

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Black Professionals in Employee Networks:
Critically Exploring Social Interests and Participatory Learning at Work

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Abstract

Although there are human resources policies, federal legislation, and workforce protection agencies that seek to minimize racial issues in the workplace, social issues are still a part of the lived experience of all employees, whether they are victims, oppressors, or bystanders of the social imperfections around them. Through the application of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this study explores the complexities of this time in American history by looking at how Black professionals experience and witness the enigma of racial tension outside of the workplace, as they work in a predominantly White corporate environment and maintain an affiliation to a Black employee network. When examining this phenomenon, Black professional development emerged as an overarching concept that is informed by Black-consciousness, social and participatory learning, and social networks.

Additionally, critical race theory (CRT) was used as the primary framework during the data collection and analysis process, which helped to identify the lack of Black representation in leadership as a chief concern and issue in corporate America. Implications from these findings are discussed to challenge human resource development (HRD) and similar fields to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of social groups, social interests, and alternative learning approaches in organizations.

Keywords: Black professionals, employee networks, social and participatory learning, critical race theory

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A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Black Professionals in Employee Networks:
Critically Exploring Social Interests and Participatory Learning at Work

Chapter 1: Introduction

Through in-depth interpretive phenomenological interviews, this study examined how Black professionals learn and develop in corporate America, while internalizing the struggles they experience as victims, activists, or mere observers of the pervasive racial issues that target their Black community. To understand this phenomenon, the function of Black employee networks was also studied to explore how they are used as a forum to supplement the learning and development of Black professionals. By exploring social learning, participatory learning, and social networks through a Black-conscious perspective, this research intends to bring awareness to the unique experience of Black professional development. Consequently, several principles of sociology will be used to articulate how racism, discrimination, colorblindness, and White privilege experienced by Black professionals outside the workplace might also influence their sensibility and identity at work. Similar to previous studies that advocate for the need to re-examine the role of social and participatory learning in human resource development (HRD), this study further accentuates the foundational contributions of sociology by demonstrating how racial issues impact the way individuals learn, connect, and perform in organizations.

To highlight the unique experience of Black professionals, critical race theory (CRT) is used as a framework to contextualize the historical and institutional assumptions

regarding the oppression of Blacks in the United States. Ultimately, this study is an attempt to exemplify how social and participatory learning, and social networks can serve as a strategy to manage unintentional, deliberate, covert, and explicit racism that exist outside and within the workplace.

Background

In a time when diversity and inclusion are acknowledged as essential components of any group and organizational function, it is important that companies are investing in the well-being of all their employees – not simply using diversity and inclusion as a competitive edge to gain insight into different markets and clientele. Fortunately, many organizations have recognized the need to provide resources, space, and time for employees to have open, yet secure discussions regarding issues about race. Several companies have integrated this approach into their organizational structure, including *Fortune 500* companies such as IBM, MasterCard, AT&T, Johnson & Johnson, Wal-Mart, and Dell (Frankel, 2008; Madera, 2013). Using Wal-Mart as an example, they have created employee networks for their employees called associate resource groups. Their Black associate resource group is named “Unity”, and their vision “...is to ensure inclusion of African American experiences and perspectives in order to strengthen [their] company and improve the corporate and shopping experience for African American associates, customers, suppliers and communities” (Wal-Mart Global Office of Diversity and Development Report, 2015, p. 19). Other companies adopt a similar approach to managing employee networks, but they might choose to include more intentional learning and development initiatives. For instance, on the online Target Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) Report they also state the mission of their employee networks, but they place a slightly greater emphasis on development. The report mentioned that “more than 10,000 team members participate in [their] diversity and inclusion business councils, which provide onboarding, networking and professional development opportunities... The councils represent six groups: African American; Asian American; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally; Hispanic; Military; and Women” (Target Corporation – A Bullseye View, 2015). Other company’s employee network information is also easily accessible through their public reports regarding diversity and inclusion and CSR efforts (Madera, 2013).

Again, several companies have participated in the movement toward diversity and inclusion, however, colleges and universities are among the most well-known agencies to cultivate a multicultural workplace (Piercy, Giddings, Allen, Dixon, Meszaros, & Joest, 2005). Institutions of higher learning refer to student development theory, identity theory, and several racial identity theories to support their commitment to recognize the benefits of diversity (DeSensi, 1995). Thus, it is not uncommon for faculty and staff to form employee networks to assist with the recruitment and retention of students and employees of color (Iverson, 2007; Piercy et al., 2015). Grier-Reed (2010) also explained social networks can be used to help people of color cope with microaggressions and other subtle forms of racism on campus. Until relatively recently, companies have begun to provide similar opportunities for employees who share the same ethnic, racial, and/or cultural affiliation. These social networks are commonly called affinity groups, affinity networks, employee research groups, employee resource groups, associate networks, and associate

research groups (Madera, 2013). This study will refer to these groups as employee networks. These groups have a spectrum of different functions, structures, and governance within organizations, and they are also created at various levels of the organization. There are many other idiosyncrasies that shape the purpose, impact, and influence of employee networks in corporate settings.

Why Social Networks Matter in the Workplace

Employee networks are not a new phenomenon to connect people who share the same interest, but their presence continues to substantially expand in corporations across the United States. In most cases, racial employee networks have a direct correlation with the diversity initiatives of the organization (Frankel, 2008). In other instances, companies allow any topic of interest to be reason enough to form social networks (Madera, 2013). Thus, there are many sub-cultures that utilize employee networks to bond, communicate, and support shared interests. I have chosen to solely focus on Black employee networks within a corporate setting. Although minorities often share similar oppression, each minority group carries unique experiences unbeknown to other groups (Taylor, 1999). Furthermore, based on research highlighting the outreach, volunteer, and mentoring initiatives in race-based employee networks (Frankel, 2008; Grier-Reed, 2010; Iverson, 2007), I perceive employee networks as a platform that recognizes the importance of community. They work toward creating a better lived experience for the members of the group, and future generations of professionals. In addition to creating a sense of community, employee networks demonstrate its values to corporate settings by encouraging employees to establish connections outside their workplace identity. In

essence, employee networks play a significant role in organizations because they have the capacity to foster support, enlighten peers, and incite transformation.

I believe the multifaceted benefits of employee networks can help reduce workplace discrimination by fostering a work environment that invest in the mutual understanding and respect for different cultures and backgrounds. Unfortunately, some employers still practice racial discrimination. Although racial discrimination has always been a relevant concern to racial minorities, the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 ignited a resurgence of heightened employer bias, which created additional barriers to employment for people of color, which has potential to be replicated during any subsequent recession (Cox, 2010). Federal workforce participation reports indicate that the distress of unsuccessful employment procurement has led to substantially low labor participation rates, especially in regard to racial minorities, but more so for Blacks, and uncontestably among Black men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). U.S. agencies have given attention to this issue and have facilitated intervention initiatives led by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). As a result, employers are subjected to more expensive and impactful consequences for racial discriminatory practices (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

Although racial discrimination has historically and presently created barriers to economic stability and prosperity for racial minorities (Cox, 2010), projected demographic changes to the U.S. population might encourage employers to be more receptive to diversity integration. The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) analysis of the 2014 census data show minorities currently comprise less than 40 percent of the population,

but they will collectively become the majority of the population by 2045, and will eventually reach 56 percent by 2060. If these projections become the nation-state's new lived reality, this entails that the workforce must become diversified and the consumer interests and needs will also change. Therefore, addressing racial discrimination in the workforce is not only beneficial to racial minorities seeking employment and career advancement, but also to employers that wish to support their consumers' needs, which is not limited to confronting social issues perpetuated through racism, inequality, and social injustice.

Why Racial Identities Matter in the Workplace

Organizations with representation of diverse experiences and backgrounds generate a more productive and welcoming learning environment (Tillema, 2006). However, understanding and valuing the differences of individuals within an organization is not always an organic process. Organizations should strive to cultivate a workplace where employees find ways to learn from one another. Recognizing how individuals respond to others, their work environment, and social issues can provide a greater understanding of why identity matters at work.

Self-verification. Individuals find solace in diversity groups because they can verify their personal thoughts and feelings, and learn how others perceive their identity (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). This intertwined notion of self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem is known as self-verification. Self-verification can be particularly important when individuals transition to a new role or environment. The idea

of self-verification can be further explained by understanding the consequences of being misidentified. Meister, Jehn, and Thatcher (2014) suggested individuals who sense their colleagues' failure to acknowledge the salience of their work-related identities might experience identity asymmetries. The authors mentioned internal identity asymmetries can impact workplace relationships. A preceding study illustrated similar findings in a field study of 179 employees that explained employees experience higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of absenteeism when one believes their colleagues recognize the importance of his or her identities at work (Thatcher & Geer, 2007). The results of these studies demonstrate self-verification has potential to influence individual and group performance. Litrico and Choi (2013) conducted a study that supports this claim when they used Bandura's social cognitive theory and symbolic interactionism, and found that "members engaged more in work collaboration and less in process hindrance when they perceived congruence between self-efficacy and reflected self-efficacy, between self-efficacy and team efficacy, and between reflected self-efficacy and team efficacy" (p.658). Each of these studies depict how self-verification can influence the outcome of work relationships and identity development. Self-verification becomes more complicated when people of color are branded by stereotypes, colorblindness, and racist ideals. For instance, how do Blacks reconcile their idea of self-verification when society has historically created an image of Blacks that is misaligned with an identity of a Black professional? Similar to other racial groups, Blacks can change, enhance, and redefine their values and skills to shape their identity, but unlike other racial groups their unique history and pigmentation creates unparalleled barriers to self-verification.

Habitus. Renowned social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu provides additional insight into the potential barriers of self-verification through his coined concept of *habitus*, which he vaguely defines as “a structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). Essentially, he explained that one’s actions, goals, beliefs, and self-perception are shaped by a set of dispositions that occur through socialization, and act as a mental model as individuals navigate through different spaces. “Bourdieu's major contributions to social theory consists of his development of a new radical form of cognitive sociology, along with an innovative variety of multilevel sociological explanation in which the interplay of different structural orders is highlighted” (Lizardo, 2004, p. 375). Because of the transformative nature of his philosophy, Bourdieu’s research is often used in discussions of social change and symbolic power (Dean, 2016; Goodman, 2009; McNay, 1999). Bourdieu (1984) emphasized that social change and power are not solely driven by structure and agency, but also through culture, which inherently evolves. Following this understanding, Navarro (2006) further contends that *habitus* is also subjected to evolve due to changes in one’s environment, circumstances, and over the course of time. In an attempt to learn the history and utility of *habitus*, Lizardo (2004) traced the influential conceptions of *habitus* to Claude Levi-Strauss’s interpretation of structural anthropology and Jean Piaget’s theory of developmental psychology. Lizardo (2004) also explained that *habitus* can be used as an alternative approach to posit agency and amend social structures.

Scholars who share a similar approach to social theory have used Bourdieu’s *habitus* to articulate the process and development of learning. Hodkinson, Biesta and

James (2008) sought to understand the collective process of learning by interrogating the dualism of individual and social learning. As a result of their study, they found that learning is culturally infused and directed through a transformative and participatory process. Although it was not the premise of the study, their findings further support Peter Senge's (1990) concept of a *learning organization*, which he describes as a transformative organization that continually invest in the development of its employees by providing learning opportunities. Senge's outlook on learning has been highly regarded in both research and practice (Goh, 1998; Hussein, Mohamad, Noordin, & Ishak, 2014; Slater & Narver, 1995; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Many organizations have integrated learning into their culture by not reserving learning opportunities to a specific time and place. However, Hodkinson and others (2008) also acknowledged "that learning is also influenced by wider social, economic and political factors, which lie outside as well as inside the person and the learning situation" (p. 28). The authors recognize how learning within organizations can be impacted by the experience individuals encounter outside the workplace.

Contemporary racism in the workplace. Unlike previous and deliberate illustration of racial discrimination, modern racism can be both intentional and unintentional. The practice of modern racism in the workplace is best explained by *workplace incivility*, which is characterized as uncivil and aggressive work behaviors that intentionally (and sometimes unintentionally) reinforce cultural superiority of a dominant group within an organization (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Using tenets from Anderson and Pearson's (1999) definition of workplace incivility, Cortina (2008) explained how

seemingly unintentional racial bias can lead to aggressive and harmful racial discrimination. Fox and Stallworth (2005) used the term *racial bullying* to also describe the “ill-treatment and hostile behavior toward people at work, ranging from the most subtle, even unconscious incivilities to the most, intentional emotional abuse. Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, and Magley (2013) further investigated the impact and evidence of modern racism and found that minority women are most subjected to mistreatment. Theories of double-jeopardy and intersectionality support the author’s findings.

These modern forms of racism are hidden and delayed, which makes it difficult to address the long-term consequences that negatively impact people of color (Guerin, 2003). Despite the difficulty to identify modern racial discrimination, as the workforce continues to become more diverse, more attention is needed to address social injustice in the workplace. Lieber (2003) explained “that colleges have always been leaders in diversity initiatives, but now businesses are seeing diversity as more than just a way to fulfill a moral or social responsibility. It is now being recognized as a competitive necessity” (p. 93). Understanding how unintentional racial bias is practiced will help address workplace inequality and supplement diversity intervention initiatives.

In addition to increasing awareness, it is important to acknowledge that approaching racial diversity through colorblindness is also a form of modern racism. Among the various illustrations of discrimination, McConahay (1986) described two different examples of racial profiling of Blacks: “1) Discrimination is a thing of the past because Blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace ... 2) Blacks are

pushing too hard, too fast, and into places where they are not wanted” (p. 92). The first statement may not initially appear to be racist, but it encourages colorblindness.

Assuming Blacks and other minorities no longer face any adversity to employment is false and dismissive. As previously mentioned, racial discrimination in the workplace is still a part of the lived experience of many minorities. Furthermore, colorblindness has intentions to level the playing field, but it ignores that the experience of people of color are shaped by their historical background of exclusion, and for some, extermination.

Whites who practice colorblindness as their approach to diversity fail to recognize the salience of race, racial stratification, and experiential difference between racial minorities and Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). The second example described occasions when hiring authorities exclude racial minorities because they believe the candidate is unfit to integrate into the (hegemonic) culture. Darder and Torres (1997) explained that Hispanic men and women are often denied employment from three covert acts of racism: (1) *tokenism*, hiring or admitting a predetermined number of people of color to represent the program or department, (2) *typecasting*, hiring or admitting people of color for ethnic and cultural related research and services, and (3) the *hairsplitting concept*, choosing not to hire or admit people of color because it is assumed they will not like the predominately White environment. These assumptions depict the institutionalized and socially constructed nature of race. Employers’ precautions about the cultural integration of racial minorities into the workplace distracts their ability to acknowledge the inherent benefits to cultivating and embracing diversity.

Why it Should Matter to HRD

Traditional approaches to HRD seek to explain how individuals and organizations improve performance through training and development (Swanson & Holton, 2001). This study seeks to critically explore this concept for Black professionals in the workplace. More importantly, this study aspires to expand the scope and utility of HRD, by demonstrating how social interests impacts the learning and development of Black professionals. Understanding this experience is important to the field because HRD plays a unique role to identify and facilitate the dynamic relationship between individuals and the organization. Hence, to become more informed and effective HRD educators and practitioners, it is important to acknowledge how racial issues impact the learning and development of employees and organizations.

As the workforce continues to become more diverse, and more people of color subscribe to HRD theory and practice, HRD must become more aware and inclusive of historically disenfranchised communities. Other scholars have also challenged HRD to be more reflective of diversity by conducting HRD research through minority perspectives. Examples include research about the experience of Black women becoming leaders in organizations (Combs, 2003; Byrd, 2008; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Stanley, 2009), the experience of gay men in masculinized industries (Collins & Callahan, 2012), the exploration of lesbian, gay, and bisexuals in leadership roles (Collins, 2012), and the marginalization and exclusion of members of the transgender community (Collins, McFadden, Rocco, & Mathis, 2015). Other studies have used an HRD lens to understand the disregard for Hispanic women in the workplace (Lopez,

2013; Paredes, 2012). Moving forward, as a field that strives to improve organizations, HRD should be aware of its social responsibility to ensure race issues are not propagated in the workplace. Realizing the value of social interests, social networks, and participatory learning can increase our understanding of how individuals navigate and integrate into organizations, and ultimately, work together.

Lastly, HRD should also re-examine its role to understand how individuals learn in the workplace. As a field focused on training and development, HRD must be more involved with “learning how to learn” (Smith, 1983). This concept is deeply rooted in adult education. Through the exploration of critical HRD research, adult education has become more relevant to HRD practice (Fenwick, 2004; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2014). While researching the role of HRD in corporate social responsibility (CSR), Fenwick and Bierema (2008) recognized the necessity for HRD to become more engaged in the process of learning. They encouraged the field to be more aware of how learning becomes central to individual and organizational development. The authors found that organizations who practice CSR “focus on employee learning and promotion, employee ownership of development, and employee safety and respect... however, HRD appeared to be only marginally involved or interested in the firms' CSR activities” (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008, p. 24). Other HRD scholars have raised similar concerns about understanding how learning occurs at the organizational level (Senge, 1990; Dixon, 1992; Marsick & Watkins, 1994), but research regarding individual learning is mostly concentrated in career development and adult education literature. Nonetheless, there has been a growing discussion connecting individual learning to social learning in HRD

(Callahan, 2013; Gibson, 2004; Storbeg-Walker & Gubbins, 2007; Woodall, 2006). This study will contribute to this dialogue by broadening the understanding of how social interests and learning influences the development of Black professionals.

Statement of the Problem

The binary between Blacks and Whites have played a central role in the workforce history of the United States. Beginning with the exploitation of free labor, and including the present-day diversity efforts to create a welcoming environment for all people of color, the United States is still in the process of creating a more inclusive workplace. However, as companies work to eliminate workplace incivility due to racial tension, the world continues to relive the past by perpetuating societal issues that have historically created division based on the contents of race. Although there are human resources policies, federal legislation, and workforce protection agencies that seek to minimize racial issues in the workplace, social issues are still a part of the lived experience of all employees, whether they are victims, oppressors, or bystanders of the social imperfections around them. The reality of escaping the social problems from the past has become a haunting continuation of our present-day experience, which ironically has become captured by our technological advances.

The speed, data, and clarity of mobile phones and cameras have increasingly incited a civic responsibility to record and broadcast social obscenities to provide counter-surveillance (Beutin, 2017). Most recently, the atrocities of police brutality targeting Blacks has become an illustration of racial discrimination that appears to be

proliferated between Blacks and Whites. The deep-rooted tension between these two groups ignited polarizing sentiments, which has prompted a social movement among Blacks known as *Black Lives Matter*. Although there are disconcerted efforts to redefine the social movement as an act of terrorism, *Black Lives Matter* is simply a reaction to the terror of feeling that Black lives simply do not bear the same value as Whites. Whether one chooses to disagree, agree, or ignore this social movement, it has stimulated a response to how individuals understand and react to racial injustice in the United States. Unfortunately, some individuals have used these events to unveil racism, while some choose to remain silent and withdrawn from the social inequalities experienced by others. Once again, it appears that the remnants of the past are disrupting the progress of building a multicultural society.

Despite these setbacks, there are many Whites and Blacks who continue to sponsor unyielding notions of hope that characterize American values to work towards a resolution to become a more unified and less combative society. This study explores the complexities of this time in American history by looking at how Black professionals experience and witness the enigma of racial tension outside of the workplace, as they work in a predominantly White corporate environment. This study examined how Black professionals who are affiliated to Black employee networks incorporate their social interests into their learning and development.

Summary

This chapter introduced the research project by providing background information about why social networks and racial identity matter in the workplace, and therefore, should matter to HRD. By identifying these concerns, a statement of the problem was presented to explain the purpose and potential impact of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The objective of this chapter is to present research that informs the learning and development of Black professionals who are affiliated with a Black employee network, and concepts that connect to their unique lived experience. Therefore, a review of literature is presented to explain distinct concepts that have motivated my interest and exploration of this phenomenon. The fundamental motivation to recognize (and value) the eccentric dimensions of Black professionals begins with an understanding of what it means to be a Black professional, and how it shapes one's workplace identity. Thus, this section begins with a survey of *Black-consciousness* theories to recognize how race influences one's self-concept and behavior. Next, *social and participatory learning* is examined to illustrate how individuals and groups learn from the actions of others to build resilience and expand their adaptive capacity. The literature review concludes with an overview of how *social networks* historically and presently operate in the workplace, as well as how social networks appear in HRD research and practice. Overall, a synthesis of all the topics mentioned above is intended to provide sufficient insight about the subjects of inquiry (Black professionals) and subject matter (social networks and learning). Upon reviewing these three bodies of literature, a concept emerged that further refined the primary focus of this study, Black professional development. The figure below (Figure i) draws attention to Black professional development as a central focal point throughout the study. By increasing the awareness of this phenomenon, HRD can further expand its understanding of how learning and development transpires from social and ethnic groups within organizations.

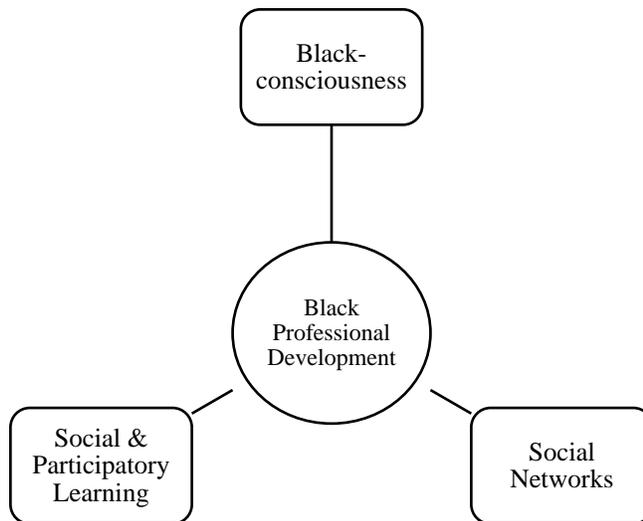


Figure i. Black professional development. This figure illustrates the main areas of research (Black-consciousness, social and participatory learning, and social networks) and centers Black professional development as the emerging focus of the study.

Black-consciousness

Black-consciousness is referenced through several other terms: African self-consciousness, Black awareness, Black self-concept, and psychological Blackness (Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987). Black-consciousness is a theoretical construct that seeks to explain the cultural and psychological awareness of African Americans. Similar to the purposes of this research project, the concept of African American is synonymous with Black, yet Black can also describe multiple cultures and origins across the globe, including White immigrants in America from Africa. In this study, Black will refer to Black American born citizens with ancestry from Africa— not African immigrants. These two groups have a different history, culture, and worldview.

