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A Phenomenological Study on African American Male Conduct Officers and their Experiences with Code-Switching in Professional Settings

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A Phenomenological Study on African American Male Conduct Officers and their

Experiences with Code-Switching in Professional Settings

A Dissertation in Education

With a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Bernard R. Little

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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation

of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized,

including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited.

I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

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ABSTRACT

African American male student conduct professionals consciously engage in code-switching in professional settings. Student conduct professionals hold significant responsibility within a college or university. The impact of their decisions creates immense pressure and results in lasting consequences for students involved. In this qualitative, phenomenological study the use of code-switching for six African American male conduct professionals is examined. Through semi-structured interviews, their diverse experiences are explored. Findings revealed that their use of code-switching is an intentional performance that they were taught and they use code-switching for professional survival. Findings also revealed that African American male conduct professionals weigh the risks and rewards of code-switching regularly and their need for connection among other African American is critical to their survival. At the forefront of their work is student advocacy and service—with a special commitment to supporting African American students. Through this research, the crucial needs of African American male conduct professionals are amplified in the context of evolving higher education organizations that desire to increase diversity and inclusion on their campuses.

Keywords: African American, male, student conduct, code-switching, phenomenology

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.), there are over 5,300 postsecondary education institutions in the United States. In 2018, there were more than 16.6 million enrolled undergraduate students. At the same time, the numbers of graduate students exceeded three million. Once admitted to a college or university, there are few people who have authority to remove a student from the institution. Two of the most common academic purposes for removal include when a student does not meet satisfactory performance or the required grade point average. Outside of academic or personal reasons, there are a select group of professionals granted authority by the university to involuntarily remove students when a violation of the code of conduct has occurred. These individuals are student conduct officers.

Student conduct officers are highly trusted, receive comprehensive training, and are employed to use ethical and moral decision-making skills to ensure the safety and security of students and the larger campus community (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). They are also charged with making difficult decisions each day that are scrutinized, could have legal implications or lead to litigation. Conduct professionals face much criticism and challenge regarding their roles from a variety of audiences. Lancaster and Waryold (2008) suggested the following:

> Conduct administrators need a thick skin and great courage to practice in a field that attracts such disillusionment and controversy. This is a tough field, and one must look deep within to discover what it is that is so compelling about the practice. (p. 7)

Given the high-risk responsibilities, these professionals typically operate under a metaphorical microscope. Students, parents, community members, university and external lawyers, college presidents, and legislators all have a vested interest in the decisions made by student conduct officers. In addition, laws govern student due process, which includes the right

to a fair and equitable hearing process to understand the charge(s) they are facing as well as an opportunity to speak to the allegations prior to determining the decision and outcome.

This due process law traces back to 1961 in the case of *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* where the court sided with students, ruling that due process is a responsibility of the university. This gives students the right to both be informed of the charges and have the option to respond. This law paved the way for student conduct practices on college campuses (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Today, in most student conduct processes there is also an opportunity for the students to appeal and challenge the decision of the student conduct officer, usually on certain grounds, which sometimes include unfair process, new information, or the student believes the sanction issued is too harsh (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

With intense pressure and laws mandating processes, it is important that student conduct officers maintain professionalism and adhere to the outlined processes dictated by the university. Altering one's approach to meet expectations of any stakeholders would be unethical and a violation of the code of conduct professional expectations set by the governing Association of Student Conduct Officers (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Yet, all student conduct professionals' experiences are not the same.

Racism, stereotypes, and bias are all present for African Americans within the Student Affairs profession (Thomas, 2005). Race plays a role in the journey of African American professionals, regardless of whether racial injustices are premeditated (Thomas, 2005). In order to professionally advance within student affairs or achieve senior level roles, African American professionals' ability to be resilient in spite of the myriad challenges they face is rarely addressed in the literature (Lewis, 2007). This resiliency comes by understanding how to best navigate dominant spaces, especially during careers at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Lewis,

2007). Code-switching (e.g., shifting language, behavior, and demeanor) is a strategy that African American males in other professional fields use to succeed within dominant environments; it has proven to be an effective skill to employ when navigating dominant spaces as a member of a marginalized identity group (Orbe, 1994, 1998). Orbe highlighted this in his phenomenological study of African American men in various career industries including both blue- and white-collar professions (Orbe, 1994).

Problem Statement

Limited research existed that explored the experiences of African American male student conduct officers and their use of code-switching in professional settings. No studies focused on whether the work environment forces African American male student conduct officers to use code-switching as a means to communicate for the purposes of thriving in majority dominant spaces. To date, there had not been an emphasis on understanding the black male conduct officer experience beyond the white narrative and norms on which the original field of research was based. Shifting this narrative to fully incorporate these and other experiences tells a different story that should be embraced instead of ignored. As colleges and universities seek to diversify their staff, a better understanding of this population would contribute to a more supportive professional experience for the individuals themselves and the organization as a whole.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore African American male student conduct professionals' beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts about their use of code-switching in professional settings. This study came at a pivotal moment in American history where current tragedies happening nationally caused individuals and organizations to further demonstrate their commitment to creating spaces that are inclusive, promote equity, and have

diversity. Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are leaving work environments they deem toxic and not supportive of inclusivity (Gassam Asare, 2019). Companies are scrambling to hire Chief Diversity Officers and intentionally focus on DEI work as a response to these challenges (Hamilton, 2021; Mallick, 2020). As colleges and universities yearn to be more inclusive, this study, which sought to understand individual experiences of a marginalized identity group, narrows the gap in literature at an important time in our history.

Historically scholars often use a deficit view when exploring the experiences of African American participants. For example, a popular subject matter in the field of education centers on closing achievement gaps among African American students in all levels of education (Kendi, 2019). The conversations around achievement gaps and the negative picture it portrays towards black boys and black girls is rooted in racism and does not consider the power of environment as well as the origins and intentions of standards (Kendi, 2019). Achievement gap rhetoric and other deficit modes of thinking is often the story told of the African American male experience (Kendi, 2019; Smith et al., 2007). As a counternarrative, this study used an asset-based approach to examine the lived experiences of African American male student conduct officers.

Research Questions

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that "Qualitative approaches to inquiry are uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues" (p. 38). Specifically, when it comes to research questions, Creswell (2003) recommended that study questions are presented within the parameter of a chosen research tradition followed by a number of queries designed to align the study's focus. Phrasing of questions is intentionally open-ended, utilizing exploratory verbs. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do African American male student conduct officers define code-switching?

2. How do African American male student conduct officers engage in code-switching within professional settings?

3. How do African American male student conduct officers determine when they use code-switching in professional settings?

4. How does the use of code-switching inform identity construction of African American male student conduct officers?

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study sought to understand the lived experiences of the participants using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research seeks to discover how individuals construct meaning of the human experiences (Creswell, 2003) and serves as a guiding influence in this study. Tenets of phenomenology are woven throughout the research design to ensure appropriate representation of the lived experiences of the participants. In doing this, the researcher demonstrated the essence of the participants' experience, which in turn improved accuracy in representing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Researcher's Positionality

A researcher cannot and should not make any attempt to remove themselves from the dilemma that they are researching and instead must be aware of where they stand as it relates to the research (Merriam, 2002). To that extent, it is critical that the researcher, as an African American, cisgender, heterosexual male understood the impact those identities had on the research. His gender, ethnicity and culture played a large role in why he attempted to understand Black student conduct officers' experiences with code-switching in professional settings. The researcher worked for several years as a student conduct officer and served as a volunteer on a leadership board with the Association of Student Conduct Professionals. His experiences as a

hearing officer and his engagement in code-switching within professional settings led to his interest in this area of research.

The researcher's identity as an African American male as well as a student conduct professional fared well given that the participants for the study shared those same identities. The researcher believed there would be a higher degree of connection with the participants for the study as he had been socialized within similar communities as the participants. These connections enabled the researcher the opportunity to quickly gain rapport and build connections with participants. His assumption was that the shared identities and similar professional roles would grant him significant access to the participants' private and vulnerable experiences.

Organization of Dissertation

The research project was organized into five chapters with the intention of combining significant literature and newly discovered data gathered throughout the study. Chapter One provides a foundation which sets the stage for the study by providing the research questions, the study's intention, and the overall purpose of the research. Chapter Two explores existing literature on code-switching from a historical view and within the context of education, higher education, African American male college students and faculty of color. This chapter weaves relevant literature together that shares the gaps that exist while highlighting the role of Student Conduct officers. Chapter Three presents the methodological approach used in the study. Chapter Four presents the findings from the study based on interviews from six participants. The four themes and subthemes are presented in this chapter. Chapter Five links the findings to existing literature and offers implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Rationale and Significance

The researcher was interested in exploring how African American male conduct officers perceived their experiences with code-switching while at work on college campuses. This research has the potential to inform how campus administrators, supervisors, and colleagues may better support African American male conduct officers as they navigate their roles and individual identities within the context of code-switching. This investigation may also create an awareness for additional research on this topic. As it stood, research was minimal when it came to the experiences of African American professionals in higher education, including the experiences of male conduct officers.

This study is critical in understanding the use of code-switching among African American male student conduct professionals for organizations and individuals to fully grasp the true experience of existence and participation of Black men in their work environments. This study may also be significant for African American male conduct officers themselves, to gain insight into the experience and impact of their decisions to code-switch. Ultimately, this study was designed to uncover the personal stories and experiences of African American male conduct Officers, an experience that is part of the researcher's agenda and warranted the need to be explored more broadly.

Key Terminology

For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined African American as individuals of African descent who are American citizens. The term code-switching (or as it is sometimes written, code switching or codeswitching) is broadly discussed throughout a variety of disciplines and especially used in linguistics. A search in the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts database in 2019 found more than 3,700 articles on the subject. Given the variety,

scholars do not share a definition of the term. In addition to the varied use of code-switching, many outside the academic community also use the term with myriad definitions. For those reasons, we can understand that code-switching is contextual and when applied to various linguists, anthropologists, sociolinguists, and other professionals, it is impossible to define the term uniformly.

In this study, the definition of code-switching is derived from a sociocultural-linguistic lens that states code-switching occurs when an individual uses two different languages or language varieties within a single conversation (Auer, 1998). Throughout the literature review, the definition was detailed using both metaphorical and situational descriptions, all crafted from the sociocultural-linguist's perspective. In addition, a detailed definition of co-cultural code-switching was provided which brings attention to code-switching beyond language. While the code-switching definitions around language have great meaning, for the purposes of this study, it is critical to also highlight that code-switching is more than the language a person uses.

To that end, code-switching moves beyond the linguistic term and also occurs when a person with a marginalized identity intentionally switches their interactional style—which includes language—to better accommodate different environments or persons in authority of the dominant race. For example, in the United States this occurs when an individual notices dissimilarity in their personal grammar, language, and mannerisms and how they differ from the widely accepted Standard American English, and makes a conscious decision to switch to the Standard American English in formal (e.g., school or work) settings or situations (Benson, 2000; Suddler, 2014; Young et al., 2014).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of literature regarding: (1) the historical context of code-switching; (2) code-switching within K–12; (3) code-switching within higher education; (4) the student conduct profession within higher education; and (5) co-cultural communication theory and code-switching.

Co-Cultural Theory with African American Male Student Conduct Professionals

Co-Cultural Theory (CCT), which was introduced in 1998 by Mark Orbe, can be used as a framework to understand the complexities of code-switching and why they are important for African American men in the university setting (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). CCT derived from two other theories—Muted Group Theory by Edwin Ardener in 1975 and Standpoint Theory by Nancy Hartsock in 1983—and is grounded in five epistemological assumptions (Orbe, 1998). Orbe (1998) stated the five assumptions as: 1) A hierarchy that privileges certain groups exists in each society, and in the United States those groups are White, American and individuals who are cisgender; 2) Dominant groups have power they use both consciously and unconsciously to maintain communication systems that represent their experience; 3) Those dominant communication structures impede on non-dominant folks; 4) The non-dominant (co-cultural) groups share a similar non-dominant and marginalized status within the dominant structure; and 5) Co-cultural groups consciously and strategically adopt communication behaviors to maintain and thrive in a dominant influenced system (Orbe, 1998).

African American male student conduct professionals work for and engage with populations of the dominant structures as described in CCT and may engage in code-switching to navigate these structures as an attempt to survive as an outsider. In addition, African American male conduct professionals at PWI's are handling conduct cases where many students are

predominantly of the dominant group. As such, these professionals may choose to alter their approach, as suggested by CCT, to adhere to the dominant group's communication style. The bearing of these choices has substantial impact on the identity development of individuals with marginalized identities that go beyond the interaction in which they choose to code-switch (Orbe, 1998; Orbe & Roberts, 2012).

Co-cultural theory is one way to view what has been discovered to be a wide range of complexities around code-switching and how African American males in various situations utilize this communication style. Co-cultural theory provides context to explain the various strategies used when communicating in dominant spaces. A deeper dive into understanding code-switching strategy is outlined below, beginning with a historical overview of code-switching.

Historical Context of Code-switching: Linguistic

The term code-switching spans linguistics and a number of other fields including sociology, anthropology, race studies, and business communications (Nilep, 2006; Young et al., 2014). Many scholars debate when the term code-switching was coined, which makes it difficult to trace its true origin (Orbe, 1998). Scholars suggest early studies by Aurelio Espinosa, a long tenured faculty member of Romantic Studies at Stanford University who introduced the phenomenon of New Mexican Spanish-English speech mixing, have great similarities to code-switching (Benson, 2001). Espinosa (1911) commented on speech mixture (i.e., phrases half in Spanish and half in English) in the speech of bilingual school children and employees in larger cities and towns (Benson, 2001).

