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Workplace challenges in corporate America: differences in black and white

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to provide a qualitative analysis of the diversity management challenges of professionals in corporate America. A specific focus is on the differential outcomes of women and ethnic minorities and their equal employment opportunities in the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper examined the workplace experiences of 42 African-American and Caucasian men and women in corporate America. Semi-structured interviews were held to discover diversity management issues unique to these groups.

Findings – It was found that challenges supported a priori assertions of organizational culture, discrimination/stereotyping, and human capital investments. Each of these challenges impacted members in qualitatively different ways that may account for the variability in work experiences and outcomes. While there were some consistent themes, the findings demonstrated significant *within* race and between gender differences.

Research limitations/implications – Qualitative studies provide in-depth information and a deeper understanding about phenomena which allows one to capture general themes that can be obscured in survey research. The intersection of race and gender provides unique findings that should be considered in future research. The use of self-reported perceptual data without triangulation can limit the generalizability of the study but does provide a view in the language and emotion of the individual who is sharing his/her workplace experience.

Practical implications – The findings demonstrate that diversity management practices need to consider race, gender, as well as multiple group memberships (e.g. African-American women) which reveals unique issues to be addressed within organizational contexts. There are also differences within race, by gender, in the ways that individuals experience the workplace. The findings provide insight for managers to aid in diversity management and retention.

Social implications – Race is socially constructed and has a political rather than biological basis for determining it. Racial categories in one country which limit an individual's power, influence, freedom, and clout may be very different than categories in another country or political context. Because race is socially constructed, individuals may increase or lose power, privilege, influence and status as they move from one sociopolitical context/power structure in one country to another.

Originality/value – This research provides an additional lens through which to examine the workplace experiences of women and minorities to aid managers in deriving the maximum benefit in a diverse, well-qualified labor force.

Keywords Equal opportunities, Gender, Culture, Discrimination, Human capital, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Tung (1993) suggests that true management of organizational diversity focuses on how to effectively integrate a traditionally white, western, male workforce with more diverse members including women and ethnic minorities. Hence, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the current experiences of diverse groups and evaluate how race and gender have impacted their experiences within organizations. Prior research has

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proposed that factors such as organizational culture may exacerbate the issues for women and minorities (Cox, 2001; Nye *et al.*, 2005) and we sought to understand if these factors still hold true in the face of increased diversity representations in the workforce and legislation aimed at eliminating discrimination based on demographic characteristics. In addition to organizational culture, we considered two broad individual-level factors that may influence organizational experience and outcomes:

(1) the experiences of an individual drawn from discrimination and stereotyping (social inequality) literature; and

(2) human capital investments.

Because the individuals in our study are from different organizations rather than the same, we are not able to examine organization-level practices for a single organization, but the responses of the individuals does provide us with un-triangulated descriptions of the organization for which they currently work.

Anti-discrimination legislation

In "access discrimination," there are barriers to the individual's entry into the organization, based on demographic characteristic such as race or gender. To help protect workers from existing discrimination based on race, color, gender, religion, and national origin, civil rights legislation was enacted in the 1960s.

The focus of much of the early civil rights legislation in the USA was on access discrimination and the ways in which ethnic minorities and women were impeded from entering the workforce. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically addressed exclusionary practices against women and ethnic minorities from positions within organizations through recruitment and selection practices. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 further advanced legislation and provided monetary remedies resulting from workplace discrimination. These and other employment legislative changes have reduced organizational entry barriers for many and as a result, there are more women and minorities employed in US organizations.

Workplace diversity has steadily increased

Women represent 46 percent of the US workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Additionally, the US Census Bureau estimates that by 2030, roughly 50 percent of the US population will be comprised of ethnic minorities (US Census Bureau, 2004). As a result of this population change and increasing educational attainments, a large number of minorities are joining corporate ranks (Toosi, 2005).

Observed from a single and multi-group perspective

Gender perspective

With respect to gender, feminists have argued that gender is socially constructed in order to maintain the power structure and social hierarchy. Amott and Matthaei (1991) found that the social construction of gender creates social differences between men and women that are not supported by any biological or physiological differences. Furthermore, the social construction of gender continues to be replicated through the ways we interact with each other (Fenstermaker and West, 2002).

Multi-group perspective

Browne and Kennelly's (1999) study suggests that women and men of color face different stereotypes that lead to discrimination. Research by Calasanti and Smith (1998) and

Smith and Calasanti (2005) examined the extent to which men and women of different racial/ethnic groups experienced the workplace in both similar and different ways. They examined the extent to which different gender and racial/ethnic groups may experience social and institutional isolation in the workplace. Their examination of simultaneous memberships (race and gender) demonstrated that the professoriate itself was not the same for each group. Similar work by Martin (1994) and Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) indicated that white and African-American women in white male-dominated fields differed in very critical ways.

The reported research builds upon the work of intersectionalist perspective, in which the argument is made that race and gender cannot be studied separately, as if "having" of one does not impact the "having" of the other (Collins, 1999a; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996). According to Browne and Misra (2003, p. 499), "an intersectionalist perspective posits that the experiences of [Latinas] in the labor market reflect social constructions of gender that are racialized and social constructions of race that are gendered to create a particular experience." Researchers like Browne and Misra (2003) who examine US labor markets have found that the social constructions of race and gender are also related to economic stratification systems. Intersectionalist research supports the claim that men and women experience the workplace differently based on variables such as social class, education, occupation, and organizational setting in which they work (Landrine *et al.*, 1995).

