

**An Exploration of the Army's Diversity Culture: A Collective Case Study that Captures the
Emotional Intelligence of Successful Male African American General Officers**

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Executive Summary

The United States Army is a progressive institution that values diversity, equity, and inclusion; however, the Army's efforts do not reflect an equitable general officer demographic population (Department of the Army, 2020, pp. 2–3; General Officer Management Office, 2021). In 2021, the Army's overall demographics were approximately 69% White, 17% African American, 5% Asian, 1% Native American, 1% Pacific Islander, and 7% Other (Department of Defense, 2021, p. 22). In contrast to the overall population, the Army's General Officer Corps was 85% White and 11% African American (General Officer Management Office, 2021). The inequitable senior Army General Officer Corps is inconsistent with the Army's definition of discrimination. According to the Department of the Army (2014), discrimination includes “any action that unlawfully or unjustly results in unequal treatment of persons or groups based on race, color, and gender” (p. 55). The Army and other institutions understand the issue of diversity and have attempted to understand the phenomenon (Department of the Army, 2020; Fugère et al., 2016; Gündemir et al., 2016; Scarborough et al., 2019).

The literature adequately highlights a diversity and inclusion concern throughout the United States (Kogan et al., 2014, p. 903; Dickens & Chase, 2017, p. 762; Orbe et al., 2015, p. 433). The issues are not new, and, historically, minorities have been impacted by racial improprieties and trauma (Hudson et al., 2016, p. 131). Some studies suggest that emotional intelligence and transformational leadership are impactful ways to improve diversity issues (Feeney & Camarena, 2019, p. 107; Khalili, 2017, p. 1011; Baba et al., 2019, p. 1091). The current literature does not provide sufficient information to help understand the equity and diversity challenges in the Army's General Officer Corps. This study was essential because it

revealed insight into four male African American officers' applications of emotional intelligence characteristics that were useful in effectively overcoming diversity challenges.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In this study, I aimed to understand how four male African Americans described their experience overcoming diversity challenges in the Army. The central research question for this study was: How do male African American Army General Officers currently serving on active duty describe the influence of the five characteristics of emotional intelligence on their ability to overcome diversity challenges? I applied a qualitative collective case study design to comprehend the experiences of the four African American officers. The study was located at the Pentagon because the site had the highest representative sample of African American General Officers.

I applied the emotional intelligence framework to understand the information provided by the participants. The study had three data collection points: individual interviews, a focus group, and a document and archival review. I reviewed command philosophies, old speeches, past interviews, and a variety of articles during the document and archival record review. To help understand the data and answer the research question, I applied Bar-On's theory of Emotional Intelligence to describe the data. The Bar-On Emotional Intelligence model includes five characteristics: stress management, self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal, and decision-making (Bar-On et al., 2000; Bar-On et al., 2006; Multi-Health Systems, 2011, p. 2). Stress management helps a person modify their behavior in a stressful situation to achieve a positive outcome (Bar-On et al., 2000; Multi-Health Systems, 2011, p. 2). The self-perception characteristic helps people understand themselves and reflect on their thoughts or actions (Bar-On et al., 2000, p. 1108; Multi-Health Systems, 2011, p. 2). The self-expression characteristic

describes a person's ability to manage their feelings and expressions to achieve the desired outcome (Bar-On et al., 2000, p. 1108; Bar-On et al., 2006; Multi-Health Systems, 2011, p. 2). A person's interpersonal characteristics help them maintain meaningful relationships and contribute to society (Bar-On et al., 2006, p. 15). The last characteristic is decision-making, and it describes how a person's emotions and behaviors impact their ability to make positive or negative decisions (Bar-On et al., 2000, p. 1108; Multi-Health Systems, 2011, p. 2). The emotional intelligence theoretical framework was helpful because emotional intelligence is an action that relates to individuals' abilities to overcome adversity and understand how their social and emotional skills can impact others (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14). I conducted a collective case study design to understand the participants' emotional intelligence characteristics.

The collective case study method allowed each participant to share their experiences with diversity and the emotional intelligence characteristics they applied in various situations. I applied the cross-case synthesis analysis technique to evaluate the data collection points to identify themes and levels of intersection. I did this by triangulating the data across each case to find similarities between each officer's experiences.

Summary of Key Findings

The study highlighted that all four male African American General Officers found emotional intelligence helpful in overcoming diversity challenges in their lives and played an essential role in their abilities to excel in the military. I conducted a collective case study design to help reveal participants' experiences with diversity and emotional intelligence. The study took place in three distinct phases: a document and records review, a series of interviews, and a focus group. I discovered unique diversity themes and emotional intelligence themes in each stage. Next, I analyzed the themes using cross-case synthesis to discover the most prominent emotional

intelligence themes and diversity challenges. The analysis found nine collaborative diversity challenges and three diversity themes. The first key finding highlighted that the most common diversity themes were stereotypes related to perceptions, hate speech, and divisive symbols. The diversity themes were helpful because they helped identify adverse racial challenges each of the four participants may have encountered in their careers.