The concept of code-switching can be dated as far back as the 1950's, when Hans Vogt introduced the concept of switching from one language to the another within the same conversation (Benson, 2000). Over twenty years later a study conducted on language in Norway

brought the most noted and referenced mention of code-switching, prompting further studies and books on the topic. Blom and Gumperz (1972) conducted a study to understand the significance of language codes in Norway between 1964–1966. Their findings highlighted the value of social meaning as they relate to codes and language. Based on the hypothesis that social meaning had everything to do with code-switching, a three-month field study was conducted in the northern town of Hemnesberget, Rana Fjord. Residents of this town placed significant emphasis on their spoken language and took pride in their communication and articulation. The researchers concluded through a qualitative study and with the use of interviews that the body of language used by residents was both rich in distinction and carried its social meanings based on formal and casual situations. Blom and Gumperz (1972) noted the following:

> Effective communication requires that speakers and audiences agree both on the meaning of words and on the social impact or values attached to the speaker's and audience's choice of expression. We will use the term social significance, or social meaning, to refer to the social value implied when an utterance is used in a certain context. (p. 417)

Social meaning goes beyond the referential naming of items, objects, or acts. Given how a word can differ in meaning depending on the context, geography, and individual speaker, social meanings can attach to words, signs, and objects (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). This work is important and highly influential for introducing the terms situational and metaphorical code-switching, which are discussed further within this study.

George Barker's (1947) study in linguistic anthropology was one of the earliest studies of code-switching in American studies. The scholar sought to understand social networks and social geography of Tucson, Arizona residents and to explore how Mexican Americans code-switch from their native language to English. Barker (1947) noted that when with family members and

those whom participants were intimate and familiar with, Spanish was spoken. However, when formal dialogue with Anglo Americans occurred, it was more than likely spoken in English. Regardless of the Anglo Americans' familiarity with Spanish, English was the chosen language (Nilup, 2006).

Sociolinguistics suggest the origins of the term in the United States should be attributed to Monica Heller (1988), who described linguistic code-switching as bilingual speakers alternating between languages in interaction with other bilinguals. This notion of changing from one form of behavior (or in this case word choice) to another was said to be for the purposes of creating a desired social impression (Molinsky, 2007; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Two of the foundational researchers of code-switching in linguistics are Uriel Weinreich (1953) and Hans Vogt (1954). Weinreich (1953) described switching codes as bilingual individuals possessing two separate linguistic varieties that ideally come out on separate occasions. Weinreich believed that code-switching was an inherited trait and one that was shaped by parental and familial guidance. In this instance, an individual learned through specific guidance how and when to use codes and acted accordingly (Nilup, 2006; Weinreich, 1953). Vogt (1954) believed, however, that code-switching was both natural and common in conversation. Vogt insisted that all language users experience language contact and that contact includes language alternation, which brings about language change or code-switching. Vogt highlighted this when he insisted the following:

> Code-switching in itself is perhaps not a linguistic phenomenon, but rather a psychological one, and its causes are obviously extra-linguistic. But bilingualism is of great interest to the linguist because it is the condition of what has been called interference between languages. (Vogt, 1954, p. 368)

Blom and Gumperz (1972) took code-switching a step further after findings in their study led them to conclude that code-switching exists both metaphorically and situationally. When defining metaphorical switching, the scholars insisted it relies on using two language varieties within a single social setting. In describing interactions between clerks and residents in the community office, the authors noted that while business took place in the standard (formal) dialect, greetings took place in the local (casual) dialect. Though the setting remained the same, two separate types of exchanges occurred (Blom & Gumperz, 1972).

Situational code-switching occurs when there is a change in linguistic form based on a change in social setting, such as a change in the setting from a formal lecture to a more informal dialogue among peers (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). The formal lecture prompted formal language whereas the peer dialogue prompted casual language; one was scripted and the other was casual (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Nilep, 2006).

A final socio-cultural linguist to highlight code-switching is Peter Auer. Auer challenged the most common writing and interpretations of code-switching in his book *Code-switching in Conversation* (Auer, 1998). The author conducted a deep analysis of how linguists and other communication scholars have come to understand the code-switching phenomenon, while criticizing the lack of attention given to context as well as the ethnographer's own pre-conceived understandings of code-switching (Auer, 1998). Infusing a historical perspective to code-switching, Auer (1998) called for more studies that seek to understand code-switching as it relates to the community one resides within. In the future directions for research section of his book, Auer (1998) emphasized the need for significant longitudinal studies on individual experiences with code-switching in their household as well their school. The scholar insisted on the need for better understanding of code-switching within cultures and community to

understand the impact that code-switching has on cultures and cultures on individuals code-switching. Such studies have recently been conducted to address the psychological impact of code-switching on a culture (Molinksy, 2007).

In summary, code-switching from a historical lens focuses on the origins of code-switching in addition to metaphorical and situational code-switching. The scholars highlighted have shaped our understanding of the term through years of research. The section that follows focuses on cross-cultural code-switching to further explain how an individual recognizes differences in their own cultural norms and adjusts based on the dominant environment that they are temporarily inhabiting.

Cross-Cultural Code-switching and Global Dexterity

While linguistic code-switching involves switching from one language to another within a conversation (Auer, 1998; Heller, 1988), cross-cultural code-switching involves moving between culturally ingrained behavior for adaptation purposes to one's surrounding (Molinsky, 2007). The movement happens when an individual who has an established set of norms identifies the need to switch for the purposes of the environment or the role one plays in that particular conversation. The individual deviates from behavior that is known and typical for them and switches to behavior more appropriate in the particular culture (Molinsky, 2007). Another term for this is what Andrew Molinsky (2013) calls Global Dexterity in his book by the same name. Molinsky (2013) defines global dexterity as "the capacity to adapt your behavior, when necessary, in a foreign cultural environment to accommodate new and different expectations that vary from those of your native cultural setting" (p. 9).

In research that spanned a decade, Molinsky gained insight to hundreds of individuals from various cultures attempting to gain access to employment, higher education, and other

benefits in the United States. The book provides countless examples of individuals who understood American customs and spoke English flawlessly, yet struggled to alter their own cultural customs and ways of being. Global dexterity is cultural adaptation or successfully code-switching with an international emphasis. It teaches those from countries outside the United States to appropriately adapt without losing themselves (Molinsky, 2013). The author encouraged individuals to make the (new) cultural behavior their own by learning as much as they can and being open to adaptation. The second part of cross-cultural code-switching encourages individuals to seek a cultural mentor whom they can lean on for advice and encouragement. The final part centers around individuals "developing a forgiveness strategy" (Molinsky, 2013, p. 8). Throughout this process, individuals are reminded of the learning process and the difficulties that present themselves when attempting to adapt to new cultures and ways of being. The author emphasized that adaptation to new cultures is ongoing and encouraged patience and resiliency throughout the journey (Molinsky, 2013).

While research is limited when it comes to cross-cultural code-switching, there is no shortage of research as it relates to cross-cultural communication. Edward Hall, a leading scholar on cross-cultural communication wrote numerous books on the subject to bring the importance of embracing cultures unlike our own into the conversation in an ever-changing global world. When writing of the importance of embracing an appreciation of cultural communication, Hall and Hall (1989) wrote:

> A massive cultural literacy movement that is not imposed, but which springs from within is called for. We can all benefit from a deeper knowledge of what an incredible organism we really are. We can grow, swell with pride, and breathe better for having so many remarkable talents. To do so, however, we must stop ranking both people and talents and

accept the fact that there are many roads to truth and no culture has a corner on the path

or is better equipped than others to search for it. Furthermore, no man can tell another

how to conduct that search. (p. 7)

The author, along with others, called for an understanding and appreciation of the diverse

cultures that exist in the global world. Similar to co-cultural code-switching, cultural

communication acknowledges a difference in customs, beliefs, and patterns and encourages a

shift in perspective to adapt to a new environment. What is different, however, with cultural

communication is that instead of altering one's customs like code-switching suggests, scholars

call for an overall appreciation and acceptance of the differing communication styles. This is

similar to code-switching in K–12 schools where many students demonstrate the ability to adjust

their communication while scholars also call for educators to understand and adjust their

teaching styles to accommodate students.

In summary, global dexterity and cross-cultural communication highlight a call for

individuals to fully assimilate to the dominant culture for the purposes of gaining entrance and

showing a willingness to embrace others. These strategies lend to the complexity surrounding

code-switching and highlight the expectations by both those with power and those instructing

students of color on how to navigate such places. Such instruction starts in the K–12 educational

system.

Code-switching in K–12 Education

There is no dearth of research conducted on code-switching in K–12 education. In fact,

K–12 and code-switching within the classroom yielded the highest return of literature throughout

the databases searched, which included ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Code-switching

within the classroom varies based on context. Some examples include students' perceptions of

code-switching, teachers and their use of code-switching, and code-switching for bilingual purposes. A significant amount of code-switching in education research approaches code-switching in the metaphorical sense as it highlights the experiences of bilingual individuals when discussing its use within various cultures including Latinx, Chinese, or Iranian students and their use of code-switching (Martinez, 2014; Momenian & Samar, 2011; Teo, 2017).

In one study of sixth graders who mostly (98%) identify as Latina/o from East Los Angeles, California, Martinez (2014) sought to explore the ways students in this classroom possess awareness of code-switching. Through participant observation, video and audio recording, the researcher was able to document the verbal exchanges of students through both instructional and social contexts during a span of three months. Of the 29 students in the class, 27 expressed an awareness that they mix both English and Spanish in conversation, demonstrating an awareness of their personal use of code-switching. The use of code-switching was natural for the students in this study, many of them stating that mixing and/or swapping languages is very common within their home and communities and other non-formal environments (Martinez, 2014).

In another study, through qualitative methods, researchers sought to understand the impact of code-switching and language development among toddlers in primary school (Bail & Newman, 2015). Parents and children were observed engaging in conversations where the parents used varying sentences that included some forms of code-switching. Some parents would code-switch once in the sentence, and others used code-switching for up to two-thirds of the sentence (Bail & Newman, 2015). The children were receptive to both languages in this case and were able to distinguish the meanings of their parents' words. The researchers concluded that there was no evidence to indicate that the exposure to code-switching has any detrimental effect

on the children's learning or vocabulary skills (Bail & Newman, 2015). The study was able to conclude that code-switching had no damaging educational effects on these primary school students (Bail & Newman, 2015).

The above studies highlight the ease of code-switching by some students as they navigate the K–12 educational world. However, the studies are limited as to what if any influence code-switching had on these students throughout their lives. Young et al. (2014) challenged the use of code-switching as it related to the psychological lasting impact on students. The authors wrote "If students are aware of their mixing of code-switching, imagine the experience of being instructed that their use of language is incorrect, as so many educators have done in the context of other studies" (Young et al., 2014, p. 18). Their criticism highlights the work of well-known scholars on code-switching in K–12 settings such as Wheeler and Swords (2006), whose work focused on training educators to understand code-switching to then train students to use prior knowledge to transition from vernacular knowledge into standard English.

While some focus on code-switching in K–12 environments center on bilingualism when studying Latinx students, the research shifts to describe "improper" or "non-standard English" when referring to African American students' language use (Young et al., 2014, p. 33). While not explicit in their approach, the implicit bias towards African American students' use of "improper" or "non-standard" English is evident in educators' refusal to embrace their use of language familiar to them (Young et al., 2014). As such, educators spend a great deal of time attempting to teach African American students to speak using Standard American English (Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Young, 2014).

Historically, educators have sought to repress African Americans' language of the home and replace it with Standard English, hence forcing students to adjust to the context or situation.

In one study, students adjusted at school and altered their language to ensure satisfactory approval from teachers (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). The authors discussed Standard English when they stated:

> When we talk about "proper grammar" and "good English," we make a lot of assumptions about the nature of language. We assume that English *is* Standard English. We assume that Standard English is Right with a capital R, and that anything else is improper, bad, incorrect, and fractured. Indeed, we seem to believe that anything other than Standard English is pretty much not English. (p. 5)

The findings from such studies on code-switching compel educators to teach African American students the importance of code-switching as it will have major influence on their experience as scholars within the classroom (Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Young et al., 2014).

Wheeler and Swords (2006) argued that code-switching is a true art, and having this conscious awareness makes the speaker more of a robust communicator. Further, if minority students are to be truly embraced within the classroom and schools, their home language is a very important component in that process. Further research is necessary to understand the different responses from educators relating to bilingual students' use of code-switching and the use of code-switching with African American students (Young et al., 2014).

In summary, research surrounding code-switching in K–12 schools is contested in nature depending on whether or not teachers, students, and researchers believe that code-switching is an acceptable form of communication. The debate widens when one considers bilingual and African American English. Though a robust amount of research exists on K–12 and code-switching, next we examine the literature within Higher Education.