Through this research in which experience-based epistemology is used, black women shared that neither gender nor race fully embraces or provides context for their experiences, rather it is the intersection of these "simultaneous and linked" social identities (Bambara, 1970; Brewer, 1993; Glenn, 1992; Hooks, 1989; Hull *et al.*, 1982; Spelman, 1988a, b) that must be used. Extant literature clearly supports that race and gender are socially constructed categories whose meaning is context dependent, subject to change, and have historical significance. Some researchers argue that race and gender change with both historical circumstances and local conditions (Lorber, 1994; Omi and Winant, 1994). For example, an early conceptualization of "black" as a racial category used the "one drop rule". If an individual had any black ancestry, they were defined as "black." US Census categories of race have changed over time, where an Asian might be categorized as "white" in one census and in a different category in another census. Indeed, latest movement of capturing race data is to have a "multiracial" category.

Race and ethnicity are also constructed within gendered meanings which legitimize stereotypical beliefs that individuals hold to subordinate another men and women of color (Browne and Misra, 2005). To better understand the experiences of black women and men, it is also important to understand the experiences of their race or gender counterparts (e.g. understand black men through examination of white men and black women, etc.).

Intersectionality research approaches do more than to include the variables race and gender in studies but look at the fusion of race and gender to create challenges and opportunities for all groups (Amott and Matthaei, 1991; Collins, 1999b, Essed, 1991; Glenn, 1999; Higginbotham, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1990; Landrine, 1985). It is, therefore, important to include groups with different social identities in the research study to identify the ways in which their experiences are similar as well as different and if power inequality exists, which groups are most negatively impacted?

Organizational culture and impact on organizational experience and outcomes

Schein (1992) defined culture of a group or organization as the basic, tacit, and shared assumptions that a group of people have which underlie and determines their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and the behavior in which they engage. He indicated five primary mechanisms through which leaders can influence the organization's culture:

(1) communicating their priorities, values, and concerns espoused in organizations;

(2) reactions to crises either by supporting espoused values under pressure or by showing other values as more important;

(3) role modeling by doing what they are asking others to do;

(4) allocation of rewards; and

(5) choice of criteria for recruiting, selecting, promoting, and terminating members.

Finally, Schein indicated that there were three levels of organizational culture:

(1) artifacts, personal enactment, stories, rituals, symbols that are often visible but not decipherable;

(2) values which operate at a deeper level than artifacts and reflect a person's underlying beliefs about what should or should not be; and

(3) basic assumptions which are the deeply held beliefs that guide behavior and tell members of an organization how to perceive and think about things.

Acker (1988) suggests that we think of organizational structures as gendered, because they are built on and reproduce gendered inequalities. Similarly, we would argue that organizations are also racialized. Based on Acker's definition of "gendered organizations" organizations are gendered means "that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." This conceptualization argued that rather than focusing on the realm of the individual, researchers should examine the organization itself, which could be said to have "gender." For example, an organization's image of an ideal leader is often the rational and logical married man with a wife (housekeeper, nanny) who does not work and is able to take care of all of the non-work duties, responsibilities, freeing him to work long hours, unencumbered by family responsibilities and competing priorities. In this sense, the organization has incorporated a gendered element in its consideration of who should and should not be a leader. According to Britton and Logan (2008), organizations and occupations are gendered at the level of culture, which also reflect and reproduce gender through their policies and practices.

Consistent with Calasanti and Smith's (1998) work, we move beyond an examination of tokenism or numerical "minorityship" and look at the underlying organizational processes that create an environment for diverse occupational experiences. Acker's (1990) and Nkomo's (1992) work has laid the groundwork for examining racialized and gendered organizations.

As we look across occupations and industries, we will have a better understanding of what "is" in organizations and can begin to make recommendations for substantively changing the culture which supports racialized and gendered organizational practices, policies, and attitudes. Through the use of open-ended questions, we encouraged our

participants to share in their own language, through their own cultural DNA lenses, what they saw, heard, experienced, and how they were impacted in these exchanges.

Ridgeway (1997) argues that, using an expectations states theory lens, there are specific mechanisms at the micro level which fortify systematic inequalities at the macro level. The relationships between African-American and Caucasian workers in organizations continue to be problematic; and the new largest minority, Latinos, bring another cultural perspective and potential for increased challenges through an additional potential barrier of language.

Intersectionality research provides an additional framework for us to examine the experiences of men, women, and race in the organization. Organizations may also be "raced" or "racialized" and it is the intersection of race and gender that provides insight into the true experience of individuals in the organization. Choosing to focus only on race or only on gender provides only a piece of the puzzle, but it is not the whole puzzle (Hill, 1999; Spelman, 1988a). Further research by Acker (2006) conceptualizes organizations and organizations as "inequality regimes," defined as "loosely interrelated practices processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (p. 443).

Race, class and gender are thoroughly embedded in organizational processes. Organizations as a whole will need to continue efforts in diversity management to include planning and implementing organizational systems and practices in such a way that it maximizes the potential advantages of diversity for individuals and the organization (Cox, 1994). Research by Kennelly (1999) interviewed white employers who relied on racialized and gendered stereotypes in their thinking about hiring workers for unskilled positions. In one case, a white woman manager described blacks as "belligerent" employees prone to challenging management policies; while another typified black women as single mothers whose priority was their children rather than work (regardless of the woman's actual marital or parental status). In addition, Moss and Tilly (1996) found that motivation and ability to interact easily with customers and coworkers were the soft skills that black men lacked. In these studies, a clear theme emerged that the intersection of race and gender impacted hiring decisions in which white workers were given an employment advantage over similarly qualified black workers.