The variety in terminology of Black and African American is reflective of several variables, including the historical era the term was constructed, and the level of Afrocentricity (Black cultural pride) during that time (Cross, 1995). Despite these variations, the objective of Black-consciousness has been consistent, which is to describe Black personalities and identities (Shelton & Seller, 1998). The study of Black identity seeks to not only understand Black experiences and psychology, but also to promote a positive self-concept, in spite of living in a racialized society (Baldwin et al., 1987; Seller, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

There are many studies that have investigated the impact of Black-consciousness on other identity indicators and characteristics, such as physical features and personality traits (Okech & Harrington, 2002). The relationship between self-efficacy and Black-consciousness is a popular research topic. Black studies have discovered self-efficacy is predictive of occupational and educational goals (Post, Stewart, & Smith, 1991), self-efficacy is likely to increase with age (Hughes & Demo, 1989), and self-efficacy is associated with the ability to problem-solve (Parjares & Miller, 1994). Each of the studies resulted in a negative correlation of self-efficacy in regard to Black men, with a few variations with Black women (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). Okech and Harrington (2002) explained research demonstrates Blacks struggle to develop a positive self-concept. In addition to theoretical and observational results, research frequently points to statistical analysis to validate the struggle of Blacks through disproportionately high unemployment, incarceration, and homicide rates, and especially the academic achievement gap between Whites and Blacks (Garibaldi, 1992). Okech and Harrington

(2002) proclaimed the inequality in education is enough basis to facilitate research intended to create effective educational interventions that acknowledge the stages of Black identity, which may explain barriers to learning. Among the various depictions of Black identity, there are three main Black developmental models that are prominently used in Black psychology research.

Nigrescence Model. Cross (1971) created a five-stage model called *Nigrescence* to explain how Blacks develop “Blackness”, which he referred to the state of mind of being Black. His model is one of the first attempts to describe the complexity of Black-consciousness. Cross’s (1971) Nigrescence Model is a commonly used index of Black-consciousness that explains how Black men and women acquire a healthy Black identity, termed *nigrescence*. According to Cross (1971), the objective of his Black-consciousness continuum is to explain how Blacks perceive Whites, other Blacks, and themselves through the following developmental phases:

- 1) **Pre-encounter:** Individuals in this stage often do not have a high racial salience. They devalue Black culture and embrace White mainstream values. These individuals are vulnerable to the miseducation of their race and can potentially become anti-Black. This can lead Blacks to feel self-hate and low-self-esteem for not being accepted into White mainstream society and disliking their Blackness. Assimilation to mainstream society is common in this stage.

- 2) **Encounter:** Through different experiences and events, individuals begin to acknowledge their Eurocentric worldview is not universal to their limited Black privilege, or lack of privilege. They start to question mainstream philosophy of race, culture, and class.
- 3) **Immersion/Emersion:** Affiliation to Black nationalism develops as individuals practice self-acceptance. They are proud to be Black. Contrarily, negative images and realizations of Whites become more prominent. An anti-White sentiment emerges towards mainstream society. Individuals may abandon membership to groups that support or reflect mainstream society, and begin exploring Black history, culture, and media.
- 4) **Internalization:** Individuals realize that hatred towards Whites does not create progress for Blacks. Tolerance of differences is recognized, and respect is practiced. Individuals become confident in their Blackness and it becomes an important and positive aspect of their identity.
- 5) **Internalization-Commitment:** Individuals with high racial salience are inspired to seek social justice and equality for Blacks. They are determined to create a better lived experience for the current and future generations of Blacks.

Cross's model was well received with in the study of Black psychology and African American studies. Stuckey (1987) explained the model lures the attention of Blacks because it describes the transformation of developing self-respect and pride for

being Black and moving away from feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. The Black-consciousness model was further developed and extended to provide developmental stages from infancy to adulthood (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). This modified version of Black identity is often used in research and practice because it is much more detailed and emphasizes the fluidity of identity. The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was also later constructed to identify varying levels of nigrescence. CRIS has been used in higher education to assess the transition of Black students' perception of self-hate to self-acceptance.

Negromachy. Prior to Cross's description of Black identity, Thomas and Thomas (1971) proposed a five-phase model of Black consciousness. The authors explained they were motivated to obtain a better understanding of the worldview of Blacks, however, the main objective was to provide guidance for Blacks who struggle to find dignity and self-worth as a member of a historically disenfranchised community. They referred to this phenomenon as *negromachy*, and claimed these negative self-reflections are consequences for allowing White society to devalue one's personhood, which sways Blacks to be dependent on the acceptance of Whites (Thomas, 1971). Essentially, Thomas devised the following five steps to describe the transformation of Black sensibility to transition from negro to Black:

- 1) **Withdrawal:** Individuals are sensitive to issues and conversations about race. They display contentious feelings towards Whites, and blame Whites for their socioeconomic misfortunes.

- 2) **Testifying:** In response to anxiety and confusion about being Black, individuals share their stories of frustration. In this stage a person is not content with being Black, and still maintains a negative perspective of Whites.
- 3) **Information Processing:** Individuals begin to search for information regarding their African history and discover how their Black heritage has been dictated by Whites.
- 4) **Activity:** After internalizing information about their racial history, they begin to seek affirmation and unity from the Black community by joining social groups. Individuals in this stage want to experience Blackness and strive for solidarity.
- 5) **Transcendental:** When an individual has affirmed his or her Blackness through understanding and transformation, the next goal is to identify one's unique individuality beyond race and class.

Each model is surprisingly different, but aims to fulfill the same goal, which is to explain the developmental stages of Black identity. However, Cross (1971) and Thomas and Thomas (1971) begin their analysis at different stages of development. Unlike the Nigrescence Model, the Negro-to-Black Model begins with a strong sense of Blackness, but internalizes it in a naive approach to mainstream society based on negative exchanges and feelings towards Whites. Cross (1971) begins his model with Blacks being naive to the miseducation and false reality of mainstream society. Despite these differences, the

last stage of both models is very similar. They both illustrate that a strong self-concept should be the goal of Black-consciousness.

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity. Following the original Nigrescence Model and Negro-to-Black Model, the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) was introduced to reconcile inconsistencies of the previous models and identify the structure and properties of Black identity (Seller, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). The MMRI was based on identity theory, which also informs theory related to religion and parenting. Identity theory emphasizes the importance of behavioral choices and options in relation to one's affiliation to their role. In the case of Blacks, Seller and colleagues (1997) explained how intersectionality of different roles and salience of race impacts behavioral choices. Unlike previous Black identity models, MMRI does not restrict Black-consciousness to developmental stages throughout one's lifespan. Instead, MMRI depicts the context and situation in which Blacks describe how much their racial identity influences their self-perception, and what it means to be a member of their race. The model attempts to explore this phenomenon by investigating four areas of interest: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. Each dimension examines the importance of race and the self-defined meaning of Blackness. The following is each component defined by Seller and others (1997):

- 1) **Racial Salience** is the extent to which one's race is a relevant part of one's self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation. Thus, racial

salience is concerned with the particular event or situation as the unit of analysis.

- 2) **Racial Centrality** is the extent to which a person regularly aligns himself or herself with his or her race. Unlike racial salience, racial centrality is relatively stable across events and situations. The unit of analysis is the individual's central perception of his or her affiliation to race.
- 3) **Racial Regard** is a person's affective and evaluative judgment of her or his race in terms of positive-negative valence. In other words, it is the extent to which the individual feels positive or negative about his or her race.
- 4) **Ideology** is the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to race. This dimension represents a person's philosophy about the way race directs one's actions, roles, and responsibilities.

The MMRI illustrates how experience, the environment, and society impacts the perception of one's self-concept and race. The unique feature of MMRI is its ability to capture thoughts about the role of race as a fluid function, and not as a process. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) was created to measure this phenomenon through a Black-conscious lens. Subsequent studies tested the validity of the MIBI and expanded on the understanding of MMRI, which supported new areas of interests, such as situational identity. Shelton and Seller (2000) conducted social experiments to explain situational variability and stability of self-concept in relation to the experience of Blacks. The researchers identified race as the most prominent identity

(within the hierarchy of other identities) when Blacks encounter ambiguous situations, participate in discussions regarding race, and interact with Whites. Further investigation is needed to validate the construct of situational identity and its impact on the self-concept of Blacks. This research project has potential to add to the understanding of situational identity by exploring the ways Blacks develop their professional and personal identity in the workplace.

Aside from the different models of Black-consciousness, there are several influential people who have contributed to the conceptualization of Blackness. American history and culture include Black advocates such as Richard Allen, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Angela Davis, Cornell West, Richard Sullivan, and several more. However, it is important to realize each advocate has a unique platform that articulates their admiration and aspirations for Blacks in the United States. An example of the dissention between two dominant understanding of Blackness is most noticeable between Fedrick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois. Although they were both respected sociologist, they represented two different schools of thought, especially in matters involving Blacks and their positionality and relationships with Whites. Douglass openly adopted a subservient approach to Black-consciousness. He believed Blacks should submit to the domination of Whites, as a way to eventually gain respect and equality. He worked very closely with Whites in political affairs to disseminate his message. In opposition of Douglass' approach, Du Bois encouraged Blacks to overcome oppression through education (Du Bois, 1968). When reviewing autobiographies of Douglass, Matlock (1979) said:

Douglass' subservience to commercial and Republican ideals was denounced toward the end of his life by young Blacks who harked back to the candor and scorn of his early years. As a Harvard graduate student in 1891, W. E. B. DuBois deplored the cowardice of current Negro leadership, including Douglass (p. 27).

Du Bois maintained that Blacks and Whites have equal value, and therefore, Blacks should not be limited to the restrictions imposed by Whites. The contrast between Douglass and Du Bois is one of many examples of the diversity illustrated in Black-consciousness. But, a common theme across different approaches to Blackness is the emphasis on learning. The ability and power of learning often plays a significant role in Black advocacy. The Black Panthers emphasized the role of learning one's rights to bear arms to resist unprovoked harassment, Du Bois associated higher learning with Black leadership through the Talented Tenth, and Marcus Garvey encouraged Blacks to learn their African ancestry and return to their homeland. Again, learning is fundamental to understanding Black-consciousness. The way in which one learns might potentially impact his or her understanding of Blackness. These assumptions provide reason to examine how learning impacts one's development and self-concept. Literature focused on learning provides evidence to believe social learning can enhance and guide individual efforts to learn.

The Role of Social and Participatory Learning

Albert Bandura (1977; 1986) defined social learning as a cognitive process that occurs in a social context through observation or instruction. The social learning theory

helps explain human responsiveness by identifying motivating factors that look beyond the confines of the individual. Bandura claimed the simple act of observing others can incite a learning experience. Bandura (1977) further explained “emotional responses can be developed observationally by witnessing the affective reactions of others undergoing painful or pleasurable experiences” (p. 2). Understanding how these reactions take form within a group with intentional motivations to learn can be understood through participatory development. Moreover, recognizing the distinction between the two learning philosophies provides a fundamental basis to acknowledge how development can be facilitated within group learning.

Social learning theory (SLT). SLT is a broad, yet conclusive concept with extensive influence in many discussions across several disciplines. Bandura’s theory has become central to debates concerning identity development, deviant behavior, and personality development. The purpose of this text is mostly interested in how social learning impacts identity development in the workplace. Previous research shares a similar objective by using the social cognitive theory to understand unique perspectives. Hackett and Byars (1996) used Bandura’s theory to review career development models that aim to include the challenges experienced by Black women. They focused on two main ideals within the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy and outcome expectations, to account for ethnicity in career development. Likewise, Wood and Bandura (1989) used the perspective of social learning to understand organizational management. Through stimulated experiments, the authors found that managers are influenced by their personal goals, self-efficacy, and prior managerial experiences when making decisions for

organizations. Other examples demonstrate how the social cognitive theory is used to understand individual and unique perspectives in the workplace (Checkel, 2001; Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006), but the process of group learning can be understood through participatory learning.

Participatory learning (PL). PL is not a singular theory, but a multi-faceted approach to learning that is action orientated. Participatory learning can be an effective approach when learners have a shared objective to overcome a common problem. PL is founded in constructive theories of learning that encourages learners to pursue knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978), and apply what they learn to confront challenges (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Emphasis on specified outcomes, reflectivity, and collective development sets participatory learning apart from traditional approaches to learning.

Participatory learning is broadly used across several disciplines that address a spectrum of issues impacting a particular unit or group faced with uncertainty. Agricultural and environmental studies have widely used PL to develop interactive strategies to create sustainable practices to withstand challenges in natural resource management (Pretty, 1995). An example of this research consists of farmers in an underdeveloped community discussing, practicing, and teaching each other new techniques to expand the adaptability of their farming system (Röling & Wagemakers, 2000). Thus, the outcome of the participatory learning approach is focused on problem-solving and building resilience to confront challenges. Unlike other forms of non-traditional learning, PL highlights intentionality.

Alternatively, social learning, as described by the social learning theory, is “a dynamic interplay between the person, the environment, and behavior” (Gibson, 2004, p. 193). Bandura (1977) introduced social learning theory as an approach grounded in three main assumptions that describe how learning is prompted through observational behavior. First, individuals do not have to acquire knowledge through personal experiences. Learning can be obtained through observation without replication. Second, individuals are intellectual beings with the innate ability to determine how newly obtained knowledge will be applied to their unique situation and circumstances (i.e. verbal instruction). Third, individuals possess the ability to identify how certain stimuli invoke a particular reaction, and therefore, individuals have self-regulatory qualities that can predict and control their actions. Exposure to formal, informal, real, live, fictional, or scripted media is an illustration of how symbolic modeling influences learning and behavior. Although social learning theory has the capability to describe the development of the participants in the study, it has limited capacity to describe the learning approach of a group, in this case, an employee network. The unintentionality of social learning also presents a passive and unmotivated approach, which is misaligned with the goal-orientated directives within employee networks. Using participatory learning to understand individual *and* group motivations to learn is a more insightful and applicable lens.

Reviewing the distinction. Acknowledging the distinction between social learning and PL is helpful to understand the fundamental difference between the two approaches. The difference between participatory learning and collaborative learning is

more complex because they share more features than the previous comparison. Understanding the faint line of separation between PL and collaborative learning is easiest to comprehend through evaluating the terminology of “participation” and “collaboration.” Collaborative learning entails the collaboration between two or more groups, whereas participatory learning entails the shared participation of learning between one group (Basco-Carrera, Warren, van Beek, Jonoski, & Giandino (2017). However, it is important to mention collaborative learning and social learning might be used as strategies within participatory learning. For instance, collaborative learning might take place within a group when they have presented a solution to their stakeholders or funders, and the next step requires how implementation would take place. The two groups working together would require knowledge exchange to reach an agreeable plan. Moreover, an example of using social learning would be a group modeling a successful technique used by another group. In both cases, the main goal for the group is still to focus their learning on advancing their group’s agenda.

Motivation to learn. Participatory learning is also known as *participatory learning and action* (PLA), which characterizes how members of a group are motivated to learn with the intention to incite action. Both PL and PLA highlight the shared priorities of a group. There are other forms of PL, such as *community based participatory research* (CBPR) that seek to identify and examine a phenomenon. Similar to PL, the group begins with the motivation to obtain information about a shared interest. This study will continue to use the general conceptualization of participatory learning to describe how communities use PL as a method to develop and protect their community.

By striving to work together, individuals within the group realize their attention, input, and effort is needed to drive their social agenda into action. Thus, the concept of participatory learning implies a willingness and motivation to learn (Pretty, 1995), which is not inherent in all forms of learning. However, adult education has identified the motivation to learn as a core principle in adult learning. Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2014) explained adult learners are intrinsically motivated to learn. When describing adult learners in the context of HRD, the authors mentioned the personal investment of learning for adults. They claimed the motivation to learn can come from a spectrum of influences, including individual growth, institutional growth, and societal growth. Other discussions about the motivation to learn has informed HRD literature. Studies have looked at how motivation can influence training (Holton III, 1996), how motivation can impact knowledge transfer (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, & Gruber, 2009), and how the motivation to learn can improve work performance (Naquin & Holton, 2003). Additional literature in HRD has examined how motivation is connected to learning at work, but this concept is rarely investigated at the group level (Bonebright, 2010).

Within the context of participatory learning, motivation to learn is perceived as an internal quality, but external motivations are equally important (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Pretty, 1995). As an approach used to aid the development of communities, external factors are a driving force to learn. Aside from agricultural and environments concerns, social, political, and economic disparities provide reason for communities to learn how to improve their conditions (Choguill, 1996; Cornwell, 2003).

The sociopolitical and economic distress of communities can generate learning environments to develop strategies to confront their oppressor (Freire, 1970). Learning under these circumstances can be an extensive process that takes a lot of time and emotional endurance. Once success is achieved the process and energy to sustain is often ongoing (Kyamusugulwa, 2015; Pretty, 1995). The ability for individuals in the group to withstand discouragement and setbacks is also necessary and expected for progress to continue (Röling & Wagemakers, 2000).

Resilience to prevail. The overwhelming size of a problem facing a community or group can motivate people to come together, but determining how to effectively manage unexpected change, danger, vulnerability, long term stress, or trauma is a participatory learning experience (Hordijk & Baud, 2011). The option to ignore these issues can create larger issues. Alternatively, the decision to confront adversity can yield resilience. The process of building resilience is traditionally explored through individual experiences, but participatory learning strategies are often used to cultivate community resilience (Pretty, 1995). Wilson (2012) further explained the ability for a community to foster resilience is not inherent to the ability to live through a crisis. He described resilience as an intentional effort to move forward. Through this interpretation, resilience is not a skill or outcome, but a process. Therefore, learning how to adapt is important to be resilient.

The conceptualization of resilience, as a process of adaptation, can be understood through a clinical term known as *resilience trajectory*, which is defined as a short lapse of disarray that is followed by equilibrium (Bonanno, 2014). In a study to understand why

some people have more resilience than others, Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, and Yehuda (2014) looked in different ethnic communities for individuals who have experienced trauma from poverty, violence, and poor health. The study claimed resilience is achieved when resources are obtained to sustain well-being, and social support systems are established for emotional stability. Ultimately, the researchers said, “[w]hat matters to individuals facing adversity is a sense of ‘meaning-making’ – and what matters to resilience is a sense of hope that life does indeed make sense, despite, chaos, brutality, stress, worry, or despair” (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, and Yehuda, 2014, p. 6). In addition to articulating the function and dimensions of resilience, the significance of the study has a greater impact. The authors concluded resilience is a process, and therefore, can be taught. This positions participatory learning as an approach to facilitate the development of resilience to prevail over adversity.

Learning environment. In an issue of *Human Resource Development International* (vol. 9., issue 6, 2006), editor Jean Woodall titled the edition “From Individual Learning to Social Learning: Reframing HRD Theory and Practice.” The compilation comprised of diverse scholarship that invited both scholars and practitioners to critically reflect on how HRD can become more tactical and inclusive of different ways of learning to support training and development. An article submitted by Tillema (2006) contributed to the theme of social learning through her depiction of how knowledge is generated in professional communities of practice. In the author’s conceptual analysis of knowledge productivity in relation to communities of practice and teams, he underlines the importance of authenticity. Tillema (2006) claimed authenticity

is a principle component of knowledge productivity, and knowledge productivity is cultivated in a positive learning environment. The author articulated this disposition by outlining the impact of the social context and goals identified in team or group-related work. The thesis of the article explained that operating in a collaborative effort with individuals who share a common interest, paradoxically challenges individuals to think different from others in their group or team, which motivates knowledge productivity (Tillema, 2006). Equally important, the author suggested the professional learning environment is essential to one's willingness to share divergent assumptions that potentially stimulate creativity. This assumption is consistent with other research that emphasize the importance of creating a welcoming, secure, and trusted environment to invite new ideas and adopt new ways of thinking (Brooks, 1994; Downey, Werff, Thomas, & Plaut, 2015). Thus, the combination of creativity and knowledge production helps unveil authenticity in the process of learning and self-discovery.

Tillema's theory has several implications that further enhance the understanding of how individuals learn from one another. First, achieving a level of comfortability with one's group (or team) and social environment has implications on knowledge productivity. A secure, trusted, and welcoming environment allows individuals to focus on the task or problem at hand. Second, exchanging ideas and tactics with individuals who share a common goal or interest can encourage others to expand and reassess their way of thinking (Tillema, 2006). Next, the author draws on previous deductions about social learning from Palonen, Hakkarainen, Talvitie, and Lehtinen (2004), and explained the "social context in which professionals work and exchange knowledge are inseparable

from their learning and opportunities to develop” (Tillema, 2006, p. 175). Basically, the social component of learning helps contribute to one’s desire to develop. This concept supports an evolved understanding of Bandura’s social learning theory by acknowledging social learning is not only prompted by observation, but facilitated by motivation. Next, the author’s suggestions about authenticity through learning and self-discovery requires collaborative communication. When individuals present new ideas to their team or group, they are motivating others to challenge their mental models, which is the way people process and understand how things work (Senge, 1990). This form of collaborative knowledge production is an evolutionary task that requires dialogue to adjust mental models. Lastly, Tillema’s advances our understanding of how individuals learn from one another by challenging HRD to readjust its mental model to place value on the intermediary between individual and organizational learning – social learning. Therefore, his article eloquently reflects the overarching theme of the journal issue, which explores how we can reframe the theory and practice of HRD through the understanding of social learning and its impact on training and development.

By engaging in social learning, employees become exposed to another way of thinking, which expands their scope of understanding. Employers have steadily begun to recognize these benefits, and find ways to create teams and projects with diversified talent (Hitt, Hoskisson, & Kim, 1997). Through collective projects and teams, employees unintentionally and intentionally learn from one another using social learning. Tillema’s perspective of social learning, along with the other scholars mentioned, is important because it identifies what is needed to facilitate positive social learning experiences. We

learn that self-awareness, motivation, and the learning environment impact social learning. We learn also social learning can benefit employees and employers by encouraging employees to become more self-regulated and authentic. However, research that explains how the benefits of social learning is applied to social groups at work, such as employee networks, is non-existent. Unlike work teams and groups, employee networks have interests that extend beyond work responsibilities. Understanding how social learning operates in employee networks may potentially enhance our awareness of the function and impact employee networks have on professional development.

Social Network and/or Employer Strategy?

