political context (17%). Although all leaders of color in this study described the significant influence their personal journey, lived experiences, and identity has had on their leadership practice, it was unexpected that the culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by leaders were concentrated within the pedagogical approach dimension compared to the personal journey dimension. Senior-level leaders of color were intentional and strategic in how they manifest their values, lived experiences, and identities in actionable ways to serve and support the success of students of color and those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings of this study and connected to the literature, the researcher drew 11 conclusions that offered deeper insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices utilized by senior-level leaders of color within the CCC system.

Conclusion 1: In order for leaders of color to effectively navigate complex institutional culture and politics and persevere in their roles, the board of trustees must direct colleges to provide intentional and meaningful support that meet the needs of leaders

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations, it can be concluded that the college governing board must be intentional in supporting the unique needs of leaders of color so they can effectively navigate complex institutional culture

and politics without denying their authentic selves. The lack of representation of diverse leaders within higher education is well documented in the literature (Gasman et al., 2015; Museus et al., 2015; Nevarez & Wood, 2010), leaving most academic leadership positions to continue to be held by White men, resulting in the maintenance of traditional ideologies, values, and norms based on Whiteness as a standard. Moreover, according to a study by Arday (2018), the absence of diverse leadership in the academy contributes to feeling a sense of diminished social capital and agency by the few leaders of color who do exist, affecting their ability to lead effectively and advance equity efforts at their institutions. Therefore, colleges must be purposeful in supporting the needs of leaders of color to be effective leaders in a diverse political setting while simultaneously embracing and enacting authentic leadership.

Conclusion 2: Stakeholder engagement is vital in the pursuit to achieve educational equity and social mobility for students

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts, it can be concluded that stakeholder engagement is important in addressing issues of educational and economic equity for students. However, leaders must be cognizant of the political and cultural contexts in which they are positioned while also building stakeholder buy-in (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) to create a culture of innovation that meets the needs of a diverse student population. Both research (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2002) as well as leadership frameworks from the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (2017) and the AACCC (2018) all point to the idea that given the ever-changing economic, technological, and political dynamics community colleges must face,

cultivating and building collaborative external partnerships is critical in maintaining institutional relevancy if they are going to serve as an engine of economic and social mobility for their community members.

Conclusion 3: Racial equity must drive college policy and practice to ensure the learning environment produces equitable student outcomes

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color prioritize equity by ensuring it is embedded within all areas of the institution, it can be concluded that to in order build an inclusive learning environment that advances equitable student outcomes, racial equity must drive college policies and practices. A learning environment that is culturally responsive to the needs of students of color and those from historically marginalized communities is, according to J. A. Banks and Banks (2009), not only one that reflects the culture, identity, and backgrounds of students, but also one in which culturally relevant pedagogical practices are used to effectively teach and serve students. Wyner (2021) emphasized that presidents of exceptional community colleges are committed to developing systems that align hiring and retention processes, professional development, and compensatory rewards with meeting the institutional goals of student success and equity. According to Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon (2017), equity-minded practitioners and leaders must view inequities as a “problem of practice” and have a “sense of personal and institutional responsibility to address” (p.7) those inequities. Therefore, senior-level leadership must ensure that instruction and student services programming and the educators within those departments understand their collective and individual responsibility in addressing inequities in student outcomes and

subsequently incentivize and reward excellence in teaching and learning practices that work actively to eliminate equity gaps.

Conclusion 4: In order to facilitate critical conversations that promote cultural humility and anti-racist practices, senior-level leaders must intentionally foster trust within the college community

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior level leaders of color cultivate a sense of community and collaboration within their institution, it can be concluded that to promote critical conversations around race and cultural difference, building awareness and trust among the college community must be prioritized. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which required schools and colleges to shutter and move completely online, teams became more isolated as they were limited to interacting via Zoom meetings, affecting collegial relationships by eliminating the ability to meet in-person. Therefore, the importance of building trust and collaboration has become even more crucial post-pandemic. As post-pandemic leadership strategies must adapt from that of pre-pandemic times, senior-level leaders are now faced with the challenge of rebuilding collaborative relationships to increase morale and momentum. Leaders in this study acknowledged their role in helping their institutions learn to relate to each other again for the benefit of the evolving needs of students. By exercising cultural competence, fostering culturally affirming team environments, and being vulnerable by actively building allyship relationships with others who are different from oneself, senior-level leaders of color in this study were found to prioritize trust-building and collaboration to facilitate critical conversations that promote anti-racist and social justice institutional practices.

Conclusion 5: Elevating constituent voices that have been historically silenced promotes new learning and results in a change in practices

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color actively seek and engage diverse voices in critical conversations, it can be concluded that elevating constituent voices that have been historically silenced promotes new learning and results in a change in leadership practice. According to Wyner (2021), exceptional presidents and senior-level leaders of Aspen Prize award-winning colleges ensure all voices have an opportunity to contribute to discussions around college wide priorities and subsequently make course corrections based on what they hear. The willingness to spend time with people to deepen and sustain collaborative relationships benefits both the leader and members of the campus community on a collective and individual level. When senior-level leaders embrace and consider the perspectives and viewpoints of complementary and disgruntled voices, new learning takes place that can shape and improve their leadership practice while also addressing needs and concerns that might otherwise not surface.

Conclusion 6: Students feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging when they see their culture and identity represented within the learning environment

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color ensure that the learning environment meets student needs, it can be concluded that students feel welcomed and a sense of belonging when they see their culture and identity represented in the classroom setting. Literature and research indicate that diversity enriches campus climate (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, 2006) and educators, including faculty and administrators from backgrounds that resemble the student population, contribute to more

culturally relevant and responsive educational experiences for students of color (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002; Arday, 2018; CCCSE, 2009; Kohli, 2009). Seminal work by Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009) points to the validating and empowering influence that culturally responsive teaching has on students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds. Senior-level leaders are accountable for improving educational outcomes for students and closing racial equity gaps in success and completion. Therefore, it is critical that college leadership make a commitment to collaborate with instructional faculty and curriculum committees to foster inclusivity and a sense of belonging by ensuring students' diverse racial and cultural backgrounds are infused in all aspects of the teaching and learning environment.

Conclusion 7: Opportunities for students and college personnel to authentically share their stories related to their identity and culture create and enhance and create an inclusive campus environment

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color draw upon their identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment that is affirming for all, it can be concluded that ensuring opportunities for students and college personnel to authentically share their stories related to their identity and culture enhances and creates an inclusive campus environment. In tapping into their own identities and experiences, culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color strategically fostered opportunities and created spaces in which the stories of students and employees of color were visibly seen and heard, which, in turn, not only served to disrupt power dynamics present in settings where title, rank, and White privilege often dominated but also promoted an inclusive environment conducive to shared learning. The tenet of CRT

called “the voice of color” maintains that people of color who have been marginalized are uniquely equipped to communicate perspectives about race and racism to their White counterparts that are unfamiliar and unlikely to be known by Whites. In essence, the “voice of color” tenet places value on the storytelling of BIPOC people to provide a counternarrative to the deficit-based, racialized notions about people of color. However, as noted by many participants in the study, the lack of educators in schools and colleges who represented similar racial or ethnic backgrounds as themselves as well as not being exposed to the range of cultural histories in curriculum and texts did not provide them with opportunities to connect with or speak about their own culture and identities or engage in culture sharing with others. Leaders attributed the absence of a culturally affirming learning environment to their feeling disengaged in the educational setting, affecting their identity development and sense of self-efficacy to be academically successful.