In this study, we sought to examine how organizational culture was perceived by members and whether it impacted work experiences that positively or negatively impacted perceptions of valuing diversity, equality, and organizational commitment.

Experienced social inequality and impact on organizational experience and outcomes

Diversity experiences have primarily focused on treatment discrimination issues (Konrad, 2003), which focus on specific actions and attitudes that have been reported by women and ethnic minorities based on their group membership. Significant reviews in the diversity literature highlight several actions that are particularly salient to women and ethnic minorities (DiTomaso *et al.*, 2003). Stereotyping and discrimination are two issues that have been raised in a number of studies examining diversity management issues. A *stereotype* is a generalization about a group of people that can often result in stigmatized individuals in organizations. Prior research has shown that men in power are more likely to stereotype female subordinates (Vescio *et al.*, 2005). We also wanted to explore whether ethnic minorities also report experiences of being stereotyped and perceptions of being stigmatized by race and gender categorizations.

Discrimination is defined as "the limitation or denial of employment opportunity based on or related to the protected class characteristics of persons" (Walsh, 2007, p. 64). Prior research has demonstrated that many forms of discrimination still exist in the workplace including racial and gender harassment, sexual harassment, and retaliation among others. Disparate treatment discrimination is by far the most commonly reported and accounts for the majority of complaints received by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2008; Gutman, 2009). This treatment discrimination generally occurs when gender and/or racial stereotypes are acted on within organizational contexts that result in differential treatment with negative consequences for women and ethnic minorities.

Discrimination creates an "unwelcoming work environment that values superficial qualities instead of job-relevant outcomes" (Goldman *et al.*, 2006, p. 809). Prior research has demonstrated that women continue to be impacted by gender stereotypical attitudes (Vescio *et al.*, 2005) and sex-segregation into occupations and that ethnic minorities were impacted by racial stereotypes that may be attributed to the low representations of both groups in managerial and leadership ranks (Bell, 2007). As a coping mechanism, those discriminated against may deny it was discrimination (Goldman *et al.*, 2006). The tendency to internalize negative outcomes may, in turn, provide majority group members justification for ongoing victimization (Ruggiero and Taylor, 1997). Furthermore, majority members may have cognitive limitations that may obscure discriminatory acts that they witness or even commit (Kravitz, 2008).

One of the ways to address discrimination and make it more salient is to allow feedback in a subjective manner that this qualitative study seeks to uncover. We anticipated that discriminatory experiences would surface in the current study and we allowed those to emerge rather than ask directed questions because we wanted to determine which ones were more salient to professionals. In this study, we specifically sought to examine how members categorize treatment that may include inclusion, exclusion, stereotyping, or the more blatant forms of discrimination.

Smith and Calasanti (2005) argued that a group's power in the broader society affects their work lives. In addition, their lesser societal power and generally lower hierarchical positioning in the workplace affects them as well (Budig, 2002; Williams, 1992; Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; Ely, 1995). In general, racial and ethnic minority group members and women feel they have less access to organizational information, power, influence, and prestige (defined as *institutional isolation*) by Smith (1998).

The reported research identifies the perceptions and observations of white and African-American men and women in the workplace. Work by Acker (1992, 2006) and Nkomo (1992) indicates that individuals experience organizations which have practices embedded that both racialized and/or gendered experiences. The reported research examines the mechanisms that may translate stereotypical views into actual discriminatory practices. Reskin (2002) indicates that discrimination may not be intentional or based on white male animus against racial and ethnic minorities, but rather may be "fueled by unrecognized employer biases toward individuals 'like themselves'" (*cf.* Browne and Misra, 2003, p. 501; Reskin, 2002).

We argue that stress may result from cultural conflict for same ethnic group members; thus a bicultural context may create intergenerational culture gaps, monolingual stressors, and within-group discrimination, or peer pressure to conform to one's ethnic group cultural norms. Bell (1990) suggested that bicultural stress arises from having to be fluent in two or more cultures, the components of which might be significantly different. As a result of navigating between cultures, Bell suggested that

individuals may feel conflicted or tension may arise when cultural identities conflict or collide.

Human capital investments and impact on organizational experience and outcomes

Human capital investments is a framework drawn from economic theories that have examined the expectations and outcomes of individuals based on factors such as educational attainment, work experiences, training, and networking and how they impact employment outcomes (Becker *et al.*, 1990). In general, it is expected that human capital investments would lead to higher returns in terms of organizational access, promotions, compensation, and equitable treatment. Prior research has demonstrated that women and minorities do not get the same career return on their human capital investments as do majority group members with the same level of human capital investment. For example, women working full-time in the USA still earn only about \$0.70 compared to every \$1 that men earn and hold only 37.9 percent of all managerial and professional occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). The pay disparities have persisted despite equal employment opportunity legislation. The pay disparities were more pronounced for ethnic minorities.

Cocchiara *et al.* (2006) examined the challenges associated with career mobility for African-American and Latino women in organizations. Consistent with prior research, they found that human capital investments did not favorably or equitably impact employment outcomes for African-American and Latina women compared to their white female counterparts and men across ethnic groups (Collins, 1989; Davies-Netzley, 1998; Higginbotham, 1994). White males were more likely to advance faster and further in their careers and earn higher salaries than minorities and women (Parks-Yancy, 2006). Prior research also suggests that women and ethnic minority women experience the workplace in qualitatively different ways than men (Calasanti and Smith, 1998; Martin, 1994; Smith and Calasanti, 2005; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1997). The overriding goal of the current study was to examine the extent to which race and gender influenced their workplace experiences and perceptions of employment outcomes across multiple ethnicities.

