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Authentic Leadership Between Control and Drift: An Investigation of African Americans Executives in Nonprofit Organizations

Ronald McNeill

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Authentic Leadership Between Control and Drift: An Investigation of African Americans
Executives in Nonprofit Organizations

By

Ronald McNeill, MPA

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Of

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the RONALD MCNEILL, MPA Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Business Administration in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

Authentic Leadership Between Control and Drift: An Investigation of African Americans in
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By
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April 2024

Committee Chair: *Dr. Lars Mathiassen*

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While nonprofit leaders are expected to demonstrate authenticity as they leverage leadership skills in the interest of their organizations, full transparency as an African American nonprofit executive carries risk in a world where conformity to the dominant gender and race in society remains the norm. The journey to authentic leadership is therefore uncertain and complex, lending itself to competing challenges of developing into a state of authenticity in leadership.

Against that backdrop, a phenomenological method and multiple case study approach was adopted to examine African American nonprofit executives and their lived experiences, appreciation for, and progress toward developing into an authentic leader. We adapted Control and Drift Theory to understand how awareness of self-identity, professional experiences, and events impact the executives' ability to manage the degree of authenticity they demonstrate in their journey toward authentic leadership. The study advances knowledge on the leadership traits of African Americans and deepens the understanding of their lived experiences and journey toward authentic leadership as executives in nonprofit organizations.

Keywords: *Authenticity, Leadership, African Americans, Nonprofits, Control & Drift*

I   INTRODUCTION

I.1   The Problem

Organizations have increasingly emphasized the importance of employees bringing their authentic selves to the workplace, as noted by George (2003). However, it is essential to consider whether this call for authenticity accommodates cultural norms found in minority communities. Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as "a process that fosters self-awareness and positive behaviors in leaders and associates, with its own challenges and pitfalls". In the nonprofit sector, leaders are expected to demonstrate authenticity in furthering the organization's mission, yet this aspect of nonprofit leadership has seen minimal investigation. Nonprofit leaders are required to embody and communicate the values of their organizations, living their mission authentically and aligning personal behavior with organizational values. Authenticity is a crucial leadership trait in the nonprofit sector, with broad implications, especially considering the social, political, and economic landscape.

DuBois (1903) highlighted the historical, structural, and societal dynamics that have influenced African Americans' ability to express their authentic selves, emphasizing the impact of "double consciousness" on their expressions and perceptions. While authenticity is a critical trait for nonprofit leaders, full transparency as an African American executive and all social actors in a nonprofit organization could carry risk in a world where conformity to the dominant gender and race in society remains the norm. Given this, African Americans are challenged with the process of fitting and conforming versus developing into one's true self as authentic leaders. The journey to authentic leadership for African American executives is often unpursued therefore uncertain and complex, lending itself to competing challenges of controlling versus developing into a state of authenticity in leadership.

Using a phenomenological method and multiple case study approach, this research seeks to examine African American leaders in nonprofit organizations and their lived experiences, appreciation for, and progress toward developing into an authentic leader. For the dissertation, I apply an engaged scholarship approach (Mathiassen, 2017; Van de Ven, 2007) grounded in Control and Drift Theory (Ciborra, C.U., Braa, K., Cordella, A., Dahlbom, B., Failla, A. and Hanseth, O., 2000; Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008) to bridge theory and practice. The theoretical foundation of Control and Drift Theory is integrated to understand how awareness of self-identity, professional experiences, and events impact African American nonprofit executives' ability to manage the degree of authenticity one demonstrates and the progressive journey toward authentic leadership. The study will advance research and literature on the leadership traits of African Americans and deepen the understanding of their lived experience and process toward authentic leadership as executives in nonprofit organizations.

The research is structured as follows: Above, I have provided a description of a problem area in business practice. Next, I provide an overview of the drivers motivating the research, and the research question. Then, I will proceed with presenting a review of the literature, theoretical framing, and a description of the methodology for the study before ending a discussion of the results and contributions. The key components are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1:Research Design Summary (adapted from Mathiassen, 2017)

Component	Definition	Specification
Title	The title expresses the essence of the research design, with emphasis on C.	Authentic Leadership Between Control and Drift: An Investigation of African American Executives in Nonprofit Organizations
RQ	The research question relates to P, opens for research into A, and helps ensure the research design is coherent and consistent.	How do African Americans in nonprofit organizations come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership?
P	The problem setting represents people's concerns in a real-world problematic situation.	In today's nonprofit landscape, there is a growing need for leaders who embody their organization's mission in an authentic manner (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2012) and align their personal conduct with the values of the nonprofit sector (Rothschild & Milofsky, 2006). Nonprofit leaders are expected to showcase authenticity as they utilize their influence and leadership abilities to advance the goals of their organizations. While authenticity is a critical trait for nonprofit leaders, full transparency as an African American executive and all social actors in a nonprofit organization could carry risk in a world where conformity to the dominant gender and race in society remains the norm. Given this, African Americans are challenged with the process of fitting and conforming versus evolving into one's true self as authentic leaders.
A	The area of concern represents some body of knowledge in the literature that relates to P.	Authentic leadership of African Americans in nonprofit organizations
F	The conceptual framing helps structure collection and analyses of data from P to answer RQ; FA draws on concepts from A, whereas FI draws on concepts independent of A.	Control and Drift Theory (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008)
M	The method details the approach to empirical inquiry, specifically to data collection and analysis.	Employing a phenomenological method and a qualitative multiple case study approach, this study delves into the lived experiences and leadership development of African American

		executives within nonprofit organizations. Specifically, the research aims to explore their progression towards authentic leadership.
C	Contributions influence P and A, and possibly also F and M.	Advance research and literature on leadership traits of African Americans in nonprofit organizations.
		Deepen the understanding of lived experiences, leadership style, and progress toward authentic leadership for African American nonprofit executives.
		Identify approaches to foster the professional success of African American as executive leaders in nonprofit management.
		Demonstrate the utility of Control and Drift Theory to understand how African Americans executives in nonprofit management evolve to authentic leadership practices and traits.

I.2   Research Motivation

The primary aim of this research is to gain insight into the experiences of African American executives in nonprofit organizations as they strive to develop an authentic leadership style. The goal is to illustrate how self-awareness, professional experiences, and personal events contribute to the cultivation of an authentic leadership style. My contemplation of the themes of personality behavior, leadership styles, and diversity, as part of my Leadership Development Plan for the DBA 9000 course, prompted me to delve into the lived experiences of African American executives in relation to authentic leadership.

As an African American male leader in business and the nonprofit sector, I grapple with the extent to which African Americans can express their true selves within the workplace, given the continued prevalence of systemic racism. It is undeniable that race is an integral component of our self-identity. Ignoring the impact of race and ethnicity on an individual's self-perception and professional navigation impedes progress towards addressing diversity, inequity, and inclusion in

the business world. This topic piqued my interest through interactions with senior African American leaders in nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions, who have mentored me. I have been prompted to inquire about the trajectory to their positions, particularly considering the scarcity of African Americans in senior leadership roles despite their attainment of advanced degrees and thought leadership in the nonprofit secto (Byrd, 2008; Davis, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Therefore, I have developed a heightened curiosity regarding leadership styles and their correlation with an individual's genuine self and lived experiences in the context of success as executives in nonprofit organizations.

I.3   Research Question

Accordingly, I ask: How do African Americans in nonprofit organizations come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership? This research question will examine how an awareness of self-identity and lived experiences and events can cause an evolution toward authentic leadership style for African American executives in nonprofit organizations.

II   LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1   Introduction

The literature review aims to summarize the research themes in authentic leadership literature and relevant concepts of self-identity, professional experiences, and events, with particular emphasis on providing an opportunity for contribution. The literature review is structured as follows: First, an overview of authenticity in nonprofit management for African Americans, and second, a discussion of three research streams emerging from the literature including authentic leadership, authentic leadership in nonprofit management, and self-identity for African Americans. I end with a discussion of the research gaps that offer the opportunity for contribution.

The examination of authenticity within nonprofit leadership remains limited. In contrast, authenticity has been extensively studied in the context of for-profit organizations in recent years (George, 2003). The nonprofit sector has seen a surge in research interest due to its growing societal, political, cultural, and economic implications (Frumkin, 2002). The lack of investigation into authenticity in nonprofit leadership is regrettable, particularly given the necessity for nonprofit organizations to effectively communicate their value propositions as part of their organizational identity (Young, 2011), and the reliance on leaders who embody and convey such values (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014). Nonprofit organizations increasingly demand leaders who authentically live their mission (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2012) and align their personal behavior with nonprofit industry values (Rothschild & Milofsky, 2006). Furthermore, nonprofits depend on senior executives to develop future leaders with strong decision-making abilities (Spicker, 2012) and deeply entrenched values to drive positive organizational results.

Authenticity, as a crucial aspect of leadership, has far-reaching implications in the nonprofit sector, yet its applications and ramifications are not widely comprehended. Nonprofit organizations have suffered from staff shortages due to attrition and ineffective executive leadership (Stid & Bradach, 2009). Experts have cautioned about a looming deficit in nonprofit leadership as baby boomers retire and many nonprofit leaders transition to government, consulting, or for-profit roles (Tierney, 2006). Nonprofit leaders are continually engaged with communities (Mondros, 1997), governments (Stephenson, 2008), and volunteer groups (Rehnborg, Poole, & Roemer, 2011) to nurture and sustain external relationships, focus on fundraising (Feldmann, 2011), grant making (Lyons, 2011), partnership building (Shaefer, DeLand, & Jones, 2011), and collaboration (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006), as well as to advance the organization's core mission. Throughout these diverse responsibilities, nonprofit leaders are expected to demonstrate authenticity as they wield influence and other leadership skills in the service of their organizations.

While authenticity is a critical trait for nonprofit leaders, full transparency as an African American executive and all social actors in a nonprofit organization could carry risk in a world where conformity to the dominant gender and race in society remains the norm. Given this, African Americans are challenged with the process of fitting and conforming versus developing into one's true self as authentic leaders.

The disparity in the representation of African Americans in senior leadership positions within nonprofit organizations has been well-documented (Davis, 2016). This underrepresentation has resulted in a lack of comprehensive literature on the leadership styles of African Americans in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Consequently, there is a dearth of research on the development and manifestation of African

American leadership within varied organizational settings (Milner, 2006). While the cultural, environmental, and strategic factors of the organization significantly influence leadership styles, there are additional aspects that warrant exploration in the existing literature (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). Understanding the leadership experiences of African Americans in the nonprofit sector is crucial, as their style of leadership can impact various dimensions of organizational performance, including their advancement to senior positions (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Furthermore, a deeper exploration of this relationship can provide insights for both nonprofit management researchers and practitioners on creating an inclusive organizational culture that promotes equity and belonging for African American leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

II.2   Authentic Leadership

The concept of authenticity is encapsulated in Shakespeare's (1901) well-known quote, "To thine own self be true" (Hamlet; Act 1; Scene iii), portraying authenticity as the embodiment of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and a congruent life experience. Erickson (1995) further asserts that individuals who remain true to their identity and values are more authentic. Hence, authenticity should be unique to each individual, reflecting their genuine self. The definition of authentic leadership has evolved over the years and is captured in various definitions, summarized in Table 1. Despite discrepancies in its definition, authentic leadership is distinguished by both practical and theoretical approaches. The practical approach stems from the real-life experiences of leaders, while the theoretical approach is founded on observations, best practices, and behavior across multiple dimensions (Northouse, 2013). The emergence of honest, ethical, and transparent leaders with conviction is a growing trend (George, 2018). Notably, recent corporate scandals have underscored the imperative for authentic leadership and ethical conduct (Iszatt-White et al., 2018).

The key definition to ground this research is presented by Luthans and Avolio (2003) which states that "***authentic leadership is a process that draws on positive psychological capabilities and advanced organizational context, which leads to greater self-awareness and positive behavior of leaders and other participants, all of which promotes a positive self-development.***"

The concept of authentic leadership involves a multi-dimensional approach, encompassing individual, relational, and developmental perspectives. According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), the individual perspective focuses on the leader's ability to remain true to their genuine self and lead in alignment with personal values. The relational perspective, as proposed by Eagly (2005), emphasizes the reciprocal effects between leaders and followers, highlighting the influence of relationships on authentic leadership. Furthermore, the developmental perspective suggests that authentic leadership can be cultivated through a lifetime of experiences (Gardner et al., 2005). Authentic leadership is characterized by positive psychological capacities and strong moral reasoning, leading to behaviors rooted in self-awareness and self-regulation (Walumbwa et al., 2008). These behaviors are guided by elements such as self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008).

Cooper et al. (2005) emphasize that the original conceptualization of authentic leadership is inherently multi-dimensional, encompassing components from various domains, including traits, behaviors, contexts, and attributions. Moreover, a study by Walumbwa et al. (2008) aimed to create a validated measure for authentic leadership, defining it as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate. The display of character and integrity takes central stage in authentic leadership, as it fosters greater self-

awareness, moral perspective, processing of information, and relational transparency among leaders and followers (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005).

Additionally, authentic leadership is seen as a moderating factor between leadership trust and a member's affective commitment, as highlighted by Kehan, Weipeng, Jenny, and Lei (2016). Patterns of authentic leadership behavior have been found to promote positive psychological changes and develop a positive and ethical climate (Munyaka, Boshoff, Pietersen, and Snelgar, 2017). In essence, authentic leadership involves acting on core values, remaining true to oneself, and fostering a mutual, genuine relationship between leaders and followers (George, 2018). It emphasizes internal choices and self-awareness, as opposed to external impositions, in leadership behavior (Sendjaya, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, & Butarbutar, 2016). Overall, the character and integrity displayed by authentic leaders play a significant role in fostering positive relationships, ethical climates, and self-development among leaders and followers.

Table 2 Authentic Leadership Definitions

Source	Definition
Rome and Rome, 1967	"A hierarchical organization, in short, like an individual person, is "authentic" to the extent that, throughout its leadership, it accepts finitude, uncertainty, and contingency; realizes its capacity for responsibility and choice; acknowledges guilt and errors; fulfills its creative managerial potential for flexible planning, growth, and charter or policy formation; and responsibly participates in the wider community."
Henderson and Hoy, 1983	"To demonstrate the acceptance of organizational and personal responsibility for actions, outcomes, and mistakes; to be non-manipulating of subordinates; and to exhibit salience of self over role."
Bhindi and Duignan, 1997	"In discovery of the authentic self through meaningful relationships within organizational structures and processes that support core, significant values; *intentionality*, which implies visionary leadership that takes its energy and direction from the good intentions of current organizational members who put their intellects, hearts and souls into shaping a vision for the future; a renewed commitment to *spirituality*, which calls for the rediscovery of the spirit within each person and celebration of the shared meaning, with purpose of relationship; a *sensibility* to the feelings, aspirations and needs of others, with special reference to the multicultural settings in which many leaders operate in the light of the increasing globalizing trends in life and work."
Begley, 2001	"Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professional effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge based, values informed, and skillfully executed."
George, 2003	"Authentic leaders use their natural abilities, but they also recognize their shortcomings, and work hard to overcome them. They lead with purpose, meaning, and values. They build enduring relationships with people. Others follow them because they know where they stand. They are consistent and self-disciplined. When their principles are tested, they refuse to compromise. Authentic leaders are dedicated to developing themselves because they know that becoming a leader takes a lifetime of personal growth."
Luthans and Avolio, 2003	"[W]e define authentic leadership in organizations as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development."
Avolio, Gardner et al. (2004, pp. 802, 803)	Authentic leaders are "those individuals who know who they are, what they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, resilient, and of high moral character."