Conclusion 8: Engaging in critical self-reflection is necessary to lead effectively in diverse environments

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color practice reflexive leadership, it can be concluded that engaging in critical self-reflection is necessary to lead effectively in diverse environments. Research by Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) suggests that engaging in sustained reflection of one’s practice allows applied critical leaders to change, adjust, or modify their leadership approach to enact and realize institutional changes. Senior-level leaders must prioritize their own professional learning and engagement in ongoing self-reflection so that persistent normative viewpoints and biases can be unearthed and challenged, paving the way for opportunities

to unlearn behaviors and mindset patterns that do not support the success of students from diverse communities.

Conclusion 9: Viewing one’s leadership as an act of service provides opportunities to give back to the community

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color accept the integration of their personal identity and professional role, it can be concluded that viewing leadership as an act of service provides opportunities to give back to the community. As part of their professional duty and personal mission to lead their institutions and diverse populations, leaders of color subscribe to a social and moral commitment to give back to the cultural communities that supported their own educational and professional journey as well and pave the way for others to achieve upward mobility. The findings echo research findings from Santamaria and Santamaria (2012, 2016), who found that applied critical leaders who preserved through barriers saw their professional role as a vehicle to change an oppressive institutional system and make it better for current and future generations. On the path toward self-actualization in the workplace setting, leaders must find ways to reconnect with the “why” of their leadership. Service to the community and mentoring of others was found to be one mechanism in which leaders in this study engaged that allowed them to stay aligned with their personal and professional life purpose and mission.

Conclusion 10: Utilizing critical inquiry grounded in a systemic awareness of the historical roots of structural and institutional racism, provides a path forward to eliminating racial inequities in student outcomes

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color challenge unjust and inequitable constructs that affect students from historically marginalized backgrounds, it can be concluded that utilizing a critical inquiry approach grounded in a systemic awareness of the historical roots of structural and institutional racism provides a path forward toward eliminating racial inequities in student outcomes. The CCC VFS plan released by the CCCCO in 2017 clearly directed leaders not to be complacent about persistent racial inequities and instead challenge and counter the deficit-minded narratives about students of color. The VFS went on to state that community college leaders must lead their institutions with a race-conscious lens and focus uncompromisingly on improving outcomes for students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Equipped with an understanding of the historical foundations of structural racism, leaders must also help others develop a critical consciousness about the root causes of educational inequities and work to interrupt and deconstruct structures, processes, policies, and practices that are not serving students appropriately. But the work does not stop there. Those unjust structures, policies, and practices must then be reconstructed to be more equitable. Leaders must be prepared for the hard work ahead and understand that it will take courage to continue to carry the banner of equity despite the resistance they will encounter. All of the leaders in this study accept this task as part of their personal and professional obligation to change minds and hearts for the benefit of student success.

Conclusion 11: Oppressive gendered and racialized institutional norms and practices must be challenged and dismantled

Based on the unexpected finding that culturally responsive female senior-level leaders of color must intentionally navigate their intersectionality as they lead equity efforts at their institutions, it can be concluded that oppressive gendered and racialized institutional norms and practices must be challenged. Women leaders of color experience a constant tension between their racial and gender identity and their role as senior-level leaders. The decision is often one where they either adopt and internalize White male normative leadership behaviors and styles to maintain their position or “stay in their seat” and honor their whole authentic selves as a part of their leadership role. Although women have been historically denied equal rights and opportunities compared to men in America, White women have still enjoyed more privileges and benefits than women of color, with access to educational opportunities being no different. The work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991), who coined the term *intersectionality* as an analytical framework for understanding the social dominance of Black women, has been important in understanding the complexity of the multiple oppressions women of color encounter, which are far different from the life experiences of White women and even men of color. Runyan (2018) aptly described this different form of racism and sexism experienced by women of color as a case in which “gender is always ‘raced’, and race is always gendered” (p.11). Further extending this to the field of education, Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) asserted that women of color, as compared to White women, face the double jeopardy of experiencing sexism, racism, and discrimination in the academy. The lack of representation of women of color in senior-level positions in colleges is a

lingering remnant of the traditional systems of power, stereotypes, and biases still present within institutional structures and in the ranks of educational leadership. As the majority student demographic of community colleges are BIPOC and female, institutions must prioritize a focus on the unique needs of women leaders of color. In order to maximize and sustain diversity within college administration so they reflect the student population, institutions must prioritize supporting women of color in leadership positions by challenging oppressive racialized and gendered norms and practices and shifting toward liberatory and gender-affirming structures and practices.

Implications for Action

In consideration of this ethnographic research study and the crucial need for community college leaders to boldly lead their institutions in ways that are culturally responsive to the needs of their diverse student populations, the researcher recommends the following implications for action. The recommendations for this study were intended to support senior-level leaders of color in their unwavering quest to advance social justice and equity within their institutions. However, these recommendations have specific guidance for college presidents and governing board members of CCCs, executive cabinet members, human resource departments, college participatory governance committees, faculty, and higher education leadership development programs. If community colleges desire to dismantle institutional structures and systems that continue to propagate systemic inequities in student outcomes, they must acknowledge leaders of color as essential to the creation of inclusive and affirming campus environments and embrace these implications for action as critical next steps to achieving racial and educational equity for all students.

Implication for Action 1: Leadership development programs must incorporate social identity and lived experience into skills-building development and utilize it as an opportunity to demonstrate cultural proficiency

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color draw upon their identity and lived experience to create an inclusive and affirming campus environment and the conclusion that members of the campus community need opportunities to share their stories related to their identity and culture, it is recommended that college and university leadership development programs incorporate social identity and lived experience into skills building development so leaders can utilize it as an opportunity to demonstrate cultural proficiency. Leadership programs must be intentional in creating an awareness of the value of social and cultural identity, intersectionality, and lived experience by recognizing these qualities as a leadership competency and embed opportunities within the program and course offerings for leaders of color to share their stories and experiences. Honoring the voices of leaders of color can also promote and support cultural competency in others. Even though graduate-level leadership development programs are increasingly adding topics related to DEI into their curriculum, such as multicultural aspects of leadership or strategies for leading diverse teams, they infrequently, if at all, encourage aspiring and current leaders to view their lived experiences and cultural identities as an asset and leadership competency. Therefore, many leaders of color have not had opportunities to identify and describe how their unique cultural story and identities shape their leadership philosophy and approach. Leadership programs need to create space for these opportunities to affirm leaders of color and equip them to support others in sharing their stories.

