

The Colored Sense of Awareness: An Analysis of African American Perceptions of Race and

Communication in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The United States has a troubled history with race relations. African Americans have immeasurably experienced racism and racial oppression in various forms and in many sectors of the American society. One of the sectors that the racial inequalities of our past have affected is the employment sector. Many Americans experience the workplace on a daily basis and therefore experience the inequities that persist in such environments. This study explores African American experiences with race in the workplace and the way that race shapes today's workplace. Specifically, this study analyzes the experiences of African American professionals working at for-profit organizations and their perceptions of the way that race shapes their organization's culture. This study employs a constant comparative analysis of qualitative interviews using Critical Race Theory as a guide. The interviews explored the manner in which race, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs, and communication affect organizational culture. The thesis further questions if and how organizations are working to create and sustain a more equitable workplace for all employees. The findings suggest that African American professionals perceive that their organizations are welcoming and inclusive of all minority groups. They also perceive the organizational culture to be friendly and family-oriented where open, positive, and encouraging communication exists. The professionals feel that their organizations are generally interested in diversity, however they feel the organization's engagement with diversity practices is not sufficient. The findings of this study could be used as a tool for organizations to reevaluate their diversity practices and to ensure that they are creating an equitable workplace.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The inequalities caused by racism and the systematic oppression of African Americans in the United States are present in many areas of contemporary American life. African Americans are still faced with problems that stem from the country's past with race and are affected by these problems in many ways. One area that African Americans must deal with race is the workplace. The inequalities that were created in the past have caused race to play a significant role in the way that African Americans experience the workplace. This study explored the experiences of African American professionals in the workplace and the way they perceive race to play a role in shaping their organization's culture. The findings of the study explain that African American professionals perceive that race has a definite effect on their organization's culture. The professionals believe that their organizations have a general interest for diversity, but they have not adequately addressed the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace. They reported that the organizations are inclusive and provide an environment where they can be productive and develop professionally. Today's organizations have made a step in the right direction of diversity, but there is much work left to do.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States' history with race has been clouded with years of the oppression and subjugation of racial minorities, particularly African Americans. The country's struggle with racism and discrimination has had various effects on many societal routines, processes, and traditions. One of the areas that race has had a serious effect is the workplace. Race has quite actively shaped the American workplace in a manner that has led to many advantages for white Americans and disadvantages for African Americans. Scholar Cheryl Harris (1995) illustrated the country's troubled past with race and the workplace with her anecdote of her grandmother's experience with employment at a large retail store in Chicago:

Every day my grandmother rose from her bed in her house in a black enclave on the south side of Chicago, sent her children off to a black school, boarded a bus full of black passengers and rode to work. No one at her job ever asked if she was black; the question was unthinkable. By virtue of the employment practices of the 'fine establishment' in which she worked, she could not have been. Catering to the upper middle class, understated tastes required that blacks not be allowed.

She quietly went about her clerical tasks, not once revealing her true identity. She listened to the women with whom she worked to discuss their worries – their children's illnesses, their husband's disappointments, their boyfriend's infidelities – all the mundane yet critical things that made up their lives. She came to know them but they did not know her, for my grandmother occupied a completely different place. That place – where white supremacy and economic domination meet – was unknown turf to her white coworkers. They remained oblivious to the worlds within worlds that existed just beyond the edge of their awareness and yet were present in their very midst. (p. 276)

I quote at length because this story powerfully portrays the way that race has shaped the American workplace. Harris' African American grandmother was so fair skinned that she was able to pass for white, which allowed her to enjoy the racial advantages associated with a segregated labor structure that privileged whiteness. The story of Harris' grandmother offers a compelling and authentic account of one of the ways the relationship between race and the workplace has affected American workers – black and white.

The inequities caused by the marginalization of African Americans have spread to various areas of social life, one of the most important is the workplace. The purpose of this thesis is to study the relationship between race and the workplace by analyzing the role that race has played in shaping organizational culture through communicative processes. Specifically, this thesis will explore the experiences of African Americans in the workplace and their perceptions of race, D&I and communication within organizational cultures.

This study employs a grounded theory approach by way of constant comparative analysis of interviews with African American professionals. These inductive interviews were informed by a comprehensive understanding provided by the review of literature. The methodology follows a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that grounded theory works to develop theory from data, this thesis does not result in the formulation of theory. It will follow the basis of the constant comparative analysis method to produce these themes and answer the research questions.

This thesis addresses the enduring problem of race within American society as it focuses on how race affects the experiences of African American professionals. The thesis is significant for two main reasons. First, it helps to provide an historical account of the role race has played in shaping the American workplace. Secondly, it addresses the role of D&I in shaping

contemporary organizational culture. Ultimately, this thesis adds to the literature about race, culture and communication in the workplace and serves to generate a better understanding of these important aspects of American life.

This thesis has six chapters, the first being this introduction. The second chapter is the review of literature. Lastly, chapter 3 is the method section. In Chapter 2, the literature review explores Critical Race Theory, D&I, and organizational culture. It discusses the role of communication and explains the relationship between these areas. Chapter 3 of the thesis is the methodology section where the purpose of qualitative research methods, the grounded theory approach and the constant comparative method are described and explained and the research questions are presented. In addition, the participants, measures and the specific steps employed in this thesis are all described and explained in this section. In chapter 4, the findings of the study are listed. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings which provide further explanation and connections to previous research. Chapter 6 is the conclusion which includes the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is divided into three sections. Each of the sections explains how race has been studied in various contexts and explores how organizations deal with issues of race. The first section features an overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT) literature. The second section delves into D&I. The third section focuses on organizational culture. The literature review describes how race has shaped the evolution of the American workplace. It also explains how race, organizational and communication scholars have addressed the issue, and it leads to four research questions about how African Americans experience race in the workplace.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) differs from other theories as it grew out of a collection of works rather than one seminal study or project (Willis, 2008). Its inception in the 1960s and 70s occurred when scholars in legal studies explored race and the inequities that were being faced by African Americans. Scholars studied racism, anti-discrimination law, and desegregation and integration (Bell, 1995; Friedman, 1995; Lawrence, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995). While there was no single study that was credited with the development of CRT, Derrick Bell has been recognized as the founder of CRT (Willis, 2008). Bell's fundamental works dealt with desegregation (Bell, 1995).

In many ways, CRT is a descendant of Critical Theory. Critical theory focuses on the notion that all human beings should have a certain level of equity and equality as they attempt to develop themselves (Wellmer, 2014). Critical Theory further contests the predominant beliefs about truth, knowledge, power and the prevalent notions of identity. The Frankfurt School of social research is credited with the inception of Critical Theory and the two fundamental foci of critical thought. Their foci include, "the analysis of the causes of oppression" and "an empathetic participation in the experience of social suffering" (Müller-Doohm, 2017, p. 253). These two features are seen in CRT as scholars work to reveal the underlying causes of racial injustices in society and attempt to challenge them. The Frankfurt School included philosophers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Walter Benjamin. The scholars sought to denounce the capitalist structures of society and their restraints on human emancipation (Wellmer, 2014).

In his fundamental essay, "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer (1972) exemplified the Frankfurt school's critique of reason by writing, "If activity governed by reason

is proper to man, then existent social practice, which forms the individual's life down to its least details, is inhuman, and this inhumanity affects everything that goes on in society" (p. 210). He further argued that Critical Theory was not a mere attempt to understand the aforementioned societal inequities, but "its goal is man's emancipation from slavery" (p. 246). Jürgen Habermas, who has been thought of as a "direct heir of the intellectual legacy of Horkheimer's Frankfurt School," argued Critical Theory should "inform the practice of those involved in struggles for emancipation" (Parkin, 1996, p. 418). As Wellmer (2014) asserted, it is clear that Critical Theory works to confront the established social and political hierarchies and inequalities in a society. Years later, these thoughts and objections helped influence a new movement called Critical Legal Studies (CLS).

The ideas of the Frankfurt School have been captured in CLS and can be observed in Matsuda's (1995) explanation of CLS.

The movement known as Critical Legal Studies is characterized by skepticism toward the liberal vision of rule of law, by a focus on the role of legal ideas in capturing human consciousness, by agreement that fundamental change is required to attain a just society, and by a utopian conception of a world more communal and less hierarchical than the one we know now. (p. 64)

CLS furthered functioned upon the notion that the law should support minority rights rather than uphold the unjust institutions that have been created in society, because when minority rights are respected, equality is more likely to prevail. Cook (1995) contended that CLS calls into question "the accepted values of classical liberalism by undermining the interpretations of private property, individual rights, equality of opportunity, meritocracy, and governmental power" (p.85). Harlon Dalton (1995) described CLS scholars as "minority scholars" who are "committed

to pursuing an active program to change the situation of our people” (p. 80). Here, people of color, are put at the forefront of the CLS movement as the members of society who have been oppressed and whose rights have been restrained.

Emerging during the civil rights movement, a particularly vibrant time in the African American struggle for equal rights, CLS scholars worked to investigate the legal ideology and doctrine that promoted the systemic oppression of African Americans. Crenshaw (1995) described CLS scholars as those who “unpack legal doctrine to reveal both its internal inconsistencies (generally by exposing the incoherence of legal arguments) and its external inconsistencies (often by laying bare the inherently paradoxical and political worldviews embedded within legal doctrine)” (p. 108). CLS scholars were concerned with the manner in which “legal ideology has helped to create, support, and legitimate” the inequitable class structure in America (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 108). As race was at the center of CLS, CRT scholars advanced these notions of racial imbalance and attempted to interpret them in various manners. Thus, CLS scholarship led to the emergence of CRT.

Scholars have offered many different conceptualizations of CRT. This literature review will focus on several of the most prominent perspectives. These approaches will form an understanding of CRT that will guide this study. Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) explained that CRT was a movement in opposition to “a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color” by studying the “relation between that social structure and professed ideals such as ‘the rule of law’ and ‘equal protection’” (p. xiii). The scholars further delineated the relation to CLS by emphasizing the need and inclination to correct the unjust connection between “law and racial power” (p. xiii). Another conceptualization of CRT was offered by Solórzano (1997) who defined it as “a framework or set of basic perspectives,

methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color” (p. 6). CRT scholarship has encompassed various aspects of race, discrimination, inequity, and property to describe the construction of existing inequalities in the United States.

In a seminal work, Bell (1995) examined school integration and desegregation and maintained that racial discrimination in the education system could not be tolerated. He further argued that the emphasis on desegregation brought new obstacles for African Americans and that several well-known legal trials were viewed as “legally irrelevant” (p. 5). Bell (1995) reviewed *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955), *Morgan v. Kerrigan* (1975), and *NAACP v. Button* (1963) to explain how the fight for desegregation led to numerous hindrances for African Americans and their bigger struggle for equality. Additionally, the scholar described various other barriers that made it difficult for African Americans to attain the privileges that were afforded to them by the constitution, but stripped from them by those white counterparts who wished to maintain a system of racial inequality.

Race, being of utmost importance to CRT, was expounded and studied in distinct forms and fashions. One of the most paramount conceptualizations of race in CRT was through the study of its relationship with property. Harris (1995) asserted that “The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination” (p. 277). The scholar argued further that the basis for the apparent problems in the relationship between race and property stemmed from “slavery and conquest” which were the manifestations of “the seizure and appropriation of labor” and “the seizure and appropriation of land” (p. 277). Harris (2015) meant “human rights, liberties, powers, and immunities” were a form of property (p. 279). Here, to claim white identity

meant to claim property, in the form of rights, liberties, powers, and immunities that were not available to African Americans.

As Harris (2015) explained, whiteness was exclusive because it was founded on black racial subjugation and “signified racial privilege and took the form of status property,” (p. 283) possessed by whites. While black people were possessed as property, dating back to the nation’s roots in chattel slavery, whites were not. Harris (2015) declared that legislation, such as the Neutralization Act of 1790, played a role in the exclusivity of whiteness by granting citizenship solely to white people. This further supported her argument that, “The assigned political, economic, and social inferiority of blacks necessarily shaped white identity” (p. 283). Harris’ work on whiteness as property is fundamental to CRT scholarship as it portrays the social and legal basis for discrimination, prejudice, and racism in the United States.

Harris’ work recognized that inequity is historical and monumental in the construction of the American society and workplace. It was an important advancement in CRT scholarship that encouraged other scholars to explore how whiteness as property contributed to ongoing racial discrimination in society in political, educational and workplace contexts.

From a political perspective, Peller (1995) identified how integrationist and black nationalist discourses shaped discussions about race and equality in the United States. He wrote, “Race consciousness defines conventional civil rights thinking – by contrasting integrationist and black nationalist images of racial injustice, and by comparing the ways in which white and black communities have understood race” (p. 127). Peller (1995) differentiated between the two groups – integrationists and nationalists. Integrationists advocated for a sense of “reason and neutrality” and sought to minimize race-consciousness, which can be defined as a “racial understanding” of the obstacles or privileges that one might face or possess based on the color of their skin (Peller,

1995, p. 127; Aleinikoff, 1991, p. 1067). Conversely, the black nationalists' contestation of integration was premised by the idea that it would simply lead to assimilation into the white culture, which would amplify "the white community's control over the black community" (p. 135). Regardless of the differences between the two sides, CRT scholars' inquiry into the debate advanced the understanding of racial tensions and the racial divide in the United States. These reflections on the political aspects of race in the United States led CRT scholars to study race in a variety of other contexts.