What exactly is the role of employee networks in organizations? Briscoe and Safford (2011) posed a similar question and explained how employee networks have evolved from social movement vehicles to employer strategies. They provided a general overview of the origins of special interest groups beginning with the formation of unions to contemporary employee networks. From the authors' illustration of social networks, it appears the purpose and impact of employee networks have evolved to accommodate the changing demographics of the workforce. Others have described how employee networks have become a social platform often made available to women, racial and ethnic minority groups, veterans, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented populations to participate in training, social engagement, and professional development to help achieve their career goals, connect with senior management, and to maintain relationships throughout the organization (Friedman & Holtom, 2002). Storberg-Walker and Gubbins (2007) also recognized the value and multi-functionality of social networks, and the

limited, yet emerging discussion of how social learning can inform HRD theory and practice. Using a broad and critical approach to HRD, the authors presented ways HRD can adopt a social capital perspective. Storberg-Walker and Gubbins (2007) claimed social networks have potential to serve as conceptual and empirical frameworks in HRD. To achieve this understanding, the authors referred to previous discussions in HRD that accentuate the importance of relationships, social capital, informal networks, and mentoring in organizations. In addition to the different areas of interests that support the adaptation of social networks in the workplace, different disciplines related to human resource development also explain how and why social networks operate in organizations. The authors suggested disciplines such as management, sociology, and organizational theory offers valuable insight about how employees connect, develop, and perform in teams and groups that share a common interest; more specifically, a shared interest that transcends the commonality of work-related tasks. These social ties have a unique impact on the benefits and value related to social networks.

Social ties. Gubbins and Garavan (2005) define a social network as a “pattern of ties linking a defined set of persons and social actors.” They explained social networks allow people to gain access to resources, information, expertise, and support. They suggested the combination of these resources provide the necessary leverage to achieve career goals and role performance. Their findings about social connections mainly relied on the work of Mark Granovetter, a sociologist who developed a social network theory called the *strength of weak ties*. Granovetter’s (1973) work looks at weak ties and strong ties in social networks. He described strong ties as two individuals a part of the same

network who are likely to frequently engage in conversation and have an emotional investment in each other. He described this type of social network in relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and advisors. Unlike these close-knit connections, Granovetter (1973) characterizes weak ties as a connection with an outside member of their social network that does not have the same emotional attachment and frequent interaction as a strong tie. However, the strength of weak ties theory is reflected within its title. The theory claims weak ties provide more resources and connections to other external social networks. Despite its subtle and distant connection, Granovetter (1973) argued weak ties provide a vast array of benefits, which include access to new information, ideas, influences, and resources. Gubbins and Garavan (2005) highlighted the rewards of weak ties to underscore the importance of bridging social networks to expand one's access to additional assets and intelligence. Therefore, a sizable and diverse social network presents more opportunity to achieve one's goals. So, although it may sound unconventional, the authors proclaim the implications for weak social ties lead to better role performance and career development.

Career development. Research regarding social networks in HRD is often used in a broad context. Hezlett and Gibson (2007) took a closer look at social networks to further advance the understanding of career development in human resource development. Through a conceptual analysis, the authors focused on literature related to social capital and mentoring. To refine their research, they articulated the distinction between social networks and social capital. They explored two different perspectives. The first point of view was supported by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) who described

social networks as one of many parts connected to social capital theory. From this standpoint, social networks represent the connections between several different entities. Alternatively, Borgatti and Foster (2003) depicted the construct of social networks as an over-arching term to describe the connections individuals make through social interaction. Under this perspective, social capital is a component of social networks that primarily refers to the benefits acquired from social connections. The latter fits the understanding of social networks within the context of this study. This study investigates how Black professionals develop through social networks. Hezlett and Gibson (2007) added insight about how social capital is cultivated in social networks through their literature review of both negative and positive experiences of mentoring in the workplace. Their research draws attention to the limited connections between social capital theory and mentoring, despite the complimentary association between the two concepts. The authors suggested the link between social capital theory and mentoring can improve career development efforts. Hezlett and Gibson (2007), also provided implications for HRD by addressing opportunities to create and facilitate an organizational culture that invest in informal and formal relationships. This notion further reinforces the importance of social networks. However, other studies suggest social networks are not always successful.

In a case study investigating the influence of social networks, Bierma (2005) cautioned organizations to be mindful of potential barriers associated with employee networks. The author was granted access to a group of women who formed a network to improve recruitment, retention, and advancement efforts within their organization. This

process was documented and evaluated, and the outcome was deemed unsuccessful. Ironically, the failure of the women's group was related to the issue that motivated the establishment of the women's professional network. The motivation and detriment of the women's group was identified as a patriarchal culture that minimized the value of women in the organization. Bierema (2005) concluded the women in the social network had conflicting reactions and varying levels of investment that became an impediment to their participation, understanding of gendered power relations, and overall attitude. This particular case was unfortunate, but depicts the importance of a shared vision and common interest to mobilize support and learning within social networks. Following Bierema's case study, Cross and Armstrong (2008) shared a different perspective by demonstrating why the sustainability of a structured formal female network is important to the equality between men and women in the workplace. Similar to the motivations described in the previous study, Cross and Armstrong (2008) presented evidence that the workplace continues to marginalize and exclude women through an everlasting patriarchal network of the "good ole' boys club." They exclaim this issue is especially germane to women who have ambitions to become senior executives. In spite of this barrier, the authors advise women to utilize the benefits of collective learning through social networks. They further explained that social networks can help women exchange experiences and ideas of how to overcome obstacles that they will most likely encounter in the workplace. Although the authors bypass the opportunity to deeply divulge in a social justice issue, they offer a practical and empowering application of social networks

that illustrates how employee networks are connected to diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Diversity and inclusion. Over seventy-five percent of Fortune 1000 companies have publicly announced a commitment to either create, expand, or increase their support of diversity and inclusion initiatives (Daniel, 2000). Employee networks have become a way to facilitate and accomplish these goals. Reagans and Zuckerman (2001) further explained informal and formal employee networks lead to better productivity and performance. They provide a place and opportunity for employees to discuss and protect their shared interest in the organization. Given the value of diversity currently recognized by firms, employee networks have become a common practice to promote inclusivity, assist with talent acquisition, and retain professionals of color (Douglas, 2008). In this regard, employee networks operate as a social network *and* employer strategy.

In response to a growing variation in racial and ethnic workforce demography, special interest groups have continued to expand their contribution and influence on workplace diversity and inclusion. Employee networks help hold organizations responsible for practicing and promoting diversity, and act as a catalyst to an inclusive culture (Douglas, 2008). Despite the growing interest and applications of employee networks, the literature reflects a distant gap between research and practice. There is limited research explaining how employee networks are utilized and inform issues of diversity and inclusion. Nonetheless, recent discussion about workplace employee networks are slowly beginning to surface in HRD.

At the 2017 Academy of Human Resources Development Conference in San Antonio, keynote speaker Jennifer Brown discussed the dynamic role of employee networks in the workplace. She provided a framework to demonstrate how they contribute to diversity and inclusion initiatives, while also shaping employee engagement, development, and performance. Using the “business case” associated with diversity, Brown (2017) explained organizations are more likely to invest in employee networks if they have a direct return on investment (ROI). As previously mentioned, similar studies emphasize diversity and inclusion initiatives are likely to have support if the organization is able to directly benefit by obtaining consumer insight, retaining talent of color, and recruiting minorities (Douglas, 2008; Piercy al et., 2005). However, the impact employee networks have on employees seems to be implied, and not empirically investigated. This study is an attempt to research the explicit, oblique, and ancillary connotations inherently associated with employee networks for Black professionals. Research about social networks provides a general orientation of the functions and benefits of employee networks in the workplace.

Summary of Literature Review

Although there is occasional disagreement about what qualifies or disqualifies as HRD research and practice, the field often invites other areas of study to broaden our perspective. This research attempts to do the same by exploring the unique experience of Black professionals. The literature presented about Black-consciousness illustrates a multifaceted conceptualization of Blackness that has several different layers, which influences one’s identity and meaning of Blackness. Recognizing how social learning

transpires provided insight to how Black professionals might develop individually, while participatory learning depicts the process of group development. Acknowledging the value of how these concepts work collectively in social networks can help the field understand how Black professionals shape their identity and promote their social interests in the workplace.

Hence, it is important to realize the identity of Black professionals are not limited to work experiences. The conception of Blackness is embedded in a social construction that is reflective of social issues. Despite their entry into a predominantly White corporate environment, Black professionals are still subjected to a history of oppression that continues to persist and impact their lived experience, even if they do not directly experience discrimination. Bandura's social learning (cognitive) theory is used to help explain this phenomenon, while participatory learning identifies how groups confront and learn from social issues that present barriers to individual and group development.

Unlike the assumptions of SLT, participatory learning suggests learning is enhanced through direct relationships and connections with individuals who share a similar experience (Pretty, 1995). Individuals who are inclined to make connections may find social networks useful to their learning and development. Social networks offer support and resources to achieve learning objectives (Gubbins & Garavan, 2005). Accordingly, Black professional development emerged as an overarching concept that bridges the connections between Black-consciousness, participatory learning, and social

networks. Framing this idea within critical race theory (CRT) further explains the implications of race and racism in a predominately White environment.

Summary

The bodies of research presented in the literature review provided an exposition of the main themes underscored throughout the study. The next chapter will provide a detailed understanding of how a race-based approach will constitute as the foundation of this hermeneutic phenomenological investigation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This section will present the theoretical framework, questions, and hermeneutic phenomenological research design chosen for this research project. The data collection and analysis methods will also be reviewed, and the participants will be introduced. Each component of this chapter is intended to reflect the critical perspective used to examine how social interests and participatory learning informs Black professional development.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical research aspires to advocate, emancipate, and facilitate change in response to social, political, and economic discrimination that historically and presently exist in various institutions, policies, and organizations (Creswell, 2013). Stemming from critical theory, critical race theory (CRT) is an interrogative approach to legal studies that

examines the relationship between power, law, and race. Cornell West, professor at Harvard University, described CRT when he said, “critical race theory is a gasp of emancipatory hope that law can serve as liberation rather than domination” (as cited in Crenshaw, 1995, p. xii). Similarly, this study embraces a transformative worldview that encourages readers to acknowledge the marginalized, yet exceptional experience of Black professionals. Through this enlightenment, the field of HRD can potentially further develop its understanding of how social networks contribute to participatory learning in the workplace. With this in mind, CRT is used as both a theoretical approach and social movement.

The multi-dimensionality of CRT creates vast opportunities for multiple applications. Although critical race theory is rooted in the study and practice of law, other fields have used CRT to expose racial inequality and inspire transformation. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998; 2009) has been very instrumental in applying CRT to the field of education and demonstrating how the role of CRT continues to evolve in educational research. Her work has created a platform for other applied fields to use CRT as an approach to research. In HRD, there has been very few, but incredible ground-breaking research that explains how CRT can be used to confront racism in the workplace by promoting radical change (Alfred & Chlup, 2010; Byrd, 2007; Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014).

Derrick Bell introduced CRT as a framework to expose the historical and contemporary exclusion of liberty and justice experienced by Blacks in America. Bell’s

perspective of CRT emphasizes the binary between Whites and Blacks through a Black-conscious perspective. In Bell's (1976) famous manuscript, *Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation*, he suggested society is divided along a racial line that separates Whites (oppressors) and Blacks (victims). Bell further supported his claims by outlining five tenets of CRT: *counter story-telling*, *Whiteness as property*, *interest convergence*, *critique of liberation*, and *racial permeance*. Each of these principles contribute to the dynamic and ardent convictions proposed in critical race theory.

Counter story-telling. Beginning with counter story-telling, CRT encourages the disenfranchised to share their experience (story) of marginalization to expose discrimination and diffuse misconceptions that oppressors use to justify the maltreatment of minorities. Through this approach, sharing the deprivation and bigotry experienced by Blacks becomes a distinctive narrative that fuels many purposes. First, counter story-telling exemplifies how their tribulations are different from other minorities who are subjected to similar social, economic, and political oppression. Blacks convey their difference by portraying the duality of being up-rooted from their African ancestry, and integrated into an American culture that traditionally rejects their Blackness. As a result, the "African-American" experience is comparable, but unmatched. Divulging this unique experience illustrates the anti-essentialist philosophy that is quintessential to CRT. However, the objective of understanding the differences discerned by each minority community is not simply to entertain our intellectual curiosity. The purpose of understanding these differences is to identify how we can overcome the unique

challenges within each community (Austin, 1991). By focusing its efforts on the Black community, CRT is a platform to aid the continued journey of Black liberation. In essence, counter story-telling is a method to expose and inform the research and movement of critical race theory.

In addition to a qualitative methodology, counter story-telling is used as a form of support and healing. Asimeng-Boahene (2010) explained that sharing one's story can bring awareness and motivation to others who have similar experiences. Learning how one manages or overcomes discrimination can encourage others to survive or confront everyday accounts of racial hegemony. These stories become proverbs for teaching social justice. Sharing a minority perspective counter to a dominant belief is also a form of empowerment for disenfranchised communities, and it can take place in many forums. Whether it is describing how standardized test exclude the experiences and familiarity of minorities, or if a scholarly submission uses a hegemonic approach to explain or understand a general idea or construct, counter story-telling can be used in several different ways.

Whiteness as property. Sharing these stories often reveal how Whites intentionally and unintentionally use their social status as a property that reinforces the exclusion of others. Consequently, Whiteness as property means Whites impose their authority and audacity to acquire and overpower non-Whites and everything of value (Harris, 1993). An example of Whiteness as property is the discovery of America, which led to the domination of its native inhabitants, and the enslavement of Blacks. There are

also more present-day and common experiences that marginalize non-Whites. Peggy McIntosh (1990), a White feminist, described the subtle and inherent everyday experiences of White privilege, which are the benefits Whites receive that are not extended to non-Whites. McIntosh (1990) created an extensive list of White privileges that include statements such as, “I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race...[and] I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking” (p. 3-4). Uncovering these can help identify unnamed social disparities that reinforce the dominance of Whites and everything they dominate.

Although the two terms, Whiteness as property and White privilege, may have similar connotation, they are two distinct conceptions. Whiteness as property identifies how Whiteness is used as a protected form of power and justification to dominate over non-Whites to sustain an imbalance of power and influence through race and racism (Harris, 1993). In contrast, White privilege is the advantages Whites receive for being White, whether they support or reject the systems that historically and presently perpetuate race and racism. Therefore, Whiteness as property is a more direct and destructive attempt to create and fortify barriers to protect Whiteness as a powerful and valuable asset.

Interest convergence. Through the scholastic exploration of Black history in America, CRT calls attention to the evolution of slavery to citizenship. CRT scholars and activists examine the progress of Blacks. One of the most influential moments in Black history is signified by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. During this time, political

activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and several others campaigned for the equal treatment and social justice for Blacks in the United States. Although the objective was to end discrimination and social segregation for Blacks, other historically disenfranchised groups greatly benefited from changes in federal legislation that extended the protection of rights to all American citizens. Examples include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which all helped alleviate barriers to secure employment, voting rights, and housing.

To achieve this level of success, Blacks were supported by political figures from both houses in Congress, as well as from other minorities, especially women. The collective support to overcome White supremacy is widely recognized as a defining feature that underlines the success of the Civil Rights Movement. However, CRT argues that the collective support resulted in the interest convergence of other marginalized groups. More specifically, the socio-political effort for Blacks to escape prejudice and discrimination in the United States also helped women and immigrants to achieve a greater degree of social justice and equality. Thus, some scholars have questioned whether the success of the Civil Rights Movement would have amounted to the same outcome if the focus were solely on the liberation of Blacks (Taylor, 1999). The abating progress of Blacks achieving equal socioeconomic status have given more reason for CRT to question the consequences of interest convergence, and critique the progress of liberation.

Critique of liberalism. Following newly implemented laws to protect Blacks in their workplace and local communities, racism still managed to prevail. As previously mentioned, less obvious and more discreet forms of racism became common practice. These subtle forms of racism are known as microaggressions. When describing the degradation experienced by Blacks, Pierce (1970) defined microaggressions as the unwarranted disrespect and disdain Whites (and other minorities) express towards Blacks. This form of racism is often experienced in silence because it is not accompanied by an extraordinary or violent event, but it carries the same importance (Essed, 1991). Others have also called attention to the dismissal of Blacks and Black culture through the concept of colorblindness. While some Whites make an effort to acknowledge Blacks share a common but unique background and patriotism that contributes to their Black identity, other Whites choose to intentionally dismiss the importance of race to minorities.

Operating in a society shielded by colorblindness is seemingly impossible for people of color to progress. This is especially relevant when the pigment of one's skin is a stark contrast from individuals who have historically and presently demonized people of color based solely on the color of their skin. Thus, being color-conscious or race-conscious is a part of the lived reality of minorities, on account of the colonization, enslavement, extermination, and present discrimination and exclusion that still exist. Therefore, electing a colorblind perspective is an act of White privilege. CRT calls attention to these unyielding notions of supremacy that continue to impede the liberation of Blacks.

Racial permanence. Through extensive discourse and content analysis, several CRT scholars are led to believe discrimination against Blacks is an everlasting thread deeply ingrained in the fabric of American nation-state. Alan Freeman is one of the first among many to boldly attest to these accusations. In response to *Brown v Board of Education*, Freeman (1977) claimed the new anti-discrimination laws created a disparate impact. It created a false idea of a colorblind constitution, equality of education, and integrated society. Others have also mentioned the dilemma of race reform, and identified how it contributes to the permanence of racism (Crenshaw, 1988; Freeman & Bell, 1981; Jung, Vargas, & Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Omi & Winant, 2014). These critical perceptions encourage us to look beyond actions and question whether conditions improve, exacerbate, or unchange the circumstances to eradicate racial discrimination.

Charles W. Mills adds more perspective to the permanence of racism in his book *The Racial Contract*, which he defines the racial contract as a tainted social contract that possessed intentional principles of racism to secure White supremacy. Mills (1997) argued society is founded on a Racial Contract that lends itself to advance its White “signatories and beneficiaries” whether or not the intention is to specifically oppress those who display a different phenotypical, genealogical, or cultural disposition. Mills provided a detailed investigation of the moral, political, and commonly uncontested worldview of how race is used as an apparatus to fuel the advancement of Whites. Mills (1997) further explained it is important to understand how race became distorted and infused into our political and institutional framework. This deception is often uncontested because racism has become a silent distasteful truth in the academy and workforce, which

leaves minorities to suffer disproportionate rejection and isolation. CRT shares Mill's stance and draws attention to the pronounced yet hidden injustice and inequality within the social (racial) contract that steers our constitution. My research uses this critical socio-political framework to identify the social and cultural implications for Black professionals.

Research Questions

This study investigates a broad concept through a relatively new lens and critical framework. Hence, the purpose of this study is not only to understand how Black professionals develop, but also to examine how their particular experience is cultivated through Black employee networks. Research focused on identity development and its influence on learning has motivated my interests to explore how Black-consciousness is practiced in a historically predominant work environment, while being a member of an employee network. The philosophy of participatory learning and the diversification of Black-consciousness gives reason to assume there are several different ways to experience Black professionalism, but there may also be common assumptions and experiences that help increase our awareness of the phenomenon, which is *the process of learning and developing as a Black professional connected to a social support network within a corporate setting*. By exploring this inquiry through a socio-cultural perspective using CRT, I intend to provide a holistic understanding of the following research questions:

- 1) How do Black professionals describe their experiences at work?

- 2) How does one's perception of being Black shape the development of his or her professional identity?
- 3) What do Black professionals value about their membership in a Black or African American employee network?

Research Design

I have chosen to perform a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Laverly (2003) provided a comprehensive outline of the similarities and differences between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology, and emphasized the subjective, socio-cultural, and historical influence infused into hermeneutic phenomenological research. Acknowledging the distinction between the two approaches is important to maintain consistency between the methodology and methods. This section starts with an overview of how my chosen methodology is best suited to understand Black professional development in corporate America.

Phenomenology. Beginning with the definition of phenomenology, it is described as a process of inquiry that seeks to analyze elements of reality through the perception of human consciousness (Englander, 2012). This general form of phenomenology is associated with Edmund Husserl who developed this concept through his philosophical research on the intentional structures of psychological acts in reference to real and ideal objects and events, also known as “phenomena.” This originating form of phenomenology is also considered realistic phenomenology (Englander, 2012). Realistic phenomenology is simply investigating the first-person perspective of one's experience in relation to one's intentionality of the lived experience. Traditionally, Husserl's method of

phenomenology is widely used in philosophy and it is considered as a branch of metaphysics (Lavery, 2003). This form of research was well received, but some critics questioned Husserl's attempt to identify and exclude the predispositions and personal perspective of the interviewer. Martin Heidegger challenged Husserl's reductionist approach (Lavery, 2013), and created an alternative application of phenomenology that invites the unique insight of the interviewer without reserving personal judgement or other external influences. Crist and Tanner (2003) described this form of phenomenology as a methodology to interpret human meaning and experience.

Interpretive Phenomenology. Heidegger's phenomenology incorporates the perspective of three relationships: (1) the interviewer and participants, (2) the participants and their lived experience, and (3) the interviewer and their personal lived experience (Lavery, 2003). Each of these relationships adds another angle and ontological perspective to explore the phenomenon. This approach also provides the opportunity for the participants and the interviewer to co-construct the meaning of the phenomenon. The collaboration between the interviewer and interviewees is an important feature of a phenomenological study. Maintaining a holistic and collaborative study is important throughout the data collection and analysis process (Englander, 2012).

Speziale & Carpenter (2007) further explained the "situatedness" of the interviewer forms the lens to interpret the phenomena, and therefore, the values, beliefs, and predispositions of the interviewer are accepted as part of the study. I followed this approach, so I refrained from bracketing throughout the data collection and analysis

process. I was aware that my personal opinions and assumptions influenced the interpretation of the data. However, much like the case of other qualitative research, my bias is more so a curiosity. My interest in this topic is more defined than the surface of my Black skin. The connotations and assumptions that are associated with my Black skin have a much greater impact in my decision to pursue this study. I hope this study will enlighten my own career development, and encourage other Black (aspiring) professionals and communities of color. Additionally, this study is an opportunity to give voice to a historically disenfranchised group of individuals who have persevered through socioeconomic challenges to become a Black professional. Sharing the perspective of the Black professionals in this study to the HRD community, both scholars and practitioners, is a contribution I feel is necessary. Most of my education was (and still is) primarily taught from a Western European (White) perspective, in which I occasionally encounter a disconnection or absence of my experience as a Black woman. This study adds another perspective to a seemingly dominant account of becoming and being a member of a “professional” community.

The goal of this interpretive phenomenology is to capture both the phenomenon and the human experience (Seah & Wilson, 2011). I believe my chosen methodology is appropriate for my study because it allows me to explore the concept of professional development through a Black-conscious perspective. As the researcher, I am encouraged to view multiple positions, reactions, and assumptions of the phenomenon. Unlike descriptive (Husserl) phenomenology, the Heideggerian approach is concerned with understanding the participants’ lived experience, not generating theory (Annells, 1996).