Implication for Action 2: College presidents must acknowledge the critical need to support leaders of color by creating employee affinity communities to foster a culturally affirming environment and dedicating substantial funding each year for mentoring opportunities to promote the retention and advancement of leaders of color

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color engender self-authenticity amidst diverse internal and external expectations and the conclusion that colleges must be intentional in supporting the unique needs of leaders of color so they can navigate complex institutional culture and politics effectively, it is recommended that college presidents prioritize the forming of employee affinity communities to foster a culturally affirming environment increase support for employees of color so they can persevere in their leadership roles. Internal diversity leadership and affinity programs exist at some CCCs but could be expanded. The benefit of these homegrown programs is that they help employees of color learn to navigate the culture that is unique to that institution, particularly for those aspiring leaders who wish to be promoted from within. However, the challenges many colleges face in sustaining these internal programs include funding shortages and leadership turnover. It would benefit the college to leverage its internal efforts to build affinity groups by partnering with statewide and national organizations whose networks are broader and more resourced to provide access to professional development resources, mentorship opportunities, and supportive peer communities. For example, organizations such as the AACC and the Aspen Institute can provide support resources on leadership frameworks and high-impact leadership practices that colleges may want to leverage.

Leaders of color also benefit from opportunities to connect with other leaders of color outside of their institutions with whom they can talk honestly and openly about their experiences and receive support. Therefore, college presidents should dedicate substantial funding each year to support leaders of color to engaging in external and internal mentoring activities. For instance, the leadership coalition made of three higher education organizations—including the African American Male Education and Network Development (A2MEND), the California Community Colleges Organización de Latina/o/x Empowerment, Guidance, and Advocacy for Success (COLEGAS), and the Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) organization—provide spaces and opportunities for leaders to connect, grow, advocate, and build leadership agency and the capacity to lead for social justice. Colleges seeking to support employees of color may want to consider partnering with organizations such as these to grow their supportive networks, thereby increasing the likelihood that leaders of color will feel strengthened in their quest to be culturally responsive to the needs of their teams and the students they serve.

It is also recommended that human resource departments partner with affinity communities to co-create and launch a specific mentorship program for mid-level leaders of color, particularly during their first year as a leader. Because the role of a senior-level leader centers around creating policy and high-level decision-making, the extent to which one must navigate political contexts while advancing DEI work is very different than in mid-level leader roles. Senior-level leaders of color in the study emphasized how important mentors and allies were in their leadership journey. As mid-level leaders of color aspire to higher levels of leadership, they could benefit from a mentor-mentee

relationship with a senior-level leader in their first year who can contextualize support to help them prepare for and navigate the complexity of an executive role. Human resources and affinity programs can work together to ensure the mid-level leader as the mentee is appropriately matched with a senior-level leader as a mentor to promote what is hopefully a meaningful and productive mentor-mentee relationship.

Implication for Action 3: Require college leadership to develop an individual professional growth plan to that includes participation in racial and gender bias training that leads to measurable reformative action with results incorporated into their annual leadership evaluation process

Based on the unexpected finding that culturally responsive female senior-level leaders of color must intentionally navigate their intersectionality as they lead equity efforts at their institutions and the conclusion that institutional practices must be examined and oppressive gendered and racialized norms challenged and dismantled, it is recommended that all college leadership undergo implicit bias training that goes beyond being merely informative, instead leading to a reformative change in mindset and action. The training should do more than just provide information, but also offer face-to-face experiential opportunities allowing leaders to learn how to identify, mitigate, and eliminate actions and practices that normalize Whiteness and perpetuate racial and gender bias and insidious forms of oppression, power, and privilege. Leader accountability for sustaining these behavioral changes should be included in their annual performance evaluations with specific and measurable goals for improvement. If colleges do not utilize a 360-degree evaluation process for leaders, then this would be an appropriate time for feedback from direct reports, the supervising administrator, and peers to provide a

holistic picture of the leader's progress toward minimizing forms of implicit bias in their leadership practice and interpersonal interactions with others.

Moreover, male college leaders must commit to ongoing bias awareness training and engage in experiential self-reflection activities focused on ways to remediate gendered hierarchies, practices, and communication styles that prioritize maleness as the standard they may be consciously or unconsciously enacting. Lastly, but even more importantly, as women senior-level leaders of color embrace their intersectional identities and unapologetically use their voice and presence to counter oppressive gender expectations in the academy, they model liberation for other women. To dismantle structural racism and sexism and achieve systemic change, all leaders have a role to play and must work together as co-conspirators, standing up against inequalities, particularly against those affecting women of color in higher education, in the fight for social justice and equity for the next generation.

Implication for Action 4: College governing boards must allocate funding each year to support formal and informal culture-sharing opportunities for college stakeholders

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color draw upon their identity and lived experience to create an inclusive and affirming campus environment and the conclusion that opportunities for students and college personnel to authentically share their stories related to their identity and culture enhance and create an inclusive campus environment, it is recommended that college governing boards allocate funding each year to support formal and informal culture sharing opportunities for

college stakeholders. Participation in culture-sharing events and listening circles should include administrators, classified staff, faculty, and students.

For adjunct employees who may not work every day of the week, it is important to pay them to attend if it is not their normal workday. Therefore, enough funding should be allocated to cover compensation and refreshments if the events are in-person. To ensure maximum participation, dedicated time for the culture-sharing opportunities should be calendared well in advance, and the events should be offered ideally at least once each academic term and during times that do not conflict with classes and service delivery. If possible, campus offices should be closed for this period and signs should be posted and announcements made to the community that offices are closed to allow employees to engage in professional development demonstrates a strong commitment to this effort.

Furthermore, the culture-sharing events should be offered in not only large group settings but also small group or one-on-one settings to allow for a more personal experience for those who do not feel comfortable in large groups. Privileging the stories of BIPOC leaders and educators honors one's cultural wealth, which, according to Yosso (2005), embodies an individual's ways of knowing that have been gleaned from experiences of marginalization and oppression. The sharing and learning of these experiences between and among people of color and their White colleagues create opportunities for allyship building and developing cultural humility through a deeper understanding of another's perspective.

Implication for Action 5: The college governing board and college president must create a task force to audit governance and decision-making processes utilizing an

equity-minded framework and use the results to create a 1-year plan to revise board policies and the college participatory governance handbook

Dismantling and deconstructing inequitable institutional structures and systems and reconstructing ones that are socially just and racially and culturally affirming is an important task of a leader who desires to build and sustain equity-minded institutions. According to Bensimon (2005), equity-minded campuses focus on remediating institutional practices, are critically race-conscious, recognize and counteract structural racism, use evidence-based inquiry, and act to close equity gaps. Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color challenge inequitable constructs, and the conclusion that a critical inquiry approach, grounded in an awareness of the historical roots of structural racism, paves the way toward eliminating inequities in student outcomes, it is recommended the college governing board and college president direct an immediate examination of governance and decision-making processes utilizing an equity-minded framework. Funding, as well as dedicated time, must be provided to the task force, comprising faculty, staff, and administrative leadership to enable them to work together to conduct an equity audit of all board and college policies and administrative procedures and identify structural and systemic barriers that contribute to low access, completion, and success rates for students from disproportionately impacted populations. The equity audit should be grounded in a theoretical or conceptual equity framework selected by the taskforce, and members should receive training on the history of race and racism in higher education and in understanding equity-mindedness and anti-racism framework.