Individual success in organizations is facilitated by networking through an individual learning his or her job, but networking with powerless coworkers may provide little benefit to the individual. Clearly, access to high status others provides the greatest opportunity for job advancement (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin, 1997). We extend the literature by capturing the impacts of exclusion from different kinds or networks.

Landrine *et al.* (1995) found that race and gender manifest different outcomes for women and men when their social class, occupation, education, and organizational setting are factored in. The actual organizational mobility of women and minorities continues to lag behind that of their white male counterparts. What has remained consistent are the reported experiences of women and ethnic minorities whose outcomes vary significantly compared to whites and men despite their human capital investments in training, education, licensure, and certifications (Cocchiara *et al.*, 2006; Collins, 1997; Hammond, 1997). The reported research builds upon this tradition in examining the ways in which racial/ethnic minorities with the same or similar human capital investments as their white counterparts objectively and subjectively experience the workplace.

For the purposes of this research, we were interested in how race, gender, and the intersection of race and gender impacted one's perception of the organization and overall

chances for equal employment opportunity. Following Dawson's (2006) framework, we attempted to elicit information that members feel shape their organizational experiences and subsequent work success.

Research question: in what ways, if any, have the intersection of race and gender contributed to or detracted from the career success of individuals in the organization, and in what ways are those experiences qualitatively similar and different across race, gender, and race × gender groups?

Method

Participants

Our population of interest consists of participants who meet the USA definitions of race and gender, where we studied African-Americans (blacks), Latinos, and Caucasians (whites). Our sample of Latinos was too small to determine what, if any, differences there were between them and the other two groups. Respondents were promised anonymity in this study, so the names were changed; however, the other demographic characteristics and statements are actual/real. A total of 42 professionals participated in this study, which included 21 white and 21 black respondents. The sample was represented by 11 white females, 11 black females, ten white males, and ten black males. Each of the participants were employed full-time in various corporate occupations including finance, healthcare, education, social services, education, and city or county government, and. The mean age for participants was 43 years.

Procedure

Participants were identified through "snowball" sampling, where students enrolled in an MBA program identified individuals within their organizations appropriate for this study (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). There were five criteria for inclusion in this study; each participant had to have:

(1) at least five years of career-level experience in their current occupation;

(2) a Bachelor's degree or higher;

(3) at least one promotional opportunity in their organization;

(4) direct contact with his/her immediate boss(es); and

(5) at least two same-level peer colleagues.

The primary method of data collection was face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, with each interview lasting between two and three hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for accuracy in capturing participant responses to the questions and follow-up on open-ended comments.

All questions in the protocol were open-ended to minimize the influence on participant responses. Each participant was given a brief overview of the study and our focus on trying to understand the work experiences that have impacted or influenced their professional lives. Participants were asked to provide demographic information. They answered the following questions: "How, if at all, has race/ethnicity or gender mattered in your career"; "how would you compare your experiences in your current organization with those of another race"; "what difference, if any, do you believe your level of education or expertise has influenced your success with your current organization?"

Analysis

The sociological and organizational/management literatures were extensively reviewed, which examined both objectively and subjectively, women and ethnic minorities' experiences in the workplace as compared to their Caucasian male counterparts. Several response categories were identified from the literature review a priori to provide a framework in which to interpret possible responses. The researchers developed criteria for analyzing and categorizing the response sets as well as specific descriptions for each of the themes. Two independent coders categorized the results and examined responses from several participants to establish a baseline for categorizing and to check inter-rater agreement. We individually examined all the responses and identified and coded the primary theme(s) of each response. We controlled for social class at a nominal level by including undergraduate degree and five years of career level work experience in current occupation.

Results

Based on our literature review, population of interest, and research questions, the following themes were predicted to emerge:

- impact of organizational culture on the experiences of individuals in organizations;
- human capital investments; and
- workplace discrimination and stereotyping.

Table I provides a listing of these as well as the additional themes of dual status, partial inclusion, and Eurocentric world view that emerged from the analysis.

Analysis of the participant interviews resulted in a variety of categories of experiences that have impacted their professional lives. Overall participants reported that experiences were impacted by the a priori issues associated with organizational

Hypothesized themes	
Organizational culture	Overall organizational framework in which individuals derive meaning, understand and share assumptions and beliefs about their organization and their place in it, the value of human capital in the organization, and the dynamics of relationships within organization
Discrimination and stereotyping	An individual personally experienced and/or witnessed discrimination, stereotyping, or glass ceiling or glass escalator phenomena which impacted their own or observed member's advancement in the workplace
Human capital investment	The individual has made investments in own educational achievements, improved skill set, career-level work experience, licensure, certification, and strategic networks
Emerged themes	
Eurocentric world view	Perceived, and/or accepted, that workplace structure was built around, and permeated by, Caucasian male experiences, values and viewpoints
Dual status	An individual is categorized in more than one identity subgroup and believes that they experienced differential treatment attributed to concurrent membership in two traditionally minority group classes
Partial inclusion	Situation in which individuals gain entry to the organization but do not feel accepted by or included as full organizational members in deriving the benefit of respect, support, and/or feeling valued by organization

Table I.
Coding scheme and category descriptions

culture, discrimination, and human capital investments. Additionally, participants reported issues within organizational contexts including intersectionality of race and gender, western view of world, and partial inclusion. Of these organizational culture had the greatest impact on members' professional lives.