The interviewer is expected to identify the similarities and uniformity across each of the participants experience, in reference to his or her own predispositions. Once the interviewer has determined what characterizes the phenomenon, a general understanding can be applied to future occurrences (Moustakas, 1994). In regard to this study, I hope a greater awareness of the experience of Black professional development can encourage other aspiring Black professionals and communities of color to pursue career fields that (historically) previously disregarded and rejected their contribution and talents.

Hermeneutics. To extract the best understanding of the phenomenon under review, the theory and practice of hermeneutics is a core methodology of data interpretation in this study. The central component of hermeneutics is interpreting the data in the form of text (Van Manen, 1994). The ability to interpret the interview text through the process of isolating and identifying themes will guide the discovery and understanding of my research questions. Seah and Wilson (2011) explained “the hermeneutic phenomenology argues that one cannot understand the lived experience of a person in isolation from the person’s interaction with the world” (p. 6). The researcher is expected to have a keen sense of awareness to capture meaning and experience when using hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive science (Gadamer, 1976; Polkinghorne, 1983). To help achieve an elevated understanding, a structured, yet fluid process of interpretation was used during data collection and data analysis.

Hermeneutic circle. The process of interpreting the text takes place in a cycle where the “researcher [is] moving from parts of the experience, to the whole of the

experience, and back and forth again and again to increase the depth and level of understanding from within the text” (Laverly, 2003, p. 15). This process is called the hermeneutic circle. This process is used as a method to achieve a holistic understanding, by considering the value of each part that contributes to the whole meaning (Van Manen, 1994). Engaging in the back and forth motion to review individual parts and the whole meaning allows the researcher the ability to understand each component more clearly. Zimmerman (2015) cautions that the hermeneutic circle is a critical interpretation of how reality is understood through a personal perspective – not to be confused with relativism. Language or culture is not the only means of reference, but the focus should be on the context of the text, which has an impact on the meaning identified by the researcher.

Adapted hermeneutic circle. Due to the inductive nature of this study, the circular interpretive hermeneutic process of analysis will be used to identify the complexities and richness of the participants lived experience. Hans Georg Gadamer’s account of the interpretive circle adapted by Crist and Tanner (2003) will be used as the main reference to analyze the data, which is a continuous process. However, the first step is for the researcher to acknowledge his or her assumptions and biases (see Table i). The interviewer’s predispositions and understanding of the preliminary research is known as the leading arch of the hermeneutic circle (Crist & Tanner, 2003). This initial phase influences how the researcher approaches the study, collects data, and selects participants. The second phase reviews data and identifies themes and examples that appear central to the research questions. Crist & Tanner (2003) described the benefits of extracting the salient information from each discussion into three to five-page summaries,

which allows the interviewers to conveniently cross-examine the characteristics of the phenomenon. This assists with the transition to the third phase to identify shared meaning between informants. These meanings mature as the study progresses and offers a better understanding to advance into the fourth phase of data analysis, to construct the final interpretations. During this phase, the researcher should clarify any existing assumptions to establish clarity, and ensure all interpretations accurately reflect the data. The fourth phase is an opportunity to explore pending lines of inquiry. The last phase of the hermeneutic interpretive process is sharing final interpretations with peers. This is a time to consider the critiques and recommendations from reviewers. As previously mentioned, this constructivist process reoccurs throughout the study in a non-linear fashion. As new ideas emerge, and new participants enter the study, the researcher may be prompted to reconsider or reframe initial interpretations. All five phases were followed throughout this research project.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The questions were aimed to extract pertinent information about the experience of Black professionals at work, their learning and development, as well as their membership in a Black employee network. The participants were encouraged to share their narrative through in-depth interviews. I was responsible for recording and transcribing their response. The interview process took place over three series.

Table i*Interpretive Circle*

PHASE	INSTRUCTION
Phase 1: Early Focus and Lines of Inquiry	Identify predispositions and review preliminary research to initiate the leading arch of the hermeneutic circle
Phase 2: Central Concerns, Exemplars, and Paradigms	Determine content from the data that responds to the research question(s)
Phase 3: Shared Meaning	Cross-examine interview data from each informant to unearth shared meaning
Phase 4: Final Interpretations	Clarify existing assumptions and explore pending lines of inquiry
Phase 5: Dissemination of the Interpretation	Share final interpretations and consider critique from peer reviewers

Table i. *Interpretive Circle*. The table depicts each phase of the hermeneutic interpretive circle adapted by Crist and Tanner (2003).

Three-Interview Model. Schuman (1982) introduced the three-interview model “to allow both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it into context, and reflect on its meaning” (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (1991) outlined how to use this approach for phenomenological research in education and the social sciences. I followed Seidman’s interviewing method for this study. Polkinghorne (2005) concisely explained Seidman’s three interview sequence from the first encounter to last discussion:

He has suggested that the focus of the first interview be on getting acquainted, developing rapport, laying out the area that the researcher would like the interviewee to explore, and trying some initial forays into the topic. Between the

first and second interview, the participant will have had time to think more deeply about the experience, and, thus, the second interview should be more focused and should allow time to explore the experience in depth. Before the third interview, the researcher reviews the transcript of the first two interviews. In the third interview, the researcher asks follow-up questions to fill in and to clarify the account, and the participant can add newly remembered information. Quality interview data usually involves multiple sessions with participants, including follow-up interviews to clarify and expand participant descriptions during the analytic process (p. 142-143).

The participants in this study underwent the same interview sequence offered by Seidman. The first phase of interviews served as the introduction to the investigation and ongoing discussion. I asked general questions about their background, ethnic, and cultural identity. The main objective was to explore their understanding and positionality of being Black in America, their experience and role at work, and how they became a Black professional. I inquired about their recent and past role models, social networks, significant milestones, and other career development attributes. The second phase of interviews was a time to expand and elaborate on themes and events that directly correlated to my research questions or appeared relevant to other participants' experience. The difference between the first and second interview is exploring the contextual implications to their experience. The first interviews encouraged the respondents to recall their experience, but the second interviews challenged the participants to think critically about why certain instances took place, how they reacted, and others responded, and how

it influenced their past and future. The second round of interviews helped me obtain deeper insight into the phenomenon under investigation, and the third interview sessions provided the opportunity to further explore any remaining or new findings. The last interview also gave the participants an invitation to reflect on the experiences they shared from previous discussions. As I maneuvered through each phase of interviews with each participant, the data was concurrently interpreted as it was collected. Therefore, I went through the hermeneutic interpretive process several times, as suggested by Crist and Tanner (2003). The repetitive process was natural and necessary to determine salient themes. This process also allowed my interpretations to evolve to a greater depth to capture the participants' experience, emotions, ambitions, and challenges.

In addition to adapting Schuman's three-interview model approach, Seidman (1991) established criteria for the interview sequence. He suggested the ideal time allotted for each interview should be 90 minutes, and the participants should be informed of the commitment before the commencement of the first interview. In terms of spacing, the interview should aim to complete the series within two to three weeks. The time between each interview should allow time for the participants to reflect on the interview discussion. Seidman (1991) also suggested three days to a week to separate the interviews. However, Seidman does not specify a number or range of participants for his model. Instead, he referred to sufficiency and saturation to determine the participant pool. Seidman (1991) explained the interview should seek participants who cover a diverse representation of the study population, and the interviewer should continue to recruit participants until no new information is discovered. In my study, participants

represented a diverse range of ages and educational backgrounds from different industries, and I applied Seidman's (1991) advice to determine when I had interviewed "enough" participants to respond to the research questions.

Purposive sample. The selection criteria for the participants in the study was based on three conditions: (1) Participants must be currently employed with a company listed on the 2016 *Fortune 500* list, (2) have at least three years of employment with their current employer, and (3) be a member of their company's Black or African-American employee network. Each of these factors were expected to contribute to the context and meaning of the topic of inquiry. To understand the complexity of the phenomenon, I chose to facilitate purposive sampling to recruit participants. When using purposive sampling, Patton (2002) encouraged interviewers to seek "information-rich" experiences from participants to unveil the importance of the research question. This study challenged participants to think critically about an assortment of different events and issues that impact their identity and development. Therefore, I had to be mindful of who was able to add the value needed to uncover the significance of their experience.

Data Analysis

The connection between the interviewer and the participants continued to play a significant role in data analysis. In this case, the responses from the participants made up the data, and *Nvivo* was selectively used as a tool to simply organize the data. Although *Nvivo* has capabilities to analyze the data as a computer software program designed for qualitative research, I chose to review and analyzed all the data myself to capture written,

recorded, and non-verbal data. Kvale (1996) suggested the data is not just what is verbally expressed. He explained the data is also inclusive of what is not said. The interviewer must be attentive to what is presented in between the lines of communication (Kvale, 1996), and not limit the data to verbatim responses. Thus, the interviewer has a responsibility to observe the full scope of engagement from the participants. The obvious responses are just as important as those not verbally communicated. Being aware of how verbal responses are supported or contradictory to nonverbal communication should be recorded as data as well. Van Manen (1997) mentioned the expression of silence also carries powerful connotations. I was mindful of verbal and non-verbal cues to capture the full range of responses during the data collection and analysis process. This qualitative approach underlines the pursuit to understand and find meaning of the phenomenon under review. In this study, having an awareness of the sociopolitical and historical background of Black people and Black culture is absolutely essential to value and identify the implicit and hidden meaning behind the data. I was able to establish a rapport with the participants about being Black and working in a predominately White career (post-secondary education), which I believe created a level of comfort that may not have been as easily conceived with a researcher who is non-Black.

Member checking. In qualitative research the interviewer has the responsibility to be the research instrument. The rigor, validity, and trustworthiness of qualitative research is guided by the preparation, reflectivity, and discipline of the interviewer (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003; Sofaer, 2002). The researcher must be aware of how he or she extracts information from the respondent. Qualitative interviewers must also be

skilled at asking follow-up and clarification questions, avoid asking leading questions, steering the focus of the discussion, asking open-ended questions, and assisting respondents with reconstructing their experience versus simply remembering their experience (Granot, Brashear, & Motta, 2012; Seidman, 1991). Essentially, the interviewer is responsible for upholding the integrity of the study. This process is important at all stages of research. Member checking is a strategy to establish additional validity and reliability in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To evaluate the trustworthiness of the data, I presented a summary of the interviews of each participant. The summary was a synthesized report of salient quotes during the interview sessions. I also cautioned the participants that their experience will be combined with other respondents, so the final representation of their experience in the study may have slight variation from their personal accounts. Through this member checking process, my goal was to confirm the validity of the data, not my analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advised researchers to be purposeful of what they intend to validate. I believe this approach fulfilled my objective to avoid confusion or misrepresentation of the data.

Peer evaluation. The feedback I receive from my peers is another common strategy to verify the rigor of my research. In addition to fulfilling the last phase of Crist and Tanner's (2003) interpretive process to subject my final interpretations to peer review, Burke (1997) also suggested peers should be selected to critically review the researcher's findings and interpretations. He recommended researchers to choose peers who do not have a direct investment or involvement in the study. In addition to referring

to my advisors, dissertation committee, and other faculty, I presented my research in an elective HRD course called “Diversity in the Workplace” at the University of Minnesota. The class had roughly 40 students at different levels and interests in HRD. As a teaching assistant, I invited students to evaluate my research in an open discussion. I implemented suggested revisions that I deemed creditable and appropriate.

Participants

The data was comprised of fifteen interviews documenting the experience of five participants. Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions. There were three females and four males who initially agreed to participate in the study. One male and one female were unable to complete the second and third interview, and therefore they were removed from the study. Both reportedly withdrew due to work-related commitments. Thus, the data reflects the interviews of five participants – two females and three males. Each interviewee identified as Black, currently worked for the same organization for at least 3 years, and was a current member of an African American and/or Black employee network. All participants were employees at an operational or world headquarters located in the mid-west representing industries in finance and banking, manufacturing, medical technology, innovation, and healthcare. Their employers are each listed in the *Fortune 500* of 2016, 2017, 2018, and they manage a range of 40,000 to 95,000 employees. The participants’ average age was 41.6. A pseudonym was prescribed to each participant to ensure confidentiality. I also included relevant identities that informed the participant’s perspective and lived experience. Other descriptions are reported in Table ii.

Table ii*Participant Descriptions*

PSEUDONYM	RELEVANT IDENTITIES	GENDER
James	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran 	Male
Lena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-Parent • Adopted by White Family 	Female
Philip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philanthropist 	Male
Dana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian • Community Developer 	Female
Lamar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban Youth Counselor 	Male
INDUSTRIES		
Manufacturing	Banking & Finance	Healthcare
Innovation	Medical Technology	
PROFESSIONS		
Information Technology	Supply Chain	Marketing
Biochemistry	Information Management	

Table ii. *Participant Descriptions*. The table displays a general description of the participants' demographic information, industry, profession, and identities that surfaced outside of their Black professional identity.

Knowledge workers. The participants each work in fields that utilize their intellectual abilities, as opposed to physical labor. When describing their job title and responsibilities, each participant explained how they are expected to use their existing knowledge or obtain new information to perform their work. This depiction of their work corresponds to traditional conceptions of “white-collar” employment, but recent

understanding of information driven work more accurately defines the participants as knowledge workers, which are employees who sustain, produce, and improve a company's strategies, resources, technology, and other functions to help the organization become more competitive and effective (Davenport, 2005).

Although the Black professionals in the study qualify as knowledge workers, they occupy different levels of management in their organization. Philip held the highest position among the participants, as a member on a global management team who supervises subordinates. The other participants work mostly in groups and team projects, with the exception of Lena who reported to primarily work individually.

Recruitment. Participants were recruited at events specifically designed to create networking and career development opportunities for professionals of color. On most occasions, I initiated conversation with individuals who appeared or presented themselves as Black. I introduced myself as a researcher, and I surveyed their eligibility with a prefatory list of qualifying questions. Majority of my recruitment efforts resulted as failed attempts on account of the following: (1) those interested did not fulfill all three requirements, (2) others who were interested and qualified worked for non-profit organizations, (3) the time commitment for a three-series interview seemed unfeasible, and (4) there were individuals who simply declined for reasons unexplained.

For those who decided to participate, we exchanged contact information. Within 48 hours I sent a follow-up email reviewing the study objective, eligibility requirements, and consent details (see Appendix A). Participants were instructed to reply with their

interview schedule, and the location of where the interviews would take place. I received responses from half of my study invitation emails. Out of the fourteen initial emails that I sent, seven responded, and only five completed each step. Despite the expected and unexpected issues I encountered with my recruitment strategy, the participants in this study provided rich and vivid narratives of their lived experience as professionals in corporate America choosing to maintain their membership to their Black community while developing and broadening their identity.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology of the study by describing the theoretical framework, introducing the research questions, and presenting the research design. The data collection and data analysis approach were also submitted. Additionally, the participants were introduced to provide context to the proceeding chapter, which is a report of the findings from the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter is a presentation of the findings collected from fifth-teen interviews conducted with five participants. Tanner and Crist's (2003) adaption of Gadamer's interpretive circle was applied to process the data, beginning with the establishment of early and direct focus. Each interview question pertained to Black, Blackness, identity, development, work experience, networking, and/or employee networks. The cumulation of each area of inquiry allowed full exploration into participants' personal, professional, and cultural experience as a Black professional. The above topics also provided a suitable range to fulfil my responsibility as a researcher, which was to not only answer my research questions, but to uncover what would otherwise remain unknown (Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong, & Holtam, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this research was not to define the experience of each participant or generalize their experience to all Black professionals who are affiliated with a Black employee network. My goal was to provide insight and awareness to the phenomenon under investigation, and I aimed to create an understanding that is unveiled as a story that captures the high, low, and climatic intersections of the participants' shared experience.

Recognizing the Tenacity of the Outlier

One of the most prominent and recurring patterns that appeared throughout each interview was the distinct and intentional orientation of the participant's point of view. Their dialogue routinely situated their frame of reference as "the other." They referred to their work experience as being separate from their colleagues who are mainly White and non-Black. They described working in their team, unit, or department as working with

and/or alongside their colleagues, but not sharing the same experience. They also mentioned moments when they are the only Black person in a meeting, working on a task, leading a project, and other circumstances where they are the only Black person in the room or on the roster. However, it was also mentioned on multiple occasions that their lack of representation is often considered the norm. I also anticipated that the limited Black representation in their occupation would surface throughout their discussion. More importantly, I hoped to learn about how the participants managed this aspect of their experience. Showmanship and value proposition emerged as the two leading constructs to describe the tenacity it takes to occupy the role as “the other” or outlier – in this case, a Black professional in corporate America.

Showmanship. As participants explained their job duties and day-to-day interactions with their colleagues, they placed an emphasis on the quality associated with their work ethic and their caliber of work. They communicated a consistent awareness of being the only Black person, which often placed them in a position to stand out among their peers. The ability to blend in or maintain a position under the radar as the only Black person was deemed very rare. Some participants explained the scrutiny they have endured because of the constant surveillance of their work progress, quality of work, and results produced by their work. Lena talked about the contentious relationship she had with her boss who frequently reviewed her work at a greater extent than her colleagues. Lena said “... it was kind of like the cat and mouse game... I always had to be on my p's and q's ... even when I was leaving for the day I would make sure to e-mail not just my boss but her boss.” While sharing her experience, Lena described high levels of stressed

that she endured from her relationship with her boss, which led her to explore extracurricular coping activities (that are considered illegal in most states) to ease her extreme anxiety. She said “I have really bad anxiety... my brain can never shut off by itself... So, to be able to keep all of that in check, and honestly not break down, I mean, I think that's one of my releases [coping activity].” Despite the significance of how Lena responded to the pressure of being singled-out by her-supervisor, the importance is embedded in how Lena responded to the stress from her work. Lena explained she did not allow herself to show she was emotionally struck by her ongoing issue with micromanagement and questionable discrimination. She made sure her work was “rock solid and on-time.” She said, “I want them to think of me being synonymous with a hard-worker... that's how I strive to represent my community.” She continued by saying “Basically, you just make sure to continuously learn, so that you're always ahead of the curve, so that you always have something to offer, so that you're anticipating the business needs, more so than other people.” After informing human resources, Lena documented each time she was the only person requested to submit additional references and updates concerning her work. Her White co-workers also reported Lena’s mistreatment, and mediators were brought in to address the issue. Lena eventually moved to another department, and stated she has not experienced any issues related to her work or race, even though her new boss is also a White woman.

Although Lena’s example is compacted with other alarming issues that affected her experience at work, other participants shared similar self-imposed initiatives to ensure their work ethic and their caliber of work are not questioned. The participants described

their work and work habits with excitement and pride. They mentioned how their co-workers also acknowledge their skills and techniques. They were also aware of how their work contributes and elevates the production of their work groups. Most of the participants explained how they make intentional efforts to invest and reinforce their skills through continued learning. Lamar suggested all Black people should be working towards the betterment of their future. He said, “you must work towards taking yourself to the next level, if you're not doing that then things are dysfunctional.” He continued by sharing his goal to build his intellectual capacity as a way to increase his social and economic capital. Others further explained their intention to work hard, but to also make sure everyone associates them with hard work and perseverance. The display of their investment and determination to accomplish their job responsibilities appeared to be just as important as fulfilling their job responsibilities. Dana explained “the goal is to make sure they are talking about you and your good work, even when you are not in the room.” James went a step further and said, “sometimes we will know the rules more than the people who wrote the book.” Philip shared a similar comment, but he acknowledged his White colleagues were invested in their own performance and feedback as well, except he alluded to a difference between his experience and the experience of his White colleagues. He explained his White colleagues experience the luxury of working hard for themselves, their family, and maybe their extended family. He said:

As a Black man, I work for all those things, and for the people who made a way for me to be here, for the people who did not get chosen because of their

dreadlocks, for the Black kid at school who needs to see the poster of the Black man in the suit, and for my brothers who refuse to wear a suit.

This perspective helped emphasize the benevolent implications hidden within showmanship, which in Philip's case is an act of selflessness, as opposed to an act of selfishness.

Value proposition. In addition to making an avid effort to associate their work with positive reviews and feedback, some participants referred to other ways their experience as the outlier is manifested at work. The idea of value proposition is presented to illustrate how participants display and amplify their contribution to their employers and community by utilizing their unique perspective as a Black professional.

Value proposition is defined as “an innovation, service, or feature intended to make a company or product attractive to customers (Google). As a member of the Black community and of their organization, the participant's affiliation to their employee network provides an opportunity to make a direct impact on the company's relationship with their Black consumers and internal Black stakeholders. When asked about the purpose of their respective employee groups, the interviewees had similar responses. The parallel across each group were recruitment and development. Thus, one of the main purposes of the employee networks is to help fulfill initiatives related to the “business line.” Philip further explained how the fusion of recruitment and development goals are led by the “business initiative.” He said:

You think a little bit bigger than your current role and you want to think about how the things that you're doing each and every day contribute to the bottom line in business, to be profitable, to make money, and to create jobs for large groups of people. And, so you want to think about how you can expand your footprint personally within the department or function that you lead or broaden so that it has a broad impact for the corporation to deliver those things.

This approach to fulfilling the needs of the business and their community depicted a holistic perspective about their work and potential ventures for development. Their employee networks appeared to be a space to engage in both these professional and social interests.

When cross-referencing the participants' responses with the public information related to employee networks, I was able to find materials online from two out of the five participants' employers that supported the "business line" initiative. An example I found was charging the employee network to provide information about issues and preferences concerning the general Black consumer base. James noted his network is occasionally asked to participate on certain projects to either consult or provide feedback on processes and products. When describing his involvement with these projects, the participant appeared to speak with gratification of his organization taking initiative to maintain awareness of a multicultural approach. Yet, he also spoke with candor about his role as a Black employee in the employee network. He pointed out he knew he was invited to participate in "special" tasks because of his race, and he understood that it is technically extra work without extra pay. Nonetheless, he expressed a willingness to do extra if it

met he was able to help his organization consider their response and the needs of people within his community, and to take advantage of the opportunity to work with other teams and upper management. Lamar commented on a similar experience when he said:

I've seen corporations continue to leverage their role in the community in supporting urban youth and the Black community and continue to call it an emerging market because they haven't done the job over the past 25 to 40 years to be in those places. So, it's still new money for them.

By connecting their employer to their Black community, members of the employee networks appear to have a strong value proposition within both groups – their organization and their Black community.