Moreover, the college institutional research office will be instrumental in that student outcome data disaggregated by race and gender will need to be available to taskforce members so they can examine areas of racial and gender inequities. Based on the results of the equity audit, the task force should hold the appropriate authority to recommend that the governing board embark on creating a 1-year action plan in which all board policies and administrative procedures will be revised to include equity-minded and anti-racist language that minimizes procedural barriers to serving students from diverse backgrounds effectively. In addition, the task force should have the authority to charge the college president, the academic senate, classified senate, and student government with revising the college participatory governance handbook to reflect updated policies and change decision-making processes and practices that have historically created barriers toward achieving an inclusive campus environment.

Changing policy and practice is not enough if the entities or actors responsible for implementing the changes are not held accountable. Therefore, it is further recommended that upon completion of revisions to board policy and the participatory governance handbook, the college governing board should partner with the task force to develop a plan to strengthen institutional and programmatic accountability for eliminating student equity gaps. Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals need to be established, and progress should be reported to the board at a public board meeting on an annual basis so that board members and the community have the opportunity to review and make recommendations for revisions as needed to improve goal outcomes.

Implication for Action 6: Human resources must collaborate with stakeholder groups to revise the employee performance evaluation and tenure review process to include proficiency in DEI practices

One area within the college environment in which a change in practice can have the greatest impact on student outcomes is in the classroom. Moreover, one of the most important responsibilities of the CEO or senior-level leader of a college is in the hiring and evaluation of instructional faculty. Revamping the college hiring process to include a stronger focus on equity-minded and anti-racist practices is a critically important action that colleges must take to improve faculty and staff diversity and representation.

However, to truly address racial inequities in student outcomes, teaching and pedagogical practices employed in the classroom must change to be more culturally responsive and sustaining and address the needs of a college's diverse student population. Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior level leaders of color prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution and the conclusion that college policies, practices, and resources must focus on building a learning environment that advances equitable student outcomes, it is recommended that the college academic faculty senate, administration, union representatives, and human resources, collaborate to revise the employee performance evaluation and faculty tenure review process to include proficiency in diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, and accessibility practices.

Members of the taskforce must include academic faculty senate leadership, classified professional leadership, union representatives, senior leadership, and the district human resource department. Ensuring broad constituency representation on the taskforce at the

beginning of the process will help mitigate concerns and potential resistance, address impacts to board policy, and faculty and classified staff collective bargaining agreements.

Implication for Action 7: Districts must allocate additional funding each year to incentivize and reward instructional and student support programs that demonstrate use of high-impact practices and evidence of closing equity gaps for students from disproportionately impacted populations

Revising the faculty and employee evaluation process to include demonstrated competencies in diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, and accessibility is critical to ensuring pedagogical practices that faculty utilize to support and serve the diverse needs and experiences of students and advance equitable student outcomes. Although this has a direct impact in the classroom and at the individual faculty level, instructional support programs and student services can also influence student outcomes such as retention and persistence. Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color prioritize equity by embedding it within all areas of the institution and the conclusion that college policies, practices, and institutional planning and evaluation processes must be centered on racial equity in order to build an inclusive learning environment that advances equitable student outcomes, it is recommended that college presidents work with their governing boards allocate funding each year to instructional support and service programs that utilize high-impact practices and demonstrate evidence of closing equity gaps.

CCCs are accredited through the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), and every 7 years, the college undergoes a comprehensive self-evaluation based on standards related to academic quality, institutional effectiveness,

and student success, and through a peer review process, institutions are assessed to ensure they have the resources and infrastructure to provide and sustain quality educational offerings and services. One standard all colleges must demonstrate is that they meet requirements for institutional effectiveness, specifically that all instructional programs and student support services must engage in a program review process in which programs and services evaluate their goals and objectives and analyze their student learning outcomes and student achievement for performance gaps (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, 2022). It is common that the identification of resources is one outcome of the program review process, and requests for resources are made as part of the college's resource allocation process. Funding shortages are often the culprit of the lack of funding programs and services received even when requested. However, if the closing of racial equity gaps is of paramount importance, then programs and services that demonstrate success in closing or eliminating equity gaps should be rewarded and resourced to continue to advance their good work. Therefore, prioritizing dedicated funding to support these high-performing programs and services on an annual basis shows district-level commitment to achieving equitable outcomes for students from disproportionately impacted populations and incentive programs to continue advancing equity and social justice efforts.

Implication for Action 8: To close equity gaps in course success rates for students of color, curriculum committees should employ a DEI and anti-racist lens in the curriculum review process to ensure course materials are culturally relevant and reflective of students' lived experiences and cultural identities

The seminal work of Gay (2000) highlights that students acquire academic knowledge and skills in a more meaningful way when that content is centered within the student's lived experience and taught using culturally responsive teaching strategies that validate students' cultural knowledge, perspectives, and heritages. In order to do this within the higher education setting, traditional educational practices and curricula must be scrutinized and then replaced with more equity-minded and culturally responsive course content. Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color ensure that the learning environment meets students' needs and the conclusion that students feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging when they see their culture and identity represented in the classroom environment, it is recommended that curriculum committees employ a DEI and anti-racist lens in the curriculum review process to ensure instructional materials are culturally relevant. As part of their instructional duty, faculty must review and update or revise their programs and course curriculum on a consistent basis to ensure currency and relevancy. College curriculum committees are the official bodies that oversee this process and recommend changes to the curriculum to the district governing board for approval. The application and use of a DEI and anti-racist framework should be utilized as a method to decolonize curriculum and course outlines of record, as well as modify learning objectives and outcomes to ensure they are responsive and reflective of the diverse cultures, identities, and lived experiences of the

student population. Moreover, curriculum committees and the faculty senate should strongly encourage discipline faculty and content experts to embed culturally relevant instructional texts and materials within their courses. Course syllabi—which often include information on deadlines, class policies, assignments, grading rubrics, and overall student expectations—are another tool that can be used to humanize and equitize the learning experience for students. Rather than be compliance-based, the course syllabus can be reframed into a document that fosters a co-learner relationship between teacher and student, empowering students to have agency over their learning.

Implication for Action 9: Providing mentorship or engaging in community service is a way for leaders to remain connected and aligned to their purpose for leading and advancing equity and social justice work

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color accept the integration of their personal identity and professional role and the conclusion that leadership is an act of service that relates opportunities to give back to the community, it is recommended that college leadership teams identify an organization in which each leader gets to engage with a community service project. The interconnectedness of a leader's life purpose and professional duty to lead for equity was overwhelmingly present for all participants in the study and manifested in their desire to give back that which has been bestowed to them by others who cleared the path for their success. Leaders in the study maintained that if a college education helped break the cycle of generational poverty in their own family, they have a responsibility to serve as a role model to give hope to others to do the same. In service to the community, leadership teams should collectively identify a community-based organization and decide the ways in which each

member and the collective team can support and serve. Examples may include participation in a service project, serving as mentors, or speaking at events and sharing stories of perseverance and empowerment. It is important that service is ongoing and not simply a one and done event. Engaging with the community must be a consistent and sustaining practice so that meaningful collaboration and partnerships are built, and individuals establish a connection to the college and view it for what it is intended to do, which is to serve the educational and career needs of its community members.