Organizational culture

For participants, organizational culture had the greatest perceived impact on workplace experiences and outcomes. Roughly one-third of all respondents cited this issue and it was evident across both races and genders. Some of the comments about organizational culture also included statements about race and/or gender and the impact of multiple membership diversity. For instance, Susan, a 26-year-old Caucasian female with only high school education, was hired at the same time and at a higher level than her African-American female competitor with undergraduate degree shared:

> Race, gender, and ethnicity have not mattered in my career, because in property management, you tend to see more women in offices anyway. Higher ups are usually men, but the ones at the property are usually women. But I don't think it has really mattered at all.

Susan's comment about the "usual" was included under organizational culture because it speaks about the standard practice in her organization. This statement suggests that Susan did not see her promotion over a better-educated African-American female as a problem or as unfair. She did not indicate that she was aware that her race may have benefited her. McIntosh (2008) coins this phenomenon "privilege" in which gender and/or skin color provide an additional advantage to which its recipients are oblivious.

Will, an African-American male in his mid-50s and a mid-level manager in city government, expressed the fatigue that he has experienced in trying to deal with his organization's culture:

> I have been fighting for almost 30 years, and I'm tired of fighting. The organization is not going to change; and I have to admit, that I haven't given up, but the fight is leaving out of me. Even though I was qualified and knew I was qualified, I had to accept the fact that the city was trying to increase its numbers as it relates to managers, and it was a big career move for me.
>
> My wide-eyed enthusiasm has somewhat waned and the reality of the organization and the culture has set in. I was hoping by this time we would have moved away from that whole issue of race and looking at each other from a racial standpoint, but unfortunately, we still have not. They have had a tremendous influence, there are certain expectations that I felt the organization had of me just because of my race, and my goal has been to prove them wrong.

This fatigue or bicultural stress (Bell, 1990) may actually translate itself in lower job performance, higher intentions to turnover, and a less positive attitude toward the organization or others within the organization. To the extent that the individual's race × gender construction is different than the organization's racialized and/or gendered culture, the more likely that the organizational outcomes are unfavorable to that individual. These perspectives reveal several things about organizational culture as we view them in light of Schein's conceptualization. First, organizational culture that is generally espoused by leaders and top management teams may not take into consideration how organizational experiences may vary for diverse members. Second, it also suggested that culture reflected deeply held beliefs that were formed at a time where exclusion was the norm and that changes in diversity representations as well as the legal landscape have not influenced organizational norms.

Respondents described their experiences (and those of others) as they interacted with or were impacted by the shared norms and accepted meaning of the organization,

the standard way of doing things. These practices are often deeply embedded in the organizational collective consciousness, and may not be obvious to the organizational members (that is, racialized and gendered organizational practices, policies, attitudes and believes). If organizational interventions around diversity focus only at the individual level – in trying to change the individual), rather than at the organizational level (shared norms, expectations, reinforcements), the experiences of those individuals are unlikely to change in a meaningful way. After an extensive review of labor market economics and sociological literature (particularly the literature on intersectionality of race and gender), Browne and Misra (2008) concluded that examination of social location (race, gender, class, and sexual orientation) is needed to explain the gaps in labor market outcomes that factoring for education, experience, and skill only does not. Indeed, some groups experience greater amounts of power and privilege within the organization because of their social location.

Discrimination and stereotyping

Within the power and privilege dynamic, we examine discrimination and stereotyping. "Access discrimination" occurs when members of a subgroup are prevented from entering a job or occupation, while "treatment discrimination" occurs when there are fewer rewards, opportunities or resources provided to a subgroup (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990). Reskin's theory of "positive discrimination," similar to McIntosh's (2008) white privilege and Van Dijk's (1993) work on differences in sensitivity to racialized encounters between blacks and whites, offers a way of examining how white men explore, understand and experience the workplace. Interestingly, because racialized and gendered organizational elements are part of the taken-for-granted aspects of organizational experience, white males may not identify how their social location provides them with power and privilege in the organization.

The awareness that racial biases exist even when one does not intentionally or want to engage in it was an "aha" moment for Steven, a white male city government manager in his mid-50s with a college degree:

> It's interesting my gut reaction is that they [race and gender] haven't mattered at all. What I have learned, though, is anyone that tells you they have no race or gender bias is either lying or just aren't in touch with themselves. We have them and don't even know it. I try very hard to make decisions absent of bias, but when you least expect it, if you are paying attention, every once in a while, you get a clue that you have bias no matter how hard you try not to have them.

Justin, a 40 year-old white male manager in airlines industry responded:

> I have been fortunate in the 20 years that I have been here. I always work very hard, and the only thing I have ever felt like that held me back was in 1986 involving a promotion between myself and an African-American female, whom I respected a great deal. When the general manager interviewed both of us, I felt I was a harder worker and she probably thought the same way. At the time, the manager felt she had more life experience and she should get the promotion over me because she was ten or 12 years older. So that was really the only time someone African-American was promoted over me; but I don't think gender or race has played in my ability of achieving.

The perceptions of black males were in sharp contrast to Justin's in terms of their equal employment opportunities. Andre, a 50-year-old black male manager acknowledged that both race and gender matter stated:

> I still feel we live in a society where the male is dominant, that there are preferences, and the good old boy syndrome still works. There is a glass ceiling there for females. I see it still

> today. I would have hoped by now we would have cracked that glass ceiling wide open and there would be no issues, but I still see it. In terms of race, the same thing exists. I don't want to come across as bitter, because I am not bitter.