Another prominent area of CRT scholarship was education. Scholars focused on the racial inequality experienced by African Americans in the education system in the early 1900s, the 1960s and 70s. CRT scholars have carried this research into the twenty-first century and have explored race in the educational context to further expose the existing inequities in the educational system. William Tate IV (1997) wrote that research about education and race had previously focused on the inferiority paradigm, which he explained to be "the belief that people of color are biologically and genetically inferior to whites" (p. 199). Critics and scholars similar to Tate refuted the inferiority paradigm and others like it because it is not supported by scientific evidence and was a groundless attempt to further the myth of white intellectual superiority and Black and minority inferiority. He further identified circumstances such as school finance, cultural nationalism, and policy as leading contributing factors to uneven educational gains for African American students (Tate, 1997).

Willis (2008) argued that scholars have been using CRT as a means to call for the amendment and regulation of the systems that have put African American students at a disadvantage. Willis (2008) further captured the beliefs of the members of the Frankfurt school

that were adopted and adapted by CRT scholars in their attempt to challenge the institutions that suppressed African Americans' educational opportunities.

They do not believe that positivism or empirical science holds the only key to change in education; in fact, they envision change as an outgrowth of more critical conscious awareness and the valuing of all cultures and languages. Further, they reason that social and institutional structures must be dismantled and rebuilt in a more humane manner and where critical theory is translated into praxis. (p. 23)

She contended that educational scholars moved from critical theory to CRT because they believe that critical theory does not account for "race, racism, and power" the way it should to explain the educational inequities (p. 23). Scholars have attempted to adopt CRT to better study and understand the diverse society of the United States and to promote approaches, methods, and processes to advance and develop equality for African American students (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Taylor, 1998). Education research is one of the many fields where CRT has been adopted, demonstrating the theory's adaptability.

CRT scholars have also studied Affirmative Action and its implications for society. For example, Kennedy (1995) offered a political and cultural case for Affirmative Action. In a legal context, he explained the political case by arguing that law school teachers are few in number, but great in wealth and significance. With that basis, he argued that "legal knowledge is ideological" (p. 162). In other words, Kennedy argued that legal knowledge was developed and shaped primarily by a homogenous group of people who held similar worldviews and ideological beliefs: white males. This led to the exclusion of many ideas, values, knowledge and people from non-white racial backgrounds in the legal field, making it a racially exclusive terrain. He

emphasized the lopsided nature of race in the legal profession and detailed the struggle for minorities to enter the profession and gain adequate knowledge (Kennedy, 1995).

In the cultural context, Kennedy (1995) argued that “we should structure the competition of racial and ethnic communities and social classes in markets and bureaucracies, and in the political system, in such a way that no community or class is systematically subordinated” (p. 162). He further emphasized merit as criterion for employment, rather than it weighing entirely on one’s race (Kennedy, 1995). He argued that Affirmative Action should “preserve a sharp boundary between meritocratic decision and race-based decision” (p. 162). Kennedy (1995) contended that this equal competition should replace the subordination of racial and ethnic communities, thus, calling for programs that enhance and promote diversity and a move away from a homogenous workforce. While emphasis on diversity should be emphasized, it should not overtake the merit of any applicant, so that it can ultimately “improve scholarship and teaching” and the workforce as a whole (Kennedy, 1995, p. 163). Kennedy’s conceptualizations highlight one important way that CRT scholars have addressed Affirmative Action.

CRT scholars have been divided over Affirmative Action (Farber, 1994). Scholars such as Patricia Williams and Robin Barnes are in favor of affirmative action because it works as a reparation for the subordination of and discrimination against African Americans in the past (Farber, 1994). Contrarily, scholars Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado are apprehensive toward affirmative action based on the notion that it functions to satisfy the concerns of whites more than those of African Americans (Farber, 1994). These scholars and others similar to them were worried that Affirmative Action would mean that only small numbers of African Americans would be hired and this would help to satisfy the needs of whites who controlled the workplace by falsely portraying a commitment to diversity and equality (Farber, 1994) when really

pandering to tokenism and maintaining system of racial inequality. They saw this as an attempt to offer African Americans a false sense of equality, while still being oppressed. Farber (1994) further noted that even though there was a sense of skepticism about Affirmative Action for these scholars, they understood there were some positive effects for African Americans; as a result, they were still somewhat supportive of Affirmative Action even if that support was not as strong as other CRT scholars.'

CRT has continued to demonstrate its endurance and relevance through its use in communication scholarship. Pompper (2005) introduced CRT to the public relations field with her seminal article in the *Journal of Public Relations Research*. She argued that research in public relations had failed "to account for difference, in general, and difference among researchers and participants, in particular" (p.147). She further explained that difference in this context referred to "race, ethnicity, and culture as operationalized among seminal social science research." (p. 147). Her work showed the field's attempt to conceptualize race as she explained its inability to study race in terms that provide a better understanding of difference and its implications. Pompper (2005) urged that "it is time for CRT in public relations" as the prevalent misunderstandings of race in the workplace have led the United States to be "handicapped to do excellent public relations" (p. 155). Pompper's scholarship inspired other scholars to incorporate CRT into their study of race in the workplace.

Logan (2011) studied race in the public relations industry and used CRT to introduce the "White leader prototype" concept (p. 443). By explicating the "self-sustaining system" that maintains White leadership, she contended that the White leader prototype "shows how race can be the most salient factor influencing ascension to leadership levels within public relations contexts" (p. 443). Edwards (2012) outlined the need for multicultural communication in public

relations. She argued that the diversity of both the practitioners and the audiences of organizations have become increasingly more evident, leading to the obligation of multicultural communication. She further asserted “the differences between audiences from (nonwhite) ethnic groups and (usually white) practitioners are presumed to be greater than the similarities,” therefore, “race becomes a skill or asset that practitioners offer to organizations wishing to bridge (though not eliminate) the gap between them and their audiences” (p. 58). Edwards (2012) used these ideas to express the role of race and its effects in the public relations profession. She further noted that this could help a profession that is still developing as it attempts to understand the implications of race for both practice and research purposes.

In her call for multicultural communication and interpretation of race in the workplace and in the public relations profession, Edwards (2012) outlined the central tenets of CRT. She offered nine principles that exhibit the essence of CRT.

1. “Race” is socially constructed, not a biological given.
2. Races are fluid: their membership, depiction and hierarchical position change over time.
3. Race intersects with other aspects of identity (e.g., gender, (dis)ability); it cannot be understood in isolation. Identity, therefore, is also intersectional.
4. Racism is a normal aspect of life, not an aberrant even or situation. Its “ordinary” appearance makes it difficult to address.
5. Racism is embedded in social systems and structures. This has particular consequences:
 - a. As a part of a wider system, racism serves the interests of elite groups so there is little incentive to eradicate it.

- b. Equality legislation is designed to address overt and obvious forms of racism; it is more limited in its ability to address the systemic and “ordinary” aspects of racism.
6. History influences the shape of current social systems and structures: therefore, understanding and addressing racism is not possible without taking into account past inequities.
7. The voices of people of color can articulate the experience of racism and the effects of race as a systemic process most effectively; research methodologies must create space for these voices to be heard.
8. Racism also operates at the intersection of identities; the experiences of minority individuals cannot be understood without reference to gender, class, religion, an/or other aspects of their identity.
9. CRT scholarship is marked by a commitment to social justice. (p. 60)

While these principles exemplify the fundamentals of CRT, they also illustrate the main ideas that have been captured by many other CRT scholars. This list of CRT principles also helps to explain the problem of race and racism in the United States. Public relations scholars using CRT help advance the theory into organizational contexts in a manner that extends the opportunity to study race and the workplace in various ways.

Scholars have studied race in various other communication contexts, many through a CRT lens (Allen, 2007; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Parker & Grimes, 2009; Waymer & Heath, 2016). Ashcraft and Allen (2003) contended that organizational communication scholarship has helped “to craft the dominance and invisibility of Whiteness” (p. 7). They further argued that there is a particular manner employed by researchers through specific messages that “hush race”

in organizational discourse (p. 10). Waymer and Heath (2016) applied Ashcraft and Allen's (2003) messages to highlight specific incidents where Whiteness norms were masked in an attempt to redirect conversations of race within organizations. This displays the ongoing tension with race and communication scholarship and the need for the study of race in organizations.

In the pursuit of an inclusion of race in communication scholarship, Allen (2007) argued that "communication theory is culturally biased because it neglects to delve into race in critical, substantive ways" (p. 260). She further asserted that there is a "rich body of scholarship" concerned with African American communication written and conducted by African Americans but has been disregarded by wider, more mainstream scholarship (p. 261). Parker and Grimes (2009) argued that race is a significant issue in management communication and identified a trend in management discourse that "perpetuates a colonising process that conceals the (re)creation and reinforcement of a racial social order that privileges western norms of whiteness" (p. 294). The variety of ways that scholars from many disciplines are able to use CRT highlights the theory's importance and applicability. CRT also draws attention to other ways in which we can further understand the role of race in the workplace.

Diversity and Inclusion

The issues of race and equality, particularly in workplace contexts, raised by CRT scholars are closely related to the issues raised in diversity and inclusion (D&I) literature. The predecessor to D&I was Affirmative Action. Scholars have studied the transition from Affirmative Action to diversity in an attempt to explain evolution of D&I (Herring & Henderson, 2012; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Mor Barak, 2000). Kelly and Dobbin (1998) described the history of equal employment opportunity and Affirmative Action and the origins of both during the civil rights movement. The scholars argued that the initial laws were "ambiguous" and led to "weak

enforcement” before the expansion and stricter enforcement of the laws in the 1970s (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998, p. 963). In the 1980s, the Reagan administration reduced the enforcement of Affirmative Action (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). This led human resource managers to take responsibility for equal employment opportunities and Affirmative Action programs in the workplace, and these professionals led the effort to recast the Affirmative Action practices as diversity management (Kelly & Dobbins, 1998, p. 972).

Thus, diversity ideology was adopted due to resistance to Affirmative Action programs. Herring and Henderson (2012) suggested that Affirmative Action was met with opposition because it was “ineffective as a policy for reducing levels of inequality for targeted groups” (p. 631). The sentiment echoed in their article was that Affirmative Action “helps those members of minority groups who need assistance least at the same time that it does little for those who are among the ‘truly disadvantaged’” (p. 631). While some were resistant to Affirmative Action because they felt that it was ineffective, resistance from others stemmed from racism. Dovidio, Mann, and Gaertner (1989) argued that this form of resistance was based on “the assumption by Whites that affirmative action is synonymous with preferential treatment in which less qualified minorities are selected over more qualified White males” (p. 84). The scholars contended that some White people were resistant because they felt the Affirmative Action programs “threaten their own advantaged status” (p.85). Due to the contention with Affirmative Action programs, diversity ideology grew in popularity and was adopted as it meant an opportunity for inclusion for the people who had continually been left out. Thus, diversity programs evolved from Affirmative Action and became the new way to confront an old problem.

There are many definitions of diversity. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary diversity is: “The condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied” (Weiner & Simpson, 1993, p.

550). Diversity has been conceptualized by scholars in various ways. For example, Herring and Henderson (2012) were concerned with forming a critical diversity perspective. By explaining a conception of Affirmative Action as “reverse discrimination” that “threatens fundamental American values of fairness, equality, and democratic opportunity,” the scholars offered their notion of critical diversity.

Critical diversity is about embracing cultural differences that exist between groups and appreciating those differences, but critical diversity must also include examining issues of parity, equity, and inequality. It is imperative that it examines all forms of social inequality, oppression, and stratification that revolve around issues of diversity. A theory of critical diversity includes celebrating cultural differences, but also it requires an analysis of exclusion and discrimination, and it challenges hegemonic notions of colorblindness and meritocracy. (Herring & Henderson, 2012, p. 630)

Mor Barak (2000), explained that to fully understand the effectiveness of Affirmative Action, one must discern that the “exclusion from circles of influence in the organization... keeps [African Americans] from fully contributing and benefiting from their involvement in corporate America” (Mor Barak, 2000, p.48). She offered four propositions to increase diversity that also positively influence organizational culture.

Proposition 1: Individuals with diversity characteristics are more likely to experience exclusion than those who belong to the “mainstream” in work organizations.

Proposition 2: There are interaction effects among diversity characteristics with respect to levels of exclusion experienced. Individuals with more diversity characteristics are more likely to experience higher levels of exclusion.

Proposition 3: Diversity characteristics and perception of inclusion-exclusion are correlates of personal outcomes.

Proposition 4: Diversity characteristics and perception of inclusion-exclusion are correlates of the organizational outcomes. (Mor Barak, 2000, p. 54-58)

These propositions help to explain how the exclusionary workplaces have contributed to a demand for diversity and inclusion. Mor Barak's (2000) considerations suggest a connection between D&I and organizational culture. The propositions also offer further insight that can be applied practically by organizations to improve their diversity and inclusion.

Research into diversity in the organization has also had a historical context as scholars attempt to interpret how race has shaped the evolution of the American workplace (Lozano & Escrich, 2017; Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998; Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Echoing some of the points made by Harris' (1995) seminal essay on whiteness as privileged property, Nkomo and Al Ariss (2014) argued that white privilege is a "manifestation of whiteness" that is concerned with "power and privilege," which has its origin in organizations during industrialization (p. 390). The researchers claimed that during the industrialization of the United States, "the roots of white privilege were firmly planted. Its entrenchment was made possible by an ideology of white racial supremacy that relied upon material acts, decisions, and policies to repress and dominate people of color" (p. 393). They further noted that slave labor was integral in the formation of white privilege as white people were seen as free people so their labor was consequently more expensive. It would be these roots that led to a continuance of white privilege in the workplace, notions of the ideal employee, and the subsequent need for diversity in the workplace (Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014).

Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) offered four diversity ideologies to illustrate the way that history and race relations have directed and shaped organizational diversity practice: 1. white supremacy, exclusion, and overt discrimination; 2. color blind equal opportunity and its challenges; 3. multiculturalism/diversity management; 4. inclusion/post-race (pp. 247-252). These ideologies detail a troubled past, but also work to show how organizations have progressed towards equality, which has not yet been fully achieved. Lozano and Escrich (2017) present an ideology of tolerance that emphasizes cultural diversity where they reflected on respect. They articulated that the notion of respect should work to “build a fair business in which people’s basic rights take priority over productivity and are the essential criteria for proposing solutions to any cultural conflicts” (p. 685). Here, scholars have considered culture in an attempt to reiterate the need for the equality of all people.

Mor Barak et al. (1998) studied diversity climate and highlighted the perceptions of employees on both a personal and organizational level. They reported that on the organizational level, white employees felt a sense of fairness and inclusivity, while African American employees had opposite, more negative perceptions. This discrepancy further illustrates the large distance to be covered on the journey to equality in the workplace. Mor Barak et al. (1998) also raised an important concern by noting that, on the personal level, racial and ethnic minorities attributed “more value” and felt “more comfortable with diversity than Caucasians” (p. 98). This shows that race can play an important role in shaping how employees see their workplaces and the role of race and diversity in them. Thus, the notion of racial and ethnic diversity will be applied in this study in regards to the participants feelings about their organization’s diversity. Each of these dimensions of the diversity climate or environment explain how diversity is

perceived in the workplace and demonstrate why a more diverse workplace is the right move for today's organizations.

As both scholars and organizations have become more aware of the need for diversity, research in to diversity management has grown (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999; Mor Barak, 2015). Gilbert et al. (1999) argued that there has been a move by organizations to attempt to expand their inclusivity and to develop and instill diversity management practices. They defined diversity management as “a voluntary organizational program designed to create greater inclusion of all individuals into informal social networks and formal company programs” (p. 61). The scholars further suggested that diversity management has been conceptualized as a new paradigm breaking the mold of human resources and “legal compliance” (p. 65). Diversity is recognized as having immanent importance. One of the significant considerations here is the notion of inclusiveness.

Mor Barak (2015) contended that inclusion is an essential factor of diversity. She explained that a central problem in organizations today is exclusion, which she wrote was “both the reality experienced by many and the perception of even more employees that they are not viewed by top management as an integral part of the organization” (p. 85). Mor Barak's perspective helps to reiterate the fact that organizations should have a true sense of the magnitude of diversity and inclusion and understand the need to facilitate positive change. Mor Barak (2015) also wrote that “fostering a sense of belonging is essential, but if the ‘price of admission’ is that employees have to give up their unique characteristics, then they are not experiencing true inclusion” (p. 85). In detailing the significance of inclusion, she suggested a management process in which managers construct an evaluation of the organization using measures of diversity climate and inclusion as well as a diversity purpose fulfillment scale. The

second step, as outlined by Mor Barak, is to “examine the connection between specific management policies and practices... and organizational performance” (p. 87). The influence of inclusion in the workplace is significant to the development of diversity management practices.

While diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings. Diversity, as Mor Barak (2015) wrote, refers to employees’ “demographic differences,” while inclusion specifically concerns the employees’ perception “that their unique contribution to the organization is appreciated and their full participation is encouraged” (p. 85). Similarly, Roberson (2006) argued that diversity has been regarded an organization’s characteristics of difference, while scholars have conceptualized inclusion as a descriptor of “worker participation and empowerment” and the employee’s perception thereof (p. 215). Much like Roberson’s explanation of inclusion, Prasad (2001) argued that workplace empowerment is “an inseparable aspect of the principle of inclusion” (p. 51). He explained the importance of an organizational awareness of the “ideas and ideals of empowerment and inclusion prevailing in the wider social, political, and cultural spheres” (p. 53). Prasad’s explication of empowerment and inclusion further portray the contrast between diversity and inclusion. Scholars’ attempts to explain the relationship between diversity and inclusion illustrates the realization of an effort to address the unsettled problems of inequity and inequality in the workplace.

D&I scholarship has illustrated the importance that has been placed on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. As organizations have begun to emphasize diversity and inclusion, they have had to consider their respective cultures. D&I research has shown that organizational culture is a critical in the understanding of diversity and inclusion (Findler, Wind, & Mor Barak, 2007). To offer more insight into the importance of race, diversity, and communication in the workplace, it is imperative to outline research in organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

The study of diversity and inclusion offered a great deal of insight into the way organizations are being studied in terms of race and difference. Diversity and inclusion are also integral parts of organizational culture which has been studied in various manners to garner a better understanding of the conventions of organizations. Scholars have proposed various theories of organizational culture (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Denison, 1996; Meek, 1988; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) outlined culture from an anthropological perspective and noted that “culture is a component of the social system, manifested in [behavior] (ways of life) and products of [behavior]” (p. 196). Here, the scholars emphasize a social system where the main focus is behavior and can be studied from various forms of thought. They also wrote that other scholars have considered organizations to be “little societies, as social systems equipped with socialization processes, social norms and structures” (p. 193). Conceptualizing organizations as societies suggests that there are certain customs, traditions, and practices distinctive of said organizations. Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) further argued that since organizations are “miniature societies,” they should all have a sense of “uniqueness” (p. 193). Thus, individuality becomes a concern of culture and what constitutes it.

Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) further contested, “In organization theory literature, culture is often treated as an undefined, immanent characteristic of any society, as yet another contingency factor with varying and little understood incidence on the functioning of organizations” (p. 194). At the same time, the scholars also noted that the thought that organizations possess cultures has been “proposed fairly frequently” (p. 194). Thus, there are many opportunities for scholars to investigate and study organizations and their respective cultures. With organizational culture being such an indefinite concept, scholars have the chance to explore its nature and provide

support for the concept. They continue to highlight the significance of the notion of organizational culture as they also explain, analyze and justify it.

Meek (1988) provided a definition of organizational culture by explaining it to be, “The proposition that organizations create myths and legends, engage in rites and rituals, and are governed through shared symbols and customs” (p. 453). This expands on Allaire and Firsirotu’s conceptualization of organizational culture by implementing myths, legends, and shared symbols to the definition. Meek (1988) moves from the perspective of viewing culture as socialization in a society and rather argues for a separation of culture and social structures. In contending that there has been blurring of the two, the scholar wrote, “the problem with some studies of organizational culture is that they appear to presume that there exists in a real and tangible sense a collective organizational culture that can be created, measured and manipulated in order to enhance effectiveness” (p. 454). Meek (1988) further argued that the increased inquiry into effectiveness is also at fault for the clouded understanding of organizational culture. In addition, she asserted, “the problem is one of changing people’s values, norms and attitudes so that they make the ‘right’ and necessary contribution to the healthy collective ‘culture’ despite (or in ignorance of) any inherent conflict of individual and group interest or the way in which power, authority and control are structured in the organization” (p. 454). Her call for the separation of culture and structure is based on the notion that scholars have misapplied culture in a way that implies an inaccurate depiction of what culture actually is.

Scholars have also attempted to delineate organizational culture from organizational climate in a manner that offers various notions of organizational culture (Denison, 1996; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Denison (1996) explained how the culture perspective was born into organizational studies in the early 1980s and had its fair share of run-ins with failure as

a growing field. He further noted that the attempt to quantify studies dealing with culture “contradict the epistemological foundations of culture research within organizational studies (p. 620). The foundations, as noted by Denison (1996), were based on a “rebellion” against “positivism, quantification, and managerialism of organizational studies” (p. 620). He argued that this move led to the study of organizational climate rather than organizational culture. Contrasting the qualitative nature of culture studies with the quantitative nature of climate studies, Denison (1996) suggested that ethnography is the leading method for studying culture as it explains context and uncovers the “underlying values and assumptions” of an organization (p. 625). Similar to Meek, Denison (1996) noted that definitions of organizational culture vary by scholar, but they are generally concerned with the norms, values, and shared conditions of the individuals who make up an organization.

Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey (2013) also described organizational climate and organizational culture as two, distinct concepts. They began by defining organizational climate as “the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected” (p. 362). Here, the emphasis is on the perceptions of experiences of the employees in terms of the structure of the organization. On the other hand, they defined organizational culture as “the shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a setting and are taught to newcomers as the proper way to think and feel, communicate by the myths and stories people tell about how the organization came to be the way it is as it solved problems associated with external adaptation and internal integration” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013, p. 362). This definition echoes the thoughts of other scholars who studied culture placing significant values, traditions, norms in the organization as central to its study. The

distinction between the two is necessary so that the boundaries can be set for organizational culture, an area that is growing and still developing in terms of its context and implications.

In detailing organizational culture, Schneider et al. (2013) contended that upon its inception in the early 1980s, “Culture very quickly became the darling of the management consulting world” (p. 369). They used this assertion as a springboard to illustrate how the study of organizational culture grew out of various disciplines and fields. They argued that this presented scholars with numerous questions, the leading question being whether the culture is “something an organization has” or “something an organization is” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013, p. 370). However, they contended that cultural studies were still conducted through qualitative methods and sustained that there is no single definition for culture. Yet, the ambiguity of the area has afforded many scholars the opportunity to study and interpret the significance of organizational culture.

Martin (1992) took a different approach and proposed a three-perspective method of studying culture. The three social scientific perspectives were integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Each of the perspectives presented a different way of conceptualizing and understanding culture. Integration, as described by Martin (1992), had three distinguishing characteristics which were: “All cultural manifestations mentioned are interpreted as consistently reinforcing the same themes, all members of the organization are said to share in an organization-wide consensus, and the culture is described as a realm where all is clear” (p. 12). This view both maintains some of the ideas voiced by other scholars, but also diverts from the belief that organizational culture is ambiguous.

He moved to explain differentiation as describing “cultural manifestations as sometimes inconsistent (for example, when managers say one thing and do another” (p. 12). Here, a more

practical interpretation of culture is provided to suggest context in the management profession. Lastly, he wrote that fragmentation “focuses on ambiguity as the essence of organizational culture” (p. 12). Martin (1992) argued through this perspective that the aforementioned ambiguity is common in organizations and that “consensus and dissensus are... constantly fluctuating” (p. 12). Martin’s (1992) approach further displays the ambivalence of the study of organizational culture.

Schein (1984) gave a definition of organizational culture that goes beyond the agreed upon tenets such as shared norms, values, traditions, and customs to express how organizations utilize said tenets to improve their workplace. He explained organizational culture as:

The pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 3)

However, Schein (1984) asserted that the “basic underlying assumptions” have a serious impact on organizations and outlined them to be: 1. The organization’s relationship to environment; 2. The nature of reality and truth; 3. The nature of human nature; 4. The nature of human activity; 5. The nature of human relationships (p. 6). These assumptions help to explain the role of relationships in the workplace and the motivations behind certain actions and behaviors. His definition also placed emphasis on the problems faced by organizations. Similarly to Martin, Schein (1984) argued consensus was of great significance in organizations as they attempted to accomplish their goals. He also alluded to the shared values and assumptions of individuals in organizations and how their behavior effects culture.

Batteau (2001) attempted to illustrate organizational culture by reviewing culture in organizational studies and anthropology. He wrote, "Management theorists have successfully adopted anthropological insights into shared understandings and constructed meanings" (p. 726). He argued that the concept of organizational culture is derived from anthropological notions, but applied to the organizational context. In his description of organizational culture, he wrote that culture "is a framework of meaning, a system of reference that can generate both shared understandings and the working misunderstandings that enable social life to go on. These frameworks of meaning are cultivated, negotiated, and reproduced within behavioral enactments" (p. 726). He was able to shift the focus to behavior, but he insisted that behavior not be thought of as simply the act of behaving, but the "cultivation" of those acts by the shared conditions and experiences in the organization (p. 727). Batteau (2001) also highlighted ambiguity and explained that as a practical element of organizational culture, it helps in the cultivation of said culture. Here, an emphasis on the vagueness and monotony in some of the daily routines of employees shows how the culture of an organization can be developed through symbols, systems, and rituals. Batteau's points offer substantial commentary on organizational culture literature by bringing together all of the precepts of culture that have been outlined by various scholars.

This literature review has illustrated the relationship between critical theory, CRT, D&I, and organizational culture to show how scholars have conceptualized issues of race, communication and culture in the workplace. It described how scholars have attempted to understand and analyze the historical context of race and how racial discrimination has shaped current race relations, specifically in organizational contexts. It also highlighted the importance of organizational culture and communication in the workplace. In addition, the literature review

led to relevant questions about race, communication and culture in the workplace such as: How do African Americans perceive the role of race in the workplace? How do they perceive the organizational culture of the organization they work for? What role do they perceive that diversity and inclusion programs play in shaping their organizational culture and a more equitable workplace? What role does communication (peer to peer and supervisor to subordinate) play in their perceptions of their organizational culture? This thesis addressed these questions via interviews with several African American professionals using a grounded theory approach.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative communication research methods help researchers to “understand the communication of people who are actively engage in trying to understand their own – and each other’s – communication” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017, p. 22). Given the literature surrounding the African American experience in workplace contexts in the United States, the need to further examine these experiences is evident. In conducting qualitative communication research, researchers attempt to, as Lindlof and Taylor (2017) described, “develop useful stories about their stories, while accounting for the influence of our own values and beliefs on this process” (p. 22). This allows for a deep reasoning of communication between various individuals in different contexts. In this thesis, African Americans’ perceptions of the workplace will be studied by examining their views on race, communication and culture within organizations. This study will employ a qualitative design to accomplish its aims.