Begley, 2004	"Authentic leadership is a function of self-knowledge, sensitivity to the orientations of others, and a technical sophistication that leads to a synergy of leadership action."
Ilies et al., 2005	"Authentic leaders are deeply aware of their values and beliefs, they are self-confident, genuine, reliable and trustworthy, and they focus on building followers' strengths, broadening their thinking and creating a positive and engaging organizational context."
Shamir and Eilam, 2005	"Our definition of authentic leaders implies that authentic leaders can be distinguished from less authentic or inauthentic leaders by four self-related characteristics: 1) the degree of person role merger i.e. the salience of the leadership role in their self-concept, 2) the level of self-concept clarity and the extent to which this clarity centers around strongly held values and convictions, 3) the extent to which their goals are self-concordant, and 4) the degree to which their behavior is consistent with their self-concept."
George and Sims, 2007	Authentic leaders are "genuine people who are true to themselves and to what they believe in. They engender trust and develop genuine connections with others. Because people trust them, they are able to motivate others to high levels of performance. Rather than letting the expectations of other people guide them, they are prepared to be their own person and go their own way. As they develop as authentic leaders, they are more concerned about serving others than they are about their own success or recognition."
Walumbwa et al. 2008	"We define authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development."
Whitehead, 2009	"In this article, a definition of an authentic leader is adopted as one who: (1) is self-aware, humble, always seeking improvement, aware of those being led and looks out for the welfare of others; (2) fosters high degrees of trust by building an ethical and moral framework; and (3) is committed to organizational success within the construct of social values."
Iszatt-White, Whittle, Gadelshina, and Mueller, 2018	"The ability to act on one's core values and to be true to self."

II.3   Authentic Leaders

Authentic leadership is characterized by a focus on genuine leadership qualities and the

development of valuable relationships with others (Craig, George, & Snook, 2015). George and

Sims (2007) emphasize the importance of being genuine, standing up for one's beliefs, engendering trust, and fostering meaningful relationships as key attributes of authentic leadership. The concept of "True North," as conveyed by George and Sims, alludes to the idea of staying true to one's leadership purpose without a predefined path, necessitating a compass to guide leaders in domains such as self-awareness, values, motivations, support team, and integrated life.

Joo and Nimon (2014) highlight self-confidence, reliability, trustworthiness, and the development of followers, as well as the creation of a positive and supportive organizational culture, as defining features of authentic leadership. Additionally, George (2003) suggests that authentic leaders demonstrate a genuine desire to serve others through their leadership, exemplifying qualities such as courage, motivation, passion for work, compassion, and intelligence.

The relationship between positive psychology, authentic leadership, and creative behavior in an organization has been noted by Zubair and Kamal (2017). They assert that authentic leaders place a strong emphasis on their core beliefs and values, which are manifested in their actions and behavior (Northouse, 2013). Authentic leaders also strive to build credibility, earn respect, and engender trust by encouraging diverse perspectives and fostering collaborative relationships with followers, ultimately leading in a manner that is recognized as authentic.

Furthermore, the impact of authentic leadership extends beyond leaders, as followers may emulate these characteristics in their interactions with leaders, colleagues, customers, and other stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the development of the organization's culture (Avolio, Luthans in Walumbwa, 2004) and positive organizational identity. Avolio, Luthans in Walumbwa (2004) posit that authentic leaders possess profound self-awareness, are cognizant of their

environment, and demonstrate confidence, optimism, adaptability, and moral integrity. Moreover, Luthans and Avolio (2003) emphasize that authentic leaders recognize and appreciate individual differences, are keen to identify talented individuals, and are motivated to assist these individuals in cultivating their talents as a unique competitive advantage.

According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), authentic leaders possess four key characteristics: Firstly, they lead without pretense, staying true to themselves and their personal convictions, refraining from conforming to external expectations. Secondly, they are driven by personal beliefs rather than external rewards. Next, they are independent in their leadership approach, guided by their unique convictions and not by imitation. Lastly, their actions are rooted in their personal values, beliefs, and identity. Notably, the definitions by Shamir and Eilam do not encompass specific leadership styles or the content of leaders' values and beliefs, deliberately omitting these factors (Penger, 2006).

Authentic leaders are transparent about their intentions and operate within their self-defined boundaries, drawing on their values to guide their behavior and actions in the workplace (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Regardless of gender, leaders become more authentic as they align their internal and external selves, projecting their true self (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). Authentic leaders are perceived as genuine and do not adapt to different leadership styles for manipulation purposes (Hashim, Ahmad, & Jamaludin, 2017). Furthermore, authentic leaders are known for building genuine relationships that foster high levels of follower trust, ultimately leading to enhanced performance and empowerment (Arenas, Tucker, & Connelly, 2017).

Authentic leadership is characterized by genuineness, positivity, self-awareness, and the promotion of openness (Kelly, 2018). Research indicates that the behavior of authentic leaders induces positive psychological changes in both their team members and the organization as a

whole (George, 2018). Furthermore, authentic leaders are recognized for their transparency, which fosters the development of strong relationships with subordinates (Nahavandi, 2015). It is noted that authentic leaders integrate self-awareness into their leadership approach, thereby perpetuating authenticity and increasing their influence as leaders (Metcalf, 2014).

II.4 Authentic Leadership in Nonprofit Management

While the for-profit sector has seen an increase in studies on authentic leadership, there is a lack of research on this topic within nonprofit literature. A review of past and current research showed limited results when searching for authentic leadership studies conducted in a nonprofit setting (Covelli & Mason, 2017). Riggio and Orr (2004) did not mention authentic leadership in their collection of chapters on improving nonprofit leadership, opting instead to focus on transformational leadership as the primary theory. Similarly, The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management (Renz & Herman, 2010) primarily addresses legal, technical, and management knowledge for leaders. Nonprofit organizations are currently facing a critical moment in their history. The Bridgespan Group (2006) conducted a survey on the leadership deficit in nonprofit management, highlighting the large, anticipated need for leaders due to newly created roles, Baby Boomer retirements, and a lack of resources to retain top talent. Authentic leadership was measured using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), developed by Avolio, Gardner, and Walumbwa (2007). This study not only contributes to the overall body of research focused on the nonprofit sector, but it also adds to the leadership literature by increasing the number of quantitative studies from the follower perspective and validating the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire.

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (2016), there are over 1.5 million nonprofits in the U.S., accounting for more than 9% of wages and salaries as well as over

5% of the GDP. The Bridgespan Group (2006) report highlighted the phenomenon of the nonprofit leader deficit and offered potential solutions to what type of leaders the nonprofit industry could benefit from in the future. They recommended identifying nonprofit leaders who possess authenticity, functional business skills, and identifying candidates based on those who show cultural affinity towards an organization's mission (organizational fit based on candidates' experience interacting with mission-driven organizations).

The Bridgespan Group's research identified a shortage of effective nonprofit leaders and proposed potential solutions for the types of leaders the nonprofit sector needs in the future. They advocated for the identification of nonprofit leaders who demonstrate authenticity, possess strong business acumen, and exhibit cultural alignment with an organization's mission. Although the comprehensive resource "Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations" by Agard (2011) fails to address authentic nonprofit leaders, it briefly touches on authenticity-related issues like communicating vision and values. Despite various white papers emphasizing the importance of authenticity in nonprofit leadership, scholarly databases like Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest offer only limited references to authenticity in the context of nonprofit organizations (Gilstrap, White, Spradlin, 2015). This lack of empirical research on authentic nonprofit leadership is concerning, especially given the perceived deficit in nonprofit leadership. Nonprofit organizations often struggle to cultivate the essential traits of authentic leadership. Therefore, exploring leadership styles, such as authentic leadership, can help identify the behaviors necessary for executives to embody authentic leadership in nonprofit organizations (Gilstrap et al., 2015; MacKie, 2016).

Practitioners have given little consideration to the application of the authentic leadership style in nonprofit organizations. Previous studies have explored authentic leadership in nonprofit

sports organizations (Takos et al., 2018) and the perception of stakeholders on authentic leadership in the strategic planning process (Rhine, 2015). Subsequent research has focused on leader behavior styles and follower job satisfaction within nonprofit organizations (Taylor, 2017), but there remains a lack of exploration into the leadership style development of executives in nonprofit management. Given these initial findings, it is important to investigate authentic leadership within nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit sector traditionally experiences a high rate of executive director turnover, compounded by the recent retirement of baby boomers, leading to a deficit in nonprofit organization leadership (Kuna & Nadiv, 2013). High attrition rates, coupled with a lack of succession planning within nonprofit organizations, pose challenges for practitioners (Kuna & Nadiv, 2013). Concerns have been raised by academic scholars and practitioners regarding nonprofit board behavior and the effectiveness of executive directors (Block, 2014).

It is widely recognized that authentic leadership skills are crucial for fostering ethical and morally conscious organizational cultures, serving as a critical factor for the survival of nonprofit organizations (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cottrill, Lopez, & Hoffman, 2014; George, 2007). However, the theory of authentic leadership continues to evolve. Recent unethical leadership and corporate scandals have compelled leaders to embrace this new leadership style to effectively lead nonprofit organizations (MacKie, 2016). Consequently, the specific changes that leaders must undergo to authentically lead nonprofit organizations are not yet well-defined, leaving many leaders uncertain about the requirements for authentic leadership (Nahavandi, 2015; Takos et al., 2018; Rhine, 2015). With the rise in unethical leadership and corporate scandals, there is a clear need to examine the validity of the authentic leadership style (Semedo, Coelho, & Ribeiro,

2017). Therefore, exploring this emerging leadership theory and its application in nonprofit organizations addresses a crucial gap in literature.

The role of leadership styles is crucial in understanding how to effectively lead nonprofit organizations (Nahavandi, 2015). African American executives have historically demonstrated an understanding of the requisite leadership styles for leading nonprofit organizations (Branche & Ford, 2022). Therefore, there is a need to explore the authentic leadership style of African American executives in the nonprofit sector. Moreover, while the concept of authenticity has gained significant theoretical traction in the business realm in recent decades, it has not been thoroughly examined in the context of African American executives in nonprofit organizations. With increasing attention to issues of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, there has been a surge in empirical research on these topics due to their perceived social, political, cultural, and economic implications (Atewologun, 2013). The underrepresentation of African Americans in leadership literature and senior positions within nonprofit organizations has been well-documented (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Little is known about the development of leadership styles among African Americans and how their leadership manifests in different organizational contexts (Milner, 2006). Therefore, studying the experiences of African American leaders in the nonprofit sector is crucial, as an authentic leadership style can have far-reaching effects on various aspects of organizational performance, including ascension to senior-level positions (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016).

II.4 Self-Identity in African Americans

Achieving authenticity is a lifelong journey that cannot be reduced to a series of fleeting events in one's life. Each individual's path to authenticity is unique, and therefore, the outcome of this process differs for everyone. It's important to recognize that authenticity isn't merely about self-fulfillment or introspection. It cannot be simplified as individualistic or ego-driven.

Authenticity goes hand in hand with an awareness of others and the broader world. Although all individuals are navigating these two realms, not everyone fully embraces this journey. Rebecca Erickson (1994) argues that the self and society are interconnected, describing them as "two sides of the same coin" (Erickson 1994, p. 27). This social psychological perspective emphasizes that "self reflects society and society reflects the self" (Erickson 1994, p. 27), illustrating their intimate connection. The concept of self encompasses self-awareness, self-esteem, self-acknowledgment, and self-perception, and it's inherently intertwined with society, as society emerges whenever people come together.

The intricate interplay between the individual and society, and the concept of authenticity in relation to society, is deeply rooted in the fact that society is constantly evolving. Throughout history, humans have established various types of societies, categorized by sociologists and anthropologists into six fundamental types based on their level of technology: "hunting and gathering societies," "pastoral societies," "horticultural societies," "agricultural societies," "industrial societies," and "post-industrial societies" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2016). Even in our modern post-industrial societies, numerous designations such as "consumer societies," "service societies," "mass media societies," and "information societies" have emerged (Erickson 1994, p. 28). The evolution of these societies has significantly impacted the understanding of authenticity, as its definition is closely linked to each social context. However, the relationship between the self, society, and authenticity remains complex and challenging to comprehend. Authenticity is often achieved when individuals can meet their own expectations or commitments to themselves (Erickson 1994, p. 32), with these expectations being shaped by the social and cultural norms of society.

Racial markers immediately communicate the groups to which individuals belong. For instance, a Caucasian person being led by a Black or Brown person can readily discern typical differences based solely on skin color. This dynamic also applies to Caucasian leaders of Black and Brown individuals. To secure the support of their respective followers, leaders who differ visibly from those they lead must highlight shared similarities rather than differences. Remaining authentic while leading a group one doesn't perfectly align with can pose challenges if doing so emphasizes one's uniqueness and ways in which they differ from the majority of their followers (Atewologun, 2013).

African American leaders often draw the conclusion that many leadership theories, especially that which is focus on authentic leadership, is not studied or written with them in mind. Understanding authenticity for individuals of color can be approached through the concept of "double consciousness" (DuBois, 1903). DuBois posits that due to historical, structural, and societal factors, African Americans are unable to experience their own consciousness in isolation, but rather through the lens of "the other." This presents a challenge for those seeking to act authentically, as double consciousness not only influences their true self-expression but also how it is perceived by others (Landkin, 2021). DuBois' description suggests that African Americans cannot perceive themselves as a singular identity or "true self," as proposed in authentic leadership theory. Instead, their sense of self is initially influenced by external perceptions and further complicated by the integration of their African and American identities into a unified "self" (Crenshaw, 1990). Crenshaw's notion of "intersectionality" further elucidates this experience of self as encompassing multiple identities, creating complexities in comprehending one's self-identity within the societal norms of American society and beyond.

One of the significant challenges associated with authentic leadership theory lies in its predominant representation from the perspective of the dominant race and culture. The theory often operates under the assumption that the standard for leadership, or the "norm," (Lorde, 2017) aligns with characteristics exhibited by straight, white men. Consequently, when a man of this demographic presents his "true self" as a leader, it tends to be perceived as acceptable or commendable. However, individuals who deviate from this alleged norm – such as women, individuals of African, Latinx, or Asian descent, or those identifying as LGBTQ – are frequently unable to afford the luxury of authenticity while in leadership roles. The possibility of projecting authenticity and being recognized as a competent leader constitutes yet another privilege that straight Caucasian men tend to unquestionably enjoy. This phenomenon becomes evident in instances such as the labeling of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as an "angry Black woman" when she confronted overt misogyny, the interpretation of Hilary Clinton's display of emotion as a "sign of weakness," and the dismissal of Angela Merkel's concerns about COVID-related fatalities as "hysterical." In each case, despite these women alignment to their authentic selves, such alignment was perceived as impeding the perception of their leadership abilities by their followers.

In the realm of leading and leadership scholarship, if we place value on authenticity, it may be more beneficial to shift the focus away from the concept of a "true self" and consider how individuals purposefully present themselves as leaders. This approach draws upon existentialist perspectives on authenticity, where being authentic is an ongoing journey that involves aligning one's actions with their aspirational self, rather than being solely concerned with how others perceive them based on their race (Lankin, 2021). For leaders striving to act authentically, the essential question then becomes, "How can I navigate my various intersecting

identities in a manner that reflects who I strive to be and meets the current needs of the situation?"

African Americans expressing one's "true self" when performing the role of leader is a luxury they often cannot afford. In the world of nonprofit management, there is an expectation for leaders to demonstrate a degree of authenticity related to their commitment to an organization's mission. When considering executive leadership within the nonprofit sector, African Americans wrestle with the realities of whether or not they can be their true selves within the workplace given the existence of systemic racism that continues to permeate throughout society, the United States of America, and our world. As much as many try to ignore this fact, race is an unequivocal aspect of self-identity. Without the acknowledgement of how race and ethnicity impact one's view of themselves and how they can navigate as an individual professionally within the organization's culture, we will never address the challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the nonprofit sector and provide the sense of belonging that is deserving of every nonprofit organization leader.

II.5   Summary

The absence of inquiry into authentic leadership within the research-based nonprofit literature is notable. Riggio and Orr (2004) did not reference authentic leadership in their collection of chapters focused on improving nonprofit leadership, preferring instead to include transformational leadership as a singular effects-driven theory amidst chapters on technical and management knowledge. Similarly, The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management (Renz & Herman, 2010) primarily emphasized legal, technical, and management knowledge building for leaders, with no substantial discussion of authentic leadership. Even the comprehensive collection titled Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations (Agard, 2011) failed to include any references regarding authentic nonprofit leaders, despite occasional implications of

authenticity issues. Notably, a Google search yielded only white papers referencing the need for authenticity in nonprofit leadership and proposing borrowing from standard authenticity literature. This evident dearth of empirical investigation into authentic nonprofit leadership is disconcerting given the perceived and growing nonprofit leadership deficit contrasted against the growth in nonprofit leadership.