Code-switching Among African American Male College Students

There has been important research conducted on African American men and what leads to their success within colleges and universities. In one study, researchers found that African American males leave institutions at high rates due to their struggles with institutional culture and experiences with racism in the college environment (Harper, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2012). The Black male students who find success often employ many strategies including code-switching, where they alter their normal approach to that of the dominant White culture in order to gain acceptance and navigate the complicated academy (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). Black men's counter stories are critical to combat the narrative that Black men are deviant, anti-intellectual, and culturally deficient (Bell, 1992; Howard et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In one study African American male students at PWI's were individually interviewed and participated in focus groups. Researchers found that code-switching was a controversial approach but one that many students felt was necessary to employ for "survival" at their institution (Glenn & Johnson, 2012, p. 360). Glenn and Johnson (2012) asserted that one way to understand the participants in their study's use of code-switching is through Co-Cultural Theory (CCT; Orbe, 1998). To review, CCT asserts that when members of non-dominant groups are in environments where their communication style is of the minority, those individuals adjust or alter to the dominant communication style. Glenn and Johnson (2012) sought to determine both if, and to what extent, the participants used CCT communication strategies of assimilation, separation, and accommodation when engaging with others at their PWI. The researchers found that there were many CCT strategies used by African American males throughout their

experiences, and participants were savvy in their communication at various times and in different environments.

Participants in the study were mixed in their use of code-switching. In one finding, some students indicated that they used code-switching because of negative stereotypes held by European Americans toward them, indicating the difficulties that African American men face when working to assimilate to the White culture simply to be accepted (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). In another finding, some students mentioned that regardless of how much they attempt to code-switch or assimilate, the stereotypes are still present. Glenn and Johnson (2012) explained,

> Nathan explains perceptions of how White people see him. He states, "You don't respect me as a person. I am just another nigger basically… I am not an individual to y'all." Several participants nod in agreement to the sentiments. Despite this perception as a permanent outsider, several participants assimilate into White culture on campus. (p. 356)

As the participants explained in the study, regardless of the use of code-switching, the work put into altering one's communication style may not matter when African Americans and other marginalized groups remain of the minority on campus. The dominant group dictates the rules and ultimately has the power through various means to determine the value placed on others' contribution (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). Yet these African American males continued to use code-switching as a way to navigate the campus community.

In another study of Black men at a small PWI, men were interviewed regarding how Black men perceive the racial climate on campus and make sense of their invisibility at the university (Allen, 2020). Participants were aware of the need to code-switch given their understanding of race on campus (Allen, 2020). These ideas of race play into the larger social constructs placed on them, their bodies, and their overall existence in a place where they are

minimally represented (Allen, 2020; Howard et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2007). One student participant described their use of code-switching in the following way:

> When I'm around mostly White people I try to act a little more polite. I have a good vernacular. I think sometimes that they look at that and they're like "he's not the 17-year-old stereotypical Black guy. He's speaking properly. He's not saying nigga every other sentence." I've gotten that hint from a lot of people, like "he's kind of different from the norm." (Allen, 2020, pp. 16–17)

This awareness, gained from early and frequent lessons taught by family members, plays a critical part in navigating integrated spaces (Allen, 2020). In a resistance to marginalization, these forms of social capital are what Black men and other folks of color gravitate to for survival (Allen, 2020; Yosso, 2005).

African American male college students' experiences with code-switching are similar to the experiences of African American male professionals in the university setting (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009; Harper & Harris III, 2012). As such, though limited research exists on the experiences of African American male student conduct officers and their use of code-switching, alternative career fields such as code-switching among faculty of color can be examined to offer similarities in perceived experiences. Understanding code-switching among faculty of color enhances the small body of literature that exists regarding code-switching among African American professionals.

Code-switching Among Faculty of Color

Blackburn et al. (1994) noted that limited research existed around the experiences of faculty of color code-switching within the academy and demanded change in a call to truly understand and support this small population of academics. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, African American faculty members represent just 6% of all faculty according to a 2017 report (NCES, n.d.). Blackburn et al. (1994) argued that higher education institutions and research centers must clearly identify and unpack the experiences of these faculty members to create supportive environments and recruit and retain high quality talent. Stanley (2006) made similar arguments as she noted that much of the scholarship ignores the individual narratives of these faculty members which detail their experience with racism, sexism, the tenure process, and other complex issues not shared by their peers of the dominant group.

A study conducted by Constantine et al. (2008) to investigate racial microaggressions expressed toward Black counseling and counseling psychology faculty members shared examples of the difficulties this small population experiences. Using phenomenological methodology, the researcher interviewed faculty members and analyzed the narratives of their experiences within the academy relating to microaggressions. One of the many themes from the study centered around the conscious choice many participants made to code-switch in order to cope with the microaggressions experienced in their workplace. In the study, Constantine and colleagues (2008) revealed the theme "Self-Consciousness regarding choice of clothing, hairstyle, or manner of speech," which emphasized the many ways faculty members choose to "prove" themselves as worthy members of the academy (pp. 352–353).

> When detailing one participant's narrative, Constantine et al. (2008) wrote:
>
> I'm self-conscious to a degree that I surmise that my white colleagues are not. I'm aware of what I wear, I'm aware of my tone of voice when I speak, and I'm aware of my bilingualism—you know, my ability to speak Ebonics. (p. 353)

The experience of microaggressions as faculty members forced the participants into a conscious decision to alter their approach so as not to stand out or be too much for their peers (Constantine

et al., 2008). Being placed in a situation to have to decide when and when not to be themselves is a daily choice that many encounter not only from their peers but also their administrators and their students (Allison, 2008; Constantine et al., 2008; Stanley, 2006). Participants in the study talked about the feeling of being monitored not only in their scholarship and service to the college, but also in their speech, their clothing, their expression, and their blackness (Constantine et al., 2008). These experiences of racism in addition to the small population of African American faculty members place many in difficult dilemmas when it comes to their identity and their careers.

In another study using participatory action research, researchers sought to understand the experiences of Black faculty, students, and frontline staff and their use of code-switching to navigate a particular PWI (Payne & Suddler, 2014). Through observations and interviews with faculty, the researchers revealed faculty members' comfort with their use of code-switching as a natural behavior to utilize in professional settings (Payne & Suddler, 2014). Code-switching, or in this case altering or softening one's racial identity given their presence at a PWI, is known to be damaging to participants, yet they still believed this was what was necessary. The participants understood how damaging code-switching was when Payne and Suddler (2014) stated, "some faculty as a result of code-switching experience higher levels of occupational stress. These faculty perceive themselves to work harder than their White faculty counterparts as a function of code-switching and assimilation" (p. 390).

In summary, while there is minimal research on the experiences of African American conduct professionals and their experiences with code-switching, comparisons to other African American and marginalized groups were used to highlight possible similarities. In the next section, additional literature about the student conduct profession is provided.

Student Conduct Profession

The student conduct profession dates back to colonial colleges, where those in the role were seen primarily as disciplinarians, whereas in the present, student conduct professionals are seen as educators (ASCA, 2018; Stoner & Lowery, 2004). While the role has existed for some time, there remains a gap in literature regarding the experiences of African American male conduct professionals as much literature has focused on conduct professionals in general terms. The professionals facilitate investigations into potential violations of an institution's code of conduct, engage in discussions with all parties involved in situations, and have direct oversight of the outcomes and sanctions regarding any violations that occur as a result of a student within the larger institution (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Violations and the impact they have on students and the institution have become more complex in recent years, requiring student conduct professionals to understand legal matters in addition to a student's developmental level and the overall impact to the school policy. The role of conduct officers has shifted from adjudicating violations such as curfew violations and academic plagiarism to more complex matters such as those involving high risk behavior involving drugs and alcohol use to violations of federal laws such as sexual and relationship violence, hazing, and severe disorderly conduct. Professionals are charged with not only the investigation of these matters but also are often named in legal cases, requiring these professionals to collaborate with lawyers, local authorities, and others (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

Student conduct professionals face many challenges when performing their responsibilities at work given the high-risk associated along with the potential impact of harm and/or liability (Fischer & Maatman, 2008). Given this, the professional association for student conduct officers (Association of Student Conduct Administrators) recommends a list of skills a

conduct officer must possess in order to be effective in the role (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). This list includes professional knowledge of the field and basic responsibilities, wisdom that comes with professional maturity, cognitive diversity that comes from an understanding and experience of cross-cultural communities, and development of temperament and attitude that come with professional experience and training. Temperament is defined as the combination of a person's mental, emotional, and physical traits that create their natural disposition (Fischer & Maatman, 2008). All of these skills and traits are necessary with the high-stakes roles and scrutiny these professionals face.

In addition, student conduct professionals possess the skills often sought after for Chief Student Affairs Officers to lead the divisions at colleges and universities (Blimling, 2002). While few student affairs professionals start the collegiate experience indicating the desire to be a senior leader in student affairs, the training and experience of a student conduct officer provides the risk management and legal background necessary to serve in these top positions (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

The student conduct role is multifaceted and requires professionals to be well-trained on matters of law, policy, and student development theory. The position demands cross-cultural familiarity. The pressure to ensure that students are supported while the greater campus community is safe is indeed a tremendous burden for any professional. These expectations coupled with the racial injustices and social inequities experienced by those of marginalized identities make this a challenging role. It is essential that higher education institutions provide authentic support and seek compassionate understanding of the experiences of African American male student conduct professionals. Given that one of the main requirements of the job includes making sound judgment and influencing the outcomes of a student's academic career, it is

essential that spaces are created where African American male student conduct professionals can thrive without code-switching or altering their communication styles. A deep understanding of the use of code-switching amongst these professionals is needed for supervisors and colleagues as they work to build more inclusive and diverse teams.

In summary, the role of the student conduct professional entails specific skills to meet a variety of constituencies' needs, which leads to a great deal of pressure for people in these roles. In addition, the experiences of African American male conduct officers are missing in the literature. Research is needed in order to fully understand their experiences as the student conduct profession continues to evolve.

Future Research

The current literature lacked a consideration of the experiences of African American male conduct officers and their use of code-switching. There are many definitions of code-switching, causing difficulties in drawing distinctions from the metaphorical or situational contexts. When considering how to explore code-switching, a clear definition of code-switching must be determined. Additionally, the research is limited in studies that apply to code-switching and professionals' use of this communication style. More research is needed to highlight the lived experiences of professionals who use code-switching, especially in contexts where members of non-dominant groups are involved. As organizations seek to create more diverse spaces it is important to understand the burdens placed on professionals with marginalized identities regarding the implicit need to code-switch. As Mark Orbe (1994) insisted, "This lack of understanding greatly reduces communication effectiveness during interethnic interactions which include African American men" (p. 287).

Given the limited research and the review outlined above, there is a need to understand the experiences of African American male conduct officers and their use of code-switching. These professionals are in spaces where dominant groups hold power and influence. Additionally, supervisors should be concerned with implicit expectations placed on African American male professionals when it comes to communication styles. Future research is needed to explore these gaps in literature.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented a review of literature examining the historical context of code-switching, cross-cultural code-switching and dexterity, code-switching among faculty of color, code-switching within K–12, code-switching within higher education, the student conduct profession within higher education and co-cultural communication theory and code-switching. This literature review provided the context necessary to explore the phenomenon of African American male conduct officers and their experiences with code-switching in professional settings.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology can be described as a term which bridges many different forms of inquiry (Merriam, 1998; Van Maanen, 1983). According to Merriam (1998), these variations are "used to make meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5).

Qualitative methodology allows for data collection through a variety of tools and designs, which may include personal experiences, introspection, the case study, interview, artifacts, life story, and cultural texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). While often critiqued for the differences from quantitative research, qualitative research works to capture the story of the participants through reflection in history and culture. Researchers utilize this methodology to understand "the meaning people have constructed that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in their world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Patton (2002) expanded on the characteristics of qualitative research:

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their meanings are. (p. 6)

In this qualitative study the researcher will use phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of African American male student conduct professionals.

Phenomenology often refers to either a philosophy or a research method (Creswell, 2003; Morse, 1991). Developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), phenomenology originated as a social science to discover how individuals discover things and describe them through their senses

(Patton, 2002). Husserl departed from a scientific approach, believing the subjectivity of the immediate existing experience as the true source of knowing (Koch, 1995). Husserl (1970) suggested phenomenology was a way to "return things to themselves" (p. 252) using description.

A phenomenological study "describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept" (p. 51). The focus is then on the meaning of people's experiences toward a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). The phenomenologist's view places value on the human experience and believes that experience has meaningful relationships to things, people, events, and situations. Schutz, as citied in Creswell (1998), suggested, "The purpose of phenomenological study is to identify how ordinary members of society constitute the world of everyday life, especially how individuals consciously develop meaning out of social interaction" (p. 53). The essences according to Patton (2002), are "the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (p. 106). The researcher's task was to present the essence of the experiences of African American male conduct offices and code-switching. Patton (2002) proposed that within the approach is the essence of a shared experience, and the researcher's role is to find that and bring it out.

Rationale for Research Approach

The researcher was interested in exploring how African American male conduct officers perceive their use of code-switching in professional settings. There is a great deal of research on the subject of code-switching within a variety of settings (see Chapter Two for a review) and while that research is informative, not all experiences are captured in past studies. Specifically, research on code-switching among individuals within higher education has primarily centered on students. The staff within these organizations are missing from this research. Additionally, few studies explore the experiences of African American men within higher education. These gaps in

the literature, combined with the need to truly understand the lived experiences of BIPOC, provided a clear rationale for a qualitative approach.

This investigation has the potential to inform researchers, academic executives, student affairs professionals, and student constituents. Filtering the phenomenological findings through a communication theory lens helped to frame the results and suggest possible future research. Findings from this study will help African American student conduct professionals as they reflect on their development and place within the college and university setting. Findings also will help inform colleagues of African American male conduct officers and African American male colleagues in general as they look to create inclusive professional spaces.

Research Context

The setting for this study was two and four-year public and private colleges and universities within the United States that had membership affiliation with the Association for Student Conduct Administrators. This association serves as the leading voice for student conduct within the field of higher education. The organization had a membership of 1,051 individual institutions across the United States (ASCA, 2018). The mission of the association connects to the education and advocacy of student conduct professionals, which connects to understanding the experiences of African American student conduct professionals.