Moving Ahead While Looking Back

The notion of holding two distinct identities was demonstrated in multiple ways. When participants discussed their journey of moving from their childhood communities and into their current social status and occupation, they depicted a principle of duality that informed their maturation as a Black professional. They described their development as a process of investing in their personal and occupational goals, while also realizing their physical and social connection to Blackness. The complexity of this intersection places them in a position of vulnerability where they cannot simply focus on their future ambitions. Instead, they are challenged to steadfast into their future while they look back at the people in their community and family who succumb and struggle to navigate the social inequities and institutional bias within a White dominated society. This

composition of duality was illustrated as participants referred to their experience traversing through fear and hope.

Traversing through hopes and fears. Each participant spoke with great conviction about expanding on their awareness to not only be mindful of their humble upbringing, Black culture and history, but to keep in mind they are still subjected to woes of discrimination. Lena's relationship with her ex-supervisor served as an early example of how microaggressions can be practiced through micromanagement. However, other cases of discrimination surfaced as participants talked about inequality. One of the most surprising cases of discrimination came from a participant who talked about the experience of being wrongly arrested at a popular tourist attraction. The participant said the arrest was an accusation of burglary from a security guard, but the participant did not have any stolen objects in possession. Through the participants' account, it seemed as if the security guard acted based on his prejudice against Blacks. To make matters worse, the participant's family was visiting and witnessed the arrest. The participant described this unfortunate event as an unforgettable experience and "truth" that the hard-work it took to become a Black professional is irrelevant to the bigotry of racism. Additionally, the participant realized the incident was only one example of how Blacks are placed in situations that question their dignity and purpose. This sentiment was also captured by another participant, Dana, when she said:

I'm just frightened how sometimes I feel like we don't have a unified voice in a community for our social justice needs to be met. Back in the day they had the

Martin Luther King's. There was one voice and everybody kind of rallied around that one voice. And sometimes I feel like our voice has been divided. Because our struggles haven't been the same. And so, I have had conversations with professionals, Black people, and they would say the same thing, you know. We're not that generation going to march out. We're about policy changes through procedure... and making our voice known in corporate America. And being the best Black citizen.

Other participants also demonstrated an awareness of being subjected to discrimination, in spite of their professional title, scholastic accomplishments, or income. Both James and Lamar mentioned numerous instances of being pulled over by the police without sufficient cause. Additionally, Philip and Lena expounded on their suspicion concerning the potential disparity across salaries based on race, which Lena alluded to race being coded language to represent work experience and the propensity to succeed in the organization – not necessarily seniority or performance. She said, “if you're in the same skill level we should be making about the same amount depending on how long we each been there...it's similar to gender - first you actually find out what somebody is making and then you complain.” She further explained that if she had the opportunity to set the agenda for her employee network, she would challenge the organization to disclose salaries. However, she realized it is a hypothetical goal not conducive to a capitalist market. Contrarily, Dana was less concerned about salary equality. She said, “I think there was a statistic done that said [her profession] had the smallest pay gap between races... [her profession] has more of a collective mindset.” She went on to

explain that all employers have a singular concern: “At the end of the day, no matter if you're Black, green, brown, or purple, they all just care about their stockholders. They want you to bring back a return on investment.” Based on both participants perspectives, the concerns and needs of their employees only appeals to employers when it can potentially interfere with the sustainability and productivity of their business line. The employee networks seemed to be a tool that can inform upper management of universal concerns and needs that impact the employees and their group.

The collective voice established through the employee networks gave the impression of stability and support. Yet, the participants made clear their professional identity still placed them at risk of being a victim of racial profiling and inequality. They are still exposed to the possibility of being discriminated. They share the same discomfort with their Black community of asking themselves “am I next” to receive undue injustice, disrespect, or incivility for being Black? In the mist of police brutality and the era of President Trump, participants acknowledged racism continues to be an unsettling topic with an unfinished resolve. Nonetheless, the interviewees exhibited an unwavering effort to uplift their community. Participants explained their affiliation to their employee network allowed them the opportunity to do more than look back as they move forward into a higher social class. Their networks create and sustain relationships with their local Black community by extending a helping hand to improve conditions related to education, employment, childhood development, and other issues that impact the Black community. Dana described it best when she said:

A lot of the things that we see in the news are negative things about the Black community, like the different injustices that are going on. But I'm really blessed to spend time with future graduates - The Generation of Hope, [which are] those who value education, and spend money in our own community... I think because I do a lot of volunteering and work with a lot of great people, I get to see a lot of the positive. And, so I have to remember things are not always based on my own reality. The injustices embedded in our community are being highlighted for some reason. I think is bringing about a lot of awareness. With the Black Lives Matter Movement whether they agree with the underlying statements of it or not. We do matter. There's definitely an awakening that something is taking place. We're no longer sitting down by the wayside. We're saying OK what is going on and what can we do about it. And, empowering ourselves to make that change and not waiting for someone else to make a change for us.”

Dana mentioned several different facets of her experience as a Black professional, but she mainly described how she has a self-directedness to get involved in her community and recognize the differences within her community. Other participants identified this form of engagement as well.

When referring to some of the events and programs that involved his employee network, James said, “we have a footprint we support that can be anything from Black theater, youth employment. It could be anything from domestic abuse to neighborhood development, education. And it could be from the homework program, tutoring program,

or financial literacy program.” Other community engagement and development initiatives were also mentioned (see Table iii).

James was able to provide additional insight about how Black professionals can become involved in Black issues. He said, “Being in the know is important outside of what the newspapers print.” He alluded to taking the responsibility not to be silent. However, he also said, “I’m not going to be out marching nine times out of ten. Although I’m not opposed to it - I don’t have the time.” Based on this statement and the other comments (see Table iii), it seems that the employee networks create intentional time and space for members to be informed and move forward in a collective voice to display their activism. Yet, it was apparent to some of the interviewees that not all Black professionals are concerned about the Black experience. Dana said, “I do see co-workers who intentionally are not involved in Black events, who are intentionally only networking with Caucasian people.” She went on to say it takes a lot of effort “to have courageous conversations about some of the topics going on in the news”, which is something they discuss in her employee network.

Exceptions from a distance. In terms of leadership, Dana also explained there are stigmas that depict a separation between Black leaders from their Black professional community. She said, “Sometimes you hear about how we don’t help each other. We don’t support each other. I don’t believe that’s true. You come to a certain level and you’re like I know everything. I’m not intimidated or worried about sharing information.”

Table iii*Insight into Participants' Black Employee Networks*

WHY DID YOU JOIN?	WHAT DO YOU DO?	WHAT IS A CURRENT AGENDA ITEM?
<p>“It was initially to connect with other professionals of color and to help me as a professional by providing visibility and different positions”</p> <p>“... to develop leadership skills”</p>	<p>“Help students understand we are good enough to excel in an education system that may not be set up for us”</p> <p>“Community engagement through reaching out to schools and students. Whether it's college students, high school, or interns. We're always finding a way to give back, and also to non-profits”</p>	<p>“How do we get people of color in management positions so that we can have a pipeline of developed talent pools to pull from when positions become available”</p> <p>“How to have courageous conversations about some of the topics going on in the news”</p>
<p>“I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn and a good opportunity to develop”</p>	<p>“Well the recruitment, retention, and development is always there”</p>	<p>“Making sure managers are held accountable to the diversity, their D&I roles and responsibilities, and the [diversity] numbers that the organization has as a whole”</p>
<p>“To connect with the other Black people at [work]”</p>	<p>“Not sure why, but they don't really meet... I don't know what's going on, I don't know”</p>	<p>“I don't recall seeing anything about anything like updates or agendas”</p>
<p>“Some random person invited me to one of the [EN] meetings.”</p>	<p>“It's just to develop, promote, and provide abilities for African American leaders”</p>	<p>“... leverage other [networks]... we do stuff together collectively collaborate. At the end of the day really we establish how to provide meaningful contribution to corporate America”</p>
<p>“It was just starting and seemed like a good idea... I like to get involved”</p>	<p>“...facilitate conversations with employees within the organization through roundtable discussions to talk about social issues that take place within and outside of work”</p>	<p>“...knowing our resources, whether it's about benefits, support groups, policy, HR stuff. Knowing how to get what you need”</p>

Although Dana felt strongly about demasking the speculation about social exclusion practiced by Black professional leaders, she could not deny the distance between Black leadership and other Black professionals. She mentioned their limited availability on account of their extensive workload. Interestingly, Lena also mentioned the distance between Black leadership and other Black professionals, but she concentrated on the differences in their appearance, specifically Black women. She said, “The higher up you get, the straighter Black women's hair get... it’s interesting because it's almost like we lose our identity because we're really not allowed to be who we really are.” Dana corroborated Lena’s comment by explaining she supports the current movement to be “Nappy and Happy” and promotes “Black Girl Magic” to denounce the exclusion of Blackness and Black women in the workplace. Other comments and

Table iii. *Insight into Participants’ Black Employee Networks.* The table shows selected responses from the following three questions: *Why did you join, what do you do, and what is a current agenda item?*

discussion related to the intersectionality of race and gender surfaced throughout both of their interview series, which included struggles of dating as a Black professional woman, additional pressures of how to look as a Black professional woman, and feelings of being undervalued in both their professional and ethnic community. The insight shared by the Black women in this study provided additional context to the psychological, sociological, and historical barriers experienced by Black professional women, but the concentration on race and gender was outside the direct focus of the study. Yet, in this case, Lena was

able to illustrate how expectations of being a Black professional woman has implications on how they display their Blackness as they develop and further their career.

Lena continued to describe her philosophy about the social pressures of being Black in a predominately White occupation, and then she began to insert her personal experience and reflections. She said, “I take pride in being Black but sometimes I don't know. It's a weird thing to say that I'm ashamed of sometimes.” Appearing conflicted and apprehensive, Lena clarified that she is not ashamed of herself, but she feels uncomfortable when she is grouped with Black people who do not share her work ethic or values. She named negative stereotypes such as Blacks being lazy, Blacks being inherent deviants of society, and all Black women being a “mad Black woman.” She admitted that she makes an intentional effort to distance herself from Blacks who fit the above categories. As Lena expressed her predicament it became evident that she was still in the process of understanding her feelings about being Black, and a part of a group associated with negative connotations. Out of all the participants, Lena seemed the most distant from the other participants' emotional investment in helping her Black community. This became more apparent when she said:

Maybe if you never eat by the beach, went on a snorkeling trip or a boat ride, or something like that, you don't know what you're really missing out on. Like I said, a lot of people are getting underpaid nowadays so, if that's all you know, if that's what everybody in your family knows, how will you see past that? So, yeah, I

mean, I feel like maybe I could be but I'm not striving to be a role model or somebody to aspire to be like me.

Presumably, Lena's distance originates from her experience raised by an upper-middle class White family, in a town where she and her brother were often the only Black people at school, in their neighborhood, at church, and at family events. When Lena concluded her comments about being Black, she said, "I've always not been in a good place with it. I think to be Black and to be successful is a constant battle." This aspect of her experience will resurface to guide the introspection of the subsequent topic.

Defining the Difference

In response to my questions exploring their relationship with their White colleagues, I was able to unpack how the Black professionals in the study feel and respond to situations that remind them of their position as the outlier. When describing different circumstances and scenarios, they each mentioned experiences prior to their current roles as a Black professional where Black representation was also limited. I learned Philip, Dana, and Lamar attended college at a predominately White university, Lena attended a predominately White private school throughout her elementary and secondary education, and James had an extensive tenure with military and law enforcement where majority of his peers and superiors were White. When describing their minority status and the advantages of Whites, each participant demonstrated a hyperawareness that explained the inequalities they experience as a Black professional. Understanding their positionality in reference to their White colleagues appeared to

inform their attitude and interaction with Whites. This section surveys how participants identified how their experience is different from their White colleagues through their understanding of White privilege, internalized racism, double standards, and acts of disruption and maintaining a secure distance within work relationships.

White Privilege. The concept of White privilege was mentioned through examples the participants experienced first-hand, and through generalizations of describing aspects of being Black. White privilege was identified as perks of being White. Dana shared her frustrations of having to do extra work in comparison to her White counterparts. She explained she has ambitions to participate in leadership initiatives at work, elevate her position, as well as increase her community service. However, she expressed her time is very limited. She pondered about the opportunity to pursue her professional and developmental agenda, without having to think about being Black in the process of learning and performing her job responsibilities. Dana said:

I think there's always been a part of me that wants to experience what it would be like not to be Black. Not because I didn't want to be Black, but because I wanted to feel what it would be like to be on the other side... For us to succeed, we have to know the background of Africa, right? We have to know about slavery and the civil rights movement. So, our load, even to understand me as a person, is a lot greater than the next person. You know, I think that was my own awakening. I'm like man - I wonder how it will be not to have to worry about all the issues that are going on. I mean really! That's White privilege, right?!! Privilege is just

saying I can worry about that if I want to, but it's not required for me to succeed in life. You know, to shut the door. They can turn off the TV about their life or me. It doesn't affect them [Whites]. Yet, it affects me if I want it to or not. How people look at me, how they interact with me, and how it's perpetuated through me, even though it's not me... If I didn't have to worry about all those other things, imagine how that opens up the ability to learn about other things.

Dana's frustration appeared to stem from her complication to balance her occupational, developmental, social, and community engagement agenda as a Black professional woman. She considered the experience of White woman in her profession, who may have the option to consolidate two or more of their interests. The next observation also takes gender into account by acknowledging the powerful position of White men.

Secure distance. The conscious decision to maintain a comfortable distance with his White colleagues was discussed frequently by James. He described how he is weary of allowing his White co-workers to know more than what he presents at work. He explained his hesitation stems from the history of distrust from Whites, because he believes they have the ability to change the precedent of what is expected, and therefore set new rules to disqualify his contributions and value, which makes him over suspicious at times. James said:

I tend to wear a shirt and tie while my colleagues can wear a polo or just a button up shirt. Maybe there's some additional pressure trying to prove myself each day. But, maybe some of it is just saying I deserve to be here. No different than

anyone. I hesitate maybe to invite my co-workers to my home because maybe they realize I live in a house the same as them or a different zip code than what they expect me to live in. So, I'm kind of sheltered. Then on the other side of it, I think there's always the reality that somehow, someway regardless of what the rules are, the White man will tend to lead or be able to hold out on top, over-talk or take on any new ideas that are given. I have seen that happen.

James spoke in detail about the distrust he holds for Whites based on his history as a Black man. During the time of his interview, controversy about the accountability of police fatalities of Blacks were received unfavorably by the Black community, and the accusation that led to the horrendous murder of Emmet Till was recently confirmed to be false by his ailing accuser. James mentioned the relatively short time in history of these two events, and the reoccurring issue of deceit inflicted on the Black community. Acknowledging how to cope with this despair and ongoing racism was addressed through the subsequent topic.

Internalized racism. Some of the most insightful and thought-provoking comments came from Philip. As a member of the senior leadership team for a global company, most of his conversation included multiple levels of introspection and philosophy about being Black, but liberated. Although Philip did not label every term that he described, he presented clear and concise descriptions of relevant concepts that relate to the experience of being Black and ambitious. When referring to barriers that interfere with the ambition of Blacks, he described the theory of internalized racism, which

“occurs when socially stigmatized groups (e.g., Black males) accept and recycle negative messages regarding their aptitude, abilities, and societal place, which results in self-devaluation and the invalidation of others within the group” (Harper, 2006, p. 338).

Based on his own experience, Philip interpreted internalized racism when he said:

I never had somebody outwardly discriminate against me or call me a racial epithet. The answer may be the same for a lot of people, but for a lot of people the way racism works is psychological to try to discourage your goals and dreams. The way you see yourself is driven by the way other people see you. It's a psychology that lives inside of me and creates behavior, if I allow it... Black people have to learn how to ignore it, if they actually want to achieve their dreams and goals.

Philip referenced unsettling tension between Whites and Blacks, but he focused on how to persevere through the alienation and disregard experienced by the Black community. He spoke in a way that was encouraging and hopeful about being Black, despite the pervasive issues impacting the Black community. The next participant provided another perspective that highlights barriers to reject and ignore the double standards between Whites and Blacks.

Double standard. The context of being Black and a professional at this time in American history was signified through references about President Donald Trump. Dana, James, and Philip acknowledged the implications of his past involvement with the Black community and present politics concerning Blacks. As a Black woman, Lena expressed

her vexation with the privilege President Trump represents through his race, social class, and gender. She explained that men like the current president are able to (and are expected to) thrive because they live by a system created to help them succeed, while others struggle to maintain basic necessities. Lena characterized this division as a double standard when she said:

For some reason, I feel like a lot of people who voted for Trump are disconnected with the rest of the world. But, it's crazy because they're so educated. Would you vote for a man who literally admitted that he grabbed [female genitalia]? If I said I grabbed [female genitalia] would I still be invited to Thanksgiving? I'm pretty sure you'd go to jail, and have to register on a list, and not be allowed near school. My mom said we don't stand behind all the things he stands for, but he's probably going to be able to implement some amazing processes, and we'll probably be able to achieve some really amazing results... If I talked like that I would not have my job. It's interesting, but you know what? He is a rich White man. And that's what they love. That's why they changed Jesus to a White man, or else they wouldn't follow him; hashtag hair-like-lambs-wool-etc.

The high emotion and discontent Lena expressed was surprising, but provided greater depth into her intricate representation of a Black woman, who is raising a Black son, and has a White family. In spite of her relationships at work and outside of work, she clearly pronounced her refusal to remain silent about the mistreatment of her community, even if

her proximity to the Black community is unclear. Having the audacity to confront these double standards is further explained through the practice of disruption.

Disruption. The idea of disruption is complex because disruption can take the form of many practices. Howarth and Hook (2005) described disruption as a social and psychological tactic intended to disturb racist practices and conditions associated with racialized beliefs, such as White privilege. Babecan (2013) explained disruption as an intervention to challenge racism by producing dialogue, awareness, and creating new possibilities to recognize differences, and ultimately, unmute strategies and thinking that silences racism. In this case, disruption through the practice of being present in a predominantly White space is discussed as a defining concept that illustrates the significance of Black professionals in corporate America. Lamar captured the functionality of disruption by identifying environmental and emotional complications that impact his experience. Much of his conversation centered on his familiarity of often being the only Black professional in a vocation that challenges traditional practice. As a mid-level manager, he is tasked to lead his team and consumers to embrace new ideas, which he mentioned is subjected to rejection. He described the up-hill battle of Black men integrating into the workspace in a similar approach. He acknowledged that Black men will most likely enter a professional space that has been traditionally occupied by Whites, and his mere presence is a manifestation of change, but it will be met with “push back.” He suggested Black men to be mindful of their emotional agility to accompany their physical representation of change. Lamar said:

Black men need to understand this: a lot of people do not want to see you come up. They don't want to see you get that new job because that new job represents change to them and that new job represents economic power to them. When they see you having money and trying and controlling your own life that makes them uncomfortable. And, it also makes them uncomfortable because you're not going to fit into a stereotype that they feel comfortable with, regarding Black men, and whenever people see you around they are uncomfortable in your presence... You represent change to the environment... The best thing to do is to focus on you and the goals that you have to set for yourself. Because if you focus on them and you start getting into it with them, you're the one who's going to lose and there are a lot of tricks that these people on the job really will use to get you out, and those tricks, again, are all meant to get to your emotions.

Similar to Lena, Lamar had strong emotions and opinions about social barriers that make the experience of Blacks more difficult to manage. However, Lamar's testimony went an additional step further by suggesting Black men are targeted to be excluded. Other studies have revealed similar findings of the heightened emotional dilemma of Black men. When describing the stress of being a Black professional man, Wingfield (2007) explained that "...assessments of them as frightening people meant that they could not afford to actually get angry or vocalize their displeasure at various offenses" (p. 205). Royster (2003) also mentioned Black men might experience exclusion until they disprove stereotypes that say, "they are lazier, less intelligent, [and] less capable of controlling their emotions..." (p. 24). Lamar echoed the sentiment of the above quotes. Therefore, understanding how

participants stay motivated, driven, and build relationships with their White colleagues is important to recognize as they push through the various obstacles identified throughout this section.

Expanding the Scope of Influence: New Age Mentorship

Research about mentorship in the Black community has been mentioned across multiple disciplines. HRD has notable literature concerning the experience of African American women encountering difficulty maintaining successful mentoring relationships (Byrd, 2009). Both informal and formal mentoring relationships were discussed in this study. Each participant provided insight into their professional development with help from a Black co-worker or mentor. However, an unexpected nuance of how mentorship has evolved was unveiled through the notion of White mentorship, executive sponsorship, and creating a personal board of directors. Primarily, participants drew attention to the limitations of time to commit to regularly scheduled meetings. Dana described this phenomenon when she said:

Most of them [supervisors] are pretty accessible. Very walk-in and open-door policy. Mentors - they are not as accessible. Just because I think a lot of people in the company will pull on them for the same thing. So, we're trying to make mentorship more accessible to all of us, so we won't feel like we're dealing with something, but you've got to wait two weeks to get on a calendar because they're busy, not because they don't want to help.

White mentorship. Dana alluded to another aspect that informs Black mentorship. The amount of Black mentor leaders to connect with aspiring Black mentees seemed to be an issue. When I questioned Dana to validate my summation, she provided an intriguing response. She explained that she and her other Black colleagues have been encouraged to engage in mentor relationships with their White colleagues in upper management. She went on to clarify Black mentors will usually connect organically, if they are aware someone is seeking guidance. Philip had a different response. He mentioned that although he has had several successful mentorship relationships, they do not always work. Philip said, “it's not an automatic clique when Black mentees come up to me... people are worried about stepping into those relationships, they don't know how to start those elections, or it just doesn't click because it doesn't happen naturally.” Despite the difference in opinion about issues concerning Black mentorship, Dana suggested the opportunity to connect with White colleagues through mentorship seemed less common, but she added it is more likely to occur through formal mentorship programs. From her experience, Dana implied Black professionals should take advantage of the opportunity to learn from White upper management and establish social ties within their White network, while also maintaining a relationship with Black colleagues. Dana explained one of her Black co-workers described the benefits of having a White mentor when she rejected the arrangement to mentor an incoming Black intern. Dana said:

One of my co-workers, an African American attorney, had an intern start in her department, and they paired her up to mentor the Black intern, and she declined. She said she needs to be paired with somebody else on my same level. And

everyone was shocked at her response... But she responded that she [the Black intern] will already get a relationship with me because I'm already going to connect with her... she needs to be with someone outside of her [Black experience] to give her perspective... I think that's the same thing with senior leadership. We're trying to learn how to get sponsorship and visibility from someone outside our circle... [and also] to have our influence come through another person.