The examination of African American executives in nonprofit organizations regarding authentic leadership remains scarce in current literature. Although authenticity has emerged as a widely discussed leadership concept in the business realm, its assessment within the context of African American leadership in non-profit organizations is notably absent. Simultaneously, the increasing societal, political, cultural, and economic significance of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion has led to heightened empirical inquiry in this area. It is essential to note that authenticity is not a trait that can be ascribed by others, nor is it readily observable within nonprofit management. The perception of "acting authentic" fundamentally contradicts the essence of authenticity (Atewologun, 2013).

Consequently, an individual's self-perception of their authenticity holds greater weight than external evaluations. According to Erickson (1994), self-evaluation or self-reported measures are therefore deemed the most suitable methods for assessing authenticity. This research seeks to explore the experiences of African Americans in nonprofit management, aiming to offer organizations actionable recommendations for fostering an inclusive organizational culture. Examining the concepts of authentic leadership, self-identity, and professional experiences and events, the study will advance research and literature on the leadership traits of African Americans leading nonprofit organizations and deepen the understanding of how lived experiences impact their appreciation for and journey toward authentic leadership. The study also

proposes to identify strategies to increase the professional success of African Americans as executive leaders in nonprofit management.

III   THEORETICAL FRAMING

III.1 From Control to Drift

To frame and connect the study to theory, the research will draw on the integration of and relationship between control and drift to understand how African American executives in nonprofit management may desire to control the demonstration of authenticity while an awareness of self-identity as well as lived experiences can cause a drift toward an authentic leadership style.

The theory was initially introduced in the book "From Control to Drift" by Ciborra et al. (2000). The book outlines a cycle in which firms aim to control the management of technology adoption but end up experiencing drifting due to various factors such as turbulent environments, implementation tactics, the power of the installed base, technology complexity, side-effects, surprises, and user resistance and creativity (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). According to Ciborra et al. (2000), limits to learning and the existing formative context (Ciborra & Lanzara, 1994) perpetuate this cycle and reinforce the perceived need for control. The theory argues that this view restricts our understanding of the world and hinders us from recognizing other dimensions of technology (Ciborra, 2002). It expands upon the rational science view, which leads us to misunderstand or overlook the world as experienced in the daily lives of agents, users, designers, and managers as they introduce and enforce geometrical models to fit the world (Ciborra, 2002). While attempting to control and plan technology in this manner, it often deviates from the plans due to side effects (Hanseth et al., 2001) and surprises (Ciborra, 1994b). Ciborra asserts that when confined by specific formative contexts (Ciborra and Lanzara, 1994), humans have limited innovative capabilities. However, coincidence, breakdowns, and human coping mechanisms can lead to drifting and result in more innovative outcomes.

Drifting can be seen as the result of two related processes (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). The first involves the adaptability of technology, as users and experts gradually explore and take

advantage of system features and potentials (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). The second process encompasses the continuous flow of interventions, experimentation, and improvisation within the workflow, shaping our perception of the entire system life cycle (Ciborra, 2002, p. 87). Consequently, Ciborra suggests shifting from control to drift in our practices, enabling organizations to embrace human innovation and cultivate technology rather than simply controlling or designing it (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008).

III.2 Between Control and Drift

Tjørnehøj and Mathiassen (2008) challenged existing theories by demonstrating, through their study, that control and drift can interact positively to influence the adoption of technology. They presented a case study at Smallsoft (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008), suggesting that rather than being opposing management philosophies, control and drift are complementary and intrinsically related in a dialectical relationship (Bjerknes, 1991; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Mathiassen, 1998; Robey and Boudreau, 1999). They found that the contradiction between control and drift was particularly useful in understanding the ten years of technology adoption at Smallsoft. The "unthinkable" innovation, the Grassroots Approach, provided management with a sense of control while allowing ample space for negotiating new practices based on everyday coping and survival strategies developed by engaged employees. While management still exercised control through prioritization, resource allocation, expert appointments, and monthly reporting, they also embraced drifting to facilitate the development and sharing of successful innovations. This portrayal of the interplay between control and drift illustrates how both opposites positively influenced ongoing technology adoption at Smallsoft (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008).

III.3 Professional Experiences and Events

Authenticity in the workplace pertains to the extent to which an employee's values, beliefs, and characteristics are aligned with their work environment (Harter, 2002). This concept

encompasses a tripartite structure, comprising alignment between one's true self and conscious awareness (self-alienation), the expression of emotions and engagement in behaviors consistent with one's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings (authentic living), and the impact of various experiences on an individual's behavior (social influence) (Wood et al, 2008). Notably, authenticity is regarded as a state rather than a trait, and it varies based on the work culture, environment, or role (Fleeson and Wilt, 2010). It is evident that an employee's workplace culture or environment significantly influences their propensity to exhibit authenticity at work.

The presence of psychological safety in the workplace fosters an environment in which employees feel empowered to express their ideas and contribute fully while being true to themselves, without the fear of negative repercussions on their well-being, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Brown (2012) highlights the significance of courage and trust in the context of vulnerability, particularly in admitting one's mistakes and viewing them as learning opportunities, reliant on the assurance that their environment will not subject them to shame. When employees experience psychological safety in the workplace, they are more likely to exhibit their genuine selves in their professional endeavors.

The experience of distinctiveness can elicit stereotype threat and lead individuals to engage in inauthentic or false behaviors in the workplace. False behaviors manifest when individuals modify their innate conduct to align with the cultural stereotypes prevalent in the dominant social group, even if conforming adversely affects their performance (Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003). Such conformity and inauthentic conduct at work are a response to perceived workplace threats, including both perceived and actual discrimination such as ostracism, lack of promotion, non-selection for employment, harassment, biased job assignments, or termination (Baker and Lucas, 2017).

Prior studies provide evidence in support of conformity behaviors. For instance, research analyzing hiring interview outcomes reveals that African American and Hispanic job seekers tend to receive less favorable evaluations compared to other racial groups (Huffcutt & Roth, 1998). In some instances, discrimination in interview processes may not be overt, but the interviewer exhibits less warmth towards minority candidates, leading to diminished performance and subsequent non-selection (Hebl et al, 2002). In response, African American and Hispanic candidates are more likely than other groups to engage in code switching during interviews or adopt other behaviors signaling in-group affiliation. Code switching, which entails switching between languages, is prevalent in workplace contexts, particularly in those with limited diversity. Individuals from ethnic minority groups often feel compelled to mirror the behaviors and mannerisms of others in their workplace to ensure fair treatment and equal standards. For many members of the African American community, this involves oscillating between their authentic selves in personal settings, such as among friends and family, by using their native language, dialect, or language register, and adopting a different persona at work or seeking preemptive measures to mitigate discriminatory treatment (Koch et al, 2001).

The influence of an individual's racial and ethnic background, as well as the culture of their regional area, local community, and extended family, can significantly impact their professional experiences and decisions. Cultural values and expectations play a pivotal role in shaping various aspects of individuals' lives, including their choice of occupations and career paths. The field of multicultural career counseling has emerged as a specialized area to address these influences when providing counseling to clients and students (Anon., 2019). It is important to note that while we cannot attribute the predominant characteristics of a culture to any one

individual, being aware of the values and expectations of one's culture can provide insights into how professional choices are made.

Race also exerts a powerful influence on professional experiences and opportunities through structural racism, which is initially manifested in policies and then perpetuated through practices integrated into labor market institutions. Census reports have revealed that while African American individuals make up 11.5% of the United States workforce (Toossi, 2009), they represent only 6.4% of middle and lower management positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010, Table 5). Prior to the passing of the Title VII amendment to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1991, workplaces engaged in active discrimination against the recruitment and hiring of individuals based on race and other social identities, including sex, religion, and nationality (Belton, 1978). Although Title VII and Affirmative Action policies have facilitated the entry of African American adults into workplaces, these legislations have not adequately supported their advancement or placement in high-status occupations.

Despite laws against discriminatory hiring practices, numerous studies indicate that African Americans face disadvantages due to subtle forms of mistreatment. Research by Rosette, Akinola, and Ma (2016) suggests that indicators of one's racial identity can result in fewer interview calls and limited opportunities for mentorship. Studies on identical resumes show that individuals with "Black" sounding names receive fewer callbacks and are rated as less qualified compared to those with "White" sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, & Jun, 2016). Moreover, restrictions on hiring formerly incarcerated individuals disproportionately affect African Americans (Agan & Starr, 2016). African Americans also encounter racial stereotypes and biases regarding their intelligence across different occupations and industries. In corporate settings, perceptions of African Americans as

lacking "professionalism" (Brown-Iannuzzi, Payne, & Trawalter, 2012) and doubts about their competence may impede their career advancement opportunities.

The experiences and events faced by African Americans, including discrimination in the workforce, are significant and multifaceted. These challenges encompass issues such as limited access to opportunities and concerns about the racial perceptions of their resumes. Many African American professionals encounter obstacles that hinder their ability to authentically express themselves in the workplace without facing repercussions, often finding themselves as the sole representative of their community in their workplaces. These professionals navigate numerous daily hurdles, both small and substantial, that impact their career growth and financial stability.

The professional landscape for African Americans is frequently characterized by pervasive biases and discrimination. While there has been some recognition of the profound inequities within U.S. society, data indicates that these injustices disproportionately affect people of color. These disparities are evident in both the workforce and the nonprofit sector. Over the past 25 years, there has been a diversification of the U.S. labor force and nonprofit sector, with an increasing representation of gender and ethnically diverse individuals. This trend is projected to continue over the next three decades (Cox, 1994). However, despite this critical shift, leadership positions in nonprofit organizations are still predominantly held by Caucasian men (Hickman & Sorenson, 2014), indicating that the efforts to diversify nonprofit leadership have not fully bridged the gap.

The impact of these racially driven experiences and events in the workplace for African Americans is deeply rooted in systemic racism and can be triggering due to the long-standing history of discrimination that African Americans have endured throughout their centuries-long presence in America.

III.4 Theoretical Framework

The proposed conceptual framework postulates a cyclical relationship between control and drift, wherein individuals strive for management control while contending with behavioral drifting attributed to turbulent environments, implementation tactics, complexity, side-effects, surprises, resistance, and creativity (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). This framework is leveraged to explore how self-identity, professional experiences, and external events influence the development of an authentic leadership style among African American leaders in nonprofit organizations. While this theory is commonly employed in the context of technology implementations within engineering, management, and software firms, for the purposes of this study, it elucidates the cycle in which African American executives in nonprofit organizations seek to assimilate into social, societal, and organizational norms, leading to a drift away from control towards the embodiment of an authentic leadership style as a result of lived experiences and external events (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008).

In Ciborra's (2002) view, control is rooted in a rational understanding of the world, with managers using simplistic theoretical models to make decisions and guide practices. In contrast, drift highlights the unintended consequences, resourcefulness, improvisation, contextual influences, and day-to-day struggles of individuals, leading reality to deviate from plans and opening up new possibilities and innovations that would not have been considered otherwise (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). In the context of authentic leadership among African Americans in nonprofit organizations, the impulse to control the level of authenticity one displays, driven by the need to conform to societal perceptions of African Americans, represents a simplistic approach to navigating the nonprofit industry and maintaining a level of success that appeases others. However, drift emphasizes the journey of self-discovery and the lessons learned from professional experiences, paving the way towards an authentic leadership style.
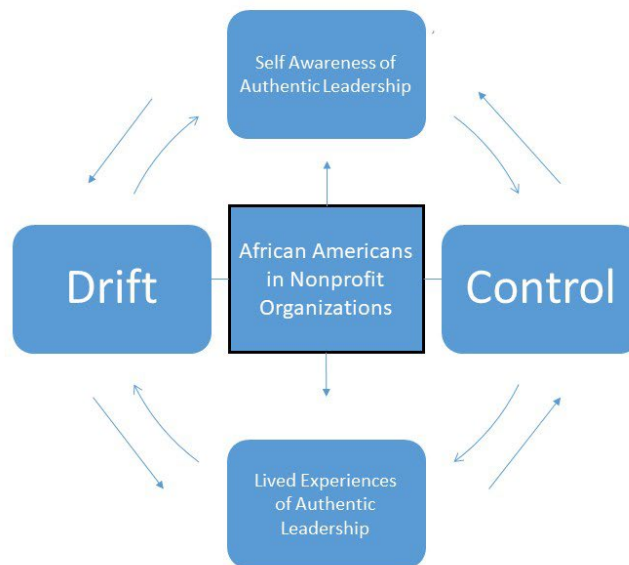
Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Table 3 Theorical Framework Definitions

Concepts	Definitions
Control	Regulate the level of authenticity one demonstrates due to the need to conform to the views of how others perceive African Americans
Self-Identity	How you identify and define yourself; how you experience your own isolated self-consciousness
Lived Experiences	Events that impact one's leadership style, professional development, and behaviors; jobs and positions held; confrontation or life altering experiences; impactful interactions with dominant race and gender; unexpected events or shifts in behavior due to confinement of social norms.
Drift	Response to gaining awareness of self-identity and learning from professional lived experience and events.
Authentic Leadership	"A process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, resulting in greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003)."

IV METHODOLOGY

IV.1 Research Design

In this study, a phenomenological method and a multiple case study approach were utilized to explore the lived experiences and development of African American leaders within nonprofit organizations as they evolve into authentic leaders. The phenomenological method prioritizes the experiential and lived aspects of a specific construct, emphasizing how the phenomenon is experienced in the present moment rather than its subsequent interpretation or meaning (Alase, 2017). Following Yin's approach (2018), the research design entailed a comprehensive literature review to identify opportunities for contributing to the study of authentic leadership development among African Americans in nonprofit management. Building on previous research, I developed a conceptualized framework, providing the basis for the research method. Given the limited research examining African Americans perspectives on authentic leadership, I adopted a multi-case embedded design that consists of six African American nonprofit executives. Multiple cases offer opportunities for replication logic in which cases can serve to confirm or disconfirm inferences and are usually more reliable and generalizable than single-case studies (Graebner & Eisenhardt, 2004; Herriott & Firestone, 1983; R. K. Yin, 2018).

The multi-case approach expanded upon previous research examining authentic leadership for African Americans in nonprofit management by shedding light on the relational challenges and opportunities African Americans experience as executives of nonprofits and how they drift into authentic leadership through an awareness of self-identity, professional experiences, and events. I approached the research though an interpretive epistemological lens, which permitted the uncovering of implicit assumptions and perspectives of the socially constructed relationship (Myers, 2019) between control and drift to understand how African American executives in nonprofit organizations may desire to control demonstration of authenticity while an awareness of

self-identity as well as lived experiences can cause a drift toward an authentic leadership style.
Figure 2, adopted by Myers (2019), provides the components of research design and the proposed
choices I make for each component.
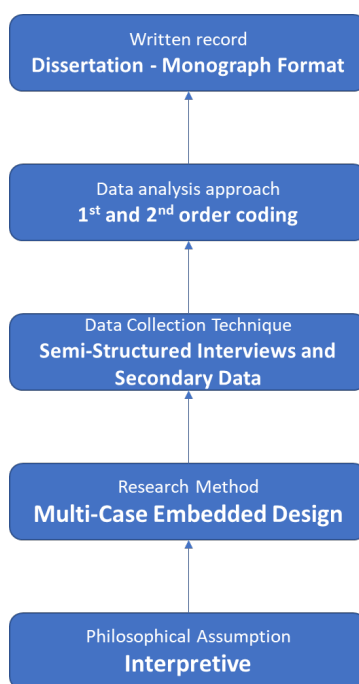
Figure 2 Qualitative research design (Myers, 2019)

Qualitative design offers a comprehensive understanding of an understudied population
within leadership literature (Yin, 2015). Case studies are essential as they provide a descriptive
understanding of an event or phenomenon and are particularly useful when involving multiple
participants (Brady & Collier, 2010). Utilizing case studies assists practitioners in both the public
and private sectors in understanding the historical factors that contribute to the development of
an authentic leadership style. Furthermore, case studies help both practitioners and researchers in
discerning the impact of different leadership styles. A multiple case study approach involves
organizing around two or more cases, collecting data through interviews, observations,
documents, and artifacts (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), this approach is beneficial for
comparing and analyzing case studies, offering more analytical advantages than a single case

study. This approach juxtaposes comparable cases to illustrate similarities and differences. By utilizing this method to explore leadership style development in African American executives, the researcher can extensively investigate emerging themes from the interviews. A multiple case study analysis (Yin, 2009) is especially effective as it allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American participants as they develop into authentic leaders (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

IV.2 Data Sources

The research study utilized a variety of data sources to investigate the research question, focusing primarily on qualitative insights obtained from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The researcher sought to understand how African American executives in nonprofit organizations strive to develop authentic leadership qualities through their lived experiences and self-identity awareness. The study involved six participants (3 males and 3 females) holding positions as vice presidents or C-suite level executives in nonprofit organizations. To ensure the selection of relevant cases, participants were required to currently serve in an executive role in nonprofit management, self-identify as African American, and demonstrate the development or pursuit of an authentic leadership style.