Research Sample

The participants in this study were African American males who served as student conduct professionals within the field of higher education. Student conduct professionals have various titles within the profession that range from coordinators, assistant and associate directors, directors, deans, and residence hall directors. The study centered on professionals who

participated as an adjudicator for the student conduct process and had authority granted by the institution to make decisions relevant to a student's conduct file.

Individual interviews were conducted with African American student conduct officers that identified as male. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling when selecting participants, which is defined as individuals who are "purposefully chosen to participate in the research for specific reasons, including that they have had a certain experience, have knowledge of a specific phenomenon…" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 128). The criteria for participants to be included in the study consisted of being full-time student conduct professionals at a two or four-year college or institution, have the responsibility of adjudicating the student conduct process, and self-profess to engaging in code-switching within their professional setting. The study was limited to the African American population as well as Individuals identifying as male as indicated in the research questions addressed in this study. Given the purposes of the study, participants had to self-identify with these characteristics to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria involved not meeting all inclusion criteria.

Participants were solicitated through professional colleagues and contacts within student affairs associations such as the Association for Student Conduct Professionals and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators. Special outreach was made to engage participants of diverse and underrepresented institution types (Community Colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, etc.) in an attempt to ensure purposeful sampling contributions. The researcher chose participants equitably based on institution type, institution size and number of years as a conduct officer. The names and identifying information of participants were kept confidential, as the researcher used pseudonyms for both institution names and participants.

Within qualitative design, researchers seek interpretive information from a participant sample as small as one individual and up to all individuals who have direct experience with a phenomenon (McNabb, 2002). Boyd (2001) suggested saturation can typically be attained with as little as two and up to 10 participants. Creswell (1998) recommended that a phenomenological study involve "long interviews with up to 10 people" (p. 65). In using a single occurrence interview design, the researcher hoped to start with an approximate sample of six participants. Once the initial sample was determined, the researcher was prepared to broaden the sample if necessary to further clarify emerging data until informational saturation had occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Saturation is reached when given the collected data, further data collection and analysis are no longer necessary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data Collection

Patton (1990) explained that the purpose of qualitative interviews is to "find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 196). The reasoning for interviewing is explained further as "entering into the perspective of the interviewer and seeking to involve what we are unable to directly observe" (Patton, 1990, p. 196). To that end, individual interviews were conducted with participants. Using the research questions and purpose of the study as a guide, the researcher asked semi-structured questions to uncover the essence of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of code-switching. As this research was conducted during an ongoing pandemic, interviews occurred via video conferencing on a platform of the participants' choosing. While not ideal, these types of meetings were normal in the current state of affairs.

The researcher asked a set of prepared questions to serve as a guide for the semi-structured interview (see interview protocol in Appendix A). The researcher engaged in the process of customized replication with each participant, which according to Ravitch & Carl

(2016) means that, while sharing key questions, "interviews seek the customization of each conversation through individualizing follow-up questions and probes for specifics within each interview" (p. 147). While initial questions for all participants were the same and based off the purpose of the study and research questions, the researcher engaged in follow-up questions in response to the participants' responses.

Participants provided informed consent prior to the start of the interview. This statement, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was provided via email prior to the start of all interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants were able to choose to not participate at any point in the study. Before starting the interview participants had an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarity from the researcher.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenology data analysis model highlighted conceptual patterns and was used to guide the work of the researcher in preparation for the investigation. The researcher followed these steps during data analysis:

1. Reading and rereading the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon to acquire a feeling for their experience and to make general sense of their experience.

2. Extracting significant statements that pertain[ed] directly to the phenomenon under study.

3. Formulating meanings for these significant statements to illuminate hidden meanings.

4. Categorizing the meanings into clusters of themes and confirming consistency between the emerging findings and the participants' stories without giving in to the temptation to ignore data that [did] not "fit."

5. Integrating the findings into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study; describing include[d] coding segments of text for topics, comparing topics for consistent themes, and bridging themes for their conceptual meanings, which [led] to creating a prototype of a theoretical model about the phenomenon studied.

6. Validating the findings by returning to the study participants to ask how the universal description compare[d] with their personal experiences.

7. Incorporating any changes offered by the participants into the final description of the phenomenon (pp. 48–71).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility is vital to qualitative research as it ensures that participants are represented accurately as identified and depicted (Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using trustworthiness as an alternative to the positivistic criteria for quality, namely, reliability and validity. Trustworthiness has four components for the qualitative researcher to ensure quality: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility centers on the participants' perspective and ensures that there is opportunity for participants to review findings and provide insight. Credibility also includes extensive review of findings known as member checking. Transferability ensures there is thick descriptions used to describe the data. Dependability requires an audit trail that non-participants can follow as it relates to the research. And finally, confirmability involves the use of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study, peer review of the methods and analysis occurred throughout the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher sought feedback from the dissertation chair and committee members, fellow doctoral students, and colleagues in higher education. Member checking occurred to ensure all participants had an opportunity to check transcriptions for

inconsistencies and provide opportunity for further interpretation. Three participants reviewed partial transcriptions and had no revisions or corrections. Finally, findings were communicated through a thick description. The researcher worked to ensure that the voices of the African American male conduct officers were at the core of the project to allow future research to determine transferability of findings that may be applicable in other contexts.

All data was stored on a password protected computer which is only used by the researcher. The data was analyzed, and all written analyses were stored in a locked drawer in a locked private office within a locked office building. Pseudonyms were used on all analysis, and the identities of all participants were stored on a USB drive in a locked drawer, separate from the other files.

Conclusion

At the time of this research, the United States is warped with systemic racial injustices that are being highlighted for the world to consume. From repeated killings of Black men, a flawed and biased educational system, and overflowing prisons that disproportionally house more Black men than any other racial demographic, these words of James Baldwin (1961) ring true: "to be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time." The social climate was both exhausting and depressing given the racially charged incidents occurring around the country and there seemed to be a radical effort to paint a distorted picture of the African American male experience instead of giving this population the same respect and inquiry that many researchers have long given other populations. There was a need to understand these individuals, and the researcher sought to gain insight into a subculture of this population for the purposes of creating the inclusive professional settings that many in higher education sought. With the use of qualitative research, this phenomenon provided an avenue to

bring about much needed change. Understanding the lived experiences of African American male student conduct professionals allows supervisors, colleagues, and others to realize the expectations required to thrive in their settings and suggestions on how to improve these ever-changing environments.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter highlights the findings from the study that examined the lived experiences of African American male conduct officers and their practice of code-switching in professional settings. The existing literature on code-switching did not depict a clear understanding of the phenomenon experienced by African American males in professional settings, including conduct officers. As such, this study sought to fill the void in the literature while also providing insight for current and future African American male conduct professionals. The findings from this study highlight the lived experiences of participants. This chapter includes a report of key themes and supporting qualitative data that helped answer the central research questions for the study:

1. How do African American male student conduct officers define code-switching?

2. How do African American male student conduct officers engage in code-switching within professional settings?

3. How do African American male student conduct officers determine when they use code-switching in professional settings?

4. How does the use of code-switching inform identity construction of African American male student conduct officers?

Participants

Inclusion criteria for the study required participants to identify as African American and male, to serve as a student conduct professional with the task of adjudicating academic and behavioral cases, and to use code-switching in professional settings. Six individuals participated in this study. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom between the participant and the researcher and lasted between 60–90 minutes. During the interviews, participants were asked demographic questions regarding how they identify. They were also asked about their experience

as a conduct officer, their years of experience in the conduct profession, and their use of code-switching in professional settings. For the complete interview protocol, see Appendix A.

The six participants who met inclusion criteria had a range of professional experience in student conduct, working in community colleges, Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU's), public, and private settings. The length of experience in the profession was also broad with the least amount of conduct experience being three years and the longest professional experience being nearly seventeen years. The participants all shared a love and passion for the students they served as a student conduct professional. Each participant spoke of their contribution to the lives of the students they encountered as their drive and motivation to show up each day, even while the work is complex and not as glamorous as other student affairs offices. The participants each wrestled with their use of code-switching but ultimately admitted that code-switching was essential to their survival in the field of student conduct and student affairs. Pseudonyms were selected for each participant at the start of the study. Table 1 provides an overview of participants.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

	Dametraus	Alex	Michael	Sidney	Marques	Rashad
# of years working in Conduct	6 years	12 years	16.5 years	8 years	14 Years	3 years
Present Institution Type	Mid-size Public	Small-Private	Large-R1, Public	Mid-size Public	Mid-size, Private R1	Large, Public, R1
Past Institution Types	HBCU	CC, Large R1	N/A	Mid-size Regional	HBCU, Large R1, Regional	N/A

Participant Profiles

Dametraus

Dametraus was a six-year student conduct professional working at a mid-size PWI in the southeast part of the United States. Dametraus had worked as a student conduct professional in

the functional area of housing and residence life, adjudicating low to medium level cases. Dametraus spoke of engaging in code-switching at work to appear more palatable to White students and professionals whom he engaged with on a daily basis. Code-switching to Dametraus is a natural way of presenting an alternate version of himself to attempt to speak from a White lens as opposed to presenting from his African American frame of reference in which he identifies. This pressure to code-switch is not something he had been told to do from White students or colleagues directly, but Dametraus shared that he felt he had to do it based on the looks he received from White colleagues and students in professional settings, critiques on word choice, and the feelings of pressure to show up and assimilate. When asked about why he did not feel like he can show up as himself, Dametraus shared,

> I feel like I'm limited in how I show up in spaces at work. I feel very much that I need to perform in a certain way. And for me, it didn't feel authentic, but I feel as though being authentic is not in my best interest in those moments.

Even as he wrestled with code-switching, Dametraus expressed an appreciation for the work he was able to do with students. Dametraus spoke of the satisfaction he had as an educator and someone whom students respected after engaging with him in meetings and interactions.

Dametraus expressed the commitment he had to code-switching given his sponsorship from his institution in his quest to gain permanent citizenship in the United States. Dametraus expressed a desire to not rock the boat or push the boundaries because not much was worth the risk of losing the sponsorship he needs to continue his work. The pressure he feels from the possibility of losing the sponsorship weighed heavy in all his interactions at work.

Alex

Alex had worked in the student conduct profession for twelve years and, at the time of the study, worked at a small private PWI in the southeast of the United States. Alex had student conduct experience at a community college and discussed the differences in the pressure he felt to code-switch where he worked currently compared to his past community college student conduct role. Alex spoke of the nature of the work and the pressure to perform based on institution type. As a community college professional, Alex felt extremely comfortable in engaging with his students freely. However, working at a private institution in the south, Alex expressed increased pressure and admitted to engaging in code-switching more.

As a former division one athlete, Alex initially credited code-switching to the student affairs profession. He spoke of his difficulty in adjusting to the lack of direct talk and needing to adjust his approach to be mindful of feelings. Alex soon realized the pressures from working in student conduct gave a whole new meaning to communication and being careful about what he said and how he spoke, appeared, responded, and shared feedback. Yet Alex expressed that code-switching had helped him gain respect and trust from his colleagues, which was helpful when working in the deep south. Alex shared,

> I think an advantage of code-switching is that you gain influence. You can build trust in the workplace. At the same time, I think I've built a good, professional reputation at my place of work. Even to the point where I have some White colleagues that will come to me and talk to me about some racial stuff. Like Yo, how do I respond to this or, What do you think about this? They told me we don't think you're someone who's going to instantly call us out as being racist. You're going to listen to what we have to say and

then give us feedback about it without saying, yeah, you're racist as fuck even though I think they are.

Alex also spoke of the struggles he had as a male in a female-dominated office environment and the pressure to code-switch in that environment. Alex shared his commitment to the students and his growth in the profession as a driver for his reason to code-switch. The student and parent interactions gave him hope that while he was not 100% himself, the impact was always worth the sacrifice.

Michael

Michael had the longest tenure as a student conduct professional, working in the field for close to seventeen years and handling academic and high-level cases which potentially resulted in the suspension or permanent removal from an institution. Michael had been at his institution, a large, research one institution in the northeast part of the United States, throughout his own collegiate career, sharing a passion for the community. He expressed surprise when recanting the number of years he had been in the field. Michael spoke of the pressure to perform throughout his entire career. Michael struggled to identify a time in his entire career that he had not engaged in code-switching. Michael spoke of his ability to use laughter to make conversations and difficult decisions easier to grasp and the importance of students understanding that nothing was personal. Even given the large size of his institution, Michael often found himself the only Black male professional within his office, which gave him a keen awareness of how race impacted his decision to code-switch.

Michael understood that code-switching helped him serve as a valuable resource in his work and that is what mattered the most. Yet, Michael struggled at times with feeling the need to

code-switch and lamenting why he couldn't show up as he is in other settings. When detailing

some of the highs and lows of code-switching Michael shared,

> I'm a pretty outspoken guy, so I've been seen as the face of conduct for a while, even
> though I have other colleagues. People say "aren't you the director" and I say I'm just the
> assistant director. But because I get out there a lot and my race, they think it's all me.… I
> find it part of who I am as a professional. I know that I'm a Black man in this role doing
> this work. And I think it helps for the most part, but it comes with challenges. And there's
> some days I struggle with the work, and I wonder if I were not Black, would my advice
> or counsel be taken differently?