Executive sponsors. The last segment of Dana's explanation of White mentorship can stand alone as another emerging strategy for Black professionals to gain support from their White counter-parts. Yet, she also admits advocating on her own behalf is a necessary process that she is still learning. As she observed her colleagues interact with leadership, she realized she needed to develop networking skills, and unlearn advice that appeared outdated. Dana said:

Being passed over for promotion might not only be because I'm Black, but because sometimes I don't have that person advocating for me in the room while I'm gone. I don't have those relationships. We tend to build relationships with people we have common ground with. I grew up in a household where we were told not to brown nose - don't be in the managers face and things like that. Now looking back, that's not brown nosing, that's networking, that's getting to know your supervisor, so you can build those relationships.

Dana's ability to reevaluate how she interacts with her manager is another example of social learning in the workplace. As she aspired to expand her role, she identified strategies that appeared effective, so she is now learning how to model effective techniques that challenges what she previously learned. These new developments have also reinforced the value of endorsement. This concept appeared as an integral component of Black employee networks as well. Having the backing and validation of colleagues outside their network was mentioned as an important contribution to the progress of the groups' initiatives. The role of an executive sponsor stood out as a leading advocate.

James provided a general outlined of the relationship between his employee network and their executive sponsor. He said, "an executive sponsor is someone who supports the group." He explained the role of the sponsor helps present the group's ideas to the diversity and inclusion department and management, so the group's initiatives are given sufficient resources to execute their professional and social interests. From this perspective, the role of the executive sponsor seems important because he or she represents the group, and therefore he or she is expected to believe in the mission of the employee network. The executive sponsor also serves the purpose of ensuring the group maintains structure and adheres to the objective of the employee network. James described this person as usually a White male. He claimed this process can be a procedure rather than a relationship, when "... an executive leadership has to just check the boxes that the group benefits because of having like-minded individuals, share, and bounce ideas off of each other." Contrarily, James described the true support of an

executive sponsor can be very beneficial in the same way some Whites have supported Blacks throughout history. He said, "I also think being Black is knowing that we didn't get here alone and that we had White support from Caucasian Americans." This perspective presented an interesting blend of using a historical Black context to support the future endeavors of his Black employee network. From this viewpoint, the role of the executive sponsor can support the progress of Black professionals.

Board of directors. As a Black professional who has reached a great level of experience and success in his industry, Philip offered recommendations of how Black professionals could help one another develop, expand their social capital, and extend their network. He proposed that aspiring Black professionals make a direct approach to identify a group of individuals to help guide their journey. He mentioned that it is currently unrealistic for people to seek advice from one individual about all their concerns. In the same way an organization utilizes a board of directors to advise their business initiatives, he suggested a board of directors also has utility at the individual level as well. Philip said:

I think it would be helpful for people to focus in on the idea of sharing of information, and so for those of us that are in corporate America and have had some level of success, we should be making sure that we're sharing that information with others - for people that are pursuing and working up. Whether they're entry level or in middle management, we should be making sure that they're creating what we call a personal board of directors, people that they can

tap into to give advice and counsel as they navigate those treacherous waters of corporate America.

Philip continued to explain the importance of having a collectivism mindset of development when he provided accounts of who played a role in his personal and professional development. He mentioned programs and resources he used that helped shape his success, but he did not mask the feeling of still being unfulfilled and unsatisfied with the journey he and other Black leaders had to endure to attain their current achievements. The next section is an attempt to describe this convolution of mixed emotions in greater detail.

Breaking New Ground While Hitting the Ceiling: Still Not Enough

The idea of having something, but not all of something has been the undercurrent for the fight for civil rights for many minority groups. Blacks have continued to fight for their civil liberties, because there is still ongoing practice of discrimination and exclusion that suggest they do not have the same privilege, freedom, and opportunity as Whites. Blacks are currently reminded of this reality through: the over representation of Blacks in the penial system, monuments honoring Confederates who fought to preserve slavery, millennials joining White supremacist groups, unjustified police brutality, the peaceful protest of Colin Kaepernick, and the intolerance of Black naturally-styled hair in predominately White spaces. There are other instances of when Blacks might feel their civil liberties are in question, but the examples above were mentioned by the participants. They also commented on how their respective community of Black professionals

encounter the dilemma of not receiving their full worth and potential at work. Lena claimed her employer is also becoming aware more influential roles should be more accessible to people of color. She said, "... they can't just have a whole bunch of White men up there [in leadership] anymore." Dana and James illustrated this sentiment through an ongoing issue in the Black employee network, and Philip framed his response in the broader context of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

The odd one out. The perception of being hyperaware of their positionality as Black professionals were previously discussed, as well as the idea of Black professionals typically being the outlier at work. Although this section might share similarities to those themes, the concept of the *odd one out* is different. In this case, the *odd one out* does not refer to Black professionals as mavericks who display their talents and value. The *odd one out* refers to the organization recognizing the importance of investing in the development and promotion of their Black employees, but not providing enough resources and support to make significant changes for Blacks. Instead, other minority groups overshadow the Black employee network. James described this phenomenon as he compared the support he receives from being a member of both the veteran employee network and the Black employee network. He said:

For an organization hiring [a disclosed amount] of veterans within a five to seven year timeframe you get an award from the Secretary of Defense, and you're able to connect with the governor. But, who gives you those awards and accolades for connecting and hiring an increasing number of African Americans without

criticism? They say we've lost our job because you gave our job to Blacks, but they don't mind if it goes to a veteran.

The juxtaposition James presented exemplified the unremitting issues the Black community faces in the era of diversity and inclusion in America. Although our society is devoting more attention to the awareness of minorities, White minorities still maintain a privilege above other ethnicities. Dana questioned the exclusion of Blacks from being grouped with minorities because they seem to have more success than Blacks. She said, "I want to see the numbers of African-Americans who have occupied positions since 10 years ago. Who served in leadership positions? Are we really making strides? They always say we're making a difference with minorities, but that also includes White women." James expressed the same concern for inequality when he said, "one could say the women employee research groups is typically White, one could say the LGBT community is mostly White men driven, and even the veteran group, one would say that's really more of a White group." He talked about how the agenda of the Black employee network is prioritized after the groups with White representation. Dana recognized a similar dynamic in her organization. Despite the rewarding impact they have in their local Black community, she disclosed her Black employee network is having difficulty achieving the same success in the organization at the level of other groups. She said:

That's one thing we're trying to figure out in our organization, because the Women's group is really making big strides with numbers and change. And, so we're trying to understand how we might mimic some of the things that they're

doing. And, also at the same time create things that are causing a positive disruption in corporate America. There's huge support for the women's network. That's a whole other conversation about why there's a bigger rally behind them. Race is always one of those harping issues in corporate America and that's always hard.

The argument that Dana pointed out about the unbalanced support for the Women's employee network fits the narrative of other issues concerning women empowerment movements. The recent Women's March of 2017 received criticism for their agenda that highlighted the concerns of human rights issue that impact White women (Bunyasi & Smith, 2018). Yet, the women's movement was well-received and evolved into a global movement. During the same time, issues concerning police brutality and President Trump's misunderstanding of Colin Kaepernick's historic protest was mentioned, but not to the same degree as the Women's March. All the participants commented on the imbalance of Black representation throughout their organization. Lamar put this notion into perspective when he said, "...we need more Black managers, more Black directors, and more Black executives. A lot of people, a lot of White men and women out there have never had a Black manager or took direction at work from anyone Black." The connotations in his statement depicts the gravity and extent of the lack of Black representation in leadership within corporate America.

Pushing through the surface. The skewed distribution of support described by Dana, James, and Lamar was exemplified in another matter using a similar lens. Philip

mentioned an issue within diversity and inclusion that is often missed. He explained large companies try to do what is necessary to meet the expectations of diversity and inclusion initiatives within their organization, but they rarely expand the same pressure to the smaller companies they partner with to sustain their operation. Based on his observations, Philip believes companies who are not on the *Fortune 500* list are not held to the same standards to prioritize a work environment that appreciates diverse people and cultures. Philip questioned the imbalance of diversity expectations when he said:

How do we change the diversity equation in those [smaller] companies? Well, I think those companies are all suppliers to the big companies where diversity is a priority and I think we have to put a little pressure on the larger companies to look at their supply base, and they need to look at them holistically as to whether or not they really embrace diversity.

His statement stressed the additional work needed in diversity and inclusion. *The odd one out* and *pushing through the surface* are two sub-themes that point to the accountability of organizations. Dana, James, and Lamar referred to a disparity in representation, support, and recognition for their Black employee network, while Philip provided reason to suspect companies can put forth a greater effort to strengthen their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Even with the progress thus far, it appears there is still not enough movement to make the change needed to establish equal opportunity in the workplace.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings from the data that directly aligned with the research questions of the study. Several areas were explored and presented to illustrate how the participants experience work, learning, and development. Participants also disclosed experiences that relate to how they perceived themselves, their employee network, their employers, colleagues, and others, in relation to learning and development. The next chapter will submit an interpretation and discussion of the findings.

Chapter 5: Critical Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This chapter will present a critical interpretation and discussion of the findings in the previous chapter. By recalling and reflecting on their experience, the following text will point out how the participants demonstrated a post-racial society is currently non-existent through their experience of consciously acknowledging race during their effort to develop and navigate their role as a Black professional. As a result, this chapter will also highlight aspects of their lived experience that is supported by critical race theory. Therefore, principles of CRT will be used to help interpret and discuss the findings.

In Figure ii, an illustration is presented of four parts of a circle that each represent a core discussion of this chapter that is informed by the research findings and critical analysis of the data. Collectively, each of the four pieces (discussions) demonstrate how the research findings support the race-based philosophies within CRT.

Double-consciousness

While describing how their experience is relatively different from their White colleagues, race was a divisive factor. The pressure to excel and perform well was illustrated through the theme *the tenacity of the outlier*. When participants explained why they place such a high emphasis on their showmanship and value proposition, they understood their position as an individual hoping to gain respect and acceptance from their White colleagues. When coupled with the participants' hyperawareness of social inequalities at work, the concept of double-consciousness became clear. W.E.B. Dubois was the first to introduce the term in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. He described double-

consciousness as a strategy used by Blacks who practice a dual understanding of their perspective, as well as the perspective of their White counter-parts. DuBois (1903) said:

One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder... He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of White Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (p. 2-3).

Each participant in the study spoke about the crossing of their identity of being Black and a professional. They illustrated an affection for both roles. At no point during an interview, a participant made a notion to choose between the two roles. Instead, they focused on how to maintain their roles. The tribulations and inequalities they noticed along their professional journey was an application of their double-consciousness. The ability to acknowledge White privilege, maintain a secure distance, overcome internal racism, call out double-standards, and cause disruption are all indication the participants understand the nature of their predicament as an individual who will always be viewed differently and see things differently.

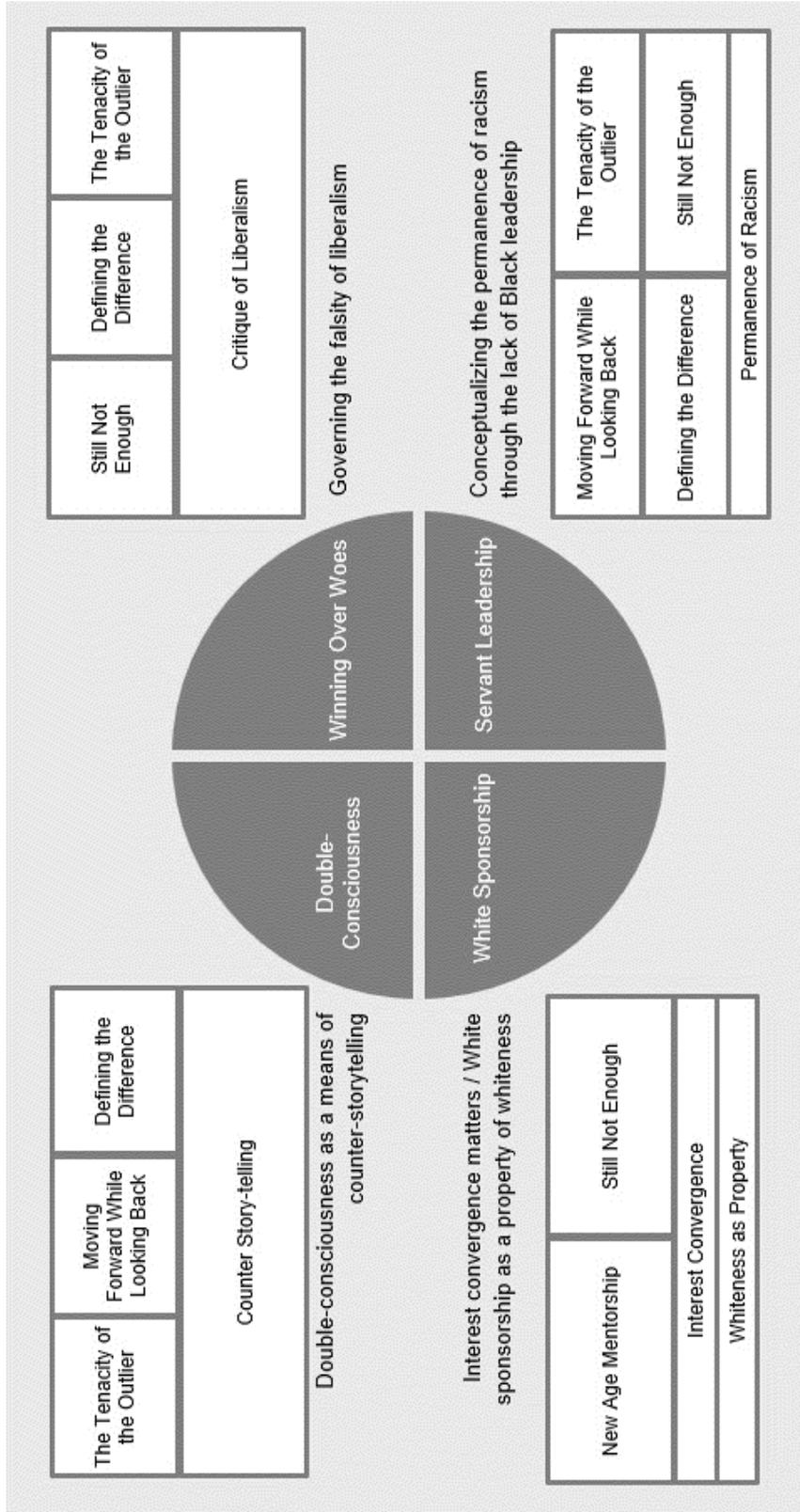


Figure ii. Theoretical Framework of Critical Interpretation and Discussion of Findings. This figure outlines how the findings guide the critical interpretation and discussion using CRT as a theoretical lens.

Yet, they have decided to concede to the demands of both roles, with the potential to be rejected by both their White colleagues and their respective Black community. Ralph Ellison (1952), a Black poet and scholar who talked about this circumstance in his book titled *Invisible Man* said, "...it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me" (p. 3). Similar to the participants, the author described the feeling of not being seen outside his Black exterior. This helps explain why the participants have shown a conscious effort to be authentic to the best of their ability, while acknowledging other Black professionals choose not to wear their Blackness to the same degree, and also recognizing their non-Black colleagues may see a fictitious idea of who they are and what they represent. In the face of this dilemma, the participants in the study have opted to be affiliated with both groups in a visible and direct approach.

The struggle to serve "two masters" as described by Derrick Bell (1976) is known to be an experience that is oddly set between the stark line of the oppressed (Black) and the oppressors (White). The participants demonstrate this experience is not isolated to Bell's observation in law. The participants described how they adhere to the challenges in corporate America, while also confronting the challenges in their Black community. The diverse accounts of how each participant balanced these two agendas also carried different weight. The level of involvement in their Black employee network seemed to be a bridge to connect their professional goals and community service. However, Bell questioned the sustainability of managing to distinct agendas when he referred to a

biblical text that says: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other” (Luke 16:13, King James Version as cited in Bell, 1976, p. 472). When I prompted participants to reflect on the fluidity of having more allegiance to their job or community, their Black identity maintained a constant presence as they referred to their experiences within and outside of work, except for Lena. She said, “I’ve always not been in a good place with it. I think to be Black and to be successful is a constant battle.” This comment, and similar statements drew attention to Lena’s connection to being Black. Her struggle to find a place of convergence may stem from her distance with the Black community. Her orientation to being Black seemed to be through a secondary experience, because her early memories of community and identity development was established with her affluent, White, adopted family. Other participants associated their Blackness with the experience of overcoming both social and economic struggles. They described their upbringing as humble beginnings, and they mentioned people within their family, and Black historical and contemporary figures who have indirectly and directly contributed to their success. Understanding the undefined yet apparent difference between Lena and the other participants might serve as the foundation for another study.

Double-consciousness as a means to counter story-telling. The ability to activate a double-consciousness allowed the participants to paint a meaningful and vivid account of resilience and ambition for a more equitable future. Learning how the Black professionals in the study navigate through a predominately White workplace provided insight to how they deal with modern racism, while attempting to stay strong in their

Blackness. Acknowledging the participants experience and learning how to create a better lived experience for aspiring Black professionals is a contribution to Black liberation. Each participant executed the skill of articulating their emotions, reactions, and reflections to their position as the outlier. This idea was also illustrated when some of the participants described their employee network. The employee networks created time and space to reveal their stories of minimization and exclusion to those who share similar experiences. The collection of their shared experience appears to be a powerful and necessary form of counter story-telling to help make positive changes in their workplace and Black community.

White Sponsorship

Life-long learning and development was important to each participant. When they described the strategies and resources used to address problems at work or seek new information, they mentioned their network. There was also a distinction of who to seek advice from, depending on the issue. For issues directly related to tasks or working with people within their team, the participants said they commonly refer to their supervisor. In regard to issues that concern their personal or professional development, they sought guidance from their mentors. However, the availability of mentors seemed to be an occasional issue. Dana expressed this concern when she said, “Most of them [supervisors] are pretty accessible. Very walk-in and open-door policy. Mentors - they are not as accessible.” In turn, she described the benefits of White mentorships, which provides the prospects of learning from a different perspective and gaining potential social ties to a White network. Other participants qualified the importance of having a

connection to their White colleagues, and James further explained the support of Whites has ironically been a part of Black progress throughout Black history.

Moreover, the role of a sponsor was also discussed, which Dana described as a person who is not expected to be accessible or assist with developing skills, instead they help create opportunities. She said, “the goal is to make sure they are talking about you and your good work, even when you are not in the room.” The role of a sponsor became more clear when James explained how executive sponsors endorse the agenda of employee networks within his organization. The idea of a sponsor became more intriguing when participants noted most of their direct supervisors have been White, and their executive sponsors have also been White. Lamar added that he believes, “a lot of people, a lot of White men and women out there have never had a Black manager or took direction at work from anyone Black.” A few of the participants talked about initiatives in their organization to actively change the representation of leadership. Lena mentioned her employer realized “...they can't just have a whole bunch of White men up there [in leadership] anymore.” If these things are true, it causes reason to pause and acknowledge: (1) *why at this point, Black representation in leadership is an ongoing issue*, and (2) *why White sponsorship is needed to support Black professionals who seek leadership positions?*

Interest convergence matters. To understand why companies are still struggling to place Black professionals in leadership positions, it is first important to keep in mind the concept of interest convergence. As one of the core beliefs of CRT, interest

convergence maintains when Blacks work together to overcome barriers that are unique to their Black experience, history shows minimal reception to their movement, unless Blacks rally for universal injustices that can help other minorities (Taylor, 1999). This appears to be the circumstance with Black professionals. Although Blacks have always questioned and identified barriers to achieving high ranking positions (Walker, 2009), this issue remained (and may potentially remain) idle. The new wave of attention and call to action for equality from the 2017 Women's Movement might have reactivated consideration for minorities in leadership. Each participant identified the women's employee network as the leading minority group in their organization. Some of the participants explained the women's group prioritizes leadership as the main objective as their shared interest. If this is the case, the interest of the women's employee networks maybe more appealing to leadership because they are within the same social network as the leaders of the organization. This can be explained by looking at both race and gender.

The women's employee network is not solely defined by gender. Although women from all races and creeds qualify to be a member of the women's group, White women make up majority of the group (Edmondson-Bell & Nkomo, 2003), which means they have privilege through their connection to Whiteness. They are a group that has influence and connection to the leaders within the organizations. Hence, White women are inherently within the social network of men who hold leadership positions, because they are the mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and neighbors who share a direct and indirect connection to men who inform, steer, and approve policies and initiatives (Sisco

& Collins, 2018). Thus, it seems the women's employee networks aspire to extend their privilege to share social *and* professional ties to the leaders within their organization.

Other minority groups also follow a similar pattern, as James explained, "one could say the women employee research groups is typically White, one could say the LGBT community is mostly White men driven, and even the veteran group, one would say that's really more of a White group." Because of this diluted version of diversity, being a minority places Blacks at the end of the priority list. Therefore, I suspect the representation of Black leadership in corporate America will continue to be an issue, unless they are granted access to White social and professional networks. Other studies had suspected the same outcome. Nason (1976) alluded to the same dilemma of Black mobility in management. His study illustrated that education and management experience were the reason Black leadership positions in corporate settings were between very few and vacant. His research exposed that white organizations considered Black employee's unfit for the rigors of management positions. In response to his findings and white organizations, Nason (1976) proposed organizations take the initiative to become more involved in this issue by creating intentional transition programs that consider the deprivation of opportunities for Blacks to foster business leadership skills through graduate education or learn business etiquette from their local Black communities. Based on this study, the need for Black employee networks is different from other groups who have been traditionally connected to privileges, such as graduate education and sustainable businesses. Despite this reality, Blacks continue to become lost in the

contexts and discussion of diversity, which makes their efforts to empower the Black community vulnerable to empower other groups who have White representation.

The theory of interest convergence reminds us that although it is necessary for Blacks to work for respect, equity, and equal opportunity, their cause will only gain traction when they are supported by Whites who have shared interests. Since the employee networks have a shared interest of leadership and promotion, which have limited capacity, the employee networks have competing agendas. Through this line of reasoning, it appears the employee networks are focused on achieving the same goal, but only for the members within their respective group. Therefore, the Black employee network does not have the support of interest convergence, which may explain why diverse representation does not always include Black professionals in leadership.

White sponsorship as a property of Whiteness. The philosophy that supports Whiteness as property can answer the second question: *why White sponsorship is needed to support Black professionals who seek leadership positions?* As a component of CRT, Whiteness as property was originated from a legal perspective. Harris (1993) explained the term was “initially constructed as a form of racial identity, evolved into a form of property... [which] Whiteness became the basis of racialized privilege – a type of status in which White racial identity provided the basis for allocating societal benefits” (p. 1710). In an American context, the way Whites have the ability to marginalize and exclude people of color has been demonstrated throughout the course of history in the form of racism. The persistence of racism provides reason to acknowledge that Whiteness

as a property operates in various spaces, including the workplace. The research and discourse concerning Whiteness as property depicts how it is used to preserve social and institutional racism and maintain socioeconomic disparities between Whites and non-Whites (Blanchett, 2006; Pulido, 2002). Others have identified how Whiteness can be used to support the advancement of non-Whites by sharing their White privilege (Kendall, 2012). This discussion helps understand the relationship between Whiteness as a property and White sponsorship, which has the potential to be misunderstood as an act of sharing privileges of power and influence with non-Whites. The subsequent examples provide additional clarification.