The purpose of qualitative research is to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Thus, qualitative researchers are able to explore and illustrate the

experiences of the individuals they are studying. They “describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). At the core of qualitative research, then, is the making sense of people’s stories, as to generate a better understanding of interaction and communication between people and the way that the world works.

Grounded Theory Approach

One of the more prominent qualitative methodologies is grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory was created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and advanced through their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. The scholars explained that they believed that theory grows from data. They argued this against the more traditional method of verifying theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They asserted that there was “an overemphasis in current sociology on the verification of theory, and a resultant de-emphasis on the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research” (pp. 1-2). This argument was the basis for their formation of the grounded theory. They argued that theory should serve to predict and explain behavior, aid in the advancement of theory, be practically usable, offer insight on behavior, and outline a specific style of research for various aspects of behavior (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory, they contested, “fills this large order” through the “systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research” (p. 3). They continued to emphasize the generation of theory from data throughout their explanation of grounded theory.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), grounded theory should be the development of theory that takes place during the research. They further explain that this development of theory happens through the constant interaction between analysis and data collection. Glaser and

Strauss (1967) asserted that “theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation” (p. 4). This notion further highlights Strauss and Corbin’s (1994) point that the grounded theory works through the continuous exchanges between analysis and data collection.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) additionally contended that a basic and principal manner of grounded theory was constant comparison as they noted that “grounded theory is a general method of comparative analysis” (p. 1). The scholars described the significance and purpose of comparative analysis.

Comparative analysis can be used to generate two basic kinds of theory: substantive and formal. By substantive theory, we mean that developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations. By formal theory, we mean that developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32)

These two forms of theory grow from the researcher’s initial focus and depend on the specific area their study is addresses. Additionally, Strauss and Corbin (1990) outlined three forms of coding essential to grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These types of coding refer to a process that is manifested in the constant comparison method.

According to Straus and Corbin (1990), open coding consists of developing categories and their associated meanings. Axial coding builds on open coding as categories are further developed and related to their subcategories. Lastly, selective coding is where the theory is

organized and refined. These three instances represent a process of coding that is further detailed in Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method.

Constant Comparative Method

Glaser and Strauss (1967) alluded to the constant comparative method that they later explained in detail. The scholars outlined the aforementioned interaction between analysis and data collection as they explained the development of the constant comparative method. They explained that the method was a mix of two various approaches to qualitative research, one that entails "explicit coding and analysis" and one that seeks to develop theory through constant "redesigning and reintegration" of the researchers' thoughts and ideas during review (p. 437). In doing so, Glaser and Straus (1967) claimed that it assists the researcher in "generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and... clear enough to be readily, if only partially operationalized" (pp. 437-438). Thus, the constant comparative method allows the researcher to thoroughly conceptualize ideas and generate a theory that works to form a better interpretation of the area and subject of study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that the constant comparative method is comprised of the following four stages: "(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (p. 439). This thesis will employ a modified constant comparative technique through interviews. In the first stage, Glaser (1965) explained that the researcher codes the incident into as many categories as possible and compares each of the following incidents to the first coded incident. This stage is also characterized by the outlining of properties of the initial categories and memo writing that focuses on the next incident and alternative ways of coding it. During the second stage of Glaser's (1967) constant comparative method, the researcher moves from "comparing incident

with incident to incident with the properties of the category which resulted from initial comparison of incidents” (p. 440). At this point, the researcher, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), compares the next incident with their accumulated knowledge about the existing categories and incidents.

In the third stage, Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote that the theory is delimited as the researcher makes modifications to the categories for clarity and relevance. At the same time, the researcher makes reductions to categories that have similarities with other categories. The researcher also delimits the initial list of categories in terms of conforming to the focus of the study at that time. The fourth and final stage of the constant comparative method consists of writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Here, the major themes across the categories serve as section titles as the researcher summarizes the memos and the coded data to justify and rationalize their theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that a codified procedure such as the constant comparative method builds the credibility of the theory as it offers readers an explanation of how the theory was generated and built from the data.

Recently, scholars have utilized the grounded theory approach and constant comparative method in various fields. Psychologists such as White and Weatherall (2010) employed grounded theory and constant comparison to study older adults and their interactions with information technology. Medical scholars like Sharrock and Happell (2006) used a grounded theory approach to compare and analyze nurse experiences with patients dealing with mental health issues. In the education field, scholar James Barber (2012) used a grounded theory, constant comparative approach to study the various manners that traditional college students learn in a number of different situations. This thesis will use the grounded theory and constant

comparative method to analyze African American professionals' experiences with race in the workplace and how those experiences shape their perception of their organizations culture.

While Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially called for the development of theory in their approach, this thesis will differ as it will use a modified grounded theory approach to identify key themes surrounding African American professionals' perceptions of race in the workplace. This approach allowed the thesis to answer four research questions that are informed by the review of literature.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African Americans perceive the role of race in the workplace?

RQ2: How do African Americans perceive the culture of the organizations where they work?

RQ3: What role do African Americans perceive that D&I programs play in shaping their organizational culture and a more equitable workplace?

RQ4: What role does communication (peer to peer and supervisor to subordinate) play in African Americans' perceptions of their organization's culture?

Sample

The sample included seven (N = 7) African American professionals employed by American corporate, for-profit organizations. Participants included three females and four males. Two participants were between the ages of 18 and 24. Three were between the ages of 25 and 34. One participant was between the ages of 35 and 44. One participant was 65 years or older. Three participants had been employed at their current job for less than two years.

Two participants were employed at their current job for two to five years. One employee was participant at their job for eight to 10 years. Lastly, one participant was employed at their current job for more than 25 years. Two participants had one to two previous jobs. Two

participants had three to five previous jobs. Two participants had five to eight previous jobs. One participant had more than 10 previous jobs. One participant had no jobs similar to their current job. Four participants had one job similar to their current job. One participant had two jobs similar to their current job. Lastly, one participant had four jobs similar to their current job.

Recruitment

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited via snowball sampling. I contacted various professional organizations and associations via email. The message inquired about contacting members who are employed by corporate, for-profit organizations and included a link to a pre-interview survey with a consent form and questions that asked for basic demographic information. The email was distributed to the members of the organization who followed the link and filled out the survey. For confidentiality purposes, no personal identifiable information was recorded in the thesis.

Interview Procedures

Upon receiving notification that the subjects wanted to participate, I coordinated a date and time for the interviews. Each of the interviews were conducted over the phone. Before the interviews began, I reminded the interviewees of the consent form and informed them that their participation was completely voluntary and they had the option of opting not to answer a question or stopping the interview at any time. Each interviewee agreed to the terms of the consent form before I began asking questions.

I conducted the interviews using a structured interview guide with questions that were informed by various dimensions of the literature review. A structured interview guide was beneficial because it allowed the interview to be informed by the research and capture the information the interviewer was seeking. A structured interview also serves to ensure

consistency across all interviews making sure each interviewee was asked the same questions. This would further allow for an accurate depiction of the experiences of the interviewees.

The interviews proceeded for an average of 38 minutes and 29 seconds with the shortest interview time being 24 minutes and 36 seconds and the longest being 59 minutes and 11 seconds. Before concluding the interviews, I informed the interviewees that I would be transcribing the interview and emailing a copy of the transcript to them to ensure transparency and accuracy. I also reassured them of the complete confidentiality of the study and their anonymity. To do so, I informed them that they would be referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc. I concluded the interviews by thanking the interviewees for their participation. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder for transcription purposes.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the interviews using an online speech-to-text transcription website Sonix. Upon uploading the audio recordings to the website, Sonix transcribed the interviews. The software allowed me to play the recordings back while also making corrections to the transcript. The play/pause feature allowed me to stop and make sure the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I then listened to and reviewed the transcripts again to make sure there were no errors. The transcriptions took place after I concluded one interview and before I interviewed the next participant. I then emailed the participants the transcript of the interview so they could verify that it was accurate. The transcripts are stored on a password protected computer owned by myself. The only people who have access to the transcripts are myself and the interviewees.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher will be sure to account for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four elements are the criteria of trustworthiness as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first criterion of trustworthiness is credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that credibility can be achieved via persistent observation. The scholar wrote that the purpose of persistent observation is to “identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail (p. 304). This was achieved through the constant comparative analysis of the interviews in which I continuously noted experiences of the interviewees to make sure their feelings were a salient factor that could contribute to a theme.

The second criterion of trustworthiness is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The scholars noted that transferability is established when the researcher provides “a thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). I established transferability by offering a detailed description of the process employed for this thesis in the methodology section via interview procedures and analysis procedures. This will allow other researchers the possibility to distinguish if the results of this study can be transferred to a different context or setting.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed dependability as the third criterion of trustworthiness. They asserted that dependability can be achieved by “using the techniques outlined in relation to credibility” (pp. 316-317). Thus, I established dependability for this study in the same manner that I established credibility. The detailed description of the interview procedures as well as the analysis procedures ensure that the study is reliable. This further allows researchers the opportunity to replicate the study.

Lastly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that confirmability is the fourth and final criterion of trustworthiness. Guba (1981) contended that confirmability is related to objectivity in the sense that the findings of a study are independent of the biases of the researcher. In order to establish confirmability, I included direct quotations from the interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were sent to the interviewees so they could verify said transcript. Therefore, the findings of this study come strictly from the interviewees and not my personal perspectives.

Analysis Procedures

This study employed a modified constant comparative analysis of interviews. I followed Glaser and Strauss' (1967) guidelines to the extent that they complied with the purpose of this study and the requirements of the thesis. In adopting Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method, I began the analysis by coding the first interview into as many categories as possible. Moving forward I compared the second interview with the first interview. In comparing the two interviews, I detailed the properties of the categories. Once all of the properties were exhausted, I wrote memos about potential ways of comparing the next interview with the existing data.

Adhering to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) second stage of constant comparative analysis, I continued by comparing each of the following interviews with the notes that I had made of the interviews that came before them and my understanding of the interviewees experiences. During this stage, I made a note of the similarities between the interviews. I did so by detailing the various experiences and perceptions noted by each of the interviewees that were the same as one another. This further allowed me to make a note of instances that stood out and how those instances related to each of the other interviews. In doing so, I was able to categorize the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees in as many ways as possible.

This constant comparison continued after each of the interviews had taken place and until I could no longer deduce new properties of the categories that already existed. At this point the comparisons ceased due to saturation. It is important to note that saturation is significant in this process and that it does not simply occur due to the quantity of data or time constraints. Fusch and Ness (2015) offered an explanation that describes saturation as they wrote, “no new themes go hand-in-hand with now new data and no new coding. If one has reached the point of no new data, one has almost likely reached the point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation” (p. 1409). Thus, when I reached the point where no new themes could be determined or interpreted from constant comparison and analysis, I ended the analysis.

Once all information was exhausted from the comparison interviews, I modified the categories for relevance and condensed them into themes that address the research questions. I was not attempting to form a theory, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their third stage of the method. Therefore, during the third stage, I deviated from Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) initial method. Here, once again the categories were reduced so that relevance and redundancy were not an issue with the findings. This produced the themes that I used to address the research questions. The process of naming the themes was a challenging and an inexact one. I used descriptors of the experiences of the participants to name the themes. The titles of these themes were based on the preponderance of the comments that were presented by the participants.

This led me to fourth and final stage of the modified constant comparative analysis. This stage was also different from Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) initial description which is writing the theory. Instead, during this stage, I wrote up the results of my analysis. Here, I disclosed the themes that resulted from the interviews and further explained how they answer the research

questions. I listed each of the themes in a section that pertains to the research question that the interviewees addressed.

Chapter 4: Findings

RQ1: How do African Americans perceive the role of race in the workplace?

RQ1 addressed the manner in which African American professionals perceive the role of race in the workplace. The findings from the interviews reveal several themes that African American professionals used to describe their experiences with race in the workplace. The experiences and descriptions of race that the interviewees offered were first gathered into one category, which I title race. This category was divided into two themes and three sub themes that will be used to answer RQ1. The themes will be accompanied with quotations from the interviews to provide more context and a better understanding of the workplace experiences presented by the interviewees. The themes will be addressed in the following sections in order to explain how African American professionals perceive the role of race in the workplace.

Racial Disparity. The first theme addressing African American perceptions of race in the workplace is racial disparity. Race plays a serious role in shaping an organization's culture. What may be even more important is the impression that racial disparity leaves on its employees. As part of a minority group within these corporate organizations, African American professionals perceive the workplace to be dominated by White professionals. Each of the interviewees indicated that their organizations were predominantly White. This experience with race in the workplace has an effect on various thought processes and day to day operations of African American professionals. It shapes African American professional's interpretation of their organization's culture. While the interviewees did explain the presence of White professionals at their organizations, the explanation of their experiences with race was more situated in the

absence of African American professionals in the workplace. Therefore this theme has three sub themes that further explain African American professionals' perception of the role that race plays in the workplace.

Lack of representation in the workplace. The first subtheme under racial disparity is lack of representation. Across the board, the African American professionals felt that there was a lack of representation of African Americans in the workplace. The interviewees explained that there were very few African Americans that work in their organizations. Interviewee 4 explained that she is the only African American that works at her organization. Interviewee 3 noted that she is the only African American woman on a team of 15, where each of the other team members are White women. Interviewee 3 further explained the lack of representation of African American employees at her organization as she stated:

Because the company is kind of broken into the sub-divisions and the particular department that I work in, I'm probably. . . If the number was let's say 50, one out of ten of that are African-American, both men and women if that makes sense.