This constant struggle with code-switching was present in the entire interview with Michael, but

again he expressed a commitment to serving students. Michael felt a need to show up to

meetings or presentations with an understanding of what is needed in that moment. The

commitment to code-switching to him was to ensure that the educational experience is valued

and the lessons intended are learned by the students.

Sidney

Sidney had been a conduct professional for eight years, serving at mid-size public

institutions on the east coast of the United States. Sidney had professional experience both in the

areas of residence life and general student conduct, serving as an advocate for students in the

relationships he built with them. Sidney was a first generation American in his family who

immigrated to the United States. Sidney spoke of the importance of code-switching as he

considered his pride for being an American and having to navigate his citizenship with his

upbringing under Nigerian parents. Sidney spoke of the responsibility he felt to advocate for

those seeking equal rights in this country. His advocacy in his capacity as a student conduct

professional was extensive as he valued the rights of individuals and ensured that processes in his control provided the equality for all those involved.

Sidney took pride in code-switching to advocate for students and used his code-switching to place emphasis on establishing rapport and showing up when students needed him. When asked how he code-switched, Sidney responded,

And so, starting with how I present and just how I'd like to meet students. I love meeting students wherever they're at. I like to consider myself someone who can read a student's disposition and see just kind of in the first 15 seconds to understand what they are about. Obviously, I don't get the full picture and neither do they. When it comes to my approach, I immediately recognize I'm a Black male. I know that impacts some. So, I switch because I need them to feel comfortable.

Overall, Sidney valued the use of code-switching in professional settings. He understood the risks associated with them but believed that there was no way of getting around it currently at his professional level. Sidney learned from those around him in his family who chose not to code-switch and the negative consequences that followed their choices.

Marques

Marques was a seasoned student conduct professional with experiences at public, private, large and small institutions as well as working at an HBCU. For fourteen years, Marques had served institutions as the only Black conduct professional, often hired for his professional rigor and ability to use skills such as code-switching to connect with students, faculty, and staff. Marques, raised by grandparents from the south, grew up with an expectation of respect and honor. Marques prided himself on his ability to adapt to whatever situation he needed too in order to honor the task he is responsible for accomplishing. Marques shared,

When I was hired, I was brought in for the reasons in which your study outlines. The institution had two men who identified as White, cisgender males. One that identified as heterosexual, the other identified as part of the queer community. They weren't able to relate to students of color and/or Greek students. They needed someone to talk through their lens in that vernacular if you will. So, the students would feel comfortable and feel like they weren't just going to be suspended or expelled.

Marques welcomed these opportunities as they allowed him to grow in his experience while doing what he loved which is serving students. Students preferred working with him over other colleagues because he was able to turn on and off code-switching when appropriate to relate to their needs. This level of code-switching did not discourage Marques, and in fact energized him. Marques valued the use of code-switching as a tool to break down barriers and build bridges of support for those he served.

Rashad

Rashad served as a student conduct professional for three years in one of the largest higher education institutions in the southern part of the United States. Rashad's experience as a certified mediator gave him a special connection to his work as a conduct officer. Rashad loved the opportunity to work with students but had less appreciation for his colleagues due to the constant microaggressions he experienced and the feeling of needing to prove his worth to colleagues constantly. Yet still, Rashad spoke highly of his student conduct work. Rashad shared,

> I actually loved the work. I wasn't looking for getting into student conduct work, I knew I wanted to work in student affairs and I thought that just meant being a dean but I didn't know how to get there. My mentor gave me a position in student conduct and while I had

no idea what I was doing, I loved it and was able to navigate the role successfully. I loved

my work in student conduct, just being able to work with students. It was something both

fun and fulfilling for me.

Rashad talked extensively about the exhaustion he had when engaging in code-switching and the

need to constantly be something that you aren't for someone who cares nothing about you

personally or professionally. It was this exhaustion that Rashad detailed that made him aware of

code-switching.

Rashad talked about the difficulties in code-switching which he believed negatively

impacted the integrity of the student conduct process. He believed that when people of color

were questioned in their work, their behavior, their communication, and their approach, that it

watered down their identity. When speaking of the importance of being genuine to who he was,

Rashad shared,

I think with code-switching you're watering down everything that makes you special. As

a Black person, the way we say certain things, the phrases that we use, the things that

only other Black people will understand. I think so much of that is lost when you code-

switch. And when that goes away, it's so boring, man.

These struggles with the need to code-switch in professional settings were unsettling for Rashad

throughout the interview. However, like other participants, Rashad believed that code-switching

was essential to surviving in these settings and was often non-negotiable.

Summary of Participant Profiles

The six participants had a range of student conduct professional experiences at a variety

of higher education institutions with the United States. They each shared their struggles with

code-switching to varying degrees and also expressed the commitment they had to code-

switching in order to serve their students. There was a pride when it came to working with students and especially serving as an advocate for Black students. In acknowledgment of their concerns regarding code-switching, each participant noted that they understood the value of code-switching and did not see a negative impact on their identity as a Black man.

Emergent Themes from Participants

In analyzing the data gathered for this qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand if African American male conduct professionals used code-switching and what impact, if any, it had on their identity or work in professional settings. Based on analysis of the data, four major themes emerged: (1) Code-switching as a Performance, (2) The Consciousness of Engaging in Code-switching (3) Risks and Rewards with Code-switching, and (4) Code-switching and Identity Construction.

Code-switching as a Performance

The code-switching as a performance theme described how participants understood code-switching as it related to their role as a Black male conduct officer. This performance as described was imbedded in communication as well as dress, approach, demeanor, and temperament of the participants in their daily lives. Analysis of these experiences resulted in the emergence of three subthemes: (a) defining code-switching (b) learning to code-switch (c) choosing not to code-switch.

Defining Code-switching

Participants expressed confidence and clarity when defining code-switching and what it looked like for them in all situations, but particularly at work. While participants each used different descriptors, the commonality around code-switching and the performance it required of them was consistent throughout all interviews. Words such as "modification, change, adapting,

and alteration" were used when participants defined code-switching. When asked how he defined code-switching, Michael remarked,

> I think about it as changing your tone, changing your approach, depending on the audience that you are in. And usually that means adjusting to the majority, instead of being more in the group that I'm in as a Black male. So, there might be verbiage that I use in some contexts that I intentionally don't use or alter, examples that I might use, tone of voice, temperament also comes into play. So, yeah, that's how I think of it. I think of it as a conscious choice in approach when talking or engaging with a certain community.

Rashad responded,

> Man, code-switching for me, is having to change the way you present yourself so that you can be most effective, in any given situation. I don't think it's necessarily selling out, I think it's all just about being effective. I'm a Black male and I know the whole, you have to work twice as hard thing so I don't have the luxury of having a conversation and not code-switching.

Participants spoke of how natural code-switching was for them in their roles as conduct professionals and feeling as though they were always having to switch between two different approaches to be palatable. Marques commented,

> Code-switching for me is a natural transition where I go from the language in which I want you to know that I have education and common sense, to where I also need for you to understand that I'm here to support you as somebody that looks like me and has similar experiences as you.

When probed further over the concept of natural, Marques responded,

> For me, it's just natural. As a mentor told me years ago, "Marques, I can take you to the
>
> White House for breakfast and I could take you to the projects for dinner, and at both you
>
> would be a success."

The natural state of code-switching and the ability to alter one's communication was a shared

commonality among participants.

Participants also defined code-switching beyond verbal communication. When asked for

his definition of code-switching, Alex remarked,

> I would say code-switching is primarily communication. But also, sometimes the way
>
> you walk, the way you sit down. The way you dress. I'm not going to gangsta lean if I'm
>
> sitting, you know. I'm not going to be up in my office slouched like that. And then dress,
>
> of course dress. I have to be a shirt and tie kind of guy. But I feel like there's a double
>
> standard. Some of my White colleagues in the office, they come to work looking like
>
> Willy Wonka, very informal. But everybody Black is sharp and formal. There's almost a
>
> different sense of urgency.

Learning to Code-switch

Participants in this study each learned code-switching by observation of family members,

mentors, and individuals in their lives who modeled code-switching. From growing up and

seeing parents and grandparents perform code-switching when engaging with individuals in the

majority to watching Black supervisors navigate high pressure professional settings, participants

recounted clearly where they learned the task of code-switching and the importance of

performing code-switching for their personal and professional survival. Rashad commented,

> Yeah, I learned it at an early age. Of course, I didn't know the term code-switching but I
>
> knew that my dad, he grew up on a farm and he made his way into IT, and this is back in

the late 80's, early 90's. And just seeing him and his interactions with colleagues and

then seeing who he presented himself to be at home. That's when I learned you have to

do this, you have to do this to be successful.

Marques also explained his observation of code-switching by watching his grandmother when he

remarked,

I would see and watch my grandmother talk to individuals in a certain way and come

home and have a different dialect. As I grew older, I would watch the way in which

people… and I even watch it now, would code-switch constantly.

Participants explained how the field of student affairs socializes you with unwritten rules

regarding code-switching and what was and what was not professional in work and even

conference settings. For example, Alex remarked,

I think it's socialization. I think it's learning how to navigate the workplace as a person of

color. You know that even when you go to conferences, right? A lot of times, you go to

conferences and the first thing you're going to do is connect with somebody who looks

like you and a conversation you have is a little different. It's like a natural connection.

So, I think it's more so, I think it's more so socialization. I think there's some unwritten

rules that somehow you become hip to the game when you start to work in this field.

Okay, I got to show up different. I got to show up, one, looking a cut about the rest. And

then I have to have answers.

Dametraus also remarked,

I think my first introduction to it was probably in my first year of grad school. The

assistant directors that I worked under, definitely were, they were people that were able to

move a room with code-switching. They were able to get things done. People respected

them across campus. And I knew they were code-switching because we would go to

lunch and talk about it. We'd have a lot of conversations about politics of higher ed and

dynamics and all of that. So, talking through that some more, understanding that they

were doing this on purpose, helped me to understand what are the ways that I can take

some of what they do and how they show up for my professional betterment.

While the observations made by participants of family members engaging in code-switching were often pleasant experiences, some participants learned to code-switch from fear of negative consequences experienced by colleagues who refused to code-switch. This learned behavior often involved participants seeing professionals they were close with miss opportunities to advance or even be removed from the institution entirely. For example, when detailing the ways, he learned to code-switch through fear, Dametraus remarked,

Yeah. I've seen people be not invited to be on certain committees or awards, or

assignments that someone might get would be less advantaged to them. Or people would

be shut out of different opportunities because they are too loud or they're too

controversial or whatever word you want to say, because they call out the system and

they're being themselves. They were cast aside for being themselves.

Choosing not to Code-switch

Just as natural and fluid as code-switching was to participants, they expressed a seriousness in moments when they intentionally choose not to code-switch. For participants, there were many times in their professional settings where they believe altering their approach or changing who they are does not give the advocacy for students, change the system, or fully express their beliefs on a specific subject the due diligence it deserves. They consciously decided not to code-switch when in these moments and clearly expressed their concerns in a way that the

audience could hear the passion and seriousness in their demeanor. These times are critical, as participants believed that they must show up and speak up for what is right in the moment. Alex exclaimed,

> So, there are times when I'm like, yeah I just need to show up to work and put my hands on the desk and say, "Look, everybody shut up and listen. This is what it is." And sometimes I find a way to do that in a tactful manner, and sometimes I'm like… fuck tact. I'm like they just need to get the raw deal.

Dametraus detailed,

> Every now and then, I have to show who I am. I turn it off, I speak loud, I demand to be heard. Because that is when and only when I feel like I'm being heard. Is it scary to them, I'm not sure? But in those moments, I don't care. And it's sad that it comes to that. Yet I am sure they understand how serious I am. And it's usually around race or students. Usually that's what I'm speaking up about.

Participants recognized moments they decided not to code-switch are risky but they saw it as necessary to cut through fakeness and drive the point home. Sometimes this is in regards to colleagues and other times when meeting directly with students in conduct cases. Michael described a moment in a conduct hearing when he felt the need to not switch and throw the script out for the moment. Michael explained,

> I was going over the police report with the students who were White, and they said, Man, the police are just always targeting us. I was like, let's stop right there, because I would have no idea. That's the moment where I took it down for a second. It's like, please tell me how the police targeted you. I would have no idea. They recognized, I said the wrong thing here. They were playing the victim and I was like, it was a noise violation, that sort

of thing. There were so many more things I wanted to say, but I didn't. I did challenge them in that moment, and I felt good about it. I was like, I'm not going to let this slide. In these moments for participants, many described the anger that they felt when they had to turn code-switching off. They felt unheard by colleagues or students when performing code-switching and could not allow those advocacy moments to be missed. Alex detailed,

> We had Black students hurt from the racial unjust on this campus and we just sit around like the day was another Monday. Like we didn't see protests, we didn't see police arresting our students. It was then that I realized they weren't paying attention. I didn't have it in me to keep pretending with them. So, I turned it off. I let them know that we need to get a clue and care about all our students and especially the Black ones. I was hurt. But I had to say something.

The Consciousness of Engaging in Code-switching

The consciousness of engaging in code-switching theme detailed the awareness that participants had of their use of code-switching and where they found themselves most engaged in code-switching. Participants identified key moments in their use of code-switching that centered when in the presence of colleagues or students who were White. Participants highlighted their need to often be free from these spaces to find relief and refuge within a village of support from fellow Black colleagues. Analysis of these experiences resulted in the emergence of two subthemes: (a) fly in the buttermilk and (b) the village.