Joshua responded similarly stating,

> I'd have to be honest from my experience as an African-American male that I have had a few positives. Being an African-American male has impacted me. Even after being at a certain position for an extensive amount of time, I find I'm still proving myself. I have been questioned, continually, having to prove myself. There have been a number of times in my career where a non-black, non-minority was promoted over me. I've seen people being in a position where they get promoted and promoted again. But you've never moved or been given certain opportunities presented to you.

Will, black male in his mid-50s and a mid-level manager in city government, reported:

> I knew when I was recruited here, that it was all not based on qualifications. Even though I was qualified and knew it, I had to accept that the city was trying to increase its numbers as it relates to managers, and it was a big career move for me. So we both won.

Leroy, a 48-year-old black male with a professional degree shared:

> Race is very important. Even in 1964, our forefathers had a clear vision that race, sex, and all the protected classes, would impact our workforce in the year 2008. That is why it is so important that we encourage education at all levels.

These comments reflect sharp differences by race where the experience of African-American men was less favorable than their white male counterparts. Consistent with Reskin (2002), white males attributed their success to their own hard work, effort, and human capital investment rather than organizational politics and "good old boy" networking. In contrast, black men felt race was always a factor and could aid or inhibit one's progression in the organization. Whether these observations were perceptions or actually espoused in organizations is unknown; however, it was evident that they did impact black members' satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Human capital investments

Consistent with the examination of labor market economics by Browne and Misra (2003), we looked at investments that individuals had made in their own success. A second key perspective relates to the education, training, experience, and other investments that individuals had made in improving their skills, qualifications, and sphere of influence. Browne and Misra (2003) found that those investments did not provide the same return for black men and women as they did for white men and women, and that the returns were different within race as well. Human capital investments were raised by several participants, particularly where such investments did not pay off as expected for black respondents. In general it is expected that human capital investments would lead to higher returns in terms of organizational access, promotions, compensation, and equitable treatment. The responses from participants reflected education, experience, and networking.

Angela, a 27-year-old black female property manager with undergraduate degree applied for promotion at the same time as Susan, a white female with a high school diploma and less. Susan was hired as Angela's manager. Angela provided the following perspective:

> I think that as a society, people have a problem coming in and dealing with black people and feeling that we are in charge. We are intelligent enough to have an opinion and able to manage

> a property. It bothers me, it pisses me off because there aren't a whole lot of black people in management positions and we don't get promoted – we get looked over. You don't have this quality, you don't have that quality; this, that and the other. So race definitely plays a part in this. You need to be the bouncy, happy blond.
>
> Most black people are held at assistant manager while the company moves in less-qualified or maybe less experienced people into management positions over black people. I was mentored by Rufus, an African-American male, who had been in the business for years and had actually retired. He told me to go to every workshop, every training, and get every little certificate, "I don't care how stupid it is, get it." Once you go for those management positions and have all your qualifications, nobody can say, "Well, you need this or that."

Some participants in this study found that human capital investments were insufficient to provide them with career opportunities they felt they deserved but were denied because of their race and gender. This perspective varied significantly by race more than gender such that black men perceived fewer barriers than black women when qualifications are considered. It is not clear from the respondents whether it was an issue exclusive to human capital investments or the differential treatment that may be associated with race and gender in organizational contexts. What is critical about human capital investments is that this has been touted throughout the greater community as the great equalizer for success in the USA. If this is not, in fact, true when different groups are considered, this has great policy implications from governmental budget and resource allocation, social services, and educational organizational perspective. That is, if "doing the right" stuff does not pay off for these groups, what alternatives are available and what potential negative impact might those alternatives have on both the organization and that population?

Dual status/double minority

Early research on the experiences of women of color in the workplace examined women who occupy a dual status or double minority, where they have membership in two minority groups (Wyche and Graves, 1992). This research was a precursor for current research on intersection of race and gender. The earlier research's focus was on an additive approach – the more categories in which one found oneself, the more difficult (or advantageous) one's potential for objective career success. In this research, their experiences are impacted or shaped by the intersection of race and gender and its concomitant racism and sexism (Graves, 1990; Moses, 1989). Graves (1990) suggested that African-American female faculty face a situation of "double jeopardy" where they have a "different job description" than either Caucasian males or females. Bell (1990) discussed the bicultural expectations and challenges that African-American women face as they navigate the world of work. The reported research goes beyond the additive approach and looks at the intersection between race and gender. In the current study, Joyce, a 52-year-old black female executive with doctorate, shared her experience of race and gender making a difference in her career:

> Race has been a factor in my career, as well as gender. I had one white man in a predominantly white organization tell me that I only got that job because I was black. And I said, yeah, I got the job because I was black, but I kept it because I was good. I could care less, just get me in the door, and I will take advantage of the opportunity. These same men who attribute my hiring to race probably got their jobs because their father worked for the company or their wife is a cousin of the president.

Similarly, Janelle, a 32-year-old black female vice-president, responded that her law degree helped her gain access, but she still felt treated differently as a black female:

> Most of the jobs I have gotten are because of my law degree. I can't say that it has benefited me in the pay department, though. I feel like my race comes into play, especially when you see that the majority of people that are in similar positions to you are not your same color. I don't see a lot of people of color in VP positions at this company; so clearly, it is race coming into play.

In Janelle's case, she felt that individuals saw her as black rather than as a woman.