IV.3 Data Collection

A case study methodology was applied with targeted interviews (Myers 2013) with participants. Multiple interviews were conducted to illuminate specifics from the perspective of the participants (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Secondary data included various sources, including interviews, collected documents and publicly available data. Collected documents included material that participants provided in the study such as their curriculum vitae, strategies, plans, and assessments. Publicly available data included research, news reporting, and commentaries about the participants.

Before conducting individual case study interviews, I initiated review sessions with experienced African American executives from nonprofit organizations to 1) solicit input on the questions prepared for the case study interviews and 2) seek recommendations on other areas to explore which can generate additional insights. Each review session lasted approximately 30 minutes over a teleconference. Upon completion of the review sessions, I developed separate, yet related interview guides consisting of 20-25 open-ended questions specific to the research question. The semi-structured questions allowed for a free flow conversation with each informant and solicited both retrospective and real-time accounts by informants (Graebner & Eisenhardt, 2004). This engaged scholarship approach included participants bringing a holistic perspective of their awareness of self-identity, the impact of lived experiences on their leadership style and how they define and develop into authentic leaders. (Van de Ven, 2007).

Additionally, before beginning research, I established Research Protocols and gained approval from the IRB. The research protocol included various components such as the project summary, rationale and background information, literature references, research goals and objectives, study design, methodology, data management and statistical design, and anticipated study outcomes. It also encompassed essential project management research documents like data management logs, budget information, and informed consent forms. Subsequently, I submitted the necessary information to the Georgia State University Internal Review Board for approval to conduct the research. The research study focuses on African Americans currently holding senior executive positions within nonprofit organizations. A purposeful sampling approach was employed, enabling the researcher to select the sample deliberately. Recruitment involved sending emails to African American executives of nonprofit organizations, providing them with an overview of the research and all the necessary information required by the IRB. Prospective

participants seeking further details or expressing interest in the research study were encouraged to contact the researcher via email to address any additional questions.

Once individuals agreed to participate in the study, a telephone consultation was scheduled to screen African American executives of nonprofit organizations. To be eligible for the research, each individual must answer the following questions during a pre-interview: 1) Do you identify as African American? 2) Do you currently hold a senior executive position within a nonprofit organization? 3) Are you currently developing or demonstrating an authentic leadership style? African American individuals who meet these criteria and wish to participate in the study received a follow-up email with a consent form attached. They were asked to print, sign, and return the consent form to the researcher. Upon receipt and review of the form, a video conference interview was arranged.

During the study, participants took part in two interviews, which were carried out via video conferencing with their consent. The interviews were digitally recorded for data collection purposes and lasted no longer than 90 minutes each. The researcher took notes during the interviews. The data was collected through interviews with six senior African American executives from nonprofit organizations, using a semi-structured interview guide along with probing questions to gain further relevant insights (Brady & Collier, 2010). According to Yin (2015), the inclusion of probing questions allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of each participant's firsthand experiences.

Throughout the data collection phase, I took measures to minimize informant biases by engaging multiple African Americans in executive positions at nonprofit organizations and employing triangulation methods using supplementary data. To ensure that informants felt comfortable providing accurate and unfiltered data, I guaranteed their confidentiality through the

informed consent documents required by the Institutional Review Board. I also allowed informants to review the summary of the case interview's findings, providing them with the opportunity to make corrections or add information. Follow-up communication with case study participants was conducted via phone and email to ensure that any necessary clarifications were made, thus enhancing the rigor and reliability of the research findings.

Table 4 Interview Questions

Section	Interview Questions
A. Pre-Interview Qualifying Questions	1. Do you identify as an African American? 2. Do you currently hold a senior executive position for a nonprofit organization? 3. Are you currently progressing toward or have you evolved to an authentic leadership style?
B. Self-Identity	1. Without telling us about your career and resume, tell us about yourself? 2. How do see yourself as African American and how has it influenced your career in nonprofit management and your leadership style? 3. What three words would you choose to describe yourself? 4. Are you able to act and behave as your authentic self in the context of being an African American in your role as a nonprofit executive? 5. Have you ever faced a professional challenge because of your race? If so, how have or do you navigate it?
C. Nonprofit Management	1. Tell us about your career journey in nonprofit management. 2. What led you to a career in nonprofit management? 3. What decisions or actions did you take to solidify your career in nonprofit management? 4. What are your top five core values as an African American executive in nonprofit management and how do they impact you as a leader? 5. What professional experiences and events (personal or societal) influence your role as an African American leader? 6. What are some of the common pitfalls that African Americans encounter in nonprofit management and how have you navigated around or managed to overcome them?

D. Authentic Leadership	1. In your life, what does being authentic mean? 2. How would you define your leadership style as an authentic leader? 3. How important do you see the role of authenticity in your leadership practice as an African American? 4. What do you think are the behaviors of an authentic leader? And why? 5. Are you more efficient as a leader when you engage from a position of authenticity? 6. How does leading with authenticity contribute to African American nonprofit executives' career failure or success? 7. Which principles and values have guided or sustained you as an authentic leader? 8. What are the challenges being an African American leader in nonprofit management and how have you navigated them? 9. Have you ever paid a price for your authenticity as a leader? Was it worth it? 10. How would you characterize a successful leader within the context of an African American executive in nonprofit management? 11. Reflecting on your leadership journey, what would you do differently regarding being authentic? 12. Would you as a successful African American leader in nonprofit management recommend being authentic to aspiring Black leaders? Why or why not? 13. What steps can an aspiring African American executive in nonprofit management take today, tomorrow, and over the next years to develop their authentic leadership?

IV.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative analyses were conducted on the collected data to fulfil the study objectives (Myers 2013). I generated the research findings and contributions based on the empirical accounts from African American nonprofit executives who have broad and deep experience in an evolution to an authentic leadership style. Following M. B. Miles and Huberman (1994), interviews were recorded, and transcribed. I created a contact summary report for each informant detailing the main issues, themes, insights, and follow-up items. The findings and implications of the case study account were based on dominant and consistent themes expressed by the informants and through

a first-order analysis. I then derived a framework from conceptualizing the perspectives into more theoretical themes by employing a second-order analysis, providing insights for domains beyond this study. The analysis included direct quotes from informants to provide rich insights and a human element to the research.

The case study method facilitated the analysis of interview data through the development of individual case studies that synthesized interview transcripts and archival data. I conducted within-case analysis to focus on establishing constructs and relationships, as well as to describe the experiences of each African American nonprofit executive. Upon completion of all cases, cross-case analysis was initiated using established techniques to identify similar constructs and relationships across multiple cases. I anticipated the need to refine emerging relationships through replication logic and to revisit the data iteratively to ensure consistent patterns across separate cases, utilizing charts and tables to aid in comparisons (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, Table 5 outlines the four tests of validity and reliability for qualitative research (R. Yin) and the strategies I will implement to address each area.

Table 5 Validity and Reliability Tests and Tactics

Test	Case Study Tactic	Phase of Design
Construct Validity	▪ Multiple sources of data (interviews and supplemental data) ▪ Have informant review their case analysis	▪ Data Collections Phase
Internal Validity	▪ 1st order and 2nd order coding analysis ▪ Address rival explanations	▪ Data Analysis Phase
External Validity	▪ Use of theory to generalize beyond each case study ▪ Multiple Cases (6 cases)	▪ Research Design
Reliability	▪ Establish a case study protocol and NVivo database	▪ Data Collection

In qualitative case study research, data is analyzed by obtaining rich, detailed descriptions of each case. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and sent to each participant for review, a process commonly referred to as member checking (Yin, 2015). Participants were asked to review the transcript, make any necessary changes, or approve it as is. If changes were required, participants were requested to note them within the document and return the amended file to the researcher. Upon receiving the feedback, the researcher made the necessary changes. If no changes were needed, participants were asked to confirm with the researcher that the transcript accurately captured their statements. After gathering the information, the researcher transcribed the data using NVivo®, a computer software that aids in organizing, sorting, and analyzing unstructured and non-numerical data. NVivo® facilitates the creation of easy-to-read reports and visuals, allowing the researcher to analyze the information coherently and efficiently. Once the data was categorized appropriately by NVivo®, the researcher analyzed it to identify themes related to how African American executives of nonprofit organizations described their experiences in developing an authentic leadership style.

In the analysis, the researcher examined the data to identify significant patterns aligned with Yin's (2015) case study approach. This process involved three rounds of coding. First, open coding was used to generate a comprehensive list of potential themes. Second, axial coding was employed to refine the themes, take note of their frequency, incorporate additional themes if necessary, and assess whether some initial themes needed to be combined. Lastly, selective coding was applied to find quotes or examples that exemplified the identified themes. Various data sources were utilized for the analysis, including interviews, collected documents, and publicly available data. The collected documents comprised materials provided by the

participants, such as their curriculum vitae, strategies, plans, and assessments. Publicly available

data encompassed research articles, news reports, and commentaries related to the participants.

V   RESULTS

V.1   Introduction

Asking how African Americans in nonprofit organizations come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership, we examined how an awareness of self-identity and professional experiences and events can cause an evolution toward authentic leadership style for African American executives in nonprofit organization. To address the research question, six individuals (three males and three females) in the position of vice president or C-suite level executives of nonprofit organizations participated in the study. Qualitative analyses were conducted on the collected data to fulfill the study objectives. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), interviews were recorded, transcribed, and after each interview. I created a contact summary report for each informant detailing the main issues, themes, insights, and follow-up items. The cases were analyzed both within-case and cross-case. The within-case analysis focused on developing constructs and relationships, describing the process experienced by each African American nonprofit executive.

V.2   Case Analyses
Thomas

Thomas reflected on his identity and leadership development journey. He viewed himself as a leader, shaped by a common life experience that informs his viewpoint. Thomas described himself as a man of faith, a parent, a husband of 25 years, a son. Throughout his career, Thomas encountered obstacles related to racial dynamics in executive leadership and nonprofit administration. He tried to be genuine despite the complexities of his identity, understanding that to avoid prejudice and preconceptions, he occasionally needed to soften his approach. Thomas has held government, consultancy, health education, and youth development positions. His entrepreneurial concept bridged the gap between the nonprofit and private sectors, driven by his

enthusiasm for enabling charities. He is currently the CEO of a hospital authority and still fights for social reform and the community's welfare.

Thomas revealed fundamental principles that directed his leadership and he characterized himself as passionate, devoted, and multifaceted. His philosophies were "to thine own self be true," and "always remember your why," as well as a dedication to excellence. His ideals were completed by keeping his inner calm and putting understanding first. When considering professional difficulties, Thomas recalled several challenges, including an upsetting incident in which a nonprofit organization failed to provide traumatized children with mental health services, resulting in a substantial funding loss. Even though Thomas faced obstacles that stemmed from racial prejudices, he recognized that these obstacles were indirect since people do not always notice how race plays a part in their perceptions and opinions of African Americans. Thomas tackled the subject of authenticity, emphasizing the necessity of caution when navigating circumstances and considering cultural norms and unconscious prejudices. He recognized the challenge of being an African American leader who was thought to be brilliant but not necessarily seen as an equal by everyone. Despite these obstacles, Thomas remained persistent in his commitment to honesty, understanding the possible consequences and the significance of remaining loyal to oneself.

In a pivotal moment, Thomas recalled leading an organization that lost a million dollars and broke up a team to be true to himself and his values. He emphasized the importance of upholding one's principles in the face of difficulty by admitting that, given the option, he would choose the same course of action again. When Thomas reflected on his leadership experience, he emphasized the need to listen and seek understanding, and he wished he had been more cautious about opening up too soon in some circumstances. This well-considered perspective captures

Thomas' dedication to resilience, authenticity, and an ongoing self-exploration and leadership development process.

Caroline

Caroline reflected on her journey as an African American leader in a nonprofit organization. When considering her African American identity, Caroline recognized the label applied to her within the framework of the African American experience in the United States. She felt that conversations regarding race in her family were not as important to her identity as impressions from the outside world. Because of her upbringing and experiences in largely Caucasian environments, Caroline's awareness of her African heritage coexisted with her attachments to the United States.

Caroline described herself as a combination of outspokenness and introversion. She was a person who spoke her mind and valued honesty because she was driven by a strong sense of justice and a keen knowledge of right and wrong. As a leader, Caroline discussed how she handled hiring and team relationships, stressing the value of a varied pool of abilities. When confronted with societal injustices, Caroline's African American identity came into focus. Her need to act was a result of seeing abuse or disregard for individuals who resembled her. Caroline's identity became a call to confront injustice and stand up for individuals who shared her past instead of concentrating on personal experiences.

Speaking about the idea of code-switching, Caroline said she never changed her conduct since she was in a mostly Caucasian environment. She was able to be real, even addressing moments of surprise when her physical presence violated stereotypes because of her background and sense of ease in her skin. Caroline's early involvement in adolescent health advocacy revealed her voice and public speaking abilities early in her career. This served as the starting

point for her work in fundraising, where she interacted with affluent Caucasian sponsors and frequently dismissed prejudices. The emotional high point was working with a renowned civil rights leader who confirmed her sense of mission and calling.

As Caroline moved from fundraising at private universities to the nonprofit sector, she encountered injustices and frustrations. The change was from working with prominent and affluent Caucasian males who gave large sums of philanthropic funds to interacting with "ladies who lunch" and made donations to their friends' charities. Her approach to leadership was characterized by her dedication to honesty, decency, compassion, and modesty. When asked if she has ever paid a price for being authentic, Caroline responds that the true price would be to be inauthentic. Maintaining her integrity and moral standards was essential, emphasizing that betraying one's true self has a greater cost than any judgment or repercussion from the outside world.

Michael

Michael considers himself someone who came from a loving family and two great parents who grounded him in the work of supporting young people. But as a young person, he made bad decisions in spite of having a strong home environment and paid the ultimate price of going to jail. This experience changed the trajectory of his life and created a space for him to find his passion and pursue his dream of going to college and fulfilling his commitment to helping others. As a result, Michael has worked in nonprofit management for his entire adult life. He sees his commitment to serving young people as something he is called to do and a part of his identity. Michael, a social entrepreneur, discussed his commitment to end poverty and shared his story of personal struggles, jail, and mentorship-led rehabilitation. His devotion to helping young people and finding solutions to societal problems was evident in his work with nonprofits.

Characterized as optimistic, determined, and modest, Michael emphasized the significance of narrative and genuineness. Michael describes hope, humility, and service and a significant part of his self-identity.

He was skilled at code-switching and negotiated the difficulties of being an African American man in America while continuously using his narrative to serve his cause. Michael used partnership and relationships to overcome the racial disparities in fundraising problems. His career in nonprofit management began as an administrative assistant and went on to include program management, national leadership, and CEO roles. He emphasized dedication, hardwork, compassion, storytelling, and honesty as fundamental principles that formed his authentic style in various situations. Michael emphasized the value of authenticity in leadership, drawing from personal experiences, including incarceration and influential networks. His success as an African American leader in the nonprofit sector could be attributed to his ability to effectively engage a wide range of audiences, close gaps, and lead authentically. He believes authenticity is defined as being yourself and not being uncomfortable with who you are or what you are uniquely good at as a leader. Michael articulated his ability to remain true to who he is being able to share his storytelling even when it may not be comfortable to do it, He shares that sense of transparency could help someone which is a demonstration of authenticity.

Michael feels he has demonstrated authentic leadership throughout his entire career but wished he would have received mentorship sooner in his professional journey. He now has an executive coach and also sought counseling for the first time. He believes these practices continue to support him in showing up as an authentic leader. Lastly, he expressed that receiving more formalized mentorship from other leaders of color could have helped avoid some pitfalls in his career.