James and Dana referenced White mentorship and executive sponsorship to describe how they receive support from their organization. James' description of how executives are assigned to sponsor employee networks in his organization presents a deliberate intent to connect upper management with minorities within the company. He disclosed his Black employee network is connected to a White executive to sponsor their group. In this example, the relationship is an opportunity for the group's White executive sponsor to use his Whiteness of authority and influence to endorse the agenda of the Black employee network. But, it also provides opportunity for the White executive to fulfill diversity and inclusion expectations for the organization. The same applies at an individual level with a mentorship relationship between a Black professional and a White mentor, as described by Dana. White mentors can use the relationship as an opportunity to share their experience and networks from what they acquired through their White privilege of access and inclusion. However, White mentors may not be intrinsically

inclined to acquire non-White mentees, if diversity and inclusion was not a growing core value in current business practices. Companies have steadily identified diversity and inclusion as an area that requires additional attention and resources to fit a more pluralistic society (Madera, 2013). Therefore, although Black professionals can benefit from the sponsorship and mentorship of Whites, it is important to realize social and organizational expectations have been established to fulfill diversity and inclusion initiatives, which places Whites in a position to seek opportunities to engage with people of color to fulfill their responsibility to diversity and inclusion, as it varies by each organization. In this example, the White executive and White mentor benefit from participating in diversity and inclusion initiatives. So, although it may appear the White executive and White mentor are invested in the advancement of Black professionals, and they have the capacity to place Black professionals in a position of leadership, a void still remains for Black leadership in Corporate America. As a result, the sincerity and intentionality of White sponsorship is questionable, and points to the potential commodification of diversity and inclusion efforts.

Winning Over Woes

Unlike the academic freedom to explore an experience or expose truth, professions outside of education are not always awarded the same autonomy. Throughout the study the participants described their limitations of displaying their frustrations at work. They referred to the “political correctness” of navigating corporate America. The participants seemed to understand and actively practice separating the discontent of their circumstances, while emanating a progressive and prideful aura about their work. This

was true when the discussion shifted between their work performance, interactions at work, and their assessment of being a Black professional. This shift was illustrated when the participants shared negative connotations of their experience and thoughts at work through the themes *still not enough* and *defining the difference*, after they shared their work experience in the theme *the tenacity of the outlier*, which exuded a much more positive and unrelenting energy. There was a clear divide between what they described as their woes and wins. In this case, the woes were the struggles of being Black in a career that is historically and presently known to discriminate and exclude Blacks. Conversely, their wins manifested in taking pride in their ability to overcome sociopolitical and economic conditions that were not in favor for Black professionals to be successful.

Governing the falsity of liberalism. I also commended the participants' success, but I was more enticed by understanding how they overcame the odds of gaining entry into an elite career field. I wanted to know how they managed to be Black professionals in a time when a large majority of Blacks have been impounded to poverty, uneducated, underemployed, unemployed, and (mentally and physically) incarcerated in a society dominated by White privilege. Each of the participants also acknowledged the significance of their presence in a predominately White career field. They paid homage to Black historical and political figures who have cultivated their definition and salience of being Black. From my perspective, in a position to witness the conviction of their words and experience the power of their testimony, I believe their conceptualization of being Black has shaped their spirit to rise above the undying recession felt by Blacks in

America. In a land where liberty and justice are led by equality and freedom, it appeared the participants in the study understood the falsity of liberation promised to all citizens.

The concept of fairness and liberty extended to all citizens of the United States remains a relevant topic. Bell (1976) described a failed system of liberalism through his critique of America's promise of meritocracy. He explained Blacks have always been pressed to defend their right to hold the same opportunities and impartiality as Whites. His acquisitions have been met with criticism by both White and Black scholars. Pyle (1998) contested Bell's race-based theory as an attack on liberty, and a counter-action to healing race relations between Whites and Blacks. Yet, Bell's (1976) critique of liberalism is more than a critical analysis of the American legal and social justice system. He presents a warning. The implications of an unjust system that falsely portrays equality is a menace to society. However, this danger is overwhelmingly grieved by those who are distant from Whiteness due to the denial of freedom, education, and the agency of humanism. Even in our modern era of technical advancement and individualism, Lamar explained how the incredible power of race-based intolerance can still become a self-destructing force through internalized racism.

Servant Leadership

Leadership was a theme that took the shape of many forms. Participants described their relationship with the leaders of their organizations, and they expressed their ambitions to develop their leadership skills. Another perception of leadership was also discussed. In the theme, *moving ahead while looking back*, the Black professionals in the

study explained how they guide the development of others, and the people within their community. The willingness to support and guide others while they are still in the process of reaching their own goals was very telling of their character. As the participants disclosed their professional and personal goals, I felt and witnessed the depth of their conviction to think beyond their individual and immediate goals. The participants described their Black employee network as an energizing and brave space to focus on their professional and social interests (see Table iii), as they received support and guidance from other Black employees. As they depicted their experience, referenced their Black ancestry, and described the depravity of present-day racism, the participants spoke about change. They spoke more specifically about their responsibility to contribute to the betterment of the Black experience. This type of leadership is reflective of servant leadership.

Greenleaf (1998) is known for introducing the theory of servant leadership. Through a series of essays, he explained how he understood leaders embody different types of leadership styles, and from his observations he understood how individuals, like the term suggest, can commit to serving and leading at the same time. He drew from his experience as an executive in research management. He said, “one cannot be hopeful, it seems to me, unless one accepts and believes that one can live productively in the world as it is – striving, violent, unjust, as well beautiful, caring, and supportive” (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 21). From my assessment, this philosophy appeared to describe the mentality of the participants in the study. They spoke about achieving their professional goals, and they also mentioned potential barriers to achieve success. While recounting their

experience *traversing through hope and fear*, they demonstrated qualities to help them navigate the inner-workings of two worlds. Many of those qualities relate directly to servant leadership. Based on writings from Greenleaf, Northouse (2010) devised a collection of attributes to describe servant leaders: (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship (9), commitment to the growth of people, and (10) building community (p. 221 -223). Each of the qualities were validated by the participants in the study at some point (see Table iv), but, neither of the participants exhibited all ten qualities. The concept of servant leadership became evident after collecting majority of the data. In retrospect, the participants' experience with each of the ten qualities may have reached a greater level of profundity, if servant leadership was a leading supposition or preliminary theme.

Through the revelations signified in the first theme, *the tenacity of the outlier*, the participants spoke from a point of view that accounted for different angles to “conceptualize” how their actions impact more than their livelihood. The participants described a vision to contribute to two movements: (1) the progress of Black professionals within their organization, and (2) the mission to promote peace and prosperity within the Black community. These two movements conceptualized their local and broader goals to guide their practice as Black professionals, which included thinking beyond their individual gains and understanding the impact of their actions. Thus, conceptualization emerged as a leading quality of servant leadership among each of the Black professionals in the study.

However, Lena warrants additional consideration. Although she provided extensive conversation about the unfortunate state of the Black community, her commentary was more so an observation, rather than taking on the role of a change agent. But, Lena did indicate her concern for the future of her young child who she believes will be subjected to the scrutiny of being Black. She explained her investment in the Black

Table iv

Characteristics of Servant Leadership Demonstrated by Participants

SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	CHARACTERISTIC DEFINITIONS	PARTICIPATIONS' EXAMPLES
LISTENING	Communicate by listening first	<i>“being in the know is important outside of what the newspapers print”</i>
EMPATHY	Seeing the world from another view	<i>“as a Black man, I work for all those things, and for the people who made a way for me to be here, for the people who did not get chosen because of their dreadlocks, for the Black kid at school who needs to see the poster of the Black man in the suit, and for my brothers who refuse to wear a suit”</i>
HEALING	Helping followers overcome personal problems	<i>“Help students understand we are good enough to excel in an education system that may not be set up for us”</i>
AWARENESS	Attuned to their environment	<i>“We’re trying to learn how to get sponsorship and visibility from someone outside our circle”</i>

PERSUASION	Promote change gently	<i>“We're not the generation going to march out. We're about policy changes through procedure”</i>
CONCEPTUALIZATION	Ability to see the big picture	<i>“You think a little bit bigger than your current role and you want to think about how the things that you're doing each and every day contribute to the bottom line in business, to be profitable, to make money, and to create jobs for large groups of people”</i>
FORESIGHT	The ability to know the future and plan ahead	<i>“... you just make sure to continuously learn, so that you're always ahead of the curve, so that you always have something to offer, so that you're anticipating the business needs, more so than other people</i>
STEWARDSHIP	Taking responsibility for others and the greater good	<i>“I want them to think of me being synonymous with a hard-worker... that's how I strive to represent my community”</i>
COMMITMENT TO THE GROWTH OF PEOPLE	Helping each person grow personally and professionally	<i>“...for those of us that are in corporate America and have had some level of success, we should be making sure that we're sharing that information with others”</i>
BUILDING COMMUNITY	Foster a safe and cohesive environment	<i>“making sure managers are held accountable to the diversity, their D&I roles and responsibilities, and the [diversity] numbers that the organization has as a whole”</i>

Table iv. *Characteristics of Servant Leadership Demonstrated by Participants.*

This table list and define characteristics of servant leadership defined by Northouse

(2010). Examples of how participants practiced servant leadership characteristics are also presented in the table.

community is demanding a brighter future for her child, by vocalizing inequality and mistreat against Blacks. Despite Lena's local frame of reference, she acknowledged the adversity and misfortune of the Black community, along with the other participants. They shared the consensus Black professionals and the Black community are still lacking the support and access needed to achieve greater heights.

Conceptualizing the permanence of racism through Black leadership. When the participants were asked to disclose the initiatives in their respective Black employee network, they mentioned ways to accomplish the same success as their White counterparts (see Table iii). They discussed the need to make intentional efforts to achieve their goals through recruitment, retention, and development. Based on the scarce number of Black upper management and executive roles (Walker, 2009), it seemed their intervention and call to action is necessary to extend leadership opportunities to Black professionals. They also identified obstacles to secure positions of authority and influence within the theme *defining the difference*. Through their experience of feeling discounted and marginalized, the participants referred to social inequalities such as White privilege and double standards that interfere with the progress of Black professionals. Yet, each of the participants shared examples within their organization of at least one Black professional who has reached a notable level of success. However, they shared a similar sentiment that a handful of select Black professionals in leadership is *still not enough*, as

suggested in the theme. Being a Black professional appeared to be a difficult position that is met with unwarranted, but forewarned barriers to achieve the same success as their White colleagues. Lena supported this assumption when she said, “I think to be Black and to be successful is a constant battle.” This particular statement, although disconcerting and opaque, shares a resemblance to the philosophy that explains the permanence of racism.

The permanence of racism is another feature of CRT that is indicative of its title. In his book “Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism”, author Derrick Bell (2008) characterized racism as a natural function that “stabilizes” and reinforces White superiority. Focusing primarily on the unique history of African American slavery, Bell (1976) explained how Whites used their Whiteness as buying power to initially claim property, but more recently to proclaim their authority to secure anything of value. Other Black scholars have contributed to this theory by articulating how racism is inherently woven into the historical, political, and social systems in American culture (Davis, 2012; Cortina, 2008; Cox, 2010; Crenshaw, 1988). From this proposition, I surmise the pervasiveness of racism can be aggressive, passive, unintentional, deliberate, undetected, and/or ignored, whichever degree of severity, racism was, is, and will always be a point of consideration. As a dominating enterprise during the origin of the United States, race and racism is central to how property, influence, value, and authority is presently distributed, despite the ongoing progress toward an inclusive and just society. I explained this to underscore Lena’s comment about the struggle to be Black and successful. The organizations that employ Black

professionals are not exempt from harvesting policies, people, and cultures that perpetuate racism. However, they are expected to work toward a more equitable society that does not give raise to White superiority. Black employee networks provide a platform to confront and minimize the practice of racism. According to the participants' issues with Black representation in leadership, and based on the ideals concerning the pervasiveness of racism, there is reason to suspect an unbalanced distribution of authority and influence in Corporate America is a form (and consequence) of racism.

Summary

This chapter discussed how the participants in this study encounter a variety of issues and circumstances as a Black professional connected to a Black employee network. By focusing on their identity and development, race was a dominant frame of reference. Tenets of critical race theory were used as the main platform to contextualize the findings to illustrate how race and racism are still relevant in Corporate America.

Chapter 6: Suggestions for Future Research, Limitations, and Conclusion

As the final installment, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the implications of the data and interpretations disclosed in the previous chapters. The final chapter also provides a reflection of the study by offering recommendations for HRD, discussing research limitations, and presenting a concluding statement to summarize the research project.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Topics involving the influence of social groups, collective emotionality, and workplace incivility emerged as insightful implications for theory and practice in organizational studies. Additional insights regarding participatory development led to suggestions for future research and practice specifically in HRD. The above topics have potential to expand our understanding and refine our practice as researchers and practitioners concerned with learning and development in organizations. The combination of social interests, learning, and development in the workplace is an idea that is relevant to both theory and practice, but under-utilized. The implications presented in this section examines how social interests can be connected to learning and development in the workplace.

Shifting the Weight of (Sub)Group Influence

Understanding how employers convince their employees to prioritize their investment of the organization over self-interest will maintain a relevant, yet mutable discussion in theory and practice. The leveling of hierarchies, the independence to work

from home, the increase in contingent and temporary assignments, and the fluidity of boundless careers challenges employers to consider their employees' investment in its organization (Polzer, Crips, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006). However, there is reason to believe the binary of self-interests and the interests of the organization is not exclusive. There are other interests to consider. Witt and Kerr (2002) explained conflict of interests can involve self-interests, (sub)group interests, and the collective (organizational) interests. The interplay between these three interests appeared within the study. The shared interest to invest in the learning and development of the Black community, positioned the group interests to parallel the participants' social interests. Ultimately, the participants demonstrated how their group (social) affiliation through their employee network posed an additional complexity to their relationship with their employer.

Based on the functions and outcomes described from the participants, the employee networks aid the interests of the members, while also serving the needs of the organization. The participants are given opportunities to make connections with leadership, develop their skills, and support their Black community outside the workplace (see table iii). The participants noted their employers anticipate a return on its investment through the retention and recruitment of Black professionals, yet this initiative inherently is an extension of the participants self and group interests. The dynamics depicted in the cross-section of interests places an emphasis on group interests. In this example, the group interests took the position as a shared interest between the employer and the employee. The participants' group (social) affiliation through their employee network presents the potential to leverage their self-interests. Contrarily, their employers'

presumably benefit from holding the members of the group accountable for the retention and recruitment of Black professionals. Furthermore, monetary contributions to employee networks to fund social interests within the Black community also positively support the organization's corporate social responsibility. This presumption is subject to more speculation, but poses implications to the relationship between group interest and organizational behavior. More specifically, this premise questions how social groups like employee networks inform organizational behavior.

The era of social influence. In organizational studies, a department, unit, or team represents the group as the unit of analysis, and the organization has influence of the content, process, and structure of the group (Phillips & Phillips, 2017). Although employee networks take the form of a group, it challenges traditional expectations of group dynamics and functions. From what the participants described, the members of the group create the content. The members follow the structure and processes necessary to establish and sustain the group, but they are tasked to develop an agenda concerning their own interests. They direct their own discussions and create their own initiatives. The autonomy within this space is unprecedented.

Employee networks expand the scope of influence to consider the interest of social groups within organizations. However, this emerging layer of influence should not arise as a surprise. Social network applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn have created a culture encouraged to speak out and respond to limitless issues that directly and indirectly impact the experience of their users (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010;

Park, 2009). Understanding how this social phenomenon appears at work is a growing interest in research. This study shows how employee networks are space for social interests to be displayed and advanced at work. Whether this assertion is conceivable, it is justifiable to consider how employee networks modify the conventional infrastructure of organizations. Understanding why some organizations choose to incorporate employee networks, and why others choose not to is also worth considering.

The Emotionality of Social Groups and Perceived Emotional Capital

Continuing with the focus of social groups in organizations, the emotionality of employee networks is considered in this section. Traditionally, research examining emotion typically focus on individuals, but the theoretical insights of Bourdieu have challenged disciplines to reconsider the scope of emotion (Zembylas, 2007). When identifying emotionality, it is important to recognize its utility to separate as well as unite individuals (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, emotions can be embodied by incorporeal entities, such as organizations and groups. For the purposes of this proposition, I claim social groups channel a collective emotion.

The participants in the study mentioned stereotypes attributed to Blacks, specifically Black professionals. The “mad Black woman” was mentioned on more than three occasions by Dana and Lena. Although the participants have different experiences and philosophies concerning their investment and connection to the Black community, they each acknowledged how they deliberately try not to fit the stereotype of the “mad Black woman” especially at work, and certainly when they are the only Black woman in

the conversation. James and Lamar also spoke candidly about the stigma associated with portraying anger as a Black man. They appeared to place a high emphasis on checking their emotions. Participants explained they do not want to represent the negative narratives they assume their non-Black colleagues have been socialized to believe. This intentional form of separation seemed to indicate a form of acceptability for the participants at work. The participants spoke about their ability to harness their emotion as if they were seen in a different light from Blacks who were unable to demonstrate emotional restraint. They believed their emotional sensibility to recognize their emotional display contributed to their emotional capital. Again, a perceived quality they assumed is desired by their non-Black colleagues.

Although the participants' explanation of their perceived emotional capital is logical and practical, I still question the need for Black professionals to conceal their emotions in fear of social stigmas. I am drawing attention to this issue because the valuation of emotional capital seems to have a greater level of scrutiny for Black professionals than their White colleagues. Cornelius (2016) shared a similar opinion, as illustrated in her study exploring the experience of Black men in corporate America. When discussing roadblocks to career development, one of the stereotypes attributed to Black men involved the subjectivity of human resources characterizing Black men as "arrogant", while renaming the same emotion as "confident" when describing White men. This example unearths how unchecked biases can prevent the career development and progress of Black men, while White men are rewarded for practicing the same emotional behavior. Thus, the perceived emotional capital of Black professionals appears

to be another necessary skill to consider, while White professionals have the privilege to think of emotions as simply feelings, as oppose to an invaluable source of social and professional capital. Understanding this unequal treatment is another illustration of how the binary between Whites and Blacks remains relevant and unbalanced. Ignoring emotionality and the value of emotional capital can potentially lead to misdirected energy to suspend or derange the progress of Black professionals.

Escaping Crab Mentality and Rejecting Black on Black Incivility

As more information is known about employee networks, multiple perspectives and opinions will naturally emerge. From what was revealed over the course of this study, there were several constructive qualities within the Black employee networks associated with the participants. The networks appeared as a positive approach to escape and reject aggressive and exclusionary workplace behaviors. Many of the findings and discussion highlighted how their group configured ways to create a better lived experience for its members and future cohorts of Black professionals. Opportunity, connection, and transformation were reoccurring topics of discussion shared by the participants. However, each participant acknowledged barriers connected to their development and the liberation of their community. As mentioned in previous chapters, the teachings of Bell's CRT identified external factors that interfere with the liberation of the Black community, but there are other critiques that look inward to understand why the plight of Blacks has not yet dissipated. A common theory that explains why Blacks encounter barriers to success points to itself – the Black community. This concept is

illustrated in many ways, but the philosophy of crab mentality accentuates how Blacks intentionally derail and inhibit one another's success.

The term, crab mentality, was initially referenced by the Filipino community. Similar to Blacks, Filipinos have a history of dislocation and slavery. Dy (1994) explained some Filipinos are still strained by colonization to the extent they define their culture and beliefs to be inferior to their colonizer, which is also known as colonial mentality. He further explained feelings of inferiority have negatively compromised the self-awareness and efficacy of Filipinos, which is exacerbated by the exclusion of those they find superior, who are their colonizers, most notably Whites. The timing and significance of these claims alludes to the preservation that colonial mentality exists in a post-colonial state. These prerogatives and similar forms of post-colonial distress help unpack reasons that cause internal conflict within disenfranchised communities. The concept of crab mentality recognizes how people of color can actively contribute to their tribulations as they impede the success of individuals who choose to escape their mental and circumstantial suffering. The crab analogy refers to when crabs in a barrel attempt to 'pull down' one another to climb out of the barrel. Bulloch (2017) provided three reasons why people revert to crab mentality:

Envy; as in a desire to ensure others are not doing better than oneself;
competitiveness, as in the efforts to try to better or even usurp someone else's
position; and burden, as in attempts to partake of another's success and thereby
diminish it. (p. 63)

Despite the reason people choose to practice crab mentality, it creates obstruction to adversity by redirecting the focus of progress, a central interest for communities of color. Unfortunately, crab mentality is well-known in the Black community, and those who partake in this form of destruction are informally known as “haters”, and they are present in an array of different groups of Black people. Pegues (2018) explained how these individuals appear as Black professionals in his study titled “Professional and Petty: An investigation into the Social and Individual Conditions that Promote Instigated Acts of Workplace Incivility Between Black Professionals.” In a mixed methods investigation of Black-on-Black (B-o-B) workplace incivility, Pegues (2018) took a social-interactionist approach to look at work climate, emotional taxation, and perceived threats in work group composition. From his sample of 523 full-time Black professionals, he found ten primary reasons that Blacks admitted to practicing social exclusion, gossiping behaviors, interpersonal hostility, and/or privacy invasion. Pegues (2018) identified deep interpersonal conflict as the leading motivation of B-o-B workplace incivility that was motivated by a perceived collective minority threat and prior experience with uncivil work encounters. The results of this study exposed how Black professionals can hinder the success of other Black professionals, which shows a different aspect of the experience of Black professionals in my present research, with a few exceptions.

The participants in the current study disclosed they have witnessed (and in Lena’s case has occasionally acted as) a Black professional who has made a conscious effort to separate themselves from other Black professionals, which is an act of social exclusion. This subtle, yet meaningful observation generated reason to consider the implication of

intergroup conflict. Based on Pegues's theoretical and empirical evidence of B-o-B, the constitution of employee networks present prospects to address and dismantle internal group conflicts. As members of Black employee networks, Black professionals are stewards of the Black professional community and should establish a commitment to challenge one another to invest in the collective group interests, as they develop individually. Discussions and practice in diversity and inclusion could benefit from understanding the psychology that perpetuates B-o-B incivility. Understanding these complications might be especially helpful to those who are not a member of the Black community, but are tasked to confront personnel conflicts between Black professionals. Aside from simply identifying B-o-B, organizations can help resolve this workplace and social issue by ensuring Black representation is positively distributed at each level. Marx, Stapel, and Muller (2015) explained minorities can feel empowered and less consumed by collective minority threat when they see other individuals in their group are regarded as successful, which eases self-imposed pressure for them to represent success for their group. Discovering these personal and private complexities further advocates for Black leadership in corporate America. Employee networks are well positioned to adopt this initiative as a call to action in their organization.