Implication for Action 10: Executive leadership and stakeholder leadership groups must form a communication/learning council to strengthen dialogue and capacity to support the most critical educational and economic needs of students from historically marginalized backgrounds

Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts and the conclusion that stakeholders should work collaboratively with campus leadership to address important issues of educational and economic equity for students, it is recommended that the college's executive leadership team and leaders from constituency-based stakeholder groups form a communication/learning council to strengthen cross-functional dialogue and institutional capacity to address emerging student success issues. Constituents should represent the academic senate, classified senate, unions, student government, and executive administrators to ensure broad viewpoints and perspectives are at the table. Additionally, but not least important, the council should have someone on the team who is well versed in DEI. Moreover, the council would benefit from learning together by engaging in professional development and training focused on equity-minded, anti-racist,

and culturally responsive practices that support students from historically marginalized backgrounds to ensure student needs are centered in any decisions that are made.

It is important to note that strengthening open lines of communication and dialogue around issues of student success and equity must also occur between senior leadership and stakeholders in other ways and venues. The council should not replace formal and informal opportunities to elicit feedback, such as town halls, forums, and summits, or the practice of senior-level leaders dedicating time to meet individually with college stakeholders to listen and address concerns or unresolved issues that are inhibiting efforts to support students. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed how leaders guide and lead their institutions in a post-pandemic environment. Some senior-level leaders in the study noted how challenging it now is to maintain strong working relationships and sustain employee morale and momentum. Therefore, as colleges see some employees and students return to campus face-to-face, there is a need to learn to relate to each other again, and the institution must operate differently to serve the evolving needs of its diverse student populations.

Community colleges serve as the vehicle for economic and social mobility for individuals from low-income backgrounds and communities of color who have been historically excluded from access to higher education by providing post-secondary educational credentials that are increasingly becoming more important to achieve family-sustaining, living wage employment. Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color leverage internal and external situations to advance equity efforts and the conclusion that stakeholders should work collaboratively with campus leadership to address important issues of educational and economic equity for students, it

is further recommended that the established council build connections with business/industry, non-profit organizations, and community-based partners to develop internship and externship opportunities specifically for students of color. Such partnerships will help to strengthen the educational pipeline for students to enter the workforce with relevant skills and abilities. This will contribute to the gains needed to meet California's workforce needs of the 21st century and the CCCs' VFS goals (CCCCO, 2017) of increasing the percentage of students from underrepresented groups who become employed in a job related to their program of study.

Implication for Action 11: District policies should be created to fund sabbatical leave opportunities for leaders to take dedicated time away from their jobs to find respite and engage in critical self-reflection of their leadership practice

According to Bensimon (2005), "inequality in educational outcomes is a learning problem of institutional actors" (p. 100) and not a learning problem of students. Therefore, educational leaders must take time to learn how to engage in double-loop learning to shift from a deficit to an equity cognitive frame and correct leadership practices that foster reparation of inequities within one's organization (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Based on the finding that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color practice reflexive leadership and the conclusion that engaging in critical self-reflection is necessary to lead effectively in diverse environments, it is recommended that college governing boards create a policy and allocate funding to provide sabbatical leaves for college leaders. Sabbatical leave opportunities are commonplace for faculty who teach in higher education. These leaves offer faculty time away from their teaching and other college responsibilities to focus on improving their teaching practice, creating a

digital leadership portfolio, completing additional education, or developing and implementing a project for the benefit of the college. Due to busy and demanding schedules, most educational leaders are often not afforded the time needed to engage deeply in professional development like faculty are. Moreover, for leaders of color who experience the normal stresses of leadership but also the heavy weight of racial battle fatigue, little time is left for their reflection, rejuvenation, and restoration. The revision of sabbatical leave policies to include educational leaders as potential recipients and the allocation of funding to backfill the leader's responsibilities while they are away demonstrates the college's commitment to supporting all leaders to utilize a reflexive and adaptable approach to leading in diverse contexts.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends further research in the following areas in order to expand the understanding of culturally responsive leadership strategies utilized by CCC senior-level leaders of color as well as areas of focus on advancing equity, social justice, and anti-racist efforts within community colleges.

- Study the experiences of community college senior-level leaders of color during their first year in their senior-level role. A longitudinal study of these first-year senior-level leaders of color should be undertaken to explore their experiences over time. This is a gap in understanding that needs to be addressed.
- Extend the current study to explore the experiences of women presidents of color in the CCC system and how other forms of their identity such as sexual

identity, body size, religion, or perceived marital status affect how they navigate their environments and lead their institutions.

- Examine higher education leadership programs that consider and include aspects of lived experience and social identity in leadership practice and if this type of approach supports cultural responsiveness in leaders of color.
- Build upon the findings of this study by more fully exploring and understanding specific ways leaders apply their knowledge, lived experiences, and beliefs regarding their leadership practice to improve the learning environment for students.
- Replicate this study using a narrative qualitative research approach to deeply explore the personal stories and lives experiences of a smaller number of participants to better understand the contextual details of salient emotional, social, and physical situations in the leader's personal and professional journey to be culturally responsive. Because one of the limitations of the study was the researcher as instrument, replicating this study using an autoethnography approach in which the researcher's own experiences and introspections are included as a source of data may provide a valuable perspective.
- Broaden the study to explore the experiences of leaders of color at predominantly White community colleges with smaller populations of students of color to discover the influence situational context has on the extent to which leaders are culturally responsive.

- Conduct a comparative study of educational leaders in the CCC system and the CSU or UC to determine the differences and/or similarities in culturally responsive leadership practices.
- Examine the relationship between educational leaders' use of culturally responsive leadership on success and completion rates of students of color.
- Replicate this study utilizing a different culturally centered conceptual framework to determine any differences and/or similarities in leadership practices.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

-Maya Angelou

It is hard to be an activist and social justice warrior who advocates for the elimination of structural and institutional racism and misogyny within higher education to reconstruct a system to support those it was not designed to support. Leaders of color take this charge as part of their professional duty, but it is also deeply personal and, in many respects, inseparable from the core of who we are. BIPOC leaders, like those interviewed in this study, often find themselves engaging in deep equity work as one of the few or the only administrators of color at their colleges. While this makes for a lonely journey at times, it is a necessary task they accept in order to pave the way for aspiring leaders of color who are ready to take the baton and carry the banner.

The focus of this study was to identify the culturally responsive strategies utilized by senior-level leaders of color in the CCCs and to explore how their lived experiences and personal and social identities influence their leadership practice from a pedagogical

perspective, on a professional and personal level, and within the political contexts in which they operate. The major findings of the study revealed that culturally responsive senior-level leaders of color: (a) engender self-authenticity amidst disparate expectations, (b) leverage situations to advance equity, (c) embed equity within college structures, (d) build community and collaboration, (e) engage diverse voices in critical conversations, (f) ensure the learning environment meets student needs, (g) draw upon their identity and lived experience to create an inclusive campus environment, (h) practice reflexive leadership, (i) manifest self-actualization in their professional life, and (j) challenge structural injustices.

The study revealed 11 conclusions focused on the critical requisite for colleges to support the unique needs of leaders of color, particularly women, so they can lead effectively in complex organizational environments, the importance of senior-level leaders challenging oppressive gendered and racialized institutional norms that continue to exist within higher education, and the value of practicing critical self-reflection to improve one's leadership praxis. In addition, culturally responsive leaders ensure that racial equity informs college policies and practices in order to promote and foster a learning environment conducive to producing equitable student outcomes. Moreover, the findings of the study illuminated that productive conversations about race and cultural differences occur when senior-level leaders build trust among the campus community and that leaders must intentionally build an inclusive campus environment where campus employees and students feel a sense of belonging. Finally, the study revealed that in order to address educational and economic equity for students, colleges must engage and

partner with internal and external stakeholders to support the needs of students from disproportionately impacted populations.