Stephanie

Stephanie reflected on her life and analyzed the development of her self-identity from being a proud youngster growing up in Jamaica to acknowledging and appreciating her African American roots in the United States. She is a mother who feels that her identity is reflected in her daughter who she feels is a more confident and a better version of herself. As someone evolving to an authentic leadership style, she is very goal oriented and loves to take on challenges. She describes herself as creative, goal directed, and flexible.

She sees herself as being in a space where she can be authentic as a leader. Stephanie is uninterested in occupying positions with nonprofit organizations where authenticity is not appreciated and cultivated in its employees. She has to be in spaces where she can show up in the fullness of her authentic self. Stephanie believes it is important for companies to provide a safe space that allows leaders to demonstrate authenticity. She conveys that transparency is the most important behavior to display to truly become an authentic leader. She is currently an executive with a nonprofit that truly allows her to show up to work in with her true identity exposed without any concern of repercussion or backlash. Her work path took her through public health, education, and nonprofit leadership, all driven by her creativity, goal-directed methods, and passion for change. She was raised in a non-confrontational environment and Stephanie had to emulate these techniques as a leader, which led to frustration and decreased success. Her core values as a leader are team oriented, collaboration, trust, integrity, and transparency. Stephanie also expressed the challenge of fundraising for African American executives in nonprofit management, especially when those that you are asking for funds from are not accustomed to building collaborative relationships with people of color.

She went through a life-changing experience after realizing the value of authenticity, speaking up against injustices and standing up for people having difficulties at work. Working with African American leaders purposefully, Stephanie considered the confidence and passion they inspired. Her leadership philosophy was cooperation, support, integrity, trust, and a positive outlook on obstacles. Stephanie believed it was worthwhile to speak up for her ideals, even though there were times when she expected to experience backlash from others when standing up for her team. Looking back on her path, Stephanie was thankful for the progress and appreciated the difficult lessons she learned to feel comfortable in her skin sooner. She understood the value of staying true to herself and accepting change when it makes sense. Stephanie emphasized the important lessons she learned along the journey while maintaining a strong relationship with her company despite racial obstacles and prejudices.

Kevin

Reflecting on his self-identity, career path, and the professional obstacles that molded him into a genuine African American nonprofit leader, Kevin shared his thoughts. Kevin expresses how much of his self-identity as being shaped by his childhood experiences. Growing up in the inner city, he was reared by his grandmother and suffered the absence of a father. He describes his personality as fun, energetic, and having a love for people. He believes demonstrating authenticity allows him to be uniquely different. He brings his personality and passion to everything that he does professionally while aligning with organizational mission, core values, and principles. He believes key factors in authentic leadership are to be hands-on, work closely with your team, and build genuine relationships.

Stressing the value of education for African Americans, he believed it was essential to gaining a place at the nonprofit corporate table. Kevin emphasized the value of authenticity,

describing himself as lively, enthusiastic, gregarious, informed, and endowed with character. Kevin felt that to stand out within the organization's mission and policies; he needed to bring his distinct personality and passion to his work. Kevin described a situation in which he had to deal with a project that was supposed to be about diversity but was lacking in diversity. His campaign resulted in a major project transformation, including adding a wider range of viewpoints. This incident made it clear how important it was to advocate for diversity.

Motivated by his love of youth development, he embarked on a 22-year nonprofit career that took him through several positions in board development, resource development, and operations. Kevin listed his top four key principles as leadership, enjoyment, integrity, and respect, highlighting the importance of leadership in inspiring teams. Kevin was inspired to become a strong role model for young people by his difficult experiences growing up without a father. He remained dedicated to helping others and mentoring to have a significant influence.

In Kevin's opinion, authenticity was crucial, particularly for African Americans assuming leadership posts. Given African Americans' difficulties in leadership roles and the necessity of setting an example for upcoming leaders, he views it as essential. Kevin shared a story of being rejected for a job because of his outspoken nature, which made many people uncomfortable, and acknowledged that authenticity comes at a cost. Despite the setback, he kept his integrity and believed sincerity was worth the cost. Upon reflection, Kevin realized he should have sought out a mentor with greater intention earlier in his career. He underlined the need for mentoring for advancement both personally and professionally with the goal of exemplifying and demonstrating an appreciation for authentic leadership.

Brandy

Brandy reflected on her identity, professional path, and difficulties as a leader in the nonprofit sector. She accepted the complexity of the African American experience and the responsibility it involved while embracing her rich background. Brandy described herself as a sister, daughter, aunt, and nonprofit administrator. She also described herself as a teacher and a student, all at the same time because of her years of professional experience. Brandy prides herself in being a contributing member of the community and a change agent. She also expressed an appreciation for her southern roots as it has allowed her to express kindness as a nonprofit executive. Her core values as a nonprofit leader include a strong work ethic, honesty, kindness, servitude, and achievement – with the ultimate goal of always giving her best effort in everything that she sets out to do to fulfill the mission of an organization. For Brandy, authenticity was a core value, as she understood the significance of being sincere when interacting professionally. Brandy encountered circumstances when her authenticity contrasted with other people's prejudices, posing obstacles relating to race and gender. To overcome obstacles, she emphasized the need to be aware of how various environments work and apply the right techniques.

Throughout her 28-year career in nonprofit management, she held various positions, moved from the local to the national levels, and eventually rose to senior executive in a separate nonprofit. Brandy's core values shaped her leadership approach. Brandy's leadership also was shaped by her considerable training, experiences in the workplace, and personal development. Her work during the Obama administration gave her important knowledge about the representation of diverse leadership. She stressed the value of authenticity in motivating young people and families through representation and fostering trust within a team.

Although Brandy recognized that authenticity came with a price, such as dealing with prejudice and not being liked by everyone, she believed the advantages far outweighed the drawbacks. The struggles she faced were worthwhile, given the genuineness she gave to her leadership and her obligation to uphold representation and principles. She was firm in her dedication to authenticity, understanding that straying from who she was would not be consistent with her moral principles. Brandy conveyed that she always strives to be trustworthy and seen by her team as a collaborator and a leader that promotes authenticity as she displays her true self to others as well. Brandy expressed accountability as an essential behavior for authentic leaders recognizing that this is critical for African American leaders as their knowledge and skillset is often questioned by those they supervise and report to within an organization.

V.3   Cross-Case Analysis

A total of three themes emerged from the data across the cases as presented in Table 1; subthemes were also identified. The themes demonstrate the factors that cause African Americans in nonprofit management to control the demonstration of authenticity as they come to an awareness of self-identity which causes a drift to an authentic leadership style. Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity with subthemes: (a) Self-Identification and African American Representation and (b) Core Values and Authenticity to Self. Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges with subthemes (a) Role of Race and Challenges Faced and (b) Overcoming Challenges and Paying the Price. Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership with subthemes: (a) Successful Authentic Leadership and (b) Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic Leader. The themes and subthemes are discussed below.

Table 6 Themes, Subthemes, and Frequencies for the Research Question

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency
Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity	
1.1 Self Identification and African American Representation	48
1.2 Core Values and Authenticity to Self	71
Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges	
2.1 Role of Race and Challenges Faced	25
2.2 Overcoming Challenges and Paying the Price	126
Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership	
3.1 Successful Authentic Leadership	48
3.2 Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic Leader	58

Note. Subthemes are italicized.

Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity

The first theme refers to the participants' representation of a complex combination of identity-related experiences and viewpoints. They discussed the complex intersections of their identities and perceived them from several angles, including those of family members, leaders, and members of larger communities. The participants had a strong sense of duty to their families, communities, and cultural backgrounds and their decision-making and leadership responsibilities were guided by this obligation. They also discussed their core values, including a commitment to virtues like pursuing excellence, humility, generosity, and openness. These values often relate to their professional identities and demonstrate a deeper commitment to honesty and integrity.

Being African American created a complex identity issue. Participants' experiences directing family and professional situations and thoughtful reflections on race, upbringing, and

independence shaped a complicated sense of self. The participant's viewpoint showed a complete

picture of individuals navigating the distinctions of leadership, beliefs, and identity, leading to a

deeper understanding of the numerous variables affecting their lives.

Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity was further categorized into the following

subthemes: (a) Self-Identification and African American Representation and (b) Core Values and

Authenticity to Self. Each subtheme is discussed next.

Subtheme 1.1: Self-Identification and African American Representation

The first subtheme showed individuals collectively depicting their identities, displaying a

complex web of personal experiences, beliefs, and positions. Together with observations on ties

to Africa and the United States, participants discussed their obligation to their heritage and

community based on fundamental values like faith and service. The dynamic character of self-

discovery was emphasized by constantly changing personalities due to influences such as

creativity, ongoing knowledge acquisition, and personal and professional obstacles. A prevalent

theme among their remarks was overcoming obstacles while highlighting hope, tenacity,

humility, and dedication to service. With participants describing themselves as father, son, sister,

daughter, granddaughter, and friends, the importance of family ties, history, and a strong feeling

of duty were emphasized. Participants emphasized the significance of education in forming

identity, giving people a voice, and cultivating qualities like friendliness, joy, energy, and a love

of good relationships. Participants' narratives shared the complex process of self-identification

by illustrating how roles, values, and individual experiences combine to form distinct and varied

identities. Kevin shared this experience which caused him to control the progression toward

authentic leadership:

"I think some of my childhood experiences -- growing up as an African American male in the
inner city, experiences that I had as a child growing up, certainly helped shape some of the path

I have had through my journey of self-discovery. So, I think childhood experiences and, and growing up in certain environments certainly helped shape the path that I am currently on as a nonprofit leader.

The categories of participants' *self-identification* and *representation as African American* emerged from the data. Participants shared their views on their African American identity, which their heritage and family members shaped. For example, Brandy shared that she and the world viewed of her as African American. She stated, "I think, for me, as much as I identify as an African American, I think the world identifies me as one as well." Caroline shared, "I think that the African American experience, the experience of, quite frankly, being African American in America, it is a label that is put upon you." She further stated, "But I think my identity as an African American is also shaped by, certainly, family and the experiences that I have had with family." Thomas shared that he viewed his identity in terms of his family and his role as father, son, and husband in the family, which determines his value and identity. He stated, "The second thing is he is the husband to DK, which plays a critical role in how he self-identifies," who he believed "played a role in who he is as well." Stephanie described herself as "Passionate, knowledgeable, and creative" and "Love being in a room with people that have positive energy and I would probably say I have a very outgoing personality." Another way participants identified themselves was their passion and their determination to solve issues related to their people. Michael explained the following perspective which caused a drift toward an authentic leadership:

"I am determined to solve some of these big, wicked issues our country faces, number one being, in my opinion, poverty."

Subtheme 1.2: Core Values and Authenticity to Self

The second subtheme consisted of fundamental principles that molded participants' personalities and directed their behavior. They navigate the complex topics of

leadership and personal development by emphasizing the significance of staying authentic, striving for excellence, and remembering one's mission. Effective communication and understanding were emphasized as being facilitated by transparency, integrity, and the dedication to seek first understanding. Furthermore, upholding inner peace came to be recognized as an essential core value, indicating that the participants understood the value of their well-being.

The recurrent themes of diligence, teamwork, integrity, and devotion to mission-centered endeavors emphasized the participants' commitment to being a good influence. It was emphasized that kindness, which includes the capacity to convey difficult information with empathy, was a crucial trait to become an authentic leader. While authenticity was defined as staying true to oneself and using one's special talents to benefit the group, pursuing achievement and the greater good emphasized a dedication to societal influence. The participants jointly support approachability, honesty, and openness to input as essential elements of effective leadership in the nonprofit sector.

The data revealed the categories of being authentic to self and core values. Participants shared their views on what being authentic meant and their core values, which also impacted their leadership style. Stephanie believed being authentic means "Genuine, true, full voice, not silenced, fully comfortable in me, all of me; those are the words that come to mind for me." Michael also shared a similar viewpoint: "It means just being myself and being comfortable with who I am and what I am uniquely good at and leaning into that." He further shared its impact on his leadership style: "Being supportive of my leadership team and my staff, being vulnerable to a certain extent, not always having to know the answers, has helped me show up and be an authentic leader." Thomas stated, "Authentic means living your life by a set of principles that cannot be compromised by anyone, for any reason." Caroline also had a similar perspective,

stating, "It is operating by my principles. It is being who I truly am. It is expecting me to behave in the way that aligns with who I purport to be." Brandy indicated this statement an experience which caused a drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"So, for me, what it means to be authentic, it just means that I get to be me. I get to show up with all the knowledge, skills, and abilities that I have at a place of work and be able to maximize those and utilize those and to use those to our collective advantage."*

Participants also shared their core values believed to impact their leadership styles, such as collaboration, kindness, trust and integrity, communication, and compassion were few to mention. Thomas mentioned that "along with knowing your why" and "To thine own self be true," one should strive for excellence, which must be who we are, not what we do. And what I mean by that is, for people who work with me and work for me, they know that I am very peculiar about my stuff." Caroline believed "transparency is important and goes hand in hand with integrity. Just tell the doggone truth. Please just tell the truth. Please do not try to spin, do not try to do all that kind of stuff." After transparency, she believed, "reflection and understanding of the community that you serve is more important than anything." Stephanie mentioned, "collaboration is another one in that we are a team. Yes, look at me as the leader, but look at me as a teammate." Michael believed that "telling your story is a part of one of my core values" and "saying the thing is another thing that is one of my core values." He believed, "all those things help me show up as just an authentic leader." Kevin believed that respect as an important core value. He explicated this thought as a demonstration of drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"I would say respect. I am big on giving respect to my colleagues, my peers, and people that are internal and external from the organization. But I also have a threshold of what respects should look like. So, I give respect, so I demand that back."*

Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges

Several issues surfaced in theme two regarding the difficulties and experiences of African American executives in nonprofit organizations. The battle for authenticity in largely Caucasian settings was a frequent topic of conversation, along with how unconscious prejudices shape impressions. Because of racial stereotypes, there were expectations of argumentative behavior, which made it necessary to control their passion for genuine conversation. The importance of racial dynamics in professional obstacles was highlighted by the influence of early life events on an individual's motivation. The participants also discussed the necessity for strategic honesty, overcoming unconscious prejudices, and difficulties with code-switching.

Along with sharing their reflections on their leadership careers, participants addressed imposter syndrome and the challenges of being an African American leader in settings where the majority population was Caucasian. They discussed the value of owning one's individuality, making an impression in the workplace, and the dangers of attempting to save every African American person in a company. The interviews also discussed the challenge of balancing survival and authenticity, the legacy of past leadership styles, and the emergence of genuine confidence. The participants shed light on the complex experiences of African American executives balancing authenticity, identity, and leadership in the nonprofit industry.

Theme 2: Influences of Experiences and Challenges was further categorized into the following subthemes: (a) Role of Race and Challenges Faced and (b) Approaches to Overcome Obstacles and Paying the Price. Subtheme 3 and Subtheme 4 are discussed next.

Subtheme 2.1: Role of Race and Challenges Faced

Subtheme 2.1 discussed the difficulties and complications the respondents had to deal with. The challenge of identity and authenticity in work environments was a common theme. The participants acknowledged dealing with racial stereotypes, cultural expectations, and

unconscious biases. They spoke about times when someone misinterpreted their passion, which made them feel argumentative or angry. The participants acknowledged the influence of implicit biases and underlined how difficult it was to separate racial issues from professional difficulties.

In addition, the respondents offer valuable perspectives on their professional paths, emphasizing critical events that influenced their leadership experiences. Drawing from their experiences in nonprofit, academic, and business settings, they talked about how their positions have changed over time, the difficulties they have faced, and the insights they gained. A recurring issue throughout the interviews is the importance of authenticity and discovering one's voice. Some relate how they changed their leadership approaches to reflect better who they are. Apart from discussing personal and professional growth, the interviews also addressed wider societal concerns like the nonprofit sector's shortage mentality, the value of representation, and the difficulties of fundraising for African American leaders. Each participant contributed a distinct viewpoint, creating a diverse collection of stories that capture the complexity of authenticity, identity, and leadership in the face of structural difficulties.

The categories of career journey, influence of experiences, professional challenges, and role of race in performing duties emerged from the data. Participants shared their career journey, which evolved them into authentic leaders. Thomas shared that his "first job out of graduate school was in the nonprofit space," and he was "youth development coordinator for the organization." Then he "went to government and multiple positions there. I was there for about two years, got promoted twice." He further stated that three years ago, an executive search firm reached out to him: "and after a slew of interviews and what have you, I ended up becoming the CEO." Caroline shared that her "first job was at a nonprofit organization focused on teen pregnancy prevention," where she "recognized that I had a voice and that I was a decent public

speaker," which "started me on my way to leadership." Stephanie's career was also started as a nonprofit intern, and she "found an organization focused on African American women's health and said, this sounds really interesting."