Diversity challenges. The participants' stories about their challenges with diversity in the military occurred throughout all phases of their military career, including participation in Army ROTC and the active-duty military. The most notable discoveries included the descriptions of stereotypes related to perceptions, hate speech, and interactions of divisive symbols. During the interviews, some of the officers shared experiences with stereotypes and perceptions. The officers shared how they were frequently identified as lower ranking because of the color of their skin. In one account, an officer explained how he showed up to an event in civilian clothes, and a woman told him to hurry up and get in his seat because the commanding general was coming. Many officers also explained how hate speech was common in their careers' early and later portions. More than one officer was called the "N" word in their military careers. In one situation, an officer explained how a subordinate said, "my battalion is fine, but Lieutenant Colonel Cleveland is an "N word." The officers' diversity themes also included experiences with divisive symbols. One officer explained how someone spraypainted an "N" over the "R" on a sign for parachute rigger hooks to produce a racial slur. The diversity themes were essential to understanding because it demonstrates that African Americans' experiences with diversity issues in the military are not an anomaly and are very common. However, each officer described how they overcame the issues using emotional intelligence characteristics in these situations.

Emotional intelligence. The diversity experiences shared by the participants were helpful because they illuminated emotional intelligence characteristics that were useful in overcoming diversity challenges and excelling as an Army officer. I asked the participants open-ended questions to recall their actions during adverse situations. As a result, all five emotional intelligence themes emerged. The most prominent characteristics were self-perception and self-expression. All the officers explained the importance of self-perception to help overcome diversity challenges. One officer explained how he would “not be denied for competency.” The generals also presented examples of how self-expression was essential in overcoming diversity challenges and improving performance. One of the generals explained that he modeled his expression after “watching a professional leader” that was a “calm and collected person.” Overall, the participants in this study agreed that emotional intelligence is essential to understanding themselves and others and overcoming diversity challenges to improve their potential for success in the military.

In addition to emotional intelligence, all officers in this study also found that mentorship played a critical role in their abilities to overcome diversity challenges and excel in the Army. Although mentorship is not an emotional intelligence characteristic, officers explained how it helped them develop and improve their skills. The officers described how they witnessed the negative impacts of not having mentors and also explained the value of having a mentor. One officer explained he had successful Army mentors that were African American and how seeing that they were successful made him believe, “well, I can do that.” The general listened to their advice, and it helped him develop emotional intelligence and leadership skills throughout his career. The ability to have positive mentors was helpful to the four male African Americans that

participated in this study. The officers' experiences with mentors helped enhance their emotional intelligence skills to overcome diversity challenges and excel as Army officers.

Implications and Recommendations

I provide three recommendations to improve emotional intelligence because education, experience, and exposure to mentors are critical to developing emotional intelligence characteristics that will improve performance. This qualitative collective case study described the experiences of four African American male General Officers who employed emotional intelligence characteristics to excel as officers in the United States Army. The participants of the study all indicated that emotional intelligence traits came from their experiences, families, and mentors. I also found that further research may be necessary to understand the usefulness of mentorship programs to help overcome diversity challenges. The officers in this study described multiple situations where mentors helped develop and implement emotional intelligence skills to overcome adversity and have an exceptional career in the Army. I recommend three focus areas to develop emotional intelligence skills to overcome diversity challenges in the Army and excel. The three key recommendations focus on the training curriculum, experiences, and accountability.

Recommendation one. The Army's current training curriculum does not discuss how individuals can improve their diversity and inclusion bias and perceptions. The Army can improve the curriculum by including diversity education parameters that promote healthy conversations about race and gender. The dialogue will create a diversity-conscious culture. The culture will also provide a space to discuss complex issues. It will allow individuals to share their

thoughts and learn from one another about diversity topics. The topics may introduce new experiences that can help drive change in the Army's culture.

Recommendation two. The Army should be intentional about exposing leaders to different cultures and experiences. The Army is a unique organization that rapidly introduces people to different cultures. The skills are helpful to people that have not lived in a multicultural society. The Army should reconstitute social clubs on military installations and encourage officers to mix and spend time together. The time together will create an experienced-based education experience, which can help each person improve their understanding of diversity.

Recommendation three. The Army should formalize diversity mentorship programs. The program will train officers that participate in diversity mentors and provide a clear path for junior officers seeking to have a role model. The formal structure will provide resources and accountability for diversity measures. Furthermore, it will allow space to build emotional intelligence characteristics and discuss their current issues. The program should evolve and incorporate technological advances. The goal is to create learning experiences that allow officers to connect and potentially modify discriminatory behavior against a person.

Conclusion

Every officer who joins the military deserves an equal opportunity to excel and achieve their highest potential. The Army needs a system that reduces cultural barriers and breaks down systemic racial concerns that impede the upward mobility of success. Various techniques can improve diversity in the Army. However, diversity and inclusion are social problems. Social problems focus on people, and the actions to solve social problems need to include the experiences of the individuals facing the dilemma. Various experiences from

diverse cultures and ethnic groups are essential to reducing the gap between diversity and inclusion. People can learn positive emotional intelligence characteristics to help them understand themselves and tackle any issue. The issues can include diversity and inclusion in the United States Army. This study evaluated the experiences of four successful African American General officers and found that emotional intelligence was critical to overcoming diversity challenges and excelling in the military. The officers' experiences in this study can help African American leaders understand their emotional intelligence characteristics and develop skills to help them succeed.

The United States Army must take a proactive approach and incorporate emotional intelligence into the training curriculum and mentorship programs to eliminate diversity issues in their ranks and enhance the path of male African American officers striving to reach their fullest potential in the military. The program should also include all racial and gender minority groups to ensure that the military is equitable throughout the force, specifically in the most senior military positions. The Army's emotional intelligence curriculum, mentorship, and equitable senior leadership program will demonstrate to Americans that the Army supports diversity, equity, and inclusion. The program will also demonstrate that the Army believes in actions and education and is committed to eliminating racial inequities in the military.

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