Donna, a 38-year-old white female responded that she did not derive a benefit from her race or gender, but that a minority female benefited from being an affirmative action hire:

> Race, ethnicity, and gender have never mattered to me personally. There was a time early in my career in which a minority female was promoted to a position as my peer. I knew first hand that the person was not qualified for the leadership role. I was told that the person was placed in the position as a good move for the company (affirmative action). I felt the promotion of this person adversely impacted the staff and department.

There are two key issues in their responses. First, employment was not always attributed to qualifications but rather to their social location around race and gender. Second, when affirmative action is associated as the primary determinant in hiring minority groups, it was most often associated with a presumed lack of competence for the position (Heilman *et al.*, 1992).

Partial inclusion

Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) examined the experiences of black female firefighters within a predominantly white male environment. They found a pervasive pattern of subordination in the firehouse for black female firefighters which limited their career progression. These women experienced more coworker hostility, lack of support, increased stereotyping, insufficient instruction, and closer supervision than their white male or female counterparts. Finally, there were strained relations between black women and every other group, in part based on the trade-off between first being accepted by Caucasian women and black men and second distancing themselves from black women. Dawson (2006) describes this as "partial inclusion" in which individuals have gained entrance into the organization (access) but do not reap the benefits of full organizational membership where they feel valued and respected.

In the reported study, Patrick, a 40-year-old black male, provided the following perspective where he has a white female mentor and the perceptions of the professional relationship:

> She hasn't given me all of the needed information for fear I won't need her [the piece-meal approach]. Future ideas that I have for broadening my department differ from hers, so I constantly hear her telling me her ideas and pushing me to accept her thinking when she should have implemented them herself when she was in charge.

While Patrick had the benefit of a mentor in the organization (e.g. a human capital investment), he believes she was withholding information from him and not allowing him to utilize the expertise that he has. This sense of knowing that there was something he should know but does not may cause him to second guess himself or lead him to make poor decisions, thus reinforcing a need for more oversight by his mentor/boss, is an example of what partial inclusion looks like from the viewpoint of the individual experiencing it. As Dawson (2006) found, this partial inclusion impacted whether minorities became more or less engaged in the organization and felt a sense of belonging that would impact job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Patrick's

view that the white woman mentor is afraid that he will not need her evokes images of slavery and plantation living between the mistress of the house and her "special" slave of the month.

Western view

Some participants responded that they had no point of reference for issues of race and gender. Often individuals who are part of the dominant culture accept it as part of the way things are typically done. They do not necessarily identify it with power or oppression (McIntosh, 1992, 2008; Nkomo, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993). Their reactions were consistent with Smith and Calasanti's (2005) finding that organizations tend to base policies and expectations on the experiences of white men who set up procedures and policies that make sense to them. As a result, the privilege such men experience often remains invisible – to themselves and to others. For example, James, mid-40s white male executive responded:

> I can't think of any times when race and gender mattered. My skills were important. I had to get the job done in a respectable ethical and legal manner.

In contrast, Patrick's response about his white female mentor followed:

> It bothers them when I don't let them crowd my space! What is troubling to me is the way whites don't understand ethnic minorities, their concerns, and that they are color blind. They tell you that you have free reign, but you know that your hands are tied because of the 'we've always done it this way' syndrome. They protect you in one situation and set you up in another, and then say, "See how I look out for you".

James' response as a white male is that his investment in developing his skills was the reason for his success; whereas upward mobility for Patrick, as a black male, depends less on his own initiative and work ethic but rather on the protection of his white female mentor.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated the complexities of diversity management. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on the experiences of diverse groups in the workplace that have implications for understanding and managing diversity and employee retention. This study addresses the gap between their representation in organizations and what is actually known about the way they experience the corporate environment in the USA. It is the intersection of race and gender that provides the most glaring examples of how differently the workplace is for individuals in different intersection categories. One of the most startling outcomes of this study was the differences between African-American and whites in the workplace in how they view race and gender impacting their employment outcomes. Collectively, whites attributed their outcomes to organizational issues of culture when they were inhibited and to their abilities when they are successful. Interestingly they never identified their race and/or gender when encountering organizational setbacks. On the other hand, blacks always considered race and gender having the dominant impact on their workplace experiences and often viewed as barriers because of their minority status within organizations. Whether these differential associations were a result of explicit feedback in organizations or perceptions because of the history of racial treatment in the USA is unknown and an issue to address in future research. What is key here is that the collective discussion about race (and to a lesser extent, gender) and

the impact of race on organizational members because more difficult when whites do not "see" race, and in this and other studies, do not seem to understand the complexities of the dynamics of the experiences of individuals who "see" race as a critical part of all of their experiences. This dichotomy of views in a context where the power usually rests with whites (and white males in particular) may increase the tension experienced by blacks who may not feel heard, understood or supported. Previous research has talked about the phenomenon of racial differences, but this study highlights the process that leads one group to feel either excluded or only partially included while the other sees life as "normal."

When we examined the findings, we found unique variance for white and black women in the workplace. While many women experience difficulties in acceptance, inclusion, objective career success attributed to the glass ceiling, blacks perceive it as a lucite ceiling, which represents a more difficult barrier to penetrate through which they experience and understand the organization (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Catalyst, 2001; Giscombe and Mattis, 2002). In all, 51 percent of black women surveyed in Bell and Nkomo's (2001) study felt accepted by their organizations compared to 81 percent of whites. A study by the catalyst organization (2001) found that black women were more likely to report exclusion from informal networks than their Latina counterparts. The lack of sponsors, information networking opportunities, role models of same ethnic group, and lack of high-visibility assignments were indicated as the most common career barriers for women of color. These messages resonated in the current study such that black women had to defend their competencies in light of affirmation action associations with their employment.