She later went on to the education side, where her professor asked her if she had "ever thought about this organization?" And when I looked at the position, I pushed past the former experience of not wanting to be a leader to "this is where I need to be." Michael explained, "I started as an administrative assistant. From there, I became a manager on a program focused on violence prevention." He stated, "after being there seven years and being mentored by a civil rights leader, I decided I was ready to take on the next challenge and become a CEO." Brandy started at a nonprofit and worked "at their front desk and, within about 90 days, was promoted to a director." She stated, "over the span of my 28 years, I have had an opportunity to do a little bit of every job in the nonprofit/youth development space." Kevin shared that he "started in nonprofit work in 2004, and just felt like in nonprofit there is a large need in communities for nonprofit organizations, especially around youth development." He further explained this as an experience which caused him to control the progression toward authentic leadership:

> *"Over the span of my 22 plus years, I have had a chance to see various parts of the organization from operations to resource development, to board development, but my passion is kids. I realized that I have a special gift to connect with kids, but also bring awareness and raise money for young people."*

Participants also shared their experiences that influenced their leadership styles as African Americans in nonprofit organizations. Thomas shared that from his experiences, he learned that one had to "be your authentic self as much as you necessarily can, wear the mask if you have to, and understand that it is not disingenuous because that is the other thing I struggled with for years." Michael shared that he got a "chance to go to Harvard for a two-week leadership

program before Covid. And that experience, being at Harvard, was unique" because he "had the chance to be around about 150 other CEOs of nonprofits from across the country, in the world, should I say." Kevin grew up without a father figure and shared, "not having my dad certainly gave me the passion and energy to get involved in an organization where I could mentor young people. Brandy stated the following as an experience which caused a drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"I have had an opportunity to have a lot of training and development and whether that was more localized training or have been a part of cohorts, leadership development cohorts, or to do some extra training that might be outside of what others might have with linkage, especially some of those that speak to women in leadership, I think I have had a lot of those type experiences that have been transformational for me."*

When sharing their professional challenges, all participants agreed that race posed a potential challenge to them. Thomas shared, "it is virtually impossible to take race out of any equation. You will face a professional challenge as a result of your race." Michael shared that he "faced a lot of racial challenges." Brandy believed that not only race but being a woman was also a reason she faced challenges in her professional life. She stated, "there have been a couple of scenarios that one is dealing with race and then another deals with gender." She further stated that she was unsure "if it was being an African American or if it was being a woman, or whatever it was, but there was something behind the scenes that was navigating there." Caroline shared that for her, the challenge was to "getting on with the business instead of having a conversation about how I came to be where I was," and the reason she believed this was "because they want to show off that some intelligent African American woman showed up at their door." Kevin indicted this experience as an example of control as he progressed toward authentic leadership:

> *"I would say that one of my professional challenges, here recently, was that in one particular project I was on a team of 20 people. Of the 20 people 18 were Caucasian females and one Hispanic, and the project was about diversity and how could we include*

diversity in our organization. If you look at the makeup of the team, it does not speak to the work that we were doing."

Participants also shared that their race influenced how they performed their role as a leader. Thomas believed, "there is already implicit biases that drive the narrative around who I am, what I am, and how I will behave." Michael shared, "I am an African American man in America. I know that I have to code-switch and do things to make different people comfortable." Brandy believed that when she "show up and I am authentic. I am me; I do not believe in trying to be anything else." She also shared, "there are times when sitting at whatever table it is, that I have to think about sometimes who I am and what I look like based on my response." She also believed, "it is not being authentic, but I think there are times where it is incredibly important to know which table you are sitting at and what levers to pull." Kevin mentioned this experience of control as he progressed toward authentic leadership:

> *"There was a job that I wanted. I wanted to be an executive director of a nonprofit at a local level. And I felt like I was qualified for the job. I was from the city, felt like I could go back home, take the job, and take it to the next level. I think my personality of just being outspoken, and I think in the interview process, it made people feel uncomfortable. And I think it made them feel uncomfortable because I was a person of color. And this organization has been around 70 plus years, and they have never had anyone of color lead the organization. I think that there was some fear, I just do not think that they were ready for that type of change, where I wanted to embrace it and thrive in it. But I think that particular opportunity, I was just overlooked, primarily because of my skin color; because of all the requirements and skillset that were needed to do the job, I had it."*

Subtheme 2.2: Overcoming Obstacles and Paying the Price

The fourth subtheme examined the difficulties experienced by African American executives in nonprofit organizations. The battle for authenticity in work environments, frequently requiring people to deal with prejudices and code-switching, was a recurring issue. Leaders talked about carefully balancing standing up for their teams and not being seen as "nags." One of the pitfalls was the pressure to save every African American person, which

hindered organizational advancement. It was stressed how important it was to develop confidence and share personal stories. Participants also discussed the importance of work-life balance, particularly for African American women, and the fear of missing out on opportunities. Professionalism and financial literacy emerged as essential traits for success, with racial bias experiences impeding professional growth. Seeking mentorship and appreciating leadership chances were key to overcoming these obstacles. Even if there were challenges, it was believed that genuine leadership was important, even if the world needed to prepare for African American excellence.

The categories of common pitfalls and use of different strategies emerged from the data. Participants shared their views on difficulties they faced being an African American leader, such as lack of confidence, sharing of stories, professionalism, balancing of work and personal relationships, and hiring incompetent African American people in positions and giving them too many chances. Thomas shared, "we give other African American people too many chances. You are either competent or you are not. If I am no longer fitting in the organization, please bid me adieu." Michael had a similar view and stated, "If you are African American, then you want to just hire all African American folks, and that is good. But you also have to make sure people are qualified to do the job." Kevin added, "we must really continue to set the standard for what professionalism looks like." He further pointed out "the financial side of a nonprofit organization" and an individual's ability to "read a P & L, understand a P & L, how to do budgets, and understand finances in general." Brandy believed African Americans have difficulty maintaining "work-life balance, and what that looks like and what it means for African Americans and just how we engage with the work." She stated the following as a demonstration of control toward authentic leadership:

"I think the other thing that I would mention is this idea of a third pitfall, and I think it is probably more for African American women than it is for men even, is just this idea of, as we look for opportunity, we feel like we have to have all the boxes checked. I think what the research tells us is that for men, men do not always see that they must have all the boxes checked."

Participants shared their views on using different strategies if they could correct their past mistakes. Michael shared, "formalized mentorship from other leaders of color could have helped me earlier on," especially knowledge of issues "they faced and learning from issues they faced that could have helped me probably avoid other issues in my career." Kevin shared, "if I could do something different, I probably would have tried to be more intentional about finding a mentor that can help me professionally and personally." Brandy believed that if she "had to do it over, I think there were times where race was an issue, and people's couched behavior is something else, and I wish I could have called it." Thomas stated, "I would not be as authentic with so many people, so soon, when I was younger. I would have learned to be quiet. Shut up a lot more. Listen more and seek understanding." Stephanie was unsure if she "would do it differently. As painful as it was to experience, I am grateful for it, and I know that the organization still has respect for me." Stephanie indicated this reflection as a demonstration of drift on her path toward authentic leadership:

"We still have a really great relationship, so they do not look at me in a bad way. They understood my journey and supported it. So, that is a good thing. It is not like I failed the organization, but I just look at, there is so much more I could have done."

Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership

For theme 3, which focused on authentic leadership, participants argued in favor of a hands-on approach, stressing the value of engaging in tasks instead of merely providing directions. The cornerstone of this leadership style is the dedication never to ask the team to do anything the leader would not do themselves, which promotes engagement and honesty. The

team leader emphasized the value of involvement and genuineness, highlighting via personal anecdotes the relevance of fostering an environment where team members liked their work. According to the participants, authenticity was more than just vocalizing values; it also entailed living up to one's convictions and strongly emphasizing a leader's involvement and visibility. The significance of doing internal work was also discussed by the participants, especially for those who were dealing with identity issues like being an African American man or woman. Participants recognized authentic leadership as dedicated to taking the lead, honoring diversity, upholding honesty, and never stopping learning. The participants discussed the personal toll that being inauthentic takes, emphasizing the negative effects of sacrificing morals and integrity.

Participants recognized that authentic leadership required vulnerability, focusing on self-discovery and being receptive to constructive criticism. The conversation focused on key traits of real leaders, like creating a compelling vision that transcends individual differences and finding a balance between being understood, respected, and appreciated. The discussion urged leaders to look for chances that push their comfort zones and areas of expertise, accept discomfort for personal and professional growth, and learn from other leaders—regardless of their experience. Along with emphasizing the significance of spirituality, self-awareness, and personal development, it was advised that authentic leadership can be characterized by behavior consistent with basic principles. In conclusion, the participants thoroughly examined authentic leadership through their experiences, guiding ideals, necessary conduct, and the need to foster an inclusive and motivating workplace.

Theme 3: Significance of Authenticity in Developing Leaders was further categorized into the following subthemes: (a) Characteristics of Successful and Authentic Leaders and (b) Suggestion and Steps to be Authentic Leader. The subthemes are discussed next.

Subtheme 3.1: Successful Authentic Leadership

The fifth subtheme addressed the participant's perception of the characteristics of an authentic leader. Participants talked about qualities including honesty, the capacity to listen attentively and speak only after considering the viewpoints of others, the quest for lifelong learning, communication transparency, responsibility, being results-driven yet empathetic, and creating strong, supportive teams. Authentic leaders were perceived as being loyal to themselves, empowering their groups, owning up to their errors, and placing a high value on the development and well-being of individuals. They valued work-life balance, kept a professional demeanor, kept an eye on the big picture, and faced obstacles head-on while being modest. They also underlined the need for resilience, diversity, and representation in leadership, frequently stressing the necessity to balance personal and professional development.

The categories of characterization of a successful leader and behavior of an authentic leader emerged from the data. Participants shared their perspective on the successful leader and shared qualities such as team culture, being true to self, confidence to lead, powerful vision, professionalism, transparency and true to work. Thomas shared that a successful leader "finds a way to strike the delicate balance between being respected, understood, and appreciated." He further stated that a successful leader "is able to craft a vision that can be sold to anyone regardless of their race, class, lived experience, or whatever." Caroline stated that successful leaders do not "worry about people judging you for the color of your skin, or treating you different, feeling respected, feeling whole." Michael stated that a successful leader is one "who has a team that is happy about coming to work every day, because none of us can do this work alone. We must have teams to help us. That is a great leader." Another characteristic was sharing a story and mentoring others; he stated, "I have said that a few times. A great leader is someone

who mentors other leaders and mentors others in this space." Brandy indicated the following as a

demonstration of drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"And so, when I look at the journey, in parallels, I think the journey for an African American leader, it is really hard work. It means longer hours. It means being overly prepared or more prepared, maybe than your counterparts are, for meetings or for whatever, because you are going to be questioned."*

Participants shared their viewpoints about authentic leaders ' behavior by discussing the

leader's behavior. Thomas shared that leadership is about integrity, "I do not think you could be

authentic without having integrity, without being trustful, without being straightforward." He

further stated, "you do what you say you are going to do, and you show up the way that you say

you are going to show up. You are open to counsel." Micheal believed, "good behavior is

effective communication because you cannot lead people without effectively communicating."

He stated, "I spent a lot of time on communication because I know it is important in leadership."

Michael further explained this sentiment as an example of a drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"If you are leading people, it is even more important because you are not only accountable for your work but theirs as well. So, I think being accountable, being trustworthy, I think this is where honesty and integrity come into play, and it gets back to values."*

Subtheme 3.2: Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic Leader

In the sixth subtheme, the participants shared important perspectives on traits and

strategies of authentic leadership. The participants emphasized the significance of actively

interacting with teams, cultivating a feeling of authenticity, and being a participatory leader.

They emphasized the need to foster a workplace atmosphere where people feel respected and

valued, going beyond conventional boundaries to establish personal connections. Authenticity

was seen as essential, necessitating self-awareness, dedication to fundamental principles, and a

readiness to exhibit vulnerability. Participants emphasized the importance of staying true to

oneself and promoted inclusive, transparent, and diverse leadership. They promoted great teamwork, mentoring, and ongoing education. The interviews discussed the complex mix of personal and professional facets that authentic leadership entails to produce an effective and fulfilling leadership experience.

The categories of importance of authenticity and suggestions and steps for aspiring leaders emerged from the data. All participants agreed that authenticity is essential to becoming a great leader. Stephanie stated that authenticity is "key, I think, because of how much I have learned." Michael added that authenticity is important, and to me, it goes beyond just race." Brandy also shared, "I believe it is incredibly important to show up and be who you are. Because when you are not, when you show up in any way that is inauthentic, it does not allow you to build a team." Thomas expressed that being authentic includes the practical implication. He provided examples and said, "my thing is I do not just tell people to do it; I do it with them. Because my biggest thing is, I am not going to ask you to do something that I would not do myself, whatever that looks like." Caroline believed being authentic has a cost, including dissociation of identity. She shared this statement as an appreciation for and demonstration of drift toward authentic leadership:

> *"No, because being inauthentic cost me. I am having a moment where there is cognitive dissonance, because to me, the price is paid when you are inauthentic. If somebody does a thing or says a thing that does not sit well with my spirit, that is not my problem, that is not a thing. The cost is when you are inauthentic, because if you are a person of integrity, if you are operating with a moral code and with values, and you compromise that because you are inauthentic, you have paid the price, then. You have compromised who you are."*

Participants provided suggestions and steps to aspiring leaders, especially from the African American population, can take to become effective leaders. The suggestions varied from being authentic, self-knowledge, and passionate, being prepared and patients, and being with

leaders to take inspiration from them. Caroline shared, "as a bookworm, read some books. Read a book. Please, just read a book." she further suggested that "understanding how others lead, regardless of their color" helped a lot. She further proposed steps, which included "So, number one, look at your field and identify people within your field that have done something that you admire and study that person." After studying that person, she suggested to "study that person's mistakes. If you have an opportunity to talk to that person, do that."

Stephanie suggested that "self-awareness was a really big thing, and really learning my strengths and celebrating my strengths, but understanding my weaknesses, and how I can put things in place because of those." She further suggested that one can do reflection by "daily recording or a weekly recording of what happened and how that made you feel" to understand "what paths feel better for you." Brandy shared that being authentic was essential but did not replace the fundamentals, such as "showing up prepared and doing your homework and understanding who is in the room and protecting your personal life as you navigate the world." She further stressed the importance of "dressing for the job that you want. It is knowing and understanding what it is that you want to get out of this work and then getting yourself prepared for it." Kevin shared the steps, such as finding "someone that they can really trust that has the time and is committed to investing in them as a person and as a professional." A further step would be "to think about their passions and make sure that they can align their passion to what they do each and every day." He shared the following statement which conveys a drift toward authentic leadership:

> "I would say, create a career path. Write it out, map it out, what you want your career to look like over the next 3, 5, 7 years, and start putting yourself in a position to be successful in that career path. And do not limit yourself to one skillset. And that is probably the biggest takeaway; is that sometimes being African American, people can just put you in a box and say, "they are good at doing X." Well, I do not want to be good

at doing just X. I want to be good at doing A, B, C, D, E, F, everything else in the same way you value me doing X."

The themes and subthemes are further summarized through the lens of Control and Drift Theory in Table 7. The table demonstrates the themes as controlling and drifting factors in participants' progression toward authentic leadership.