Implications for HRD: Transforming Social Interests into Social Action Through Participatory Development

Through in-depth dialogue and critical reflection, this study learns employee networks provide space for social interests at work. Understanding how the participants' social interests are transformed into actionable items was also discussed. Through the

process of learning the experience of the Black professionals in the study, I acknowledged there is opportunity to enhance the process to transform their social interests into social action. Subsequently, I suggest we can learn more about how individuals and groups develop by understanding this process. I further contend applied fields that focus on the development and learning of organizations have the potential to strengthen the effectiveness of employee networks through the lens of *participatory development*. As a discipline that develops competencies to direct the learning and development of organizations, human resource development has influence to guide the practice of organizations, and thereby, contribute to social action at work.

Focusing on individual and group learning challenges popular thinking in HRD. HRD has grown accustomed to primarily concentrating on executive and organizational development (Dixon, 1992). As a consequence, HRD has become distant from internal issues that are more closely aligned with the practice of learning and development in organizations. Research regarding social interests, social justice, social action, and forms of non-traditional and social learning are breaking ground in the field (Bernier & Rocco, 2003; Byrd, 2007; Collins, 2012), but this genre of scholarship is often considered critical or divergent from the objective of HRD. However, the reality reflects a different narrative. HRD has been slow to realize our society (in the United States) has always encountered issues involving inequity and discrimination against minorities, and more importantly, these imperfections have always appeared in organizations with people of color. More specifically, these social imperfections have appeared at work and have traditionally been ignored in HRD research. Since HRD theory has strong connections

with high level organizational training and development, it failed to capture the growing movement of employee networks, which focuses on both individual, groups, and other unpopular areas of research, such as race, racism, and social interests. Githens and Aragon (2009) presented an exception with their research examining LGBT employee networks. The current study is an additional effort to explore how employee networks have multiple levels of influence within and outside organizations. To engage HRD in this conversation, the topic of interest can be restated as the following: Transforming social interests into social action through participatory development at work.

Participatory Development

Why do individuals participate in collective forms of development? This question draws attention to the outcome of participatory development (PD), and has more than one response. There are two areas of discussion that use PD for difference objectives. The first area of discussion places an institutional approach to participatory development. Cornwell (2003) explained people collectively develop in a group to invest in the effectiveness and efficiency of a particular program or project. The second frame of reference is used as a “process of empowerment”, primarily exercised by social groups with a history of exclusion. In both cases, the involvement of the beneficiaries is deemed a necessary feature of participatory development. Each perspective also encourages participants to think beyond their direct impact of the outcome. Yet, the second approach shifts the subject of focus to include power, voice, rights, and agency (Cornwell, 2003). For this reason, PD is recognized as an alternative approach to “top-down” development initiatives.

Practice of participatory development. Following the civil rights movement of the 1960's, the reconfiguration of inclusivity demanded new programs and projects. People of color worked with government officials and agencies to dismantle color lines, and PD was largely used to include new perspectives into the restructuring of practices that previously excluded people of color (Brilliant, 2002). As a group invested in their development, these communities became learning environments that took the form of participatory action research (Freire, 1970). Participatory action research, and similar terms appear throughout the literature that represent the core meaning of PD, which is a group collaborating to push forward a shared agenda. Kyamusugulwa (2015) identified several other concepts that use PD in the context of social, political, or economic development such as: public participation, collective action, community-based participation, civil engagement, community-driven action, and others. Using the rehabilitation of African countries as an example, Kyamusugulwa (2015) further explained new waves of initiatives and reconstruction were expected to have “basic needs”, which require input from the local community.

- 1) Concrete Approach
- 2) Strong Leadership and Identity
- 3) Space for Dialogue

Effective participatory development strategies. In the process of surveying the literature and practice of participatory development, Kyamusugulwa (2015) reviewed effective strategies in PD essential to fulfill the group's objective(s). Concrete approach,

appropriate leadership, and space for dialogue were acknowledged as leading PD techniques.

Kyamusugulwa's assessment of the leading best practices in PD are straightforward, but requires diligence and tactic. I expand on his ideas to illustrate their impact, beginning with the first factor, establishing a concrete approach. Solidifying a concrete approach sets the foundation for social action. A concrete agenda should clearly articulate any submission of change. The group should be prepared to explain the reason for their request, and have suggestions for change moving forward. The clarity, conviction, and specificity in the group's initiative will influence stakeholders' receptivity and investment in the group. The subsequent strategy, appointing strong leadership and collective identity, is also important. The group should aim to ensure they share the same goal, and elect a member who represents and communicates their vision consistently and effectively. Kyamusugulwa (2015) further explained that "a small and homogenous group has a better chance of success than a heterogeneous one" (p. 1268-1269). A strong front of solidity sends a pressing message. Maintaining harmony and order within the group is necessary to push through inevitable obstacles that challenge the group to reaffirm their purpose, and potentially restructure their approach.

The third strategy, space for dialogue, takes the form of multiple spaces. The group should have a space that is free from distraction or surveillance to hold honest and open discussion. The group also needs designated space for mutuality to negotiate terms and propositions. Kyamusugulwa (2015) mentioned there is often a person or agency

meditating agreements between the group and the higher authority. Being able to have clear lines of communication can minimize distorted messages, and abate uninvited influences that misguide the group's message. Thus, space for dialogue should not be overlooked and appointed as a place of convenience.

Each of the listed strategies were faintly referenced by the participants in the study. They spoke about the purpose and outcome of the group, but none of the participants identified their strategy as a best practice. Having a direct approach through PD demonstrates how technique and skill are needed to lead change initiatives. HRD theory and practice is equipped to support social action through participatory development, in a parallel fashion to organizational, group, professional, and career development. HRD has the capacity to determine how individuals collectively work together to fulfill their social interests, while also adhering to their responsibility as an employee. Choguill (1996) can help aid this initiative with his theory on how underdeveloped communities develop through participation. His research concerning participation is focused on the process needed to build relationships with decision-makers to support communities, which he depicts in a figure called the *Ladder of Participation for Underdeveloped Countries*, which is inspired by Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* that described the involvement of citizens working with government to plan policies and initiatives.

Other images have been adapted to reflect how different circumstances and stakeholders convene to address community-based problems (Pretty, 2015). One of the

latest revisions to the ladder of participation fits the current participatory development discussion. Seven levels of participatory development are illustrated by Basco-Carrera, Warren, van Beek, Jonoski, and Giandino (2017) that closely align with phases relevant to employee networks and organizations building rapport and exchanging knowledge to fulfill the social interests of the group. The adaption of both constructions of participation originally inspired by Arnstein (1969) is proposed and presented in a *Pyramid of Social Group Participation*, which includes seven steps: ignorance, awareness, discussion, consultation, conciliation, partnership, and empowerment (see Figure iii).

In the *Pyramid of Social Group Participation*, each of the seven steps are listed on the pyramid to depict each level of participation between social groups and the executive leaders in an organization, which is measured by a spectrum of support. The measure of support ranges from no support to high support, with the highest level representing the empowerment of the group to be supported and become members of the executive leadership team in their organization. The model implies the goal for both parties, the social group and executive leaders, is to reach the top of the pyramid, if they aspire to support one another and develop their relationship through active participation. However, the model is depicted as an evaluation of the executive leader's participation and support. The levels in-between the bottom and top of the pyramid identify potential barriers to progressing through each level of participation and degree of support. Choguill's (1996) definition of neglect, rejection, manipulation, and support were used to explain the different steps on the pyramid, which were fused with Basco-Carrera's and

others (2017) representation of collaborative participation. The combination of the two models were further adapted to accommodate an organizational context.

Pyramid of social group participation. I created the *Pyramid of Social Group Participation* to help identify the level of support social groups receive and aim to obtain from the executive leaders of their respective organization. The broad terminology used in the model provides opportunities to apply this approach in traditional and non-traditional organizations, such as the workplace, government entities, and self-guided community-based organizations. The model can assist groups navigate conversations and conduct research to plan their development. By adopting participatory development as another lens to understand group and social learning, HRD can support social groups with this radical and informal approach to learning, as well as advise executive leaders on how to authentically engage with social groups and their interests.

As an instrument that depicts the trajectory of progress between social groups and the leaders within their organization, the *Pyramid of Social Group Participation* is a process that needs to be cultivated. Thus, the model places social groups in a position to make executive leaders accountable for the lack of support and participation in the social interests and development of the group. The ability for a minority group to voice its critique within a hierarchal structure is essential to the liberation of the social group and its social agency to self-direct its own agenda, especially for racial minorities (Brewer, 2006). Henceforth, moving through different stages of the model may require consultation and assessment from external actors, such as human resource development

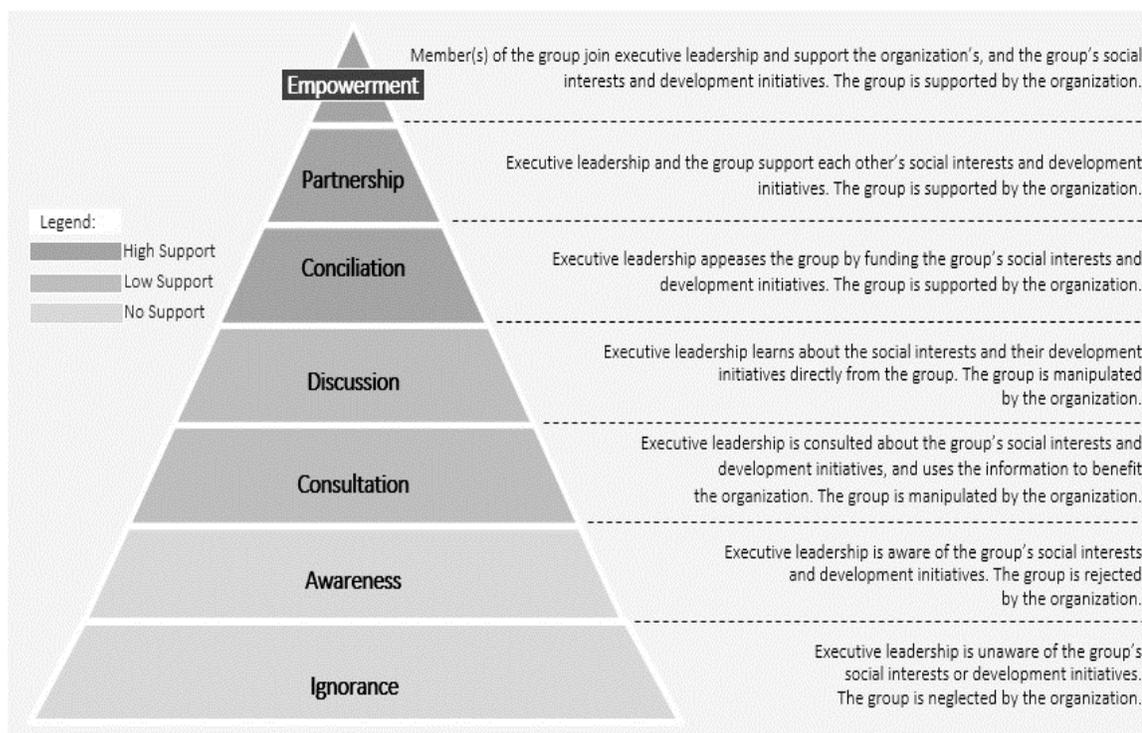


Figure vi. The Pyramid of Social Group Participation. The pyramid is adapted from Choguill (1996) and Basco-Carrera, Warren, van Beek, Jonoski, Giardino (2017) who were both inspired by Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation*. The illustration reviews different stages of support and participation between executive leaders and social groups.

professionals. Through this capacity HRD can exercise its own social agency, and have a better understanding of how learning is fostered through a bottom-up approach. The progressive and influential context of empowerment within the model can also be an effective organizational change and development tool. HRD can benefit from more practices that provide concrete materials to address and inform diversity and inclusion

issues in organizations (Ferdman, 2014; Wasserman, 2015). Ultimately, this model can serve as a participatory development method to help bridge the current distance between HRD, social interests, and social action within traditional and non-traditional organizations.

Recommendations for Human Resource Development

In order to be a more inclusive field, HRD should seek ways to explore its application. As a broadly defined discipline that finds itself stuck in a limited frame, HRD can do more for different people, in different contexts, for a variety of reasons. The instability of HRD has left pathways for ambiguity and indecision to build on loose ground. This insecurity has impeded the progress and flexibility to expand. As a result, HRD is being heavily led by ideas and practices outside the field, and HRD has occasionally become reactive to learning and development in organizations. Employee networks reflects the gap between HRD theory and practice. The field must determine how to reposition itself to be an invaluable asset to any gathering of people invested in their training, learning, and development. HRD can begin by recognizing its social agency and its potential role in social movements through multiple perspectives and experiences.

Social Agency in Human Resource Development

Laird (2010) described social agency as “the belief that it is important to take action to improve society and work for social justice. It highlights the value one places on activities like helping others in difficulty and doing community work” (p. 368). If this is

true, social agency invites individuals to think critically about issues impacting their morality and experience. Thus, people have a disposition to think about their needs, and how their needs are being met. Laird's definition emphasizes how this critical disposition is not constricted to self-interests, but it also includes concern for the social interests of one's community. HRD can use this framework to further understand how learning and development is a collective investment within a group. Acknowledging how individuals within groups motivate one another's learning can help HRD identify how learning and development is led from a "bottom-up" approach.

Social Movement Learning in Human Resource Development

Contention between "top-down" and "bottom-up" initiatives take the form of many stagnate sociopolitical and economic issues. Understanding how individuals and groups demonstrate resistance to change led at the organizational level has positioned HRD to help facilitate learning, implement change, and restore equilibrium (Swanson & Holton, 2001). HRD can expand its ability to perform the same responsibility from the opposite direction. When groups and individuals propose initiatives of change, HRD can help facilitate learning at the executive level, implement change, and restore equilibrium. Some practitioners might argue HRD already assist with change from multiple levels, and others might even include outside perspectives by acknowledging how corporate social responsibilities address social issues. However, I recommend HRD can be more involved in social issues directly involving the members of their organization. Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other discriminatory practices deserve more attention. Understanding and explaining how to address these issues in organizations should be a

core function of HRD, and not considered an alternative interpretation of the field and its value to organizational learning, training, and development.

Embracing the importance of social agency and social movement learning will most likely prompt additional changes in HRD. These concepts are connected to power and politics, which are topics rarely mentioned within the foundational literature of the field. However, the current social climate has placed pressure on organizations to identify their support for social causes, so it has become common practice for companies to identify their alliances and support (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). While some companies choose to maximize their return on investment for participating in social causes (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010), HRD can set standards for organizations that choose not to neglect social causes or disingenuously support social movements. Along the same lines, HRD can help establish a social climate in organizations where their members and employees are not expected to conceal or ignore the social injustices experienced in their community. Employee networks can help organizations achieve these goals. Therefore, HRD must continue to understand how social interests and social action are relevant to learning and development in organizations. Further research and discussion are needed to consider how these propositions fit the future direction of HRD.

Limitations

The participants' privacy and variance of experience regulated what was presented in the findings. The participants trusted my judgement not to reveal any information that would identify their employer or any member representing their

organization. However, the participants referenced situations and conflicts that directly responded to the research questions, but was too revealing. The data only reflects what secures the confidentiality of the participants, their employee networks, and their employers.

In regard to variance, there were noticeable differences in the participants' employee networks. The participants described different purposes for joining the group, different objectives for the establishment of their Black employee network, as well as different bureaucratic systems of how the group is funded and managed. Other differences included eligibility to join their network, which varied by exclusivity to certain departments, employment classifications, and rank within the organization. Additionally, some of the networks were established longer than others, and the level of collective involvement of the employee networks and the level of participation from the participants in the study varied. Understanding each of these differences was tempting to explore, but this topic was outside the direct focus of the study and was briefly mentioned within the implication chapters.

Conclusion

The progress of Blacks in the United States has never been matched with an invitation. There has always been a coalition of Blacks fighting for the betterment of Black people, but all Black people are not able or willing to confront the systems that marginalize their existence. Additionally, the past reminds us there have always been people outside the Black community to recognize and help avail their disposition as an

anomaly in the history of colonization, immigration, and the caste system. Unfortunately, the “minority” position of the Black community in the context of diversity and inclusion does not always reflect this particular distinction, which makes the plight of the Black people unique. For these reasons and many more, it is important for Black people to have their own space, so they can decipher how they fit into all other spaces. This research project explored the experience of Black professionals who choose to occupy Black spaces at work.

Findings of the study presented aspects of the participants’ work ethic, relationships, and contributions from both within and outside of work. Their career development and community participation also provided insight into their experience, and as a result, the binary between White and Black professionals was heavily discussed throughout multiple sections of the study. This White and Black lens was organically informed by participants’ responses, and thereby, supported critical race theory as a theoretical framework. Interpretation of their experience helped identify the lack of Black representation in leadership as a chief concern and issue in corporate America, while implications of this study explored how human resource development can help address this issue, and become aware of obstacles encountered by Black professionals. In conclusion, this research presented evidence of how racism in American history is relevant to the professional development of the Black professionals in the study. Through the process of understanding this phenomenon, the field of human resource development is challenged to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of social groups, social interests, and alternative learning approaches in organizations.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Critically Exploring Social Learning in Black Social Networks: Implications for HRD Research and Practice

You are invited to be in a research study to explore the process of learning and developing as a Black man or woman connected to a social support network within a predominantly White professional setting. You were selected as a participant because you are: (1) currently employed with a *Fortune 500* company, (2) have worked for the same employer for at least three years, and (3) have a current membership with your company's Black or African-American employee research group. I ask that you read this form and feel free to ask any questions before, during, or after the study.

This study is being conducted by: Stephanie Sisco, a doctoral candidate in Human Resource Development, within the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of Black professionals who work in a predominantly White corporate environment, and to explore how their affiliation to their company's Black or African American employee research group contributes to their experience as a Black professional. Research about social learning, social networks, and critical race theory have motivated and directed the objective of this study. I hope to obtain a greater awareness of the experience of Black professionals to encourage other aspiring Black professionals to pursue similar career fields. I also hope to identify how HRD can help create a better lived experience that is conducive to learning and development for minorities in a corporate climate.

Procedures:

If you agree to be a participant in this study, I would like to audio record your interview to make sure I capture all your comments. The recording will be transcribed and the tape will be erased. I want to assure you this discussion is confidential, and all the information I gather will be treated as anonymous data. You can inform me if you would like me to turn off the recorder or disregard anything you say at any point during or after the interview.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only my advisors and I will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality. All audio recording will be securely stored by Stephanie Sisco (the researcher of the study) for the duration of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting any future projects or studies.

Contacts and Questions:

*The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie Sisco. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me and/or the faculty advisor, Dr. Joshua Collins, of this study at the University of Minnesota, 310E Wulling Hall, 86 Pleasant Street SE Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-626-4529, or collinsj@umn.edu.*

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher and/or faculty, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects'

Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. Please verbally respond "yes" or "no."

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

(Semi-Structured Interview Questions)

1) How do Black professionals describe their experiences at work?

- What is a typical day like at work?
- What do you look forward to at work?
- What do you least like about your job?
- What are you most proud of at work?
- Does your job require you to interact with co-workers or clients?
- How would you describe your relationships with your co-workers and/or clients?
- Have you experienced any challenges at work that can be associated with your ethnicity?
- What changes would you like to see in your office?
- What led you to apply to your current position?
- Where else did you work before your current position?
- What was the application and orientation process like?
- How did you prepare to be successful in your current position?
- Why do you think you got selected for your current position?
- How would you describe your work-life-balance?
- Would you say that your co-workers have a similar work-life-balance?

2) How does one's perception of being Black shape the development of his or her professional identity?

- How would you describe the state of the Black community?
- What was your reaction to the relatively recent police brutality against Black people?
- Do conversations about social issues involving Blacks take place at work? If so, with who?
- Can you think of a song, film, artwork, or poem that captures or speaks to your experience as a Black professional?
- When you consider media and entertainment, are you satisfied with the way you are portrayed as a Black professional?
- What historical political figures have shaped your philosophy of Blackness?
- What moments in history have prompted you to react with fear for the black community?
- When you hear people denounce Black people, how do you react?
- Some Black-consciousness theory explain Blacks go through a process of turning self-hate into pride? Can you recall any moments where you were discontent with being Black?
- Research shows Black professionals have a hard time finding the right person to marry. Do you have any guess as to why the data currently shows 70% of Black women are unmarried?
- When you consider other Blacks from African ancestry around the world, how different or similar is the African-American experience?
- What is your approach to learning when you are challenged to acquire new information?
- When you work in a team, what are the skills and qualities that you typically perform better than others? Why do you think that is?

- When you work in a team, what are the skills and qualities that you typically struggle with worst more than others? Why do you think that is?
- To be a Black professional what things did you have to unlearn or give up to maintain your elite identity?
- What is your muse to achieve your current and future goals?
- When you have an important task or event, what people, things, practices, or rituals do you perform to ensure your success?
- Name at least three things you avoid doing or saying as a Black professional while at work?
- When does race matter and when does it not matter?
- Can you recall a time when you had an issue, disagreement, or negative experience with another Black professional?
- What is your experience working with other professionals who are minority, but are not Black?
- Have you ever witnessed a Black professional act in a way that is considered “White”?
- How has your childhood impacted your identity as a Black professional?
- What would happen if you became a VP in your organization? What are the first three changes you would make as a new leader?
- What do you consider the best aspect of being a Black professional?
- What do consider the least appealing aspect of being a Black professional?

3) What do Black professionals value about their membership in a Black employee networks?

- Who has supported your development and/or advancement at work?
- Who do you go to when you have personal or job-related issues at work?
- Who introduced you to your company's Black employee network?
- Why did you decide to join the group?
- What is the objective of the employee network?
- Who benefits from the employee network in your organization?
- How does the employee network reflect the interest of Black professionals in the group?
- Who supports your employee network in your organization?
- What type of activities are performed by the group?
- What are some examples of the topics discussed in your group?
- If you had the opportunity to lead the employee network next year, what changes would you propose?
- Are you a member other employee networks at your workplace? If so, why?
- Do all Black professionals in your organization join the employee network? If yes or no, why?