Fly in the Buttermilk

The fly in the buttermilk sub-theme describes the moments when participants found themselves engaged in code-switching at work which was when in the presence of colleagues and students who identify as White. The fly in this case represented the African American

participant and the buttermilk represents the predominantly and often majority White spaces where participants are employed and provide service to students. Participants were conscious in their decisions to alter their approach, style, communication, clothes, or demeanor to ensure that they blended in with colleagues in order to feel valued in that space and respected as a professional. Yet still while code-switching, participants were seen as threatening or intimidating given their race. In one instance when discussing when he consciously engaged in code-switching, Alex responded,

> I'm always concerned about coming across as threatening or intimidating. I've been told that before by a White student. Hey, you're kind of intimidating," or, "You're scary. I've challenged back by highlighting my code-switching, for instance I'm wearing a tie, I'm wearing glasses, and I'm talking real calm and careful to the students. Yet they couldn't put their finger on why they felt scared. I knew though.

The choice to code-switch as a conduct officer also heavily involved speaking with attorneys and members of the community on critical issues. Participants admitted to consciously engaging in code-switching to ensure they were seen as professional in these moments. In explaining one of these interactions, Michael responded,

> And so, I think about, if I'm on the phone with a lawyer, and I think there are times where I want to be very straightforward and like, are you kidding me? Come on, man, do you understand you are minimizing what this person did, and be more direct. Kind of take my guard down. Sometimes I feel like I could come across more effectively if I could just be me in this space instead of being "professional me" in this space. I struggle with how I come across, how I am perceived by other individuals.

Participants engaged in code-switching in various ways when working with White students and colleagues. They were aware of the strategies used to navigate White spaces. In describing an instance of code-switching, Michael explained,

> I muffled myself. I chose my words carefully, I chose not to, pretty much to respond to everything he was alleging. And I just kind of just remained silent on some of the things he was bringing up. It was hard. But it has become so natural to do. To just be quiet.

Silence and muffling were two strategies of code-switching used commonly by participants in White spaces. Another repeated strategy involved careful word choice for fear of being recorded. Participants were always anxious about whether they were being recorded in specific conduct cases by White students. In recalling one of his earlier experiences with code-switching, Dametraus described,

> I think a time I would think about code-switching is at one of my earlier conduct meetings and how I approached the conversation from a White lens, because I felt as though that was the way I needed to communicate with them. And I knew I wasn't using the language or the speech that I would typically speak in, because I thought one I was being recorded so I need to act a certain way. Because I have had students record me before.

Marques also shared about being recorded and code-switching because of past recorded experiences. Marques remarked,

> In that moment I knew I was code-switching because honestly I feel like I knew I the hearing may have been recorded and I would've been documented. Because conduct is such a scripted process, but I still needed them to know that I was human.

When sharing the strategies used while code-switching, participants recalled moments of unrest and disbelief in the notion that they felt the need to alter who they were given the risks or the stress of being with White colleagues. The immense pressure to always be "on" and conscious of how you are showing up in spaces gave some participants heightened levels of anxiety in their recollection of these experiences with code-switching. These experiences brought on by the feelings of mistrust or proving themselves within spaces with White colleagues or students was best summed up by Rashad in explaining his conscious choice of code-switching. He remarked,

> I just didn't ever want to present myself like, I don't know, like Mr. Hip Hop you know. I don't want this because I don't want them to undervalue the experience that I'm bringing to this team. Not only because of my age but more importantly, because of my race. I felt like I had so much pressure and anxiety going into those meetings to make sure I presented myself acceptable. And that's sad to say. I deserved to be in those rooms. Right? I deserved to be at the table. I didn't have anything to prove.

The Village

The village sub-theme represents the value each of the participants placed on their reliance and dependence on connecting with their Black colleagues. In those connections and interactions, participants felt like they could cease with code-switching and simply exist at work. These were the groups or sometimes one or two colleagues were where participants flocked to in order to escape from the pressures of code-switching among White colleagues and students. When detailing the importance of these spaces, Alex described,

> We call it the village. This is place where African Americans and other people of color can go and chill. When in the village, I use slang, I don't talk proper, you know. I would

refer to things jokingly, that I would never say in my office. I might slouch back in my

chair and let my shoulders lean. I chill.

Sidney also remarked about the tremendous amount of comfort in these spaces. Sidney shared,

With other Black colleagues, we have our Black staff organization. And that's just a

space, a safe space, so to speak, for other individuals that look like me at work, at the

institution. That's where we can kind of turn off and say what we want to say. It's

because we want to be open and free. And when you are with your people, that's how it

should be.

The bliss expressed by participants when in the company of their fellow Black colleagues

was a stark contrast to the pressures identified by participants when in spaces dominated by

White colleagues. This detailed need to find one's people and be in spaces where code-switching

does not need to exist was of great importance to participants. In describing this need, Dametraus

exclaimed,

I think I also like when I'm in Black spaces where I don't have to do it. Where I can just

exist and I'm appreciated and valued because I'm just existing. I think those spaces exist

in our cultural centers or different spaces where I'm still at work but working with people

who I identify with. I have that space and feeling of belonging and not feeling like I'm

always on.

These sacred spaces gave participants joy and reassured them of the safety and acceptance they

sought in professional settings. These colleague interactions gave them the energy and fuel to

return to their offices and their work to press forward with the task at hand, while of course code-

switching.

To Switch or not to Switch

Participants discussed some of the risks and rewards of code-switching in professional settings. They detailed how they consciously weigh those risks and rewards in the impact they have in meetings and interactions with colleagues, when interacting with students, and their belief that code-switching would be a thing of the past after achieving a high-level position within the student affairs profession. Further analysis of lived experiences resulted in the emergence of four sub-themes: (a) risks vs rewards of code-switching (b) authority (c) exhaustion and (d) agency for Black students.

Risks vs. Reward of Code-switching

Participants reported their understanding of the risks and rewards of code-switching and the potential impact that it had on their overall well-being, their professional journey, and their reputations. At times, participants became bothered by how much thought went into deciding whether to code-switch or not and how code-switching was more for others and not themselves.

The feeling of pressure of being "on" or in the spotlight was at times described as exhaustive for participants. The feeling of performing in their communication, in their clothing, in their decisions, and even in their interactions with fellow colleagues created great anxiety for participants. Alex recalled,

> They watch you. They watch what you wear, where you hang on campus, and who you
>
> interact with. I mean, I have two colleagues in my office that are constantly making
>
> remarks about how I seem to be having a bad day or asking each other what mode I'm in
>
> that morning. I feel like I have never treated them with disrespect but are we not all
>
> allowed to have rough days at work? Not us.

However, participants reported the rewarding feeling of being able to be respected was worth the risk. In explaining the rewards of code-switching, Rashad explained,

> You sometimes have to do it to be effective. Sometimes you have to do it to get a needed outcome. Sometimes people won't even take the time to hear what you're saying if it's not wrapped up in a bow that is pleasing to I guess, mainstream, the masses. Just by talking White and code-switching, it's more appealing which makes me more effective.

There appeared to be a majestic moment in code-switching where participants were able to be heard and respected. When detailing this rewarding experience, Sidney noted,

> People get what I'm saying. In those moments when it's necessary, the code-switching does occur. God, it's beautiful when I can, especially when I'm talking about code-switching to my colleagues and amongst the students right? I like to think that I'm having some kind of impact on their lived experience. And so, it's always a benefit to be able to do that in those moments with students.

Though the rewards of being understood and respected were valued, there were moments expressed by participants where the rewards did not outweigh the risks. The feeling of not understanding the passion participants had at work on key topics were of great risk to them when it came to code-switching. In detailing the risks, Alex remarked,

> I think there are times where I feel very passionate about certain topics, and when I feel as though we aren't doing the right thing in the scenario. And I don't code-switch. But that doesn't happen a lot. I think the expression would be like, knowing which hills to die on. So, I don't always code-switch, but when I don't it's usually around identity things.

When matters of race were involved, participants intentionally chose to stop code-switching and get raw. Dametraus detailed,

I think I don't spare my White colleagues' feelings or emotions in that moment. I put the

values I have about myself and people of color and students above speaking nicely to

White colleagues. Because sometimes I feel like unless I do that, then they won't get it,

or they won't respond in a certain way.

Authority

Participants saw their positions as a key reason for engaging in code-switching so

frequently. Participants shared the aspiration of gaining a higher position with more authority. In

addition, participants believed that when in the higher positions of authority, they would not need

to code-switch. Participants shared that while being a conduct professional and student affairs

professional required a need to code-switch, once they established trust with their colleagues and

gained more authority and autonomy, the better the chance they would have to be themselves.

Alex explained,

You know that when you enter the workplace, you have to be a cut above the rest in order

to even get one foot in the door. Not to succeed, but just get the opportunity to prove

yourself so that you can succeed. That's like half the battle. Once you get there, you

establish some trust, I feel like only then like, you can be a little bit more authentic after

you've built up some trust in the workplace.

The desire to be able to show up as they truly were was shared by participants. They excitedly

detailed mentors and administrators who were true to themselves, and participants believed that

only because of their role and authority, this authenticity is possible. In detailing what the

authority he sought looked like, Rashad described,

My old boss, he is a Dean of Students, he would be in the room. He was a Black gay

male and we had a really close friendship. I just think he shows up, and this is something

I love about him. He shows up as himself in every situation. Of course, he adjusts to the audience, but I don't think that he code-switches. He's just himself. And I love that about him.

With greater authority, participants believed that would remove the feeling of fear and truly allow them to exist and not perform for their colleagues and their students. Yet the fear remained and was just as natural as code-switching to these professionals. Those feelings made their daily experiences with code-switching that much more exhausting. When talking of these desired positions of power and prestige, participants gleamed with hope and optimism. Yet still, there was some fear that remained. Sidney described,

> I'm unwilling to not code-switch now. It's not a risk I think I'm willing to take quite yet. At least until I'm in a position of, who knows, influence. Where I don't have to be afraid, but nervous, necessarily. But even then, I can't say that now, but if I'm in that kind of role, I wouldn't have these stereotypes about me that make code-switching important. At least for me.

Exhaustion

Participants expressed a feeling of exhaustion with code-switching and navigating the need to constantly show up at work daily and perform in dominant spaces. This exhaustion wore on the participants overall well-being and left participants with feelings of anxiousness when recalling moments of code-switching. Rashad replied,

> I've never done or said anything that will make me feel like I'm selling out, but code-switching is just exhausting. I think that's what I hate the most about it. It's not a, I don't like who I am. I think in some situations I wish I didn't have to do it each and every day.

In describing the fatigue of code-switching, Michael explained,

I think some of the costs are, there is fatigue that comes with code-switching and there is frustration that comes with that. There are times when I leave work emotionally drained. And when I get a nasty email or have an interaction, I want to go off. But I don't. I turn on the professional and just let it be. As I always do.

Alex commented,

I think one of the disadvantages of code-switching, one of the main ones is exhaustion. It's personal exhaustion. Because you have to show up to work and put on, I don't want to say a show, but you do, to a certain degree. You have to put on a show. You must show up as your professional self.

Participants expressed that to be a conduct officer in general provides a level of exhaustion just in the responsibilities of the job. The functions of following a strict process, being at the will of several invested parties, and ensuring the education and development of students while holding them accountable were all stressful parts of the role. So, to perform those tasks with the added responsibility of code-switching, there were new levels of exhaustion. Alex described,

You get frustrated in your job and I think conduct in of itself, can be exhausting. There're elements of the work that just present default exhaustion. Then there's another layer of exhaustion that you feel from not having a job where you can present your authentic self all the time. And you try to figure out, "am I overdoing this?" You think, would there be problems if I presented my authentic self? So, it causes professional exhaustion. I will say that before this position, I never felt as though I had to code-switch as much prior to this position.

Yet still, when it came to code-switching, participants felt that it was ultimately necessary to maneuver within organizations and be effective. Even in the exhaustion, participants deemed it essential to code-switch. In describing the costs and benefits to code-switching, Dametraus remarked,

> I think code-switching is powerful because people listen and using that, understanding what they want and how they speak and what they value; I can get the things that I want to get out of a situation. But also, powerless because I feel like I'm not being me 100% to get the things that I want, and other folks can just show up and do mediocre and they're fine. I have to do this intellectual gymnastics to be valuable enough for people to listen to what I'm saying and care about the things that I care about.

Agency for Black Students

The feeling of support and value for students was shared across all participants. The commitment these professionals had for students was clear and evident. In addition, these African American professionals placed an expressed value on their role in supporting African American students. This sense of duty came as a badge of honor that provided more joy than compensation ever could in their roles.

Participants looked forward to their interactions with Black students and used these opportunities to turn off code-switching and serve as a brother or cousin and support students well-being. When detailing that care for Black students even after suspending one of them, Marques described,

> I always help them to understand that I'm human and there's no judgment here. I'm just here doing my job for the institution. I'm still going to check up on you through all of

this, because even though you're suspended, that doesn't mean that you're not coming

back. I need for Black males and Black women to achieve degrees.

This support resonated in several interactions with students and was a calling to do more and be

more for Black students. In detailing an interaction with a Black student, Marques further

explained,

I looked at that student and I said, why are you here playing these games. You know

exactly why you're here. You know exactly the struggles that your parents made to get

you here. I had to remove him from the residence hall. Mother comes in, Black mama

crying. He's sitting there. I said "Now when are you going to get it together. Your mother

is here worried about losing you to the streets and you're just sitting here thinking about

the next time you can get high."