The results of the study have significant implications for district governing boards and college presidents to center equity in all areas of policy and decision-making, faculty senates, and other participatory governance groups to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism into the curriculum, teaching, and learning practices. An equally important implication supported by the findings of this study is the exigency to colleges to recognize the cultural wealth of knowledge and competencies leaders of color bring to their institutions in the quest to eliminate inequitable outcomes for students of color and others from historically marginalized communities.

I would like to bring us back to the quote by John Lewis that I presented at the beginning of my study, one which all who profess to be advocates of equity and social justice may choose to embrace:

When you see something that is not right, not just, not fair, you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, “What did you do? What did you say?” If there was any time more important, then time is now to not “be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” (Lewis, as cited in Bote, 2020, p. 3)

As educational leaders, we are called to lead with these words in mind. Our communities depend upon us to lead in ways that are different from what has been done traditionally. So, how do we lead in a different way? In returning to this question posed to readers at the beginning of this dissertation, I say we must lead authentically and unapologetically with a clear consciousness of where we have come, a laser focus on the vision for change,

and an appreciation for how we lead in order to enact those bold changes to better serve our students and each other. As one of a few Black female administrators at the colleges where I have served, the salience of race and gender as part of my identity is ever-present for me. As a leader, I remain mindful of how college institutional policies and practices were not created or intended for people of color and women. This awareness not only informs my worldview and influences how I show up but also requires me to reflect on my leadership practice daily to ensure I am responding to the call to action to lead for social justice and equity within my institution and community. Hence, as educational leaders of color, although we may feel uncertain during times in which we traverse political contexts and still embody our personal and professional identities, we cannot lose sight of our life purpose, as well as the reason we answered the call to enter the world of community college leadership.

In this study, I sought to shine a light on the assets and competencies that leaders of color possess and effectively employ when leading social justice and equity efforts to benefit students at their institutions and invite their voices to counter the story that is frequently cited that focuses almost solely on the challenges leaders of color experience. This single story, if you will, is a narrative that is far too often viewed as the norm. While leaders of color do in fact encounter racism and sexism daily, this study was able to illuminate the stories about how they draw upon their cultural identities as an asset, lean into their authenticity, and surmount obstacles to boldly lead their institutions to be more equity-minded. I am humbled to have been given the opportunity to create a space for leaders in this study to tell their stories, some of which were never spoken out loud to anyone until now. In honor of all of the senior-level leaders of color who participated in

this study and shared their culturally responsive leadership practices, I would like to further elevate their voices with some of the words of wisdom they shared when I asked the question, “Looking back on your experiences, what advice would you give your younger self regarding cultural responsiveness?” To those current and aspiring leaders of color, they would say,

- Know your worth; you matter.
- Don’t wait until you are older to be authentic, be authentic now.
- Find ways to include the other parts of your life without sacrificing the activism work that is needed.
- Leadership is about creating conditions such that the people you serve can be their authentic selves.
- It’s ok to not know and it’s ok to make mistakes.
- Think of every struggle in your life as preparation for your leadership role.
- Embrace the power of your voice as a leader of color because you are called to be the voice of the voiceless.
- Don’t be afraid to tell your story.

I thank all the brave and courageous leaders I interviewed in this study. Each of you were gracious in taking time out of your very busy and demanding schedule to spend time with me. I was deeply moved by the support and encouragement you gave me to push forward and complete my research and your willingness to share so much of your personal and professional experiences with me. I am so grateful for the privilege of hearing your stories and learning from you. I will conclude with a quote from Kamala Harris, the 49th Vice-President of the United States. As the first woman and African

American/Asian American vice-president in U.S. history, her words encapsulate the drive, courage, and commitment to equity expressed by many of the leaders in this study which I find a relevant end to this dissertation,

Even in dark times, we not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be. We shoot for the moon, and then we plant our flag on it. We are bold, fearless, and ambitious. We are undaunted in our belief that we shall overcome, that we will rise up. This is American aspiration. (January 2021)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Authentic and Unapologetic:

Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by California Community College Senior Leaders of Color

Synthesis Matrix

Synthesis Matrix	American Higher Education	Race and American HE	Community Colleges in the US	DEI in CA Community Colleges	Community College Leadership	Leadership Representation	Race, Culture, Campus Climate & Leadership Practice	Theoretical Foundations CRT ACL Cultural Responsiveness	Conceptual Framework CRL
Aguirre, A., Jr., & Martinez, R. (2002)							X		
Altbach, P. G. (1991)	X	X							
Amiot, M. N., Mayer-Glenn, J., & Parker, L. (2020)								X	
Ash, A. N., Hill, R., Risdon, S., & Jun, A. (2020)	X	X							
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (May 2017)	X			X	X				
Bailey, T. W., & Morest, V. S. (2006)				X	X				
Bailey, T. R., Jenkins, D., & Smith Jaggars, S. (2015)	X			X					
Banks, C. A. M., & Banks, J. A. (2001)						X			
Bensimon, E. M. (2005)				X	X		X		
Bernal, D. D. (2002)						X	X	X	
Brooks, J. S. & Miles, M. T. (2010)							X		

Bush, E., Cooper, S., Kurlaender, M., & Rodriguez, F. (August 2020)				X		X			
Bustillos, L. T., & Siqueiros, M. (2018)					X	X			
California Community College Chancellor's Office-CCCCO. (February 2020)				X	X				
Chin, J. L. & Trimble, J. E. (2015)		X							
Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (1994)			X						
Colon, A. (1991)	X	X							
Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2017)								X	
Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005)								X	
Drury, R. L. (2003).			X						
Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., Taylor, M., & Chessman, H. M. (2019)		X		X					
Fraise, N. J., & Brooks, J. S. (2015)							X		
Gay, G. (1994)								X	
Gay, G. (2000)								X	
Gay, G. (2010)								X	
Hollowell, C. (2019)								X	
Horsford, S. D., Grosland, T., & Gunn, K. M. (2011)									X
Jean-Marie, G. (2006)						X	X		
Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. D. (2002)					X		X		

Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016)						X		X	X
Ladson-Billings, G. (1994)								X	
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995)								X	
Ladson-Billings, G. (1998)								X	
Ladson-Billings, G. (2009)								X	
Ladson-Billings, G. (2014)								X	
McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M. & Malcom-Piqueux (2020)		X							
Mize, R. (2020)				X	X	X			
Museum, S. D., Ledesma, M. C., & Parker, T. L. (2015)						X		X	
Nevarez, C. & Wood, L. J. (2010)			X		X	X			
Oakley, E. O. (April 2019)				X	X				
Parker, L., & Villalpando, O. (2007)						X		X	
Santamaria, L. J. (2012)				X			X	X	
Santamaria, L. J. & Santamaria, A. P. (2012)							X	X	
Santamaria, L. J. (2014)							X	X	
Santamaria, L. J., & Santamaria, A. P. (2016)						X	X	X	X
Smith, C. J. (2019)			X						
Taylor, M., Turk, J. M., Chessman, H. M. & Espinosa, L. L., & (2020)		X							

Terrell, R. D., & Lindsey, R. B. (2009)									X
Terrell, R. D., Terrell, E. K., Lindsey, R. B., Lindsey, D. B. (2018)									X
Theilin, J. R. (2019)	X								
Townsend, B. K. (2011)							X		
Wilder, C. S. (2013)	X	X							
Wyner, J. (2021)					X				
Yosso, T. J. (2005)							X	X	

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

PROFESSIONAL DUTY

Equity is a focal point in the CCCs. Given this current climate, culturally responsive leadership is at the center of building equity-minded institutions and campus cultures. The first set of questions will look at your sense of professional duty in leading for equity and excellence.