Table 7 Themes – Control and Drift

Theme 1: Self Awareness of Identity			
Subtheme	*Description*	*Construct*	*Control and Drift*
Self-Identification and African American Representation	"I think some of my childhood experiences -- growing up as an African American male in the inner city, experiences that I had as a child growing up, certainly helped shape some of the path I have had through my journey of self-discovery. So, I think childhood experiences and, and growing up in certain environments certainly helped shape the path that I am currently on as a nonprofit leader."	Lived Experience	Control
Self-Identification and African American Representation	"I am determined to solve some of these big, wicked issues our country faces, number one being, in my opinion, poverty."	Lived Experience	Drift
Core Values and Authenticity to Self	"So, for me, what it means to be authentic, it just means that I get to be me. I get to show up with all the knowledge, skills, and abilities that I have at a place of work and be able to maximize those and utilize those and to use those to our collective advantage."	Self-Identity	Drift
Core Values and Authenticity to Self	"I would say respect. I am big on giving respect to my colleagues, my peers, and people that are internal and external from the organization. But I also have a threshold of what respects should look like. So, I give respect, so I demand that back."	Self-Identity	Drift
Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges			
Subtheme	Description	Construct	Control and Drift
Role of Race and Challenges Faced	"Over the span of my 22 plus years, I have had a chance to see various parts of the organization from operations to resource development, to	Lived Experience	Control

	board development, but my passion is kids. I realized that I have a special gift to connect with kids, but also bring awareness and raise money for young people."		
Role of Race and Challenges Faced	"I have had an opportunity to have a lot of training and development and whether that was more localized training or have been a part of cohorts, leadership development cohorts, or to do some extra training that might be outside of what others might have with linkage, especially some of those that speak to women in leadership, I think I have had a lot of those type experiences that have been transformational for me."	Lived Experience	Drift
Role of Race and Challenges Faced	"I would say that one of my professional challenges, here recently, was that in one particular project I was on a team of 20 people. Of the 20 people 18 were Caucasian females and one Hispanic, and the project was about diversity and how could we include diversity in our organization. If you look at the makeup of the team, it does not speak to the work that we were doing."	Lived Experience	Control
Role of Race and Challenges Faced	"There was a job that I wanted. I wanted to be an executive director of a nonprofit at a local level. And I felt like I was qualified for the job. I was from the city, felt like I could go back home, take the job, and take it to the next level. I think my personality of just being outspoken, and I think in the interview process, it made people feel uncomfortable. And I think it made them feel uncomfortable because I was a person of color. And this organization has been around 70 plus years, and they have never had anyone of color lead the organization. I think that there was some fear, I just do not think that they were ready for that type of change, where I wanted to embrace it and thrive in it. But I think that particular opportunity, I was just overlooked, primarily because of my skin color, because of all the requirements and skillset that were needed to do the job, I had it."	Lived Experience	Control
Overcoming Obstacles and Paying the Price	"I think the other thing that I would mention is this idea of a third pitfall, and I think it is probably more for African American women than it is for men even, is just this idea of, as we	Self-Identity	Control

	look for opportunity, we feel like we have to have all the boxes checked. I think what the research tells us is that for men, men do not always see that they must have all the boxes checked."		
Overcoming Obstacles and Paying the Price	"We still have a really great relationship, so they do not look at me in a bad way. They understood my journey and supported it. So, that is a good thing. It is not like I failed the organization, but I just look at, there is so much more I could have done."	Lived Experience	Drift
Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership			
Subtheme	*Description*	*Construct*	*Control and Drift*
Successful Authentic Leadership	"And so, when I look at the journey, in parallels, I think the journey for an African American leader, it is really hard work. It means longer hours. It means being overly prepared or more prepared, maybe than your counterparts are, for meetings or for whatever, because you are going to be questioned."	Lived Experience	Drift
Successful Authentic Leadership	"If you are leading people, it is even more important because you are not only accountable for your work but theirs as well. So, I think being accountable, being trustworthy, I think this is where honesty and integrity come into play, and it gets back to values."	Lived Experience	Drift
Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic Leader	"No, because being inauthentic cost me. I am having a moment where there is cognitive dissonance, because to me, the price is paid when you are inauthentic. If somebody does a thing or says a thing that does not sit well with my spirit, that is not my problem, that is not a thing. The cost is when you are inauthentic, because if you are a person of integrity, if you are operating with a moral code and with values, and you compromise that because you are inauthentic, you have paid the price, then. You have compromised who you are."	Self-Identity	Drift

| Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic Leader | "I would say, create a career path. Write it out, map it out, what you want your career to look like over the next 3, 5, 7 years, and start putting yourself in a position to be successful in that career path. And do not limit yourself to one skillset. And that is probably the biggest takeaway; is that sometimes being African American, people can just put you in a box and say, "they are good at doing X." Well, I do not want to be good at doing just X. I want to be good at doing A, B, C, D, E, F, everything else in the same way you value me doing X." | Lived Experience | Drift |

Self awareness of identity, self identification and African American representation, experiences and challenges, race, overcoming challenges, and paying the price are factors that cause case study participants to control their demonstration of authentic leadership. Self awareness of identity, an understanding of one's core values, authenticity to self, and developing authenticity in leadership caused research participants to drift toward an authentic leadership style.

V.4 Summary

The participants explored the intrinsic interconnections between family, community, and cultural heritage, highlighting the diverse nature of identity and lived experiences. The participants' strong obligation to these interconnections influenced their leadership and decision-making duties. For some, faith greatly impacted how they interacted in different areas of life. Family relationships were emphasized, demonstrating how they affected personal identities, and core values like excellence, kindness, and openness related to professional identities. The conversations also examined how cultural ideas and thoughts on race, upbringing, and individualism shaped the complexities of being African American.

On that basis, the participants shared difficulties African American leaders in nonprofit management encounter, especially related to authenticity in environments where the majority of

people were Caucasian. In order to have a real discourse, the participants had to learn to moderate their level of authenticity. They did this by sharing their experiences navigating unconscious biases and racial stereotypes. With personal experiences stressing career moves toward community engagement and nonprofit management, the significance of racial dynamics in professional difficulties was highlighted. The participants discussed imposter syndrome, how to be authentic while still surviving, and the legacy of earlier leadership philosophies. They emphasized African American executives' intricate ways of navigating authenticity and identity in nonprofit organizations.

Moving on to authentic leadership, participants highlighted the need for a hands-on approach and the leaders' active participation in duties. They placed importance on setting a positive example, encouraging participation, and upholding authenticity. They also stressed the need for personal work and how authenticity goes beyond just vocalizing views. Participants discussed the important characteristics of authentic leaders, such as self-awareness, openness to criticism, and vulnerability. Participants encouraged aspiring leaders to learn from others, embrace discomfort as a means of personal development, and act in a way that aligns with their core values. Taken as a whole, the participants offered a thorough analysis of authentic leadership for African Americans in nonprofit management by fusing life lessons, principles, and the significance of fostering diverse and inspiring work environments. As such, the participants illuminated the complex interplay between identity, authenticity, and leadership.

VI DISCUSSION

Our literature review revealed a scarcity of process studies that empirically investigated authentic leadership among African American executives in nonprofit organizations. In addition, we found a paucity of research on authentic leadership within nonprofit organizations and a lack of studies utilizing the Control & Drift Theory to examine this leadership style. To address these gaps, our engaged scholarship research employed a phenomenological method and a multiple case study approach to explore and analyze authentic leadership among six (6) African American executives in nonprofit organizations. Our primary question was: How do African Americans in nonprofit organizations develop an understanding of and progress toward authentic leadership? This study delivers three significant contributions: First, it advances research and literature on leadership characteristics of African Americans in nonprofit organizations. Second, it enriches our comprehension of the real-life experiences, leadership style, and progression toward authentic leadership among African American nonprofit executives. Lastly, the study demonstrates the applicability of Control & Drift Theory in understanding the evolution of authentic leadership practices and traits among African American executives in nonprofit management.

VI.1 Empirical Findings

Based on the data collected in this study, three main themes surfaced: Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity with subthemes: (a) Self-Identification and African American Representation and (b) Core Values and Authenticity to Self. Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges with subthemes (a) Role of Race and Challenges Faced and (b) Overcoming Challenges and Paying the Price. Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership with subthemes: (a) Successful Authentic Leadership and (b) Steps Towards Becoming an Authentic

Leader. Upon examination of participants' statements, these themes, though arising independently, revealed an overarching pattern upon review.

Theme 1: Self-Awareness of Identity and Core Values - The participants' responses consistently underscored the importance of self-awareness in enhancing leadership authenticity. They emphasized that authentic leaders place value on comprehending their emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. According to Metcalf (2014), practicing self-awareness regularly enables leaders to adopt a more influential and authentic leadership approach. Additionally, Braun and Peus (2018) highlighted that self-reflection and meditation practices are instrumental in developing self-awareness, which in turn fosters a more authentic leadership style. In this study, African American executives explored the multifaceted nature of their identities, considering various perspectives including those of family members, leaders, and larger communities.

The participants had a strong sense of duty to their cultural backgrounds as African Americans and their decision-making and leadership responsibilities were guided by this obligation. They also discussed their core values, including a commitment to virtues like pursuing excellence, humility, generosity, and openness. Iszatt-White, Whittle, Gadelshina, and Mueller (2018) defined authentic leadership as "the capacity to act on one's core values and remain true to oneself". When individuals stay loyal to their identity and core values, they exhibit greater authenticity (Erickson, 1995). These values often pertain to their professional identities, indicating a deeper commitment to honesty and integrity. The literature review for this study indicates that strong core values are central to effective leadership and are advantageous for organizations and society (Olsen & Espevik, 2017). Furthermore, the literature suggests that core values contribute to leaders' genuine and ethical behaviors (Sendjaya et al., 2016). High levels of cognitive core values paired with a strong sense of identity are predictors of well-grounded

authentic leadership (Sumanth & Hannah, 2014). Therefore, as participants have stated, having a strong foundation centered on core values is crucial for becoming an authentic leader. The findings of this research study align with previous academic research on the connection between the authentic leadership style, self-awareness of identity as an African American, and foundational values.

Theme 2: Experiences and Challenges - The literature and findings of the research demonstrates the impacts of racially driven experiences and events in the nonprofit sector for African Americans which are often steeped in systemic racism and can be triggering due to the longstanding lived experience of discrimination that African Americans have experienced for centuries in America. All the nonprofit executives in the study confirmed the significant role that race plays in their ability to become an authentic leader, especially in the eyes of their Caucasian counterparts. Apart from discussing personal and professional growth, the findings demonstrate a wider societal concern like the nonprofit sector's shortage mentality, the value of representation, the difficulties of fundraising for African American leaders, and dangers of attempting to save every African American person in a company. The results of this research also support the literature on the concept of code switching and double consciousness as a continuous experience and challenge which is still permeating through the social and structural norms within the nonprofit sector.

In the seminal work "The Souls of Black Folk," W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) provides a profound insight into the African American experience through the concept of double consciousness. Du Bois articulates this experience as a tension between two facets of an individual's identity, describing it as a "world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." This phenomenon of seeing

oneself through the lens of a racially prejudiced society creates a dichotomy within the self, leading to a perpetual feeling of division between being both an American and a Negro. Du Bois (1903) illustratively speaks to the complexity of this experience, noting the dilemma of possessing "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body," highlighting the internal conflict and societal challenges faced by African Americans due to their dual identity.

Extending this concept to the contemporary workplace, research by Landkin (2021) delves into the implications of double consciousness for African Americans seeking to navigate their professional environments authentically. This notion of double consciousness transcends mere personal identity, manifesting in pragmatic strategies such as code-switching, where individuals alter their speech, behavior, or appearance to conform with dominant cultural norms (Koch et al., 2001). Specifically, African Americans may find themselves switching from Black English to Standard English depending on their social or professional context. This adaptive behavior is not merely linguistic but also embodies the shifting between one's authentic self and a more guarded persona when engaging in activities like fundraising or forming partnerships to mitigate potential discrimination. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing impact of double consciousness on African Americans, particularly in professional settings, and underscore the complex interplay between individual identity and societal expectations.

While not conforming to the social norms of the dominant gender and race comes with a price of potential lack of acceptance, belonging, as well as act of discrimination, the participants in this study convey that the more significant price to pay are the implications of not remaining true to oneself and leading with the intersectionality of their identities as a path to authenticity.

According to research respondents and literature, the critical hurdle and price to pay is the idea of intersectionality as it relates to self-identity. When we delve into the realms of intersectionality and authentic leadership development, we examine unique facets of individual and collective identity. According to Landkin (2021), intersectionality considers various dimensions of identity such as race, gender, age, sex, ethnicity, and class. This contrasts with authentic leadership development, which centers around understanding and fostering an individual's identity in relation to their authentic self.

Eriksen (2009) adds depth by suggesting that authentic leadership indeed intertwines with intersecting social identities, aiming at nurturing an authentic expression and lifestyle. Additionally, the integration of intersectionality provides nuanced insights into authentic leadership. Specifically, it's pivotal in dissecting the sophisticated elements of identity among distinct groups. Notably, this hybrid analytical perspective has significant implications for African Americans in nonprofit leadership roles. It underscores how their leadership style is inherently influenced by the embracement of their multifaceted identities, thereby shaping their approach and contribution within the nonprofit sector. Hence, the interplay between intersectionality and authentic leadership underscores a critical framework. It enhances our comprehension of how diverse identity components collectively influence leadership dynamics, especially within the context of marginalized communities in the nonprofit realm.

Crenshaw (1990) introduced the concept of "intersectionality" to describe the complex nature of the self as encompassing multiple identities. This concept challenges the traditional idea of a "true self" in authentic leadership theory. Nimon (2014) conducted an autoethnographic study exploring the challenges of managing both privileged and oppressed identities and the interactions between them, raising the question of whether this constant negotiation is an

authentic way to live. Ladkin (2021) suggests that most people navigate multiple identities and perceptions daily, highlighting the need to reconsider how authenticity is understood. These findings align with previous literature on the experiences of African Americans in nonprofit leadership in relation to authentic leadership.

Theme 3: Authenticity in Developing Leadership - The literature and research findings demonstrate the process of becoming an authentic leader in the nonprofit sector for African Americans. In their book, "True North," George and Sims outline the attributes of authentic leadership, including being genuine, standing up for one's beliefs, engendering trust, and cultivating valuable relationships with others. According to George's definition (2003), authentic leaders have a sincere desire to serve others through their leadership and are more focused on empowering individuals they lead. Their leadership qualities include courage, drive, passion for work, compassion, and intelligence. The participants emphasized the importance of a hands-on approach, highlighting the value of engaging in tasks rather than solely giving directions as a significant aspect of developing into an authentic leader. At the heart of developing this leadership style is the commitment to never ask the team to do anything the leader would not do themselves, fostering engagement and collaboration. The team leader should underscore the importance of involvement and authenticity, using personal anecdotes to illustrate the significance of creating an environment where team members enjoy their work.

The categories of characterization of a successful leader and behavior of an authentic leader emerged from the data. Participants shared their perspective on the successful leader and shared qualities such as team culture, being true to self, confidence to lead, powerful vision, professionalism, transparency and true to work. George (2007) emphasizes the importance of a compass to guide individuals in their leadership journey, as there is no predefined map or direct

path. This compass is essential for keeping leaders focused on their true north or leadership purpose, and it encompasses five disciplines: (a) self-awareness, (b) values, (c) motivations, (d) support team, and (e) integrated life. Joo and Nimon (2014) propose that authentic leaders exhibit self-confidence, reliability, trustworthiness, and the ability to develop their followers, all while fostering a positive and supportive organizational culture. The feedback from participants regarding the development of leadership highlights the importance of authentic leaders aligning their behavior with their personal values. According to the respondents, behavior and personal values are directly linked and are the best descriptors of a leadership style. They identified integrity, transparency, and honesty as some of the key characteristics necessary for becoming an authentic leader.

In a recent study, research participants emphasized the significance of relationship building as a fundamental attribute of an authentic leader. Today's followers crave deeper, more personal connections with their leaders. Cultivating relational skills not only enhances a leader's emotional intelligence but also bolsters their ability to engage with others and lead in a more authentic manner (Goleman et al., 2001). The study uncovered that authentic leaders were more attuned to those around them and actively worked to foster strong relationships with their followers. Connectedness and relationship building are foundational aspects of authentic leadership (George, 2003). Research by Avolio and Gardner (2005) underscores the positive influence of relational connectedness on the development of an authentic leadership style. These findings are consistent with previous academic research on the journey towards achieving authentic leadership.

VI.2 Contributions to Theory

The results of this research contribute to the understanding of the development of authentic leadership styles among African American executives in nonprofit organizations using the Control and Drift framework. Control and Drift is a cyclical process where individuals seek management control while experiencing behavioral drifting due to various forces such as turbulent environments, implementation tactics, complexity, side-effects, surprises, resistance, and creativity (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008). Although the theory is typically applied in the context of technology implementations in engineering, management, and software firms, in this study, it illustrates the cycle wherein African American executives in nonprofit organizations are compelled to navigate social, societal, and organizational norms while striving for control, resulting in a drift towards an authentic leadership style as they encounter lived experiences and events (Tjørnehøj & Mathiassen, 2008).