Representation and advocacy went hand in hand for participants, as they expressed a

commitment to showing up for Black students and doing what it took to show them a positive

example. Often participants were the only person of color in their office, which was valuable to

them to support these students. Sidney described,

Especially when I'm talking to other Black-identifying students, meetings are extremely

different for me. And they need to be I think. They have to. Black male identifying

students, they have to see individuals that look like me in this position to understand that

we are here for them.

Along with that representation, participants valued the Black students' perceptions of them as

advocates. Michael detailed,

I think because when I'm meeting with Black students, the students don't see me as this

person that's trying to get them in trouble. They may perceive me as more of a person

that's in a role that this is my function at this moment, but I'm not out to get them. And it

feels more of a like, let's talk about what happened. Let's work through what we need to

do.

As a result of this advocacy for Black students, participants believed the use of code-switching

and the risks or rewards were worth it, given their access and impact on Black students. In

describing engaging in code-switching and the opportunity to work with Black students,

Dametraus described,

I like who I am when I do it, because I think I do it for a greater purpose and that purpose

is the students. So, I think the good outweighs the bad in that environment, because I

think it helps push things along that I think needs to be addressed or it helps me get into

spaces that I'm able to make an impact for them.

Code-switching and Identity Construction

The African American male conduct professionals who participated in this study

expressed mixed feelings with code-switching at work. This was especially true as they

navigated spaces with White colleagues and students. Many of the participants expressed a

consistent understanding of code-switching, knowledge of when they engaged in code-switching,

and the risks and rewards involved in code-switching. Their understanding and choice to or not

to engage in code-switching were all connected to a desire to exist and show up for others in

their professional settings. Remarkably, participants in the study persisted as professionals given

their struggles with code-switching. Code-switching impacted how they saw themselves as Black

men, which emerged as a theme of the study. One subtheme explained their understanding that

code-switching has on them as Black men. That subtheme was: (a) I know who I am.

I Know Who I Am

Participants in the study were adamantly and unapologetically Black. The pride and energy they showed when speaking of their culture and their purpose in life because of their identity was inspiring. To be Black and to be Black and proud are two different, but valuable, experiences. And these men were proud to be Black. When it came to the impact code-switching had on their identity as Black men, participants differed in their beliefs. One participant denied an impact at all. Alex detailed,

> I don't think code-switching informs my identity at all. I think my identity, I don't want to say causes me to code-switch. But how I identify as a Black male, I think often… I don't want to say it drives me to code-switching. I think my identity is there. I know it's there. But I just think that there are concerns as to how that could impact or impede you. Impede progress in the workplace.

This juggle between the impact of code-switching on participants' identity was also true in another case, although expressed differently. In discussing the impact on his identity, one participant described how it influences him as it relates to other Black people. Dametraus explained,

> I think it does show up in how I navigate Black spaces. I think when at a PWI or outside those spaces, I think I'm acting a certain type of version of my Black self. I think when I go into other spaces, I am relearning how I don't have to do all those things and code-switch. How people don't care about those things. So, it's internal like, Okay am I doing too much, or too little. And how are people perceiving me?

These internal battles expressed by participants highlighted an impact code-switching had on their identity, which in some cases caused them to code-switch around members of their own racial group.

Participants believed that code-switching was part of their identity. Code-switching gave them power in times when they needed it, to navigate the higher education terrain by adapting themselves. This method was increasingly more and more natural for participants and gave them energy when using code-switching to make things happen. When commenting on the impact that code-switching has on their identity, Michael remarked,

> Yes, it's impactful. I think I am a person that can walk into any space and get what I need because I can appeal to whoever I'm talking to. I'm good at meeting people where they're at and if they want to be a hard ass, I can be more acquiescent. If they need more from me, I can be that person too.

To some participants, they were unable to separate code-switching from their identity given how natural the performance was for them. Code-switching was something that seeped into every conversation and interaction. Sidney elaborated,

> It's a part of who I am. It's part of what I do. How I speak. Even just speaking with you. Just how I'm like, when we first started and were so cool and real. It feels different than how I speak to other colleagues. And so yeah. I think it's part of everybody's identity. It means different things within each group for sure.

Participants referenced how young they were when code-switching became a natural part of them. This made it difficult to not see code-switching as part of their identity. Rashad explained,

Because it was ingrained in me at such a young age, I think it does. I think that it's, for

me it's this is what we have to do, sometimes. This is how we have to, I don't want to get

super deep but… we have to do things to get through life. But especially in higher ed, this

is what you want to do. This is what you have to do. Growing up as a Black kid, I just

meant that's what you have to do.

Conclusion

Chapter Four presented findings from a phenomenological study on African American

male conduct professionals and code-switching. First, the researcher outlined the participants and

their connection to the study. Descriptions were included based on demographic information

provided by participants. Next, participants' perceptions were shared about code-switching in the

workplace with an emphasis on higher education. Following, the researcher shared the emergent

themes from participant experiences which included Code-switching as a Performance, The

Consciousness of Engaging in Code-switching, Risks and Rewards with Code-switching, and

Code-switching and Identity Construction.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The central aim of this phenomenological study was to deeply examine code-switching from the perspective of African American male conduct professionals and therefore help make sense of code-switching in the context of higher education settings. Interest in this topic emerged as a result of seeing gaps in the literature on the topic and the researcher's experience within the student conduct and higher education profession. The study shined a light on the experiences of the six participants to detail their use of code-switching to help fill gaps in literature and recommend supports and resources for African American male conduct professionals in the future.

Code-switching among African American Male Conduct Officers

While there has been a substantial amount of research done on code-switching over the years, little has been researched about the lived experience of African American male conduct officers and their use of code-switching in professional settings. In order for higher education to meet the needs of these professionals as employees within institutions, an understanding of their experiences and the extent to which they are showing up to work in genuine and authentic ways is crucial. Despite the lack of literature on this phenomenon, the concepts of code-switching were outlined by the researcher to make connections to this qualitative study.

It is critical to note that code-switching for the participants in this study moved beyond language. Code-switching was in language, political and professional way of speaking, tone, and temperament. Code-switching was also in how they approached colleagues and the demeanor they kept throughout the interaction. In addition, participants believed code-switching also comprises every part of their appearance including their dress, hair, and their style overall. This

study lends the idea that code-switching must not only be about language but also include the entire makeup of one's identity and how they present themselves.

Connection to Co-Cultural Theory

As discussed previously, co-cultural theory is a framework that highlights communication styles of individuals with limited to no power of authority within society (Orbe, 1996). Participants in this study admitted to using code-switching, a component of co-cultural theory, explicitly because they felt powerless within dominant White spaces. Code-switching was a method for participants to gain power and influence while accommodating colleagues or students. Accommodation was a component of Orbe's co-cultural theory that resonated throughout interviews with participants. Accommodation includes tactics such as dispelling stereotypes, which participants believed was critical to their success as student conduct professionals and future leaders within the field of student affairs. Participants believed that their use of code-switching showed White colleagues and students that they could navigate dominant spaces intelligently and thrive as professionals. These and other reasons for code-switching align with co-cultural theory and were amplified throughout the findings within this study.

Connection to Theme One: Code-switching as a Performance

Comparable to the vast amount of research on code-switching, participants share similar understanding that code-switching serves as a performance. Koch et al. (2001) detailed that the practice of code-switching depends heavily on the audience, and more than likely when engaging in code-switching for African Americans, the performance was due to the dominant majority being present. Participants in this study defined code-switching as a performance where one alters who they are in order to be acceptable to White colleagues and students. They insisted that how they speak normally is not nor ever will be acceptable to the dominant race, and they change

for the occasion, which was similar to previous research (Constantine et al., 2008). Myers (2019) insisted that this level of adjusting who one is for the sake of others through code-switching is the "manifestation of the melting pot ideal which requires the submergence of one's cultural roots to gain access to the promise for America" (p. 113).

In addition to clearly articulating the definition of code-switching and how they use code-switching, participants recalled their understanding of how they learned to code-switch. While each of the six participants have unique lived experiences, the African American male conduct officers learned code-switching through observation of family, teachers, mentors, and colleagues, which was similar to previous research (Allen, 2020). Whether it is a parent who corrected them to speak "proper" after hearing what they perceived as incorrect English or a teacher instructing them on the proper moments to use standard English, participants learned to code-switch at an early age, which is consistent with the literature (Myers, 2019; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). This learned behavior stayed with them as they navigated their own experiences at college where many participants mastered the craft of code-switching. As they gained professional experiences, code-switching for them became as normal as it was for their parents, teachers, and mentors.

Code-switching was a regular performance for participants, and they recalled countless memories over their professional journey when they used code-switching. Participants, very similar to others described in previous research made a conscious choice at times to not code-switch (Myers, 2019; Payne & Suddler, 2014; Young et al., 2014). Often in moments of despair for participants when advocating for students, the code-switching came off and the participants got real and raw. Previous research has suggested that these moments are similar to those in which Bilingual Latinos or Chinese and Filipino individuals would speak in their native language to truly enunciate their points (Casielles-Suarez, 2017). The power for participants in these

moments were when their audience heard them as they were, because whatever the topic, they wanted to express a level of seriousness. The literature lacks in understanding the phenomenon of one choosing not to code-switch and what impact that has on the person and their professional growth. Yet, participants in this study made clear that they turned off code-switching regularly, which should be studied to gain a better understanding.

Connection to Theme Two: The Consciousness of Engaging in Code-switching

Participants in this study were adamant about their conscious choice to use or not to use code-switching. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that the ability to turn code-switching off and on is a skill that marginalized individuals leverage each day (Auer, 1998; Hewlin & Broomes, 2019). Whether in a meeting with an individual student that will determine the student's future at the institution or presenting to a group of faculty members regarding the conduct process, participants were aware of their use of code-switching. This awareness centers around the racial make-up of the offices, institutions, and student populations that the participant is employed within. In examining when they decide to code-switch, the word White or majority was almost always part of the explanation. In his inaugural post on code-switching to the National Public Radio (NPR) community, Demby (2013) detailed that the awareness that race and ethnicity plays on code-switching becomes more and more troubling as an individual stops to think of how regular code-switching is part of their communication pattern.

This finding is a critical contribution to literature regarding the conscious decision to code-switch. While participants in this study were conscious of their decision to alter their communication and demeanor to feel valued by colleagues, past research showed that this does not always work (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). The hope of blending or assimilating, as past research suggests, matters little when others African American males interact with still see them

as a threat or intimidating. Student participants in Glenn and Johnson's (2012) study expressed that code-switching felt useless at times given that those with dominant identities were unwilling to move beyond the stereotypes subscribed to their black identities, so there was no need. African American male conduct professionals, on the other hand, never came to that conclusion and felt that code-switching was effective for their growth and well-being.

As aware as they are when they perform code-switching, participants expressed an overwhelming need to be in community and spaces where code-switching could cease. For participants, these spaces were sacred and provided similar joy as described in previous studies involving undergraduate students. As those students participated in mentoring programs and engagement opportunities with other Black men, there was safety, community, and most of all there was joy (Hewlin & Broomes, 2019). Participants detailed the experiences they grew fond of when walking to meet fellow Black colleagues and taking the mask off. These spaces are often informal, and interactions occurred both on and off campus. Some of these interactions occur in more formal settings within Employee Resource Groups (ERG's) within their institutions (Welbourne et al., 2017). What started in the 1960's as an effort to improve diversity and inclusion efforts within organizations has now evolved into safe and supportive spaces for staff of marginalized identities; ERG's provide employees with an opportunity to be themselves and see themselves (Welbourne et al., 2017). Participants detailed the need for community, to feel a sense of pride and have a reminder that they are enough even though they felt a need to constantly alter their identity.

Connection to Theme Three: Risks and Rewards with Code-switching

Because this study uncovered rich data regarding conscious code-switching, it is worth noting the data uncovered participants' struggle with the risks and rewards of code-switching.

Career advancement, opportunities for growth, and respect were all key reasons for code-switching and mirrored past studies (Roberts, 2005). In order to advance in their careers, researchers have found that marginalized populations momentarily replace their own identities for the greatest optimization of fair treatment, service, and advancement (Cross, Jr. et al., 2002). Participants expressed both a desire to advance within their careers as well a fear of mirroring racist stereotypes held by colleagues as two of their greatest motivations to engage in code-switching at times. In addition, some participants believed they would no longer need to engage in code-switching once they reached their desired outcome of achieving an executive level position within higher education.

The risks or negatives to code-switching for participants in this study spoke truth to power regarding the exhaustion and emotional, psychological, and physical abuse one experiences as a result of altering themselves for the sake of others, which has also been shown in previous studies (Grandey et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2009; Hewlin & Broomes, 2019). The emotional toll one experiences has great impact on how they view and experience the organization. Participants expressed a lack of trust for colleagues and students as some of the lasting impacts code-switching had on them as professionals. Ultimately, choosing not to code-switch proved to be the biggest risk for participants, as they had experienced colleagues and family members face negative personal and professional consequences as a result of not code-switching.

Connection to Theme Four: Code-switching and Identity Construction

Identity is what makes a person themselves and distinguishes them from others (Fishman, 1999). Identity helps individuals mark themselves as part of various social groups, and identity has everything to do with an individual's confidence and the image they allow the world to see.

Individual identities are shaped by the world in which they live, and culture plays a significant role in the construction of one's identity (Paltridge, 2006). Participants in this study were aware of who they were as men and African Americans. Their identity as African Americans gave them a sense of pride, yet still exhausted them from time to time. While being unapologetically Black, participants were quick to highlight that their use of code-switching was because of their race. While using code-switching was not something that participants believed informed their identities as African American men, their understanding of code-switching has been shaped as a result of their race. Participants believed that code-switching was unavoidable given their identities as Black men. They learned since early in life that code-switching was essential to make White folks feel comfortable when they were around. From being told to talk right or talk like you got some sense around these white folk by parents and family members; participants knew that their race was perceived as a threat by some individuals. Therefore, code-switching was a necessary skill because of their racial identity.