Diversity management implications

Several issues emerged that were important for understanding and addressing workforce diversity management issues. First, the white males in the sample indicated a lack of awareness about race or gender as much of a factor in their everyday work lives. Second, because there are differences both within and between groups, organizations must consider this source of variance as they develop and implement diversity initiatives. Finally, both the individual and the organization have an obligation to talk candidly and openly about the unique opportunities and challenges provided in a diverse workforce and to enter into a partnership to ensure full membership to all organizational citizens.

If, indeed, organizational culture plays an important role in the way individuals experience the workplace and consistent with research on gendered and racialized organizations, there is again a call to look at institutional policies and practices which were embedded to change the organization. Much of the organizational interventions have been focused on changing the individual. Because the organization and individual interact with one another, changes in both may become necessary. Much of the work done at the individual level is limited by the lack of work focusing on organizational level issues in diversity management. Instead of focusing on ways to alter management behaviors, Roberson and Kulik (2007) and Brief (1998) suggest that managers must deal with existing stereotypes that have been embedded and reinforced in the culture and try to reduce the impact on affected employees. Furthermore, organizations must acknowledge stereotypes and address them directly to create a work environment where all can succeed.

Literature on organizational diversity suggests that organizations that effectively manage issues concerning stereotypes and power differentials will recognize a cost

advantage due to lower turnover and absenteeism rates compared to those that do not address these issues. In addition, companies that have reputations for being women- and/or minority-friendly will have greater access to attract and retain the most talented and often scarce employees. Further, successful diversity management will heighten an organization's marketing efforts, which will enable it to target and meet the needs of a more diverse customer base (Adler, 1986; Cox and Blake, 1991; Hartenian and Cudmundson, 2000; Richard *et al.*, 2004). Along with enabling individuals to feel included and respected, maintaining a diverse workforce may provide access to new markets and legitimize an employer's reputation. Promotion of diverse groups and policies that support and reinforce it may be indicators of corporate social responsibility (Singh and Point, 2004). Finally, effective diversity management in which the organization adopts an inclusive, multicultural framework has the potential to increase an organization's creativity, problem-solving ability, and flexibility (Cox and Blake, 1991; Roberts, 2005).

Limitations and future research

The ideal component of qualitative research is that the comments revealed in this study and their meanings were not obfuscated by averaging out the responses. Each individual's responses stand as they were given. In the current study, there was some selection bias in terms of inclusion in this study so that we could capture those who would meet some of the minimum criteria including human capital investments. However, because of potential for low sample sizes from random sampling and the sensitive nature of the questions asked as well as the need to establish rapport quickly, the use of this technique was both necessary and appropriate. We do not feel as though it restricts the generalizability of the results given that these findings were in line with prior research that examined gender differences (Priola and Brannan, 2009).

Race is socially constructed and does not have a biological basis for determining it. Governments and societies have, for political and social reasons delineated racial classifications and have used them for a variety of purposes, including immigration, status, division of labor, citizenship, and other rights. Within the USA, that classification has been based primarily on "black" and "white," with blacks classified as individuals from the African Diaspora, and "whites" as non-Hispanics and lighter complexioned individuals, many of whose families are from Europe. Because of the level of power that persons with European ancestry had as compared to other groups colonizing the USA, their experiences were considered more credible representations of the American experience (Schiele, 2005). As a result, their experiences and interpretations of that experience have had a major impact on how the American socio-cultural landscape is viewed and conveyed. Thus, the term "Eurocentric" perspective is often used to describe the "norm" or perspective related to the USA. Because of the legacy of slavery in the USA, a differentiation was made to separate individuals based on skin color, with browner skin having lower social status. In other countries, racial classifications have differed, with the underlying tenet of creating some social or political aim based on that country's socio-cultural landscape. Those differing interpretations and sense-making concerning race have created different categorization schemes and political power structures. As an example, skin color may not be the dominant factor, whereas language, religion, or political party may be.

The results of this study provide some insight for future research examining diversity experiences of four groups – white men, white women, black men, and black women. We must include other groups (e.g. Latino/Latina, Korean, Chinese, Japanese).

We must refrain from only looking at the individual level and to expand our analysis to organizational practices and policies which may reinforce at the system level attitudes and behaviors that exclude qualified individuals from full participation in positive organizational outcomes. Including additional levels of analysis (individual, group, and organizational), both quantitatively and qualitatively, can provide additional context, depth, and comparisons across organizations and industries. In addition, more qualitative interviews with an expanded group of business professionals, across racial and gender demographics should be incorporated in future research. There are also issues in diversity management research that should be explored to shed light on the complexities of the issues within and between groups would be to evaluate the perceptions and attributions of individual members. For instance, minority groups may be more sensitive to subtle racial harassment than whites (Chrobot-Mason and Hepworth, 2002) and Cross (1998) indicated that black professionals may experience negative expectations about their potential performance, yet these issues have received limited attention in research contexts. Furthermore, female professionals may perceive their departments as more hostile than their male colleagues (Riger *et al.*, 1997) but we need more information about how these perceptions were formed. Finally, white colleagues may unconsciously perpetuate racism in their organizations in part due to bias in institutional structures. These research perspectives would focus more on the perceptions of the individual members and how they draw attributions from their workplace experiences that may inaccurately reflect organizational issues.

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