If the interviewees could not think of a number, they offered a percentage range of employees who are African American, with the lowest range being 10 percent to 20 percent and the highest being 35 percent to 45 percent.

Despite the low numbers of African Americans working in the organizations, the interviewees suggested that there was no tension among African American employees and employees of other races at the organization. Interviewee 2 stated, "At this particular organization, I think it's pretty comfortable, not too high tension. For the most part I think it's open dialogue and it's never, it hasn't yet been an issue where anything race related has come into play."

Interviewee 3 also said, “There's no tension or any like blatant issues, like it's a decent work environment.” So, even though the interviewees felt like there was a lack of representation of African Americans, their interactions with employees of other races were not impacted in a negative manner. However, the feeling that there is a lack of representation lead to further thoughts and comments about noticing their race and seeing other African Americans in the workplace.

Awareness of race. The second subtheme under racial disparity is awareness of race. Being an African American professional in is an experience where employees recognized their race constantly and continually throughout their time at an organization. It is something that is thought about often. Regardless of whether this affects their daily interactions, it is usually a thought in the back of their minds. Interviewee 5 captured the subtheme by simply stating, “I am always cognizant of my race within corporate America.”

Two interviewees explained that this constant acknowledgement of their race did have an effect on their interactions, or even their thoughts about the expectations that had been set for them. Interviewee 3 stated:

. . .when it comes to actually working professionally in this environment, I find that I have to be extra cautious about every word that I use. Really making sure that before I send an email, it really makes sense, more than my counterpart. So I'm constantly proofreading things and making sure that I'm using the absolute best language, verbiage as possible, because I know that I am the black woman on the team and everyone knows that.

Interviewee 3 explained this sort of awareness by saying, “I feel like there is added pressure to really do exceptional work, versus the desire for all of your employees to do exceptional work.”

When thinking about how race plays a role in the day to day operations of an African American professional, the continual recognition of one's race leads to heightened expectations of oneself presented by the organization. Interviewee 5 stated:

. . .when I first joined the firm, and this goes to any I guess organization that I will work for, is I know there is always a, not a double standard but a standard that I have to, because of my race, I would be expected to work just as hard, if not harder than the next person.

Interviewee 7 also expressed this idea when speaking of a new higher event he attended in which older African American employees were describing their experiences at the organization. The interviewee stated:

. . .whenever they walked into a room and they were like the only African-American person in the room and they felt like they didn't belong right away, just because it was a little unsettling and it's something like very obvious so like if you walk into a room and you're the only Black person in the room, they said they then noticed that.

These statements show how African Americans constantly deal with their race in their organizations. Noticing one's race because they don't see others like themselves happens often, but also offers a positive outcome for instances where they do see other African Americans in the organization.

Seeing others like oneself. The third and final subtheme under racial disparity is seeing others like oneself. The interviewees mentioned how important it is for African American professionals to see other African Americans working in the organization. When no other African American is present in the workplace, that sense of awareness of one's race is evoked. Interviewees described this feeling both in terms of just seeing other employees at the

organization and seeing employees in management positions. Positive feelings were associated with both instances. Interviewee 1 said, “People are always more comfortable when they see more people like them.” The interviewee also noted that this comfortability extends to those situations where African Americans see other African Americans in senior positions.

Interviewee 2 captured this sentiment when he stated:

I think that, that was one of the first things, you know, as a black male, that affected me was seeing so many people with similar skin tone in higher level management, then sales managers, front desk managers at multiple properties have a pretty good say and hold a pretty decent position. So I think that was, I think it's comforting. I think it's reassuring more so and to see your own diversity.

Interviewee 3 described seeing another African American in the workplace as a moment when you can “let your hair down.” The interviewee further said that there is an “unspoken understanding” between African American employees. Seeing others like oneself brings about a level of comfortability that is essential to a positive experience for African American professionals.

This notion could be extended to seeing other racial minorities in leadership positions as well. Interviewee 5 showed this when he stated, “I always look at, not only African-Americans in that leadership position, but people of diverse backgrounds or not people, but minorities in leadership positions.” It is important that organizations have diverse leadership so that minority employees can aspire to higher positions and be inspired to do exceptional work. From the African American perspective, it is vital to the experience of a professional to see others who look like them and/or other minorities in leadership positions so that their experience in the workplace is a positive one.

Hiring/Promotion processes. The second theme that explains how African Americans perceive the role of race in their organization is the organization's hiring/promotion processes. Race can potentially affect an organization's decision making in terms of hiring practices and the requirements that are set for potential new employees. Interviewees 1, 5, and 6 all noted the way that race plays a factor in the hiring or promotion processes at their respective organizations. Interviewee 1 explained that an individual's race changes the way an organization chooses to recruit. The interviewee insisted that African Americans have to "go through more loops" to get the same job as their White counterparts. She further argued that when the organization goes to recruit, they ask more of the African American professional than they would of the White professional. The underlying biases of a corporation may not be overt, but they do exist and they do present African Americans hurdles that are not present for White professionals.

Race also plays a role in the way that African Americans are able to climb the corporate ladder at their organizations. While the obstacles exist for African American professionals in the recruiting and hiring process, they also endure in terms of career advancement and promotion within an organization. Each of the interviewees explained that there are very few African American professionals in management level senior positions at their organizations. Interviewee 5 explained that as they are pursuing a management position they are being advised by other African Americans about what that particular experience is like at a big firm that has challenges with having diverse management.

Interviewee 6 simply stated, "I feel like it's harder in our company for a black man to get a promotion or to get or go to another position versus any other gender or race..." He also suggested that race could play an indirect role on the hiring/promotion process based on the characteristics of the interviewee and interviewer. In his opinion, if an African American

applicant is being interviewed by a White professional they, have a lower chance of being hired/promoted than a White applicant. However, he did affirm the opposite saying that an African American's chances are higher for being hired/promoted if they are being interviewed by another African American. This instance clearly portrays the effect that race can have on an organization's hiring and promotion practices and how it affects the decision making of an organization.

RQ2: How do African Americans perceive the culture of the organizations where they work?

RQ2 focused on how African Americans perceive their organization's culture. The findings from the interviews offer various themes that explain how African Americans experience the workplace. The themes address the way that organizations make African Americans feel about the workplace. Initially, one category formed from the interviews, which I titled culture. This category was divided to four themes. These themes adequately address the manner in which African American professionals perceive their organization's culture. The themes are noted in the following sections and to answer RQ2. Quotations from the interviews are included in the sections to explain and detail the nature of the themes.

Inclusive workplace. The first theme that addresses African American perceptions of their organization's culture is an inclusive workplace. The data from this study suggests that many of today's for-profit organizations offer a workplace that is welcoming and accessible to its African American employees. Each of the interviewees characterized their organization's culture as an open and welcoming one using descriptors such as friendly, progressive, collaborative, awareness, loose, unified, and transparent. These descriptors help to explain the way that organizations are working to cultivate a more inclusive environment for their employees. Across all of the interviews, the notion that the organizations were committed to make each group, in

terms of minorities, feel welcome was persistent. Interviewee 2 illustrated this when she said, "...it's inclusive because there's this desire to make each group, whether it's an ethnic group or a particular orientation, feel like they have a place and a face and a voice." This sort of inclusiveness further allows for employees to feel welcome and motivated to perform at a high level.

Interviewee 7's elaboration on his organization's engagement with employees also explains the importance of an inclusive work environment. He stated:

So with this one, it really has that small office feel where everyone knows each other, almost everyone knows each other. It's like a family. They're very encouraging. They care about you as a person not just another person at work kind of thing. They're really invested in your progress and your personal growth and your professional growth...

He continued to explain his organization's focus on work-life balance. This adds another layer to the theme of inclusion as this organization is actually devoted to making sure the employee is having both a healthy and a positive experience working there.

None of the interviewees claimed to feel ostracized or exiled from the organization and its internal groups. If interviewees were not overt in their feelings about their organization being welcoming, they suggested that the organization created an environment that allowed them to get their job done with the least amount of complication as possible. Interviewee 4 stated:

...the organizational culture is very much like we come here to work. You know, show up in the morning, get your work done, log your hours. If you happen to have time to spend it with your co-workers, do so. But definitely making sure that the client is taken care of at the end of the day.

This shows that while inclusion may not be expressed overtly in organizations, African American professionals do not feel excluded in the workplace.

Family-oriented culture. The second theme was deduced from African American perceptions of their organization's culture as being family-oriented. Inclusivity in the workplace offers many positives for employees of all races and ethnicities. While inclusion is essential to producing a positive work environment, organizations have also worked to form a more close-knit workplace for their employees. Extending interviewee 7's abovementioned comments about family in the workplace, the interviewees explained that their organizations were family-oriented. In this sense, to be family-oriented is less centered around the home family and more concerned with the work family. This sort of culture further fosters a productive work environment for employees. Interviewee 1 stated:

But in terms of our particular culture, at this network I would say it's very actually family oriented because we are on a campus we're sort of isolated we're not in an urban area, we're actually in a sort of residential area. So, within the campus itself you know, it's enclosed, people know each other. Proximity, we have a cafeteria, so that sort of forces people to get together. I would say on the whole people are pretty friendly. You know they go out after work. They do things together.

Later interviewee 1 also commented "So, I would say the culture is again and it's not utopia but for the most part, it's encouraging, positive and I would say sort of family oriented." Interviewee 2 also shared this view of his organization as he said:

Pretty relaxed, very much so friendly environment, especially when it comes to just coexisting and kind of having common ties when it comes to the same mindset that each

person has. So it's very family oriented, very friendly like I said and pretty much able to just enjoy the fact that we're all there for the same purpose of just helping out.

Interviewee 3 also commented on her organization being "big on family." The interviewees expressed that the organizations are making a serious effort to make sure that employees are engaged with one another and are united in both a social sense and more importantly a business sense.

Desire for diversity within the organization. The third theme addresses the way African Americans perceive their organization's culture is the organizations desire for diversity. The interviewees suggested that there is an overall desire for diversity at their organizations. As the interviewees noted that the workplace is open and inclusive but lacking representation and diversity, they offered various interpretations about their respective organization's claim to diversity. The comments on the organization's desire for diversity addressed various areas, the first being diversity in the context of our society and its past. Interviewee 5 suggested:

So, there has been certainly a push and an awareness, more conscious awareness of how do corporations manage that, I guess, expectation of dealing with things that involve diversity and inclusion and just overall, the value system that they would like us to honor on a daily basis...

The primary way he explained this was through his organization's engagement with its employees. He also described the organization's aim for diversity as "more of a deliberate push to make sure that employees understand what it means to be diverse..." This notion is also important, so employees have an understanding of what diversity is and how to be able to communicate effectively if a coworker comes from a different background and a different worldview.

The second way the interviewees explained their organization's desire for diversity was as a pure commitment to diversity. Interviewee 3 stated, "...they make a point to provide resources for the different employees to feel like they have some sort of inner circle while in such a big sea of people who may not look like them." Interviewee 7 made a similar remark to interviewee 3 and commented:

... they're big on like diversity and bringing in different backgrounds and all that stuff because they really believe that's the best way to get the best ideas and the best solutions to the questions that we're trying to answer and stuff like that.

This approach to diversity is vital to an organization's success. It supports the minority employees within the organization and produces a more well-rounded staff that is able to make more comprehensive decisions.

Interviewees 1 and 6 were adamant about the way that their organizations portrayed diversity. The two were concerned that their organizations focused on diversity as a whole and not on achieving racial or ethnic diversity within in the organization. Interviewee 1 stated:

... a lot of times when you have a discussion about diversity, it almost inevitably will be, 'Yes, we totally believe in the diversity of thought.' I hear that very often. And then I will say, yes that is true, but I was referring to ethnic diversity.

Interviewee 1 continued to describe diversity from her organization's perspective as referring to diversity of ideas, thought, and sexual orientation, but exclaimed that she was referring to racial and ethnic diversity, which she further explained could be overlooked in those conversations.

Interviewee 6 also made remarks referring to the way diversity is portrayed at his organization as he said:

... might present itself as a company that's one, other than all the Fortune 500 companies, like one of the most diverse statistically. And that's something that they really hang their hat on and that is a good thing. However, I feel like when they say diverse, they are also including White, I guess like lesbian or homosexual or anything like that.

Interviewee 6 also continued to describe his organization's perspective on diversity as being more all-inclusive, which he noted was valuable, but he felt that racially and ethnically, the organization was lacking.

Lastly, the desire for diversity was portrayed as more lackluster than promotive.

Interviewee 2 stated:

I think it exists, but I do think it's a little bit more sort of toward the cultural relevance of it where it . . . not necessarily it exists to advance it, but it exists because it needs to exist and that if it wasn't . . . it doesn't do anything to push the boundaries of things.

This perception explains that African Americans expect a certain level of engagement with diversity in their organizations and when that expectation is not met it can lead to unpleasant views of the organization's commitment to diversity.

The intersection of race and gender. The last theme that explains African American professionals' perceptions of their organization's culture is the intersection of race and gender. Interviewees 1, 3, and 4 noted that their experiences in the workplace have been influenced by their gender. Whether it be in their thought processes or a simple observance of the demographic makeup of their organizations, these interviews noted gender to play a role in their experiences in the workplace. Interviewee 1 stated:

Well I will say that there are times when I think that the voices of African-Americans can be discounted. Again this is an observation. Do not have scientific evidence. But, you

know, observations and like just watching interactions or even myself sometimes when I'll present things and then it's sort of repeated. But that is just what I said. And so there might be a split. I'm not sure how much it has to do with being African-American versus being a woman. But, I think it's a little bit of both. My environment is predominantly Caucasian and predominantly male.