Language is a marker of cultural identity in that the value and importance of one's language and language expression are central to who an individual is and how they interact with the world (Omar, 1993). Environment has a profound impact on identity, and techniques such as code-switching are employed in response to what part of one's identity is being required for the moment at hand (Jan, 2006). While participants varied, the study revealed the impact that code-switching had on the identity construction of African American male conduct professionals. The experiences of exhaustion, holding back one's true feelings, or choosing not to challenge racist ideologies and established norms for job security and upward mobility all have a profound impact on identity. As Tabouret-Keller (1997) insisted, "The language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable" (p. 315). While more research is

needed to unpack the impact of code-switching on identity, participants in this study expressed an appreciation to start that process for them.

As mentioned earlier, the literature shows a list of traits necessary for Student Conduct Professionals to be effective in their roles within organizations. In addition to professional knowledge and expertise, these traits such as wisdom, self-control, maturity, and the need for cultural competency were described as essential for conduct professionals (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Throughout the study, participants highlighted these traits and detailed how code-switching to them was just as essential as part of the necessary traits for African American male Student Conduct professionals. Participants detailed experiences where they needed to remain professional and calm, and to understand the needs of students and their development. Part of their understanding was a commitment to ensuring that they control themselves to display these traits, even in times of frustration or disagreement.

Implications for Practice

This study examined how African American male conduct officers engage in code-switching in professional settings. The findings from this research provided an understanding of how African American male conduct officers define and chose to engage in code-switching, in addition to the risks and rewards associated with code-switching. This study added to the existing research regarding Black professionals' agency and support for the success of Black students and the obligation they have to be both an example and motivation for these students throughout their collegiate experiences. The experiences shared by participants in this study shined a light into an area of research that has been lacking, African American male conduct officers. These participants' conscious choices and daily decisions to show up to work and minimize their identities to prove their worth is difficult to comprehend but far worse to

experience. These professionals experience racial abuse at work based on social norms formed from white supremacist ideology that has increased over the decades and has resulted in both conscious and unconscious harm. The gaps in the literature are counter-intuitive given the focus from higher education institutions to create inclusive workplaces that further their missions and support students. This study has begun to fill in some of these gaps.

The first implication of this study is that African American male conduct officers need institutions to intentionally understand African American males' experiences in professional settings and to recognize the racist histories that exist in their policies, communication standards, written and unwritten rules, and overall culture and how that impacts these professionals. Attention is needed to truly review this established culture in order to begin to allow African American male conduct officers some relief from the exhausting performance of code-switching. For example, institutions should engage in active listening sessions and provide opportunities for confidential feedback from African American professionals in order to gain insight into their experiences.

The second implication from this research is that institutions should work tirelessly to increase the number of African American professionals employed within their organizations and provide unwavering support for affinity groups and/or employee engagement groups. Similar to past research, this study revealed the dependence that African American male conduct officers had on other colleagues who shared their racial identity. To be with other Black colleagues provided the necessary energy and space to perform at their best. There must be groups of professionals of color where these individuals can go to feel trusted and valued. These sacred spaces are best if they are on campus, but if not, then institutions should provide these professionals with support to find these spaces within the community or higher education

professional associations. This can be done through professional development funding and intentional support and release time to attend and engage in these settings.

The third implication for practice centers on a need for institutions and staff members over student conduct offices to find deliberate ways to remove some of the stress and anxiety that comes with their professional roles. Given the increased pressure from the various constituent groups as it relates to a student conduct professional's decision, trust is essential for all employees. Professionals must work to create offices where expectations are clear and trust is established for African American male conduct professionals. Methods such as open-door policies, skip-level meetings, and climate studies have the ability to help supervisors understand if trust exists within their organizations. Intentional methods should be taken to ensure that staff are able to focus on the role they are hired for rather than on meeting the social norms that have been established by others. Accountability is critical here as African American males will need to feel the trust for themselves to truly feel engaged in the organization.

The fourth implication for practice centers on the exhaustion experienced by participants in this study. Attention is needed by African American male conduct professionals and those supporting them in the area of self-care. These professionals must find ways to place themselves first given the complexities that their professional settings present their daily lives. Seeking professional help, relying on mentors and support systems, and regularly taking vacation days to unwind are all suggestions to support self-care. The realization however is that no amount of self-care is greater than truly evaluating whether an organization is worth one's sacrifice and commitment for the sake of their racial identity. As such, African American male conduct professionals should ensure they assess their personal values and search for work environments

that offer the support and trust needed to thrive. Recommendations are provided below to build upon these implications.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Higher Education institutions should work to provide the necessary care, professional development, collegial support, and space for African American male conduct officers. These resources are vital for the continued growth and development of these individuals but also necessary for the survival of them as individuals. Participants showed great resolve given the challenges they face within their professional settings. And even though they show up daily to perform their roles, they shared explicitly the impact this has on their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Institutions must realize the value they add when it comes to content knowledge, competence and professionalism. In addition, they are the support mechanisms for Black students within these institutions, which participants were proud to reveal. Given the role they play in supporting Black students, institutions must recognize this and provide them the tools to manage their well-being. Some recommendations include understanding and assessing the office culture and expanding representation.

Understanding and Assessing Office Culture

Participants in this study made clear their use of code-switching is connected to feelings of mistrust from colleagues, a lack of respect, and systemic issues around stereotypes and biases that have existed for decades for their race. To that end, institutions must evaluate their organizations' policy and culture to understand the impact they have on these professionals. Universities can begin by reviewing office rules and procedures. It would be important to check for dress codes that may impede cultural identity or language guides that are set to Standard American English. Organizations must find ways to gain insight into their employees'

professionals experiences by way of listening sessions, evaluations and feedback, and/or outside consultation. These efforts must be confidential and result in no negative harm on employees who share their stories. In addition to listening, organizations should work to outline steps to make changes based on feedback and experiences. It should be noted that while time and financial resources are needed to complete this organizational cultural review, those must not be reasons not to engage in this process for the health and well-being of African American employees. The core of this process must include a commitment by the institution to support African American male conduct officers and other professionals holding marginalized identities as essential contributors to the organization and ultimate well-being of students.

Expanding Cultural Representation

The village is a key finding from this study and highlights the place, people, and vibe that African American male conduct officers depended on for support from other Black professionals. This support is vital and comes both formally through established groups and informally through relationships with other colleagues. The need for an expanded diverse work environment which contributes to the success of the institution is an understood commitment established by many organizations. What this research showed is that Black people need Black people, and when you have a job that forces you to minimize yourself, that need for Black colleagues is even more essential. A dedicated effort to recruit and retain Black professionals at higher education institutions is imperative. Often, participants in this study described being the only Black and sometimes only person of color in their offices. The need for more diversity is crucial to assisting these professionals as they assist students and the institution.

Representation an important recommendation, yet with that representation must come an effort to truly invest in the inclusion of these new and existing staff to be supported for who they

are and what they contribute. If these professionals are recruited to increase the number of racial minorities only without changing policies, this will likely result in more African American professionals who must engage in code-switching within the organization. A change must occur to create an environment where universities value these professionals and allow them to exist as they are, when they are ready and willing. Given the finding from this study around the agency for Black students, it is crucial to see African American male conduct officers as valuable assets. Along with the intentional focus on inclusion, organizations can work to provide funding for African American male conduct professionals to have access to professional associations where there are colleagues with shared identities as them. Higher education leaders must understand the need for this support when deciding across the board professional development funding cuts given budget constraints. For these professionals, the stakes are higher given their use of code-switching, and an intentional commitment to equity is necessary.

Recommendations for Future Research

While limited research existed on the experiences of African American male conduct officers and their use of code-switching in professional settings, the findings from this study supported existing literature from separate disciplines. Existing literature spoke to the high stress and anxiety placed on conduct professionals as decision making officials at the institution (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Existing literature also spoke to the understanding and experiences that individuals had when engaging in code-switching and their motives for engaging in this performance (Hewlin & Broomes, 2019). The research highlighted the conscious choice made by African American male conduct officers to code-switch for the purposes of professional survival and the risks and rewards for making that choice.

Participants in this study were African American male conduct professionals, and the results of the study may have been different if African American female or non-binary conduct professionals were involved. Future studies could intentionally include African American professionals of various genders to gain insight into their experiences and detail their use of code-switching in professional settings. Additionally, future studies could study code-switching experiences by other people of color within university settings.

Some participants discussed their use of code-switching because they knew they were being recorded or could be involved in legal battles. Another area of future research which should be examined is whether African American male conduct officers' decisions are appealed at a higher rate than White professionals' and whether that plays into their decisions to code-switch.

Future research should also include interviews with colleagues and supervisors of African American male conduct officers to understand the level of awareness they have regarding code-switching and their colleagues' use of this performance in professional settings. While this study asked participants whether they believed colleagues knew of their use, examining the supervisor's first-hand experiences could help establish sound research on the topic. Given that colleagues may or may not be the deliberate cause of African American male conduct officers' use of code-switching, understanding their perceptions could contribute to already existing literature.

Including an observation as a source of data could add to the understanding of African American male conduct officers use of code-switching. Interviews provided rich data, and observations in addition to interviews could triangulate the data and add to the body of literature. A follow-up discussion after observations that details what the researcher observed and what the

participant experienced would allow the participants to further expand upon their own conscious choice of code-switching.

A replication of this study can be done involving individuals in positions of higher authority such as Deans of Students and Vice Presidents to determine whether they engage in code-switching. This would speak to one of the findings of this study where participants believed their use of code-switching would cease when attaining positions of power. In addition, a study that focuses on community college professionals specifically would lend to the research greatly. This study could also be replicated to include student affairs professionals broadly and not limiting the criteria to student conduct professionals.

Finally, future research must work to challenge the deficit approach to research on African American males with emphasis on Student Affairs professionals. Research continues to center on the achievement gaps, difficulties, and the lack of success these individuals experience in higher education and K–12 settings. Research must center on the joy, success, and celebration that comes with being African American males in K–12 and post-secondary environments. How these individuals contribute to the strength and success of organizations are ways to refocus the research to be more asset centered.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined the use of code-switching in professional settings by African American male student conduct officers. There were many important findings and implications of this study. One implication was the need for higher education institutions to understand the experiences of African American male conduct officers on their campus to truly enhance their professional experiences. Given the performance of code-switching, institutions must critically evaluate the social norms they place on these professionals to minimize themselves and their

identities in order to successfully navigate the organization's culture. Another implication was the need to intentionally expand diversity and inclusion efforts to create teams where African American male professionals have access to colleagues with whom they share an identity. This is critical as they often seek these individual relationships as a means of survival at institutions.

Future research can build upon the findings of this study. Understanding the experiences of African American female student conduct officers or even understanding the impact that code-switching has on the appeals processes within student conduct work can both contribute to the limited body of literature. In addition, a deeper understanding of colleagues' and supervisors' knowledge of their African American male conduct officers' use of code-switching could warrant greater understanding into this phenomenon.

This dissertation highlighted the conscious choice made by African American male conduct officers to perform code-switching as a means to navigate their higher education institutions. While the use of code-switching is exhausting, presents a multitude of risks and rewards, and allows these professionals access to professional growth and opportunities to advocate for Black students, their use of code-switching is intentional. Institutions must actively support these professionals and understand that bringing one's authentic self to work is not always an inclusive possibility.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Bernard Little

Dissertation Study: A Phenomenological Study exploring African American Male Conduct Officers and their Experiences with Code-Switching in Professional Settings.

<u>Interview Protocol</u>
Interviewee: a professional who identifies as African American and Male and currently works or has worked previously as a conduct officer within a college or university in the US and has self-professed to having code-switched in professional settings.
Research Questions:

5. How do African American Male Student Conduct officers define code-switching?

6. How do African American Male Student Conduct officers engage in code-switching within professional settings?

7. How do African American Male Student Conduct officers determine when they use Code-Switching in professional settings?

8. How does the use of code-switching inform identity construction of African American Male Student Conduct Officers?

Interview Question outline:
Illinois Wire-tapping statement: "This conversation is being audio recorded for research

purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to be recorded. You may request that the

recording stops at any time in the interview. Do you agree to be recorded? Recording starts

now." If student declines at beginning or during, the interview ends without any penalty to the

student and thanks for taking the time.

<u>Introductory Questions</u>

1. Describe your experience as an African American Male student conduct professional.

2. How would you describe the work environment as a conduct officer?

<u>Key Questions</u> (Linked to Research Questions)

3. How do you define code-switching?

4. When was the first time you learned about code-switching?

      a.   Where and how did you learn about code-switching?

5. Think back to when you remember code-switching at work as a conduct officer and tell

   me what happened?

      a.   Describe any thoughts or feelings during the times you code-switched at work?

      b.   How did you know that you were code-switching?

          i. Were others aware that you were code-switching?

6. What led or contributed to your decision to code-switch at work?

7. Are there times when you choose not to code-switch and if so, can you describe them for

   me?

8. Does your use of code-switching inform your identity as an African American Man?

      a.   Describe how (if applicable)

      b.   Describe why not (if applicable)

<u>Closing Questions</u>

9. Please share anything additional that you believe is important for me to know concerning

   your experience with code-switching in professional settings?

10. What questions do you have for me?