The participants discussed how their leadership identity has been influenced by societal and cultural norms, leading them to navigate the balance between authenticity and conformity in their leadership roles within nonprofit organizations. This study sheds light on the experiences of African American leaders in the nonprofit sector, a group often overlooked in traditional leadership literature. By using the framework of Control and Drift, participants were able to articulate their personal journeys toward authentic leadership, providing valuable insights for both practitioners and scholars in understanding the development of African American nonprofit leaders. As Sheep (2006) aptly stated, "Whether or not organizations want the whole person, the whole person reports for work" (p. 358). Analyzing this study through the lens of Control and Drift offers valuable implications for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the workplace, as well as a deeper comprehension of the experiences and paths to authentic leadership for African American executives in nonprofit organizations. The experiences shared by these

African American nonprofit leaders have the potential to serve as a guide for those aspiring to reach senior leadership positions in the nonprofit sector. Furthermore, these findings can lay the groundwork for future research on African American leadership in academia and the for-profit business sector.

VI.3 Implications of Practice

In the realm of academic inquiry, the text provided outlines a qualitative exploratory research study centered on African American nonprofit leaders who have demonstrated core characteristics of authentic leadership. Through this study, participants shared insightful perceptions on the themes of Control and Drift, elucidating how both self-identity and various life events can influence an individual's journey toward embracing an authentic leadership style. The collected data illuminate the participants' personal interpretations and understandings of what constitutes authentic leadership, reinforcing prior academic and practitioner literature on the subject. This study echoes the sentiments of George (2007), who posited the absence of a one-size-fits-all roadmap to leadership development. Instead, George suggests the necessity of a metaphorical compass to aid leaders in maintaining focus on their true north or ultimate leadership purpose. This compass is conceptualized through five critical disciplines: self-awareness, values, motivations, support team, and integrated life, all pivotal in navigating the complex path to authentic leadership. This research contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership development, particularly within the context of African American nonprofit leaders, and underscores the significance of authenticity in effective leadership practice.

The following research study underscores the increasing importance of honest and ethical leadership characterized by transparency, strong core values, and unwavering conviction (George, 2018). Exploring the experiences of African American executives in nonprofit

organizations as they develop their authentic leadership style is essential, considering the significant impact of leadership style on organizational dynamics. This study could offer a valuable framework for African Americans aspiring to senior leadership roles in the nonprofit sector and academia, serving as a guiding tool to facilitate their professional advancement. Furthermore, the insights from this study can provide valuable input for organizational leaders in developing diversity, equity, and inclusion training programs that foster awareness of biases and stereotypes affecting underrepresented groups. These programs could center on inclusion practices, fostering a sense of belonging, raising awareness about unconscious biases, promoting positive employee interactions, and offering strategies for advancing to senior leadership positions (Weatherspoon-Robinson, 2013). The study's findings could serve as a point of reference for organizations across all sectors aiming to dismantle cultural barriers and impediments that hinder the upward mobility of African American leaders within their entities.

Nonprofit executives could play a pivotal role in creating assessments and questionnaires to aid African American executives in recognizing their talents and leadership qualities when striving for senior leadership roles. This information could significantly benefit nonprofit leaders in recommending leadership and mentorship programs for those aspiring to higher positions. Offering a variety of leadership training programs can contribute to a positive organizational culture by promoting knowledge sharing, fostering healthy working relationships, and enhancing cultural competency among employees (Weatherspoon-Robinson, 2013).

VI.4 Limitations

Please bear in mind the following limitations: generalizability, social desirability, and researcher bias. Firstly, generalizability is limited (Brady & Collier, 2010) due to the specific focus on African American leaders in nonprofit organizations, which prevents generalizing to other racial or ethnic groups. Additionally, the small sample size of six African American

executives at the Vice President and C-Suite level further restricts the ability to draw broader conclusions about African American leaders in various public and private organizations. Secondly, social desirability (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2022) comes into play, potentially leading participants to portray themselves in a more positive light to conform to societal expectations, thus affecting the validity of the research. Finally, researcher bias (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2022) is a limitation due to the intentional selection of African American executives in nonprofit management as case study participants. This approach grants the researcher the discretion to choose the study's participants, introducing the potential for bias.

The researcher made a deliberate choice to prioritize the inclusion of African American executives in nonprofit organizations as the central focus in the leadership literature, despite the existing limitations. This decision is aimed at giving voice to a population that has often been overlooked in mainstream literature (Weatherspoon-Robinson, 2013), allowing scholars and practitioners to gain insight into their lived experiences. By doing so, this research provides a platform for understanding and opens the door to exploring improved leadership training, mentorship programs, and potential areas for future research.

VI.5 Future Research

Drawing from the foundational research in this area and the findings of this study, further research is necessary to delve into the development of leadership styles among African American leaders. To accomplish this, scholars should initially investigate the impact of intersecting identities on the development of leadership styles. Through this study, the examination of intersectionality showcased the need to comprehend the experiences of African American executives in nonprofit management not only in terms of race and gender, but also through the consideration of other aspects (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016). Many of the participants highlighted the presence of additional factors contributing to the process of developing

leadership styles. Consequently, it may be pertinent for future research to include culture, spirituality, relationships, age, nationality, and other identities. When considered in conjunction, intersectionality may be valuable in further elucidating how multiple identities can reinforce one another and augment the development of leadership styles among African American executives in nonprofit management. In essence, more studies are necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and identify the different groups with which African American executives in nonprofit management may align.

In future research, it would be beneficial to explore the relationship between gender and authentic leadership among nonprofit leaders. It's worth noting that our research study did not impose any demographic or gender-specific restrictions, and both male and female nonprofit leaders were encouraged to participate. However, it's important to acknowledge that the gender distribution in our study, with fifty percent female and fifty percent male participants, may not fully represent the actual gender diversity in nonprofit leadership. Therefore, I recommend further investigation into how gender-based authentic leadership influences the success of nonprofit organizations.

Moreover, utilizing the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) as a method of measuring the authenticity of nonprofit leaders could significantly contribute to existing literature. The ALQ assesses the four components of authentic leadership: balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and self-awareness (Northouse, 2016). By employing the ALQ in future studies, we could gather quantitative data to effectively measure the authenticity of nonprofit leaders.

The scope of this dissertation did not allow for an in-depth investigation of all these points, indicating the need for further research on the development of leadership styles among

African American leaders. Implementing these recommendations in future studies could significantly contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of African Americans and their influence on the leadership style development process.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Research Protocol

1. **Summary:**

The investigation into authentic leadership traits among African American nonprofit executives is currently lacking, despite the widely theorized concept of authenticity in business leadership in recent decades (Atewologun, 2013). Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) rely on leaders who embody the values crucial to advancing their mission. While these leaders are assessed based on their ability to authentically align with the organization's values, the full disclosure and transparency of an African American nonprofit executive with all stakeholders in the workplace could pose risks in a society where conformity to dominant gender and race norms persists. The path to authentic leadership for African American executives is therefore complex and uncertain, presenting challenges related to balancing control and developing an authentic leadership approach.

In our research, we employ a phenomenological method alongside a qualitative multiple case study approach. Our goal is to delve into the lived experiences of African American leaders within nonprofit organizations. We aim to understand their appreciation for, and their journey towards, becoming authentic leaders. This exploration allows for a deeper comprehension of the unique pathways that these individuals navigate, contributing to the broader discourse on leadership within the nonprofit sector. The theoretical foundation of Control versus Drift is adopted to understand how awareness of self-identity, and professional experiences and events impact African American nonprofit executives' ability to manage the degree of demonstrated authenticity and the progressive journey toward authentic leadership. The study will advance research and literature on the leadership traits of African Americans and deepen the understanding of their lived experience and process toward authentic leadership as executives in nonprofit organizations.

2. **Description:**

2.1. Rationale: The rationale of the study is to understand how African Americans in nonprofit management come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership and better understand their lived experience of controlling versus drifting into a state of authenticity in leadership.

2.2. Objectives: Our objective is to 1) convey how African American executives in nonprofit management come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership; 2) share how awareness of self-identity and professional experiences and events impact their ability to manage the degree of demonstrated authenticity and the progressive journey toward authentic leadership; and 3) identify strategies to increase the professional success of African Americans as executive leaders in nonprofit management.

2.3. Methodology: The researchers will utilize a case study methodology incorporating targeted interviews (Miles et al. 2014; Myers 2013; Yin 2017) with African American executives currently working in

nonprofit management. Six (6) participants will take part in the study. Adopting a phenomenological approach, multiple interviews will be conducted to glean insights from the unique perspective of each participant (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Subsequently, qualitative analyses will be performed on the gathered data to achieve the study's objectives (Miles et al. 2014; Myers 2013; Yin 2017).

2.4. Data Management and Analysis: Volunteers participating in the study will undergo a series of interviews, which will be conducted via video conferencing or in person at the participant's workplace. With the interviewee's consent, the interviews will be digitally video recorded to aid data collection. The initial interview may last up to two hours, and the follow-up interviews should not exceed one hour each. Investigators will take notes during the interview sessions. This study does not offer compensation to the participants. The analysis will utilize various data sources, including interviews, collected documents, and publicly available data. Collected documents encompass materials that participants provide for the study, such as their curriculum vitae, strategies, plans, and assessments. Publicly available data include research, news reporting, and commentaries about the participants.

1.   Ethical Considerations:

The text outlines the ethical considerations and privacy measures for participants in a research study. It emphasizes voluntary participation, the option to withdraw, and the privacy of participant information. The study ensures confidentiality by assigning random identification numbers to participants, securing data with password protection, and limiting access to sensitive information to key researchers. Additionally, the document specifies the storage and eventual destruction of data, ensuring that participant identities are not disclosed in publications or presentations related to the study. This approach highlights the importance of respecting participant rights and maintaining ethical standards in academic research.

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to examine African American leaders of nonprofit organizations and their lived experiences, appreciation for, and progress toward developing into authentic leaders. Researchers will investigate how awareness of self-identity and professional experiences and events impact African American nonprofit executives' ability to control the degree of demonstrated authenticity and the progressive journey toward authentic leadership. Using a phenomenological method and qualitative multiple case study approach, this research will replicate six (6) separate case studies of African American executives of nonprofit organizations. The study will advance research and literature on the leadership traits of African Americans and deepen the understanding of their lived experience and process toward authentic leadership as executives in nonprofit organizations.

The research question is as follows:

How do African Americans in nonprofit management come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership?

Interview Guidelines:

- The participant will provide written consent of engagement before the interview is conducted.
- The interviewee will be notified of the purpose of the research study and project.

Note: The bullet points below outline the potential set of questions that may be asked. It's important to note that not all of these questions will be applicable to every participant. The specific questions asked during interviews will depend on each participant's path towards developing an authentic leadership style. Additionally, since this study utilizes semi-structured interviews, further pertinent questions may arise based on the participant's responses during the interview process.

Interview Questions:

Pre-interview Questions
- Do you identify as an African American?
- Do you currently hold a senior executive position for a nonprofit organization?
- Are you currently progressing toward or have you evolved to an authentic leadership style?

Self-Identity
- How do you identify as an African American?
- Without telling us about your career and resume, tell us about yourself? Who is _____?
- How do see yourself as African American and how has it influenced your career in nonprofit management and your leadership style?
- What three words would you choose to describe yourself?

- Are you able to act and behave as your authentic self in the context of being an African American in your role as a nonprofit executive?
- Have you ever faced a professional challenge because of your race? If so, how have or do you navigate it?

Nonprofit Management
- Tell us about your career journey in nonprofit management.
- What led you to a career in nonprofit management?
- What decisions or actions did you take to solidify your career in nonprofit management?
- What are your top five core values as an African American executive in nonprofit management and how do they impact you as a leader?
- What professional experiences and events (personal or societal) influence your role as an African American leader?
- What are some of the common pitfalls that African Americans encounter in nonprofit management and how have you navigated around or managed to overcome them?

Authentic Leadership
- What does it mean to be authentic in your life?
- How would you define your leadership style as an authentic leader?
- As an African American, professionally, how important do you see the role of authenticity in your leadership practice?
- What do you think are the behaviors of an authentic leader? And why?
- How are you more effective as a leader when you behave authentically?
- How does leading with authenticity contribute to African American nonprofit executives' career failure or success?
- Which principles and values have guided or sustained you as an authentic leader?
- What are the challenges being an African American leader in nonprofit management and how have you navigated them?
- Have you ever paid a price for your authenticity as a leader? Was it worth it?
- How would you characterize a successful leader within the context of an African American executive in nonprofit management?
- Reflecting on your leadership journey, what would you do differently regarding being authentic?
- Would you as a successful African American leader in nonprofit management recommend being authentic to aspiring Black leaders? Why or why not?
- What steps can an aspiring African American executive in nonprofit management take today, tomorrow, and over the next years to develop their authentic leadership?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Title: Authentic Leadership Between Control and Drift: An Investigation of African American Executives in Nonprofit Organizations

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lars Mathiassen
Co-Investigators: Ronald McNeill, MPA

I.   Purpose:

  2.5. You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine and understand how African Americans in nonprofit management come to appreciate and progress toward authentic leadership and better understand their lived experience of controlling versus drifting into a state of authenticity as a nonprofit leader. You are chosen as a candidate for an interview because you are an African American currently serving in an executive position for a nonprofit organization. A total of six (6) participants will be recruited for this study.

II.   Procedures:

As a participant in the study, you will take part in two to four interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to explore how self-identity awareness, professional experiences, and events influence the ability of African American nonprofit executives to demonstrate authenticity and cultivate authentic leadership. There are no right or wrong answers, so please respond truthfully. During the interview, investigators will take notes, and with your consent, it will be digitally video recorded to aid data collection. The interviews can be conducted via video conferencing or in person at your workplace. The initial interview may last up to two hours, with a possible follow-up interview lasting no longer than one hour.

Additionally, we may ask you to provide supporting documents such as your resume, curriculum vitae, strategies, plans, and assessments to support the study's concepts. Your contribution of documents is entirely voluntary.

III.   Risks:

In the context of this research, the participant shall not be subjected to any greater risk than that encountered in the ordinary course of daily life.

IV.   Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. However, we hope to deepen the understanding of lived experiences, leadership style, and progress toward authentic leadership for African Americans executives and advance research on leadership traits of African Americans in not-for-profit organizations. Moreover, society may benefit from learning strategies to increase the professional success of African Americans in nonprofit management.

V.   Alternatives:

The presented alternative to engaging in the study is the decision to abstain from participation.

VI.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Engagement in this study is wholly voluntary. Should individuals elect to partake yet subsequently revise their decision, they retain the unequivocal right to withdraw from the study at any juncture. Participants may omit any inquiries or cease their participation at their discretion.

VII.   Confidentiality:

Your records shall be maintained in strict confidence to the fullest extent permitted by applicable law. The individuals and entities granted access to the information you furnish include:

- PI: Lars Mathiassen, PhD; GRA Eminent Scholar, Professor; Center for Digital Innovation, Georgia State University
- Co-Investigator: Ronald McNeill, MPA
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

Your interview recordings and all project documents will be assigned a unique identification number and recorded in a secure code sheet. This identification number will be used instead of your name on all project records and materials. The code sheet will be stored separately in an encrypted password-protected file to ensure privacy. Only the principal investigator (PI) and co-investigator will have access to the project data and the code sheet. When presenting or publishing the study results, no information that may identify you will be used. The code sheet and all project data will be securely stored for fifteen years and then destroyed. Your name and any personal identifying information will not be disclosed.

VIII.   Contact Information:

Should you have inquiries regarding the particulars of the study, your role within it, or if you possess any concerns or complaints pertaining to the research, kindly establish contact with:

- Lars Mathiassen, PhD at lmathiassen@ceprin.org
- Ronald McNeill, MPA at 404.984.8016 or rmcneill3@student.gsu.edu

IX.   Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

Upon providing your consent to participate in this study, you will be furnished with a copy of this consent document for your records. Should you agree to voluntarily partake in this research endeavor and consent to being documented via video recording, kindly affix your signature below:

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