These remarks further explain that African American professionals are confronted with thoughts about their input and voice in an organization. This statement exemplifies how one's race and gender intersect in a manner that influences their thoughts about the organization's culture based on their experiences.

Interviewee 3 first noted her race and gender in her explanation of her experience working at her organization. The interviewee said:

Okay, so I am an African-American woman who works at a predominantly white company that actually, I would say it's male, white males who really run the company. So particularly and on my team I am the only African-American woman out of about 15 white females on our particular team.

As the interviewee noted the presence of White professionals, she further detailed her experience at the organization by stating:

So for me the experience is twofold as a woman and a woman of color because I am constantly looking for representation and somewhat non-existent, but also really trying to find my voice as a woman, as a woman of color. . .

The interviewee reinforced the notion that there is a lack of representation in the workplace, but this also extends that representation to include a more specific group; African American women. Interviewee 4 also noted that she was the only African American women in her organization. She

also explained that being the only African American has affected her experience with communication based on what she feels she has in common with employees of other races in her organization.

RQ3: What role do African Americans perceive that D&I programs play in shaping their organizational culture and a more equitable workplace?

RQ3 was concerned with African American professionals' perception of their organization's commitment to creating an equitable workplace. Through D&I programs. The findings from the interviews shed light on the initiatives and efforts created by their organizations to enhance both, diversity and inclusion. One category, titled commitment, was initially derived from the interviews. This category was divided into two themes that address way that organizations incorporate D&I programs at the organization. The following sections are focused on these themes and provide an answer to RQ3. Quotations will be included to provide additional understanding of the African American professionals' perceptions.

Affinity Groups. The first theme that addresses the manner in which African Americans perceive D&I programs at their organization is affinity groups. As organizations have been faced with the task of addressing diversity in the workplace, they have provided African American and other minority professionals with an avenue that allows them to feel welcome and supported in their organization. Four of the interviewees indicated that their organizations have various affinity groups that allow members of minority communities the opportunity to connect with one another. Interviewees 1 and 3 explained that their organization has Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that are devoted to women, Hispanic employees, the LGBTQ+ community, and veterans, but are not exclusive to those groups, so anyone can participate in any of the hosted events. Interviewee 5 explained that his organization has minority network groups and he only identified

one which is supportive of African American employees at the organization. Interviewee 6 referred to the social committees and organizations within his organization and outlined organizations for African American employees, the LGBTQ+ community, and Asian employees.

Interviewee 6 further explained how the organization allows for these groups to be noticed and respected within the workplace. He stated:

So I feel like they anytime any of those organizations have an event or just have communication that they want to put out, it's given to everybody companywide. So even though it's a group that you have to join, the workings of the group is made public to everybody so that everybody knows that these organizations exist and they have programs that everybody can participate in.

If affinity groups are present in the organization, African American professionals perceive that there is a general engagement with diversity and inclusion practices and an aspiration towards creating a more equitable workplace.

An overall commitment through initiatives, programs, and events. The second theme that explains how African Americans perceive their organization to be creating a more equitable workplace is an overall commitment shown through initiatives, programs, and events.

Organizations understand that there is a duty to address diversity in the organization so that there is a better understanding amongst employees of its meaning. Organizations must engage in diversity and inclusion practices to ensure that their workplace is open, accessible and respectful of each of the communities that exist within the organization. The interviewees explained the organizations have created and held various initiatives, programs, and events that further display their attempt to create a more equitable workplace. Three of the interviewees explained that their organizations held events during Black History Month (BHM), which highlighted the African

American employees and the African American culture. Interviewees 1 and 3 expressed how important the BHM events were in terms of representation for African Americans.

Interviewee 1 detailed an event where images and comments from African American employees were posted in various areas around the organization. She stated:

And so I had, back to the first point about just seeing people who were like yourself, a number of people came up to me and kind of said oh it was really good you know, your picture, first of all the pictures were beautiful, all of them, male, female- and they were just saying that it was so good to see themselves, daily for a month, you know, they had the posters walking by.

Interviewee 1 further suggested what the event meant in terms of representation by saying, “I also thought it made an impression on people who aren’t African-American that you know, we looked professional and these were our personal comments.” Interviewee 3 also made comments in regards to what a BHM event featuring employees meant for the organization. She explained that she felt that the organization was making a push for representation of minority groups. Similarly, interviewee 6 discussed a BHM event that highlighted African Americans in senior level positions.

Interviewees further explained their organizations commitment to both, diversity and inclusion through various sessions based around understanding diversity, D&I training, and giving back to the community. Interviewee 5 detailed an initiative for D&I by saying:

Just recently our firm did a . . . I think it was, it was an initiative where they held several sessions that were related, that were related to understanding the perspective and the mindset of someone from a diverse background. Topics covered anything from what it

feels to be, what it feels to be an African-American in the professional work workplace, what it feels to be a homosexual in the workplace or LGBTQ member in the workplace.

The interviewee further suggested that the conversations held during the sessions helped the employees of the organization to form a better understanding of what it means to be diverse.

Interviewee 5 also suggested his organization's commitment to diversity through their efforts to give back to the surrounding community. He stated:

I think one other thing our firm does pretty good is that they do a very good job of giving back to the community and being that we're based in the _____ area, I've noticed that their participation in communities surrounding like at-risk youth within inner cities especially like _____, they have made a valiant and cognizant effort to make sure they engage those communities.

Lastly, interviewee 2 offered a less favorable interpretation of his organization's commitment to diversity. Interviewee 2 said, "There is a Diversity and Inclusion training that takes place during orientation. But I wouldn't say it is necessarily any take charge initiatives to ensure that."

Additionally, the interviewee described the training as "run of the mill." This further supports the idea that African American professionals expect their organizations to be deeply engaged with diversity practices.

RQ4: What role does communication (peer to peer and supervisor to subordinate) play in African Americans' perceptions of their organization's culture?

RQ4 was focused on what role African Americans perceive communication to play, both peer to peer and supervisor to subordinate, in shaping their organization's culture. The findings from the interview offer insight on the type of communication and the way communication is used within the workplace. Initially, two categories, communication and voice, were created

from the interviews. Those categories were divided into four themes that help explain the role of communication in the workplace. The following sections are concentrated on the themes and further provide an answer to RQ4. Quotations from the interviews will be used to provide additional context to offer a better detailing of the themes.

Positive and open communication. The first theme that works to explain the role of communication in shaping organizational culture is positive and open communication. Each of the interviewees described the communication within their organizations as positive, both peer to peer and supervisor and subordinate. The positive and open communication was discussed in several different manners as it pertains to the workplace. On the peer level, interviewee 1 explained this sort of open communication in terms of organizational events by stating:

So we you know we'll have like we have an internal corporate, you know we have a large Christmas party where everyone's interacting. We have a bowling event where everyone is interacting. But, there are also things where people just you know go out you know after work, functions that tends not to be, you really don't have your manager or someone who's at my level.

Interviewee 3, on the other hand described open communication in a more transactional view as it relates to transparency within her team. The interviewee said:

So, particularly my team, we are email based, although we sit next to each other, we keep everything in writing just so it's trackable transferable and we are consistently communicating on every front, whether if there was something that was not done and we're flagging it to one another. If there was something that was questionable, we're flagging and following up. If there is any concern in perhaps how something was addressed, which I've had some areas like that happen, we immediately either take a walk

or you know shoot a little note through the messenger system we have and say, " Hey, everything okay? Can we talk really quickly?"

The interviewee did however articulate that from team to team, communication could vary, which should also be taken into consideration.

Interviewee 4 explained communication on the peer level in more of a relaxed and friendly manner by saying:

...when we do have the opportunity to talk to each other like we're really excited to talk to each other, not so much necessarily about work stuff because we're always focused on work, but you know share a little bit about our personal lives and joke around with one another. And when we are, because of the way that the office is configured even though the door is a glass door, we do feel like we can go in and ask questions to somebody else.

Interviewee 5 discussed open communication in terms of collaboration in the workplace. He stated:

But ultimately, I think a majority of my time and my experience has been positive in the sense that even though we're peers, if we're operating and trying to achieve a certain goal with supporting different clients but maybe with the same issue or challenge that that client may be facing, they have been very open about providing advice on how you sort of deal with those types of situations. . .

Similarly, interviewee 7 described the open communication as helpful due to the fact that coworkers participated in an internship with the organization prior to being hired, whereas the interviewee did not. So this collaborative form of positive, open communication along with each of the other manners noted above help to explain how African American professionals perceive and experience communication in the workplace.

Encouraging and supportive leadership. The second theme that describes the way that African American professionals perceive communication in the workplace is encouraging and supportive communication. In continuing to explain the positive communication in the workplace, each of the interviewees described communication from supervisor to subordinate to be open and constructive to their experience. Primarily, this form of communication was discussed in terms of either being encouraged to ask questions or speak to management or in terms of feedback. If this was not the case, communication was described as simply open. Interviewee 2 offered a statement reflecting open communication and stated:

So it's pretty open communication. There's obviously a chain of command when it comes to that but there is no issue with talking to anybody higher on that chain. You can always talk to each individual and I believe open-door policy.

In a similar vein, interviewee 6 simply stated that communication is informal and relaxed in the workplace.

Regarding the employees being encouraged to ask questions, interviewee 4 said:

We are definitely encouraged to ask lots of questions, even if we feel like they're stupid questions. And of course sometimes we preface like "this is probably a dumb question."

We're still encouraged to ask it. And when we do, we're met with feedback that is positive.

Interviewee 7 also described communication between management and lower level employees to be easygoing if questions ever arose. Similarly, interviewee 5 explained communication from management in a supportive manner by stating:

But overall I think in terms of at least the project that I support right, now I've had tremendous support from my leadership management team in terms of being there for me

if I have any questions related to anything that I'm working on or anything that I'm supporting.

Interviewee 5 further argued that this was important in terms of the professional development of employees and management empowering them to grow.

On the other hand, communication was discussed in terms of feedback in which interviewees offered several statements. Interviewee 1 stated:

I would say, overall again I feel and again it's not a utopia but overall I feel it's positive and the reason I can say that is we actually do company surveys every other year and my particular division also does what they call a site survey as well on alternate years where we actually get the pulse of employees.

Interviewee 1 further elaborated on a two-way flow of communication where management allowed the lower level employees to speak to what they feel is and is not working and addressed those concerns in a symmetrical manner. Interviewee 3 also offered thoughts about feedback when stating:

There are quarterly department wide meetings and there is an open-door policy for higher ups and their employees and direct reports that if there is any question, concern, hesitation, confusion about anything that they have an access, more than free access to come and have a conversation, put something on a calendar and that has to be- it has to be responded to in a timely manner. And the supervisors and managers have to really respond to that because of these surveys that go out worldwide, not worldwide sorry, companywide.

These descriptions of the communication between management and lower level employees, in terms of being positive and encouraging help form a better understanding of African American perceptions of communication in the workplace.

Intra and Inter-racial communication. Intra and inter-racial communication serves as the third theme regarding African American perceptions of communication in the workplace. The interviewees explained communication with other African American professionals and professionals of other races in two different manners. In terms of communication between African American professionals, a majority of the interviewees described communication as welcoming, sincere, and supportive. The interviewees discussed communication between African Americans and other races as simply positive or open. In two cases, interviewees had little to no contact with other African Americans in the workplace. Interviewee 4 then discussed communication between herself, the only African American employee, and other minority employees, while distinguishing that communication from communication with White employees. The interviewee stated:

So I feel like when we're alone they're kind of like these . . . like we feel a little bit more freer to talk about cultural things. You know, it's just because it's like kind of unspoken like you understand what's going on here. And you know kind of like the unspoken rule like all the other white people don't know what's going on. They have no clue. I definitely feel like it's easier to talk to them especially about things where you kind of might be getting on, like getting to a point where it's not so much uncomfortable, but it's very clear that something is playing out because of race, gender or something like that. It's just easier to talk to them about it than say, my other co-workers.

Interviewee 7 who rarely interacts with other African Americans in the organization, described communication with other African Americans as normal.

In each of the other cases the interviewees independently distinguished communication with other African American professionals from communication with White professionals. This can best be illustrated through examples of encounters with other African Americans or White professionals described interviewees 1 and 6. Each interviewee offered the examples in a different manner that suggests various ideas about intra and inter-racial communication in the workplace. Interviewee 1 offered an example in which she stated:

I see a lot of younger African-Americans, I never see them together. I see them with people of other races . . . going to lunch, talking, walking in the hall. Now part of this could be because I've been here a long time, but the people who have been here longer, the people who are older we didn't have any problems congregating together. So if I go to the cafeteria and I see someone and I know them, we'll probably strike up a conversation and then somebody else will come in and join the conversation. And there might be four or five of us talking or laughing about something. I do not see that with the younger or- I would say probably people under 35.

On the other hand, interviewee 6 presented the following example:

So like if I'm in the hallway and I see somebody that's black that worked for the company, even if I have no idea what department they work for, even if I may not have seen them before, like usually there's more like a "What's Up" or maybe like a small quick chat or anything like that. And I feel like we kind of like latch on to each other versus if I was this see somebody of another race and I didn't know, it might be just a "Hello" or maybe no speech between us.