1. In what ways do you feel a sense of professional duty or obligation to lead for equity, social justice, and anti-racism in your institution?
2. Are there strategies that you use to promote social justice and ensure student success? If so, can you share what some of those strategies are? (who developed these strategies, who is involved, when are they used?).
3. Part of leading in this space is building an equity minded culture, how do you and your team/institution accomplish this?

PERSONAL JOURNEY

As I shared earlier, Culturally Responsive Leadership takes into consideration the identities and experiences of team members, students, and communities that we serve, to create more inclusive environments. This set of questions focuses on your personal journey which includes your experiences and personal identities. I encourage you to share openly and I want to hear any stories you are comfortable sharing.

1. Please tell me about your personal identity (for example, race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, etc.) I am interested in how those identities influence your view of the world and how you lead.
2. Considering your lived experiences, how have they influenced your leading equity efforts at your institution?
3. Have there been times when you felt like an insider, or an outsider, leading equity efforts at your institution? Please share an example. How has this impacted your leadership approach?
4. Can you live out your personal identities (can you bring your authentic self) in your workplace, or are there incongruencies? And if so, how do you mediate the differences in your personal and professional worlds?

PEDAGOGY

Culturally responsive leaders work to build an inclusive environment that actively values the identities and lived experiences of all students and staff. This set of questions focuses on pedagogy, in other words, your approach to building inclusive environments.

1. As a leader, how do you develop a climate of cultural affirmation within your department and across the institution?
2. How do you build a team that has the capacity to serve ethnically and culturally diverse students?
3. In your effort to build an inclusive environment, inevitably challenges come up. What is your approach to working with these challenges?

POLITICAL

The last set of questions explores the political context. When leaders seek to be culturally responsive, one approach is to be mindful of the political contexts in which we lead. In the Community Colleges, teams are quite diverse and as such, varying degrees of points of views are often present. In fact, some political points of views can differ quite dramatically.

1. How do you build consensus and alliances around culturally relevant policies and practices?
2. As a leader, how do you develop meaningful and positive relationships with students, staff, faculty and community constituents so that you can be culturally responsive to your team?
 - a. How do you deepen your understanding of your staff's perspectives?
3. Looking back at your experiences in leading within the political context, what advice would you give your younger self regarding cultural responsiveness.

APPENDIX C

Interview Script

Researcher: Renee Craig-Marius

Participant #: _____ Date: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is Renee Craig-Marius and I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global. Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate you spending some time with me today. I understand how busy you are and am very grateful to have this time with you.

First, I would like to review the Informed Consent Form that was provided to you when the interview was scheduled. I understand that you have already read and reviewed this form. I will provide an additional copy. Please let me know if you have any questions.

To review:

- Your name, responses, and opinions will be kept confidential.
- The interview will take approximately 1 hour.
- Research findings will be shared with you upon request.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of senior-level leaders of color within California Community Colleges to gain insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies they use to lead their institutions.

Culturally Responsive Leadership is defined as leadership practices (e.g., influence, management, administrative) that take into consideration race, ethnicity, language, culture, and gender of team members as well as the communities that an organization serves. In this study, I will be probing how several factors influence your leadership practice, when you are attempting to be culturally responsive. These factors include: the political context in which your college operates, your pedagogical approach to building an inclusive and anti-racist school climate, your professional duty to being equity-minded and honoring all members of the community, and your personal journey, including your lived experiences and multiple identities.

You've been selected to participate in this study based on your wealth of knowledge and experience leading in the community college system. I am sure you have some amazing stories related to your leadership and I'm excited to learn more from you. I really encourage you to share openly your experiences regarding culturally responsive leadership. It's my goal to capture these stories so that the rest of the world can learn from them.

Before we begin the interview, I want to inform you that this research was approved by IRB which is the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This committee reviews and approves research that involves human beings.

I would like to remind you that this interview will be recorded so I can make sure to transcribe your answers correctly. Again, this transcription will be sent to you upon request or so you can review it for accuracy. Please remember that your name will be anonymous. Additionally, all names will be removed from the transcript as well.

Once again, thank you for taking time to allow me to interview you. If you have any questions or need a break, please feel free to pause the interview. As previous agreed upon, we will end the interview at _____.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time today. I will send you a transcript, if desired, of your responses so you can review it for accuracy.

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Email:
3. What is your level of education? Check all that apply.
 - Associates
 - Bachelors
 - Masters
 - Doctorate
 - Other:
4. Phone Number:
5. Preferred method of contact
 - Phone
 - Email
 - Text
6. Which category below includes your age?
 - 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60 or older
7. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? Check all that apply.
 - Hispanic or Latino/a/x
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - White
8. What is your gender identity?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Non-Binary
 - Other (please specify)
9. Current Position Title:
10. Number of years of experience in higher education:

11. Number of years of experience in current position (ex: senior level leader):
12. Total years in this type of position (ex: could be at other institutions or in positions similar to current position):
13. Number of direct reports:
14. Of your direct reports, how diverse is your team? *Diverse can be race, ethnicity, age, etc.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not diverse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very

15. How well do you feel your educational training prepared you for diversity, equity, and inclusion work?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not prepared	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very prepared

APPENDIX E

UMass Global Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval



IRB Application Approved: Renee Craig-Marius

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>

Fri, Apr 8, 2022 at 2:18 PM

Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu

To:

Cc:

Dear Renee Craig-Marius,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX F

Invitational Email to Participants

Name
President/Vice President
Address, City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Name),

My name is Renee Craig-Marius. I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global and am conducting my dissertation research on culturally responsive leadership. The purpose of the study is to explore how lived experience and personal identity, sense of professional duty, pedagogical approach, and institutional context influence a senior-level leader's ability to lead their college in ways that are culturally responsive.

I am specifically interested in connecting with California community college senior-level leaders of color to learn how their unique experiences, personal identities, cultural wealth of knowledge, and backgrounds shape their leadership practice as they work to foster and build equity-minded institutions that are responsive to the needs of our racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

You have been identified a senior-level leader engaged in issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion at your college and in the CCC system and are in an ideal position to share your culturally responsive leadership approaches. I, too, am a senior-level leader of color at my institution and believe this study is timely given the important work we as CCC leaders must do to recreate policy and practice that is grounded in equity and anti-racism. The results of this study may reveal strategies that leaders of color use to improve campus climate, create equity-minded hiring and retention practices, and promote culturally relevant and anti-racist pedagogical approaches to better serve students.