Interviewee 6 further distinguished the communication by stating:

I feel like the only difference is if. . . I feel like if there were Black and White people, if I feel like they know each other or at least seen each other, they'll speak. But it's not like- if a White person was walking down the hallway and they see a Black person that they've never seen before, I don't feel like there's an obligation to necessarily speak versus where we would speak anyway.

These two examples of communication between African Americans and between African Americans and other races help to develop a clear understanding of how African American professionals perceive communication in the workplace.

Employee voice. The fourth and final theme that illustrates African American professionals' perceptions of communication in the workplace. Each of the interviewees explained that they feel that their voice is heard and respected by leadership in the organization. Interviewee 1 claimed that her voice is always respected and sometimes heard. The interviewee stated:

So yes, I feel that I am respected in terms of my opinion. They know that I know what I'm talking about. They know I have expertise . . . in my field. Do they like what I say? That's a different story. Do they always hear me? I would say a majority of the time, but not always given my standing. And so yes, if. . . I feel like if I was not African-American, I feel like yes my voice would probably be heard all the time.

Interviewee 1 further exclaimed that while her voice has been taken into consideration by management, she could not say the same for other African American professionals. The interviewee said:

Just based on the fact that we have problems retaining people. And a number of those that I have spoken to, I would say in a nutshell, they did not feel like their voices were heard.

And so they moved on.

This is important to note regarding the way that communication affects an organization's culture. If other interviewees had comments similar to this about the voices of other African Americans, they said that they could not speak for other African Americans and their experiences.

In terms of the interviewees' feelings about their voice, each of the other interviewees claimed that their voice had been heard by management and taken into consideration.

Interviewee 2 discussed making improvements to an operational checklist for the organization.

Interviewee 3 spoke about spearheading a name change and pay raise for her position. Similarly, interviewee 6 noted that management has been consulting with him primarily about

improvements to be made to their employee training module.

Interviewee 5 discussed voice from a leadership perspective and stated:

I've had several, I mean not several but a couple of instances where I've had a staff member work for me and I guess because they think I'm young and that my word doesn't carry. So I've had to pull them to the side and be very specific about what I expect as a project lead and the expectations that I expect of their work product, of their work quality. But all that stuff got ironed out fairly quickly and I think it's mainly because you know I'm very direct. I don't take, I don't take any mess per se. So it's more so you have to establish that at the very beginning because if you don't, you potentially run into the issue of people walking over you or not respecting your word or respecting the vision in your leadership style or what you think needs to be accomplished for the client.

Interviewee 5 also elaborated on the notion of being a “good talker.” The interviewee explained that one’s voice being taken into consideration or even being respected reflects their reputation and their work-ethic.

Additionally, each of the interviewees suggested that they can speak freely within the organization to a certain extent. This idea is captured completely by interviewee 2, who stated:

I would say as free as it can be you know obviously without crossing boundaries as a workplace. Yes, so I've had pretty, pretty good conversations just in general as people talking about different things. But obviously while still keeping it professional, but as free as it could be while still keeping it professional.

If interviewees felt like they needed to hold back they suggested that it was either because they had nothing to contribute or what they would have contributed would have been less than desirable in the workplace. Towards the notion of voice, the interviewees explained that overall, their voice is respected and heard, which offers an insightful view of the perspectives that African Americans have about the way that communication shapes their organization’s culture.

The interviews established various themes and sub themes to answer each of the research questions. In, summary, the themes and sub themes used to answer RQ1 are racial disparity with sub themes of lack of representation in the workplace, awareness of race, and seeing others like oneself. Lastly, regarding RQ1 was hiring/promotion processes. These themes explain how African Americans perceive the role of race in the workplace. The themes used to answer RQ2 are inclusive workplace, family-oriented culture, and desire for diversity. These themes illustrate African American professionals’ perception of their organization’s culture. In regards to RQ3, the themes used were affinity groups and an overall commitment through initiatives, programs, and events. These themes help to explain the role that African American professionals perceive

D&I programs play in constructing their organization's culture. Lastly, the themes used to answer RQ4 are positive and open communication, encouraging and supportive leadership, intra and inter-racial communication, and employee voice. These themes portray the role that communication plays in African American professionals' perceptions of their organization's culture.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to examine the experiences of African American professionals with race, diversity and inclusion, culture and communication in the workplace. It identified various themes that help to better explain the perceptions and experiences of African American professionals. CRT seeks to highlight and challenge the inequalities that are present in various sectors of our society. The current study suggests that race has a definite role in shaping an organization's culture. Furthermore, the employees' experiences with race indicate that inequities still exist in the workplace on a lesser level, but organizations have begun to take steps to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. African American experiences with race in the workplace also illustrate organizational culture in today's for-profit organizations.

Race was found to play a significant role in African American professionals' perceptions of the organization. This suggests that African Americans recognize the racial disparity within their organizations, which also has an effect on their thought processes and day-to-day operations. Consequently, their perceptions of the organization's culture are altered in a manner that calls attention to the racial disparity in the workplace. The African American professionals noted that White professionals were dominant in the workplace, a workplace composed of primarily White male leadership. This finding supports previous research which suggests that within corporate America, a White leader prototype exists in which being White could positively

affect a professional's ascension up the corporate ladder (Logan, 2011). This finding also highlights a fear of CRT scholars who argued against Affirmative Action based on the idea that organizations would hire very few African Americans.

The professionals' reflections on racial disparity further led to views of representation in the workplace, an awareness of race, and seeing others like oneself. African American professionals recognize that there are few other African Americans that work in their organizations. This acknowledgement of a lack of presence leads African American professionals to feel that there is an under representation of African Americans in the workplace. Whether it is simply the presence of African American employees in lower level staff positions or even in management positions, professionals find themselves constantly noticing their race. This continual recognition of one's race leads professionals to address discouraging thoughts. Most notably, African American professionals feel that they must work twice as hard or be exceedingly better than their White counterparts to fill the same positions or even progress up the organizational hierarchy. To that end, African American professionals are encouraged when they see other African Americans in the organization and more specifically in management positions.

The presence of other African Americans in the workplace provides a sense of comfort that simply does not exist when they are not present. It is important that organizations have diverse leadership so that minority employees can aspire to higher positions and be inspired to do exceptional work. While comfort is significant to a positive work experience, a diverse workplace also fosters a developmental environment on the professional level which allows African American employees to progress in their careers.

Furthermore, African American professionals perceive that race plays a role in the hiring and promotion processes at their organizations. African Americans feel that it is generally harder

to be hired due to obstacles that do not exist for their White counterparts. While hurdles exist for African American professionals in the recruiting and hiring process, they also endure in terms of upward mobility and promotion within an organization. These ideas and feelings further support research that refers to the concept of the White leader prototype, which again, argues that race can be the most influential factor in a professional's advancement within an organization (Logan, 2011). This finding also reinforces the argument based around Affirmative Action that there should be an equal competition for employment where organizations promote racial and ethnic diversity and diverge from a homogenous workplace (Kennedy, 1995). Organizations must commit to shifting their hiring/promotion practices that put African Americans at a disadvantage. This would lead to a more diverse and equitable workplace which should be on the forefront of any agenda for today's organizations.

African Americans experience race in a number of ways in an organization. From being aware that they are the minority to understanding and perceiving various difficulties in the hiring and promotion processes of an organization, their day-to-day experiences are impacted by race. Because of these experiences with race, their perceptions of the organization's culture are constructed in a way that is focused on race and the effects that it has on an employee's experience at an organization. While it is significant to have these feelings noted, it is imperative that organizations work to create an environment that allows African American professionals to have an equitable experience. Therefore, it is important that organizations have a pulse on what African Americans and other minority employees are feeling so that the workplace is conducive to the performance of the organization and more importantly, the growth and development of all employees.

African American professionals do however feel that their organizations offer an inclusive workplace. Regardless of the number of African American employees in the organization, professionals consider their workplaces to be welcoming. Organizations have taken steps to ensure that the workplace is one that fosters teamwork and collaboration. So, to the benefit of the organization, African American professionals feel that they are provided with a productive environment. Moreover, the professionals acknowledge and appreciate the organization's respect for minority races in the workplace. They discern that organizations are aware of the importance of diversity and are invested in making their minority employees feel welcome. In regards to the employee, an inclusive workplace allows African American professionals the opportunity to grow, both personally and professionally. This sort of inclusion and professional development of the employee has a positive effect on African American perceptions of their organization's culture.

This finding does not support research that suggests that African Americans perceive the workplace in a negative light in which they are excluded (Mor Barak, 2000; Mor Barak et al., 1998). This could be a result of organization's attempts to create a more equitable workplace as they understand the need for diversity and equality in the workplace. It further suggests that organizations are more inclusive than they have been in the past, which is also a step in the right direction in creating a more equitable workplace.

In noting the inclusive workplace, African American professionals perceive their workplaces to be family-oriented. Family in this sense is centered around the organization being a family rather than the more traditional view of a family regarding the employee's home life. This effort works to encourage employees to embrace one another to help foster a workplace where the organization's goals can be achieved and the employees can grow and advance within

their organization and in their overall professional career. This finding indicates that today's organizations create a culture that is family-oriented because it is a value that is shared in the organization, which is indicative of organizational culture as it is outlined in related research (Denison, 1996; Meek, 1988; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013).

As organizations move to create more welcoming and inclusive workplaces where they focus on a family-oriented culture, African American professionals feel that there is a general desire for diversity within the organization. In most cases, the desire exists to promote collaboration and the diversity of knowledge so that the organization can perform at a high level. African American professionals perceive that organizations are more interested in establishing the meaning or definition of diversity than they are in achieving greater racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace. Additionally, African American professionals believe that organizations have a desire for diversity because of the current social and political climate in the United States. The professionals acknowledged the existence of a desire for an overall more diverse workplace, but less of a commitment to racial diversity.

This finding draws attention to how each, diversity and inclusion can be construed as separate words with separate meanings noted in D&I literature (Mor Barak, 2015). So often we hear the words diversity and inclusion together in terms of programs and/or departments within many organizations across the country. The current study suggests that organizations may need to revisit these terms and develop a more productive approach to creating both a more diverse and a more inclusive workplace. After all, striving for one does not guarantee achievement of the other.

Therefore, while corporate organizations understand that there is a need for diversity in the workplace, they must also be aware of falling into a state of negligence in their engagement

with said diversity. If this happens, it does not help to forge a change in a system that has continually put African American and other minority professionals at a disadvantage. This finding along with African American professionals' thoughts on racial disparity and hiring or promotion processes highlight a fear of CRT scholars who argued against Affirmative Action on the premise that organizations would hire few African Americans which satisfies the concerns of White leadership while portraying a false image of diversity and equality (Farber, 1994). If organizations desire a more diverse workplace, where many groups are present, represented, and respected, they must commit to diversity on each level which would include a stronger engagement with their efforts to be more racially and ethnically diverse. Such a shift would be beneficial for both the employees and the organization as a whole.

African American women also noted gender as having a role in shaping their organization's culture. The professionals are faced with the intersection of race and gender in their organization because they feel that there is also a lack of representation, specifically of African American women. This highlights the importance of recognizing intersectionality in D&I efforts (Crenshaw, 1995). This lack of representation and simply being outnumbered in the organization shapes the experiences of African American women and affects their perception of the organization's culture as being predominantly White and being led by White males. In addition to the concept of the White leader prototype, this finding supports CRT scholar Edwards' (2012) third tenet of CRT that suggests that race intersects with other aspects of identity and that it cannot be understood in isolation, which means that identity is intersectional. Thus, it is imperative that while organizations try to create a more diverse workplace, they must also understand the way that race and gender intersect so that they are not only inclusive of African American males, but all African Americans as well as other minority races and genders.

African American professionals perceive that the commitment to diversity that does exist within their organizations is manifest in affinity groups and in various initiatives, programs, and events. In terms of affinity groups, professionals noted various ERGs and networks that allow for minority groups to be connected and supported. The affinity groups that are most noticeable in the organizations are based race, gender, and sexual orientation. Having numerous affinity groups in the organization works to develop a more equitable environment by allowing the members of the minority groups within the organization to have a voice and a supportive community. This is significant in terms of how African Americans and professionals from other minority groups perceive their organization's dedication to diversity and inclusion.

In regards to the initiatives, programs, and events in an organization, African Americans feel that the strongest sense of representation for African Americans comes in BHM where the spotlight is shined on African American employees in both low level and management positions as well as the experiences of African Americans within organizations. Representation at corporate organizations is important. African American professionals feel that there is a lack of such representation for employees over the course of the year. So, it is imperative that organizations make strides to improve representation of not only African Americans, but for all minority communities in the workplace. This would show a commitment to diversity and inclusion and could offer professionals in lower level positions something to aspire to.

African American professionals also noticed that their organizations are committed to diversity in a racial/ethnic manner through a series of discussions about diversity, D&I training, and an effort to give back to the community's at-risk youth, who are frequently members of marginalized racial groups. However, excluding the commitment to the surrounding community, the professionals perceive these efforts to be mediocre. African American professionals hold

their organizations to a high standard in terms of being committed to a racial/ethnic diversity, therefore, they perceive that their organizations are missing the mark, because they are not pushing boundaries and devoting enough energy and effort to create a more racially/ethnically diverse workplace.

The findings suggesting that organizations are generally dedicated to diversity in the workplace through various groups, initiatives, programs etc. explain that today's organizations are engaged in diversity management on a basic level. Research suggests that diversity management provides a sense of inclusion for all in social networks and company programs (Gilbert et al., 1999). This study proposes that this type of diversity management does exist in today's organizations. However, given the experiences of African Americans in the workplace, there needs to be a greater focus on and commitment to increasing the racial diversity of an organization, rather than an acknowledgment of its meaning. Such an action would further lead to a workplace that is more equitable for all employees.

In terms of communication in the workplace, African American professionals suggest that the positive and open communication, encouraging and supporting leadership, intra and inter-racial communication, and employee voice all have a positive effect in shaping their organization's culture. The professionals experience positive and open communication on both levels, peer to peer and supervisor to subordinate. This positive communication helps to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. It further enhances the work experiences of African American professionals. Leaders in the organizations are seen as genuinely interested in the development of the employees and employee feedback about how the organization can perform optimally. Professionals are encouraged to speak up and ask questions which further leads to positive perceptions of the organization and its culture.

This study shows African Americans find communication with other African Americans in the workplace to be more embracing than communication with other races, specifically with White professionals. African Americans are more comfortable approaching and striking up conversations with other African American professionals than they are with White professionals. However, this does not mean that communication between African Americans and White professionals is hostile or negative in any manner. African American professionals just feel that they have more in common culturally with other African Americans than they do with White professionals in their organization. They do feel that communication is positive with White professionals and is conducive to a productive work environment. The thought that African Americans perceive communication with other African Americans to be comfortable and embracing further supports the idea that the presence of other African American professionals in the workplace is vital to a positive experience and ultimately increased positive interpretations of the organization's culture.

African American professionals also perceive voice to have an effect on their organization's culture. The professionals feel that their voice is heard and respected in the organization. Both peers and leaders in the organization are open to listening to suggestions brought forth by African Americans. Whether it be a suggestion or improvement to a policy or the attempt to acquire a title change and pay raise, organizations are receptive to the voice of African American professionals. African Americans also believe that they can speak fairly freely in their organizations. They rarely feel that they must hold back unless what they say would warrant a negative reaction from other professionals within the organization. Employee voice is significant to an organization's performance and since African American employees perceive

their organizations as being respectful of their voice, their perceptions of the organization as a whole are more positive.

This study suggests that experiences of African Americans with race and communication in the workplace is indicative of their organization's culture. It is concurrent with organizational culture research that situates culture as a manifestation of the proper or normal form of communication within organizations (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Moreover, the African American professionals' perceptions of an inclusive, family-oriented workplace where communication is positive, but one that also lacks great diversity leads to a better understanding of the cultures that exist in today's organizations and their efforts to create a more equitable workplace. The experiences and perceptions also lend insight into the cultivation of culture within organizations through their engagement with both diversity and inclusion. This supports scholarship that argues that culture is cultivated by the conditions and experiences within an organization (Batteau, 2001). The findings of this study could inform organizations of how African American professionals experience race in the workplace and how said organizations can enhance their efforts to create a more equitable workplace.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study of African American professionals' experiences with race, D&I, culture and communication in the workplace supports literature that identifies and challenges the inequities that exist in the United States. It further reinforces literature surrounding D&I and organizational culture. The study provides a detailed account of the experiences and perceptions of African American professionals about their organizations. The study suggests that today's organizations have an inclusive culture where communication is positive and is used to promote diversity within the organization, which further suggests that organizations are attempting to create a more

equitable workplace. However, the study also indicates that as organizations have created a more inclusive work environment, they have not yet made substantial progress to becoming more racially and/or ethnically diverse. This suggests that organizations need to ask how they can work to increase and improve their engagement with racial and ethnic diversity. It may be beneficial for African American professionals to share their experiences, feelings, and perceptions with their organizations and for their organizations to listen to, understand and respect their voices as well as act upon their feedback.

Limitations

The size of the sample for this study was particularly small given the number of for-profit organizations established across the country. The study reports the experiences of only seven African American professionals in the workplace. Therefore, the results may be limited and cannot be generalized to account for the experiences and perceptions of all African American professionals about their organizations and organizational cultures. Additional research should be conducted to collect and present a more comprehensive view and understanding of African American professionals' experiences in the workplace. In terms of the interviews, all were conducted via phone, which could affect the manner in which participants answered questions. Face-to-face interviews may reveal different answers to the questions and an overall difference in interpretations of participant experiences in their organizations. Additionally, the structure of the interviews limited the questions and follow-up questions that could be asked. A less structured interview may allow for additional findings that were not presented in this study.

Only one participant held a managerial position, which offers a different view from professionals who are in lower level positions at an organization. While this might exemplify the participants experiences and thoughts about African American professionals in management

and/or supervisory positions, aiming to recruit and interview more professionals in these roles could offer more thorough results. Furthermore, participants were asked to recall the number of African Americans that work in their organization and those that are in management level positions. The responses were not concrete or noted from any company report. In some instances, participants adjusted the number or offered a percentage. In both cases, participants suggested ranges which they changed multiple times before settling with a final answer. The answers were based solely on the participants recollection of other African Americans in the organization which may have provided a subjective view of the workplace.

There was no triangulation in this study. All findings came from the interviews and the discussion was based solely on these findings. If researchers were to attempt to replicate this study they could achieve triangulation by observing communication in the workplace. They could also include an in-depth questionnaire that inquired about communication, D&I, and organizational culture. In achieving triangulation in the study, the researchers may be able to report richer findings that have stronger implications for organizations.

Implications for Future Research

This study reported on the experiences of African American professionals at for profit organizations. The study offers a new way of connecting research from CRT with that of D&I as well as organizational culture and communication. Future research could limit the scope of the study to inquire specifically about D&I departments and programs within organizations. Research surrounding D&I suggests that African Americans experience exclusion from organizations and have a more negative view of inclusion than White employees. As this study was focused specifically on the experiences and perceptions of African Americans, further research comparing the experiences and perceptions of White participants may offer a more

holistic view of today's organizations and their cultures. In terms of replicating this study, conducting the study with non-African American minority groups could present additional findings about an organization's commitment to diversity. It could also present an opportunity to provide additional recommendations for the organization about understanding minority employees' feelings about the organization's diversity and working to create a more diverse workplace.

Furthermore, this study shed insight on the manner in which each, diversity and inclusion are experienced separately within an organization. Further research into professionals' experiences with diversity and inclusion separately in an organization may reveal interesting findings about the way that organizations try to build and sustain work environments where the two are recognizable. Participants also alluded to professional development which could also be studied in regards to the manner in which race and communication affect employee development within an organization. Such a study could present a new way of conceptualizing race and communication in the workplace. One of the participants noted that her experiences with race in the workplace tended to be dissimilar to those of the younger African American professionals at her organization. Future research could explore the role of age in African American professionals' perceptions of race, diversity, inclusion and communication in shaping organizational culture. This may present interesting findings about how the relationship between race and the workplace has evolved over the years.

The scope of this study was restricted to for-profit corporations. Future research could consider government and nonprofit organizations. This would provide a more holistic view of African American professionals and their experiences with race, diversity, inclusion and communication in the workplace. It would also provide context for a comparative analysis in

which the effects of each of the abovementioned factors on an African American's experience are fully interpreted.

This study offers insights about the implications of race, D&I, and communication on African American experiences in the workplace. It illustrates African American perceptions of the workplace and the organization's culture. The findings of this study would provide organizations with adequate context to reconsider and engage more deeply with their diversity practices. It also could serve as a form of feedback about diversity and inclusion in the organization. The study provides organizations with a rich understanding of how some African Americans experience the workplace and allows for a reconceptualization of the way that organizations work to create and sustain a more equitable workplace.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Recruiting Message for Race and Communication in the Workplace Study

I am conducting an academic study about race, communication and culture in the workplace. This study will work to generate a better understanding of the way that race has shaped today's workplace. I am asking full-time employees at a for-profit corporation who are at least 18 years of age to participate in this research study. This study requires that participants be African American.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete one short online survey and participate in an interview. The survey is for demographic purposes only and should not take any longer than 10 minutes. After you submit the survey, I will contact you to set up the interview. I will coordinate a place and time for the interview with you at that time.

CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY [Qualtrics link will be inserted]

Your participation is greatly appreciated!

For more information contact the researcher, David Mercer, at dmerc50@vt.edu.

David Mercer
Communication Graduate Student
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix B: Consent Form**RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM**

Title: The Colored Sense of Awareness

Protocol No.: 19-013

Sponsor: N/A

Investigator: Nneka Logan, PhD

David Mercer

Shanks Hall, Room 107

Blacksburg, Virginia, 24060

United States of America

Daytime Phone Number: (540) – 231 – 1749

The purpose of this study is to form a better understanding of the way that race has shaped today's current workplace. Specifically, the study examines how African American participants describe their experiences with race, communication and organizational culture in the places they work.

The participants will complete one online survey and participate in an in-depth interview with the researcher. The online survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The interview will proceed for a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of one hour.

The survey will collect basic background information for the participants. The interview will question employee experiences with race at their job. Participants will be asked about the communication between themselves and their peers at their job as well as communication with their superiors.

To be eligible to participate you must be at least 18 years of age and employed full-time at a for-profit corporation. This study focuses on African Americans.

The risks of this project are minimal. Participation in this study will lead to no greater risk than participants would face in their day-to-day interactions. Participants will be asked to recall certain events and experiences from their past. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You must be 18 years of age to participate.

Participants may learn something about themselves or their workplace from this study. No benefits are promised or guaranteed to encourage you to participate.

All data from this project will be kept on a password-protected computer to ensure your confidentiality. Only the researcher, David Mercer, will have access to your responses. This data will be summarized and presented in a Masters thesis at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Any information in which the participant identifies themselves will be deleted from the records when the study is finished. Your completion of the survey is private and you may take it at any computer of your choosing at any time of your choosing. The interview place, date, and time will be coordinated with you and the researcher. Only the researcher will be present during the interview.

Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this study.

It should be noted that participants are free to withdraw their participation from this study at any time and will not face a penalty. You are free to not answer or respond to any question that is being asked without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact the research investigator whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or even, you may contact the Western Institutional Review Board at (800) 562-4789 or help@wirb.com.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to not participate or halt your participation at any time.

If you understand the statements above, are at least 18 years of age, and freely consent to participate in this research study, click the "I Agree" button below to continue. Completion of this survey will all imply consent to participate.

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

I Agree

Q2 What is your name?

Q3 What is your age?

18-24 years old

25-34 years old

35-44 years old

45-54 years old

55-64 years old

65 years or older

Q4 What gender do you most identify with?

Male

Female

Transgender

Intersex

Other _____

Prefer not to answer

Q5 How long have you been employed at your current organization?

Q6 How many previous jobs have you had?

Q7 How many jobs have you had like your current job?

Q8 Please include your email here so the researcher, David Mercer, can schedule the interview with you.

(This is only for the purpose of scheduling an interview and will not be used in any other data collection. The email will not be shared to anyone other than the primary researcher, David Mercer.)

Appendix D: Interview Script

Tell me about what it's like to work in your organization?

What is your current role at your organization?

Follow up: What are your job responsibilities?

How would you describe your organization's culture?

Follow up: What are the noticeable symbols, values, or communication patterns of your organization?

Can you describe the communication between management/supervisors and lower level employees in your organization?

Can you describe the communication between peers in your organization?

About how many African Americans work in your organization?

Follow-up: About how many are in managerial/supervisor positions?

Describe the communication between you and other African Americans in your organization?

How would you describe the communication between African Americans and employees of other races in your organization?

How do you think race affects an employee's experience working at your organization?

To what extent do you believe that you can speak freely when speaking to management/supervisors in your organization?

In your organization, do you feel like you have voice in project teams or groups?

Follow up: Does your voice have influence or is it heard and respected by leadership and/or your peers?

Follow up: Can you provide an example of your voice being heard and taken into consideration in your organization?

Follow-Up: Would you say that is typical for other African Americans in that organization?

Do you ever feel that you must hold back from speaking to management in your organization?

Follow-up: Tell me about a time when you had to refrain from speaking to management?

Is communication used to promote or suppress diverse viewpoints in your organization?

Follow-up: Can you think of any examples?

Are there any notable efforts, strategies, or initiatives that explain your organization's commitment to diversity?

Follow-up: Tell me about an instance when you have either encountered or recognized these efforts.

Is there anything else you would like to share that I didn't cover?

Appendix E: WIRB Exemption Determination Letter



The linked image cannot be displayed. The file may have been moved, renamed, or deleted. Verify that the link points to the correct file and location.

Appendix F: VT IRB Approval Form



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 10, 2019
TO: Nneka Logan, David Lewis Mercer
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Colored Sense of Awareness
IRB NUMBER: 19-013

The Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB), acknowledges the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This acknowledgement recognizes the item(s) identified in the Special Instructions section.

NOTE: Amendments that must be submitted to WIRB for review and approval include changes to funding, conflict of interest, ANY and ALL changes to study procedures and study documents. If your study received a Determination letter (qualified for Not Human Subjects or for an Exemption) please review the information at the end of your Determination Letter. If your study was approved by a Panel, WIRB provides guidance on making changes in their Guide for Researchers. Please refer to the section titled, Changes to Research / Additional Document Submissions in the following document:
<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/wirb-guide-for-researchers.pdf>

Invent the Future

Appendix G: Table of Findings

Table 1
Findings

Research Questions	Categories	Themes	Sub Themes
RQ1	Race	Racial Disparity Hiring/Promotion Processes	Lack of representation in the workplace Awareness of race Seeing other like oneself
RQ2	Culture	Inclusive workplace Family oriented culture Desire for diversity within the organization The intersection of race and gender	
RQ3	Commitment	Affinity Groups An overall commitment through initiatives, programs, and events	
RQ4	Communication Voice	Positive and open communication Encouraging and supportive leadership Intra and Inter-racial communication Employee Voice	