I'm mindful that you have a very busy schedule and are managing multiple priorities. However, I would be deeply humbled and appreciative if you would consider participating in my study. Participation would involve an approximate 60-minute interview held virtually using Zoom at an agreed upon time that is convenient for you and possibly a real-time, virtual observation, or previously recorded session of you engaging in equity efforts.

If you would like to learn more about the study or have questions, I would be happy to schedule a brief phone call or zoom call with you to discuss this more. Please know that this initial meeting with me would not obligate you to participate in the study but only serve to help add clarity about the study. If you know now that you are interested in participating, I will kindly ask that you respond back to me so that I can provide you with information on next steps to secure your consent and arrange a time and date that is convenient for you to conduct the interview.

I may be contacted by email at (email address) or by phone or text at (phone number). You are invited to also contact the dissertation chair for my study, Dr. Jeffrey Lee, at (phone number) should you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Renee Craig-Marius
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX G

Sponsor Invitational Email to Participants

Date:

Dear (Name):

As a fellow California Community College colleague, I am asking your assistance to participate the dissertation research being conducted by Renee Craig-Marius, who is an Ed.D. candidate at UMass Global. The purpose of the study is to explore how lived experience and personal identity, sense of professional duty, pedagogical approach, and institutional context influence a senior-level leader's ability to lead their college in ways that are culturally responsive.

Renee is specifically interested in connecting with California community college senior-level leaders of color to learn how their unique experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds shape their leadership practice as they work to foster and build equity-minded institutions that are responsive to the needs of our racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

I have served as her doctoral mentor for the past three years and I whole-heartedly support her research on this very timely and important topic. Renee has more than two decades of experience in our system and I am excited about the impact her research can have on our DEI agenda and future policy. You will be contributing to that change by agreeing to be interviewed for her research.

One-on-one interviews will be conducted using Zoom at an agreed upon time that is comfortable for you and will last approximately one hour. Virtual observations or pre-recorded observations, if conducted, will be in an academic setting of your choice, and may last approximately 1 hour as well.

If you agree to participate in an interview and be observed in a relevant academic setting, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. Further, please be assured that the researcher is not affiliated with the administration or employees at your institution.

The researcher, Ms. Craig-Marius, is available at (email address) should you have any questions. I am also available if you have questions or need further clarification about the study. With all the changes in the California Community College System, her research will support future leadership practice and strengthen the success of our students. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sponsor

APPENDIX H



UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX I

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by Senior-Level Leaders of Color in California Community Colleges

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Renee Craig-Marius, Ed.D. candidate.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Renee Craig-Marius, a doctoral student from UMass Global. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of California Community College senior-level leaders of color to gain insight into the culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies they use when leading their institution. The study used the Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework.

This study aims to explore how the lived experiences and personal identities of California community college senior-level leaders color factor into their utilization of culturally responsive leadership strategies within their institutional context. The objective is to discover culturally responsive leadership practices and strategies leaders use to create equity-minded institutions and lead efforts to address achievement and equity gaps for historically marginalized student populations.

This study will add to the body of knowledge about culturally responsive practices used by leaders with particular emphasis on higher education. The review of the literature revealed a considerable amount of research on the practices of K12 leaders but a dearth of research exploring culturally responsive leadership within the California community college context. Additionally, very few studies focused on how community college leaders of color draw upon their lived experiences, cultural wealth of knowledge, and personal identities to lead their institutions in culturally responsive ways. The results of this study may reveal specific strategies that leaders of color use to improve campus climate, create equity-minded hiring and retention practices, and promote culturally relevant and anti-racist pedagogical approaches to better serve students.

Currently, California community colleges are focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and are faced with an urgency to make structural and institutional changes to address the persistent achievement gaps of students from marginalized populations. The results of this study may help to change traditional leadership paradigms and inspire the field to engage in new thinking about how lived experience, attributes of one's cultural identity, and the value of voice can enhance educational leadership practice to address the equity and social justice imperatives in community colleges.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a one-on-one virtual interview and/or observation setting at an agreed upon time that is comfortable for the participant. In compliance with federal, state, and UMass Global COVID-19 guidelines and protocols, the interviews will be audio and video recording using the Zoom technology platform. The interviews, conducted by the researcher, will last approximately one hour.

Transcripts of the audio and video recordings will be sent to the participant for review and correction. The observations, if conducted, will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and will be conducted via Zoom. If a real-time observation is not possible, a previously recorded virtual observation, if conducted, will take place in an academic or other professional setting of choice by the participant. If a real-time observation is not possible, the researcher may view a previously recorded, publicly accessible session of my choice. Completion of the interviews and observations will take place April through May 2022.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with the research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and all recorded interviews, observation documentation, and artifacts will be stored in a locked file drawer accessible only to the researcher. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
- b) The potential benefit of this study will include my contribution to the literature on culturally responsive leadership and assist in raising awareness of how the lived experiences of senior-level leaders of color influence their leadership practices as they lead their institution within California community college system.
- c) My participation in this research study is voluntary and will not be compensated for participation. I may choose to not participate in the study and can discontinue my participation at any time without any negative consequences. I can also decide not to answer questions during the interview that I may feel uncomfortable with or choose not to participate in observations. I will contact Renee Craig-Marius researcher, at (email address) or by cell phone at [redacted] to alert her of my withdraw from the study. Finally, the researcher may stop the study at any time.
- d) If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jeffrey Lee at (email address).
- e) No information that identifies me will be released without my consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or use of the data is changed, I will be informed, and my consent reobtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I can contact the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it, and I hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

Printed Name of Participant Signature of Participant Date

Printed Name of Researcher Signature of Researcher Date

Audio Recording Release and Consent Addendum

INFORMATION ABOUT: Culturally Responsive Leadership Strategies Used by Senior-Level Leaders of Color in California Community Colleges

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Renee Craig-Marius, Ed.D. candidate.

I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file upon my permission.

If I do agree to being audio recorded, the sole purpose is to support data collection as part of the study. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist, if utilized, will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed after completion of the study and the written transcription will be stored securely in a locked file drawer and confidentially shredded and destroyed after three years following completion of the study.

I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary and will not be compensated for participation. I may choose to not participate in the study and can discontinue my participation at any time without any negative consequences. I can also decide not to answer questions during the interview that I may feel uncomfortable with or choose not to participate in observations. I will contact Renee Craig-Marius researcher, at (email address) or by cell phone at [redacted] to alert her of my withdraw from the study. Finally, the researcher may stop the study at any time.

If the study design or use of the data is changed, I will be informed, and my consent reobtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I can contact the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I can also contact the dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jeffrey Lee at (email address).

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Renee Craig-Marius, researcher, to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview and/or observations. As with all research consent, I may withdraw permission at any time for audio recording to be used in this research study.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Researcher	Signature of Researcher	Date


APPENDIX J

Observation Protocol

Date:	Time:	Setting:
<p>Culturally Relevant Leadership Framework</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Political Context</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pedagogical Approach</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Personal Journey</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Duty</p>		
Narrative of Observation:	Researcher Reflection:	

APPENDIX K

CITI Program Certificate



Completion Date 23-May-2020
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 36721307

This is to certify that:

Renee Craig-Marius

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w30b6d425-5bce-4591-88a5-3520b4c69b59-36721307