

Fall 12-1-2012

## **Employee Racial Discrimination Complaints: Exploring Power Through Co-Cultural Theory**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

EMPLOYEE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS: EXPLORING  
POWER THROUGH CO-CULTURAL THEORY

by

Leslie Yvette Rodriguez

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012

## ABSTRACT

### EMPLOYEE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS: EXPLORING POWER THROUGH CO-CULTURAL THEORY

by Leslie Yvette Rodriguez

December 2012

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine the influence of power on an employee's decision to file a formal racial discrimination complaint against their employer with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Additionally, this case study explored the communicative strategies that lead up to and follow the filing of such a complaint. This study used both Orbe's (1998) co-cultural theory and French and Raven's theory on power bases (1968) as both theoretical foundations and lenses to analyze this occurrence.

Four minority women from Central Texas participated in this qualitative case study. Specifically, in depth interviews were conducted where co-researchers were asked to provide narratives regarding the events that surrounded their complaint and narratives that revealed the communicative practices that were used to communicate with superiors and other employees before, during, and after the complaint process. These narratives were analyzed using the existing typologies provided by the two noted theories. McCracken's (1988) guidelines were used to guide the emergence of new categories.

Five central conclusions were drawn based on the analysis that materialized from the proposed research questions. First, employees seek to address an occurrence of racial discrimination in house prior to filing legal charges, which provides organizations an opportunity to rectify the issue and avoid further legal consequences. Second,

complainants maintain a heightened level of scrutiny regarding the actions of the organization during the process of the complaint. As such, it is critical that all decisions appear unbiased. Third, the absence of expert power and the use of coercive and legitimate power may increase the likelihood of an employee filing a formal racial discrimination complaint. Fourth, once an employee files a formal racial discrimination complaint with EEOC, communicative interaction between the employee and employer appears to halt. Fifth, a racial discrimination experience permanently alters an individual's future communicative experiences in current organizations. Combined, these results offer both theoretical implications as well as practical applications.

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my dissertation director, Dr. John Meyer for his considerable guidance and understanding as this project came to fruition. His continual encouragement, insight, and advice made this process a positive learning experience. Sincere gratitude is also given to my committee members, Dr. Wendy Atkins-Sayre, Dr. Lawrence Hosman, Dr. Charles Tardy, and Dr. Steven Venette, for their assistance throughout the duration of this project. To Susie, Lu-Lu, Karla, and Bella, thank you for allowing me to share your stories.

A special thank you to my parents for their continual support. You three instilled within me an unwavering pursuit for education that made this moment a reality. To Joni, Chris, Verna, and Tina, in each a special way, you all provided the motivation I needed to complete this process, and for that I cannot thank you enough.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that 99,922 discrimination charges were filed with their office. Specifically, 35,890 (35.9%) of these charges alleged race-based discrimination against their employers and were seeking relief under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After a thorough investigation of each charge, EEOC found approximately 70% of the charges that alleged race-based discrimination had no reasonable cause. Although this percentage is high, it does not diminish the fact that many race-discrimination charges are found valid, which indicates that some employers continue to use race as a discriminating factor when determining their behavior and communication with their employees. This type of behavior, whether overt or covert, costs organizations 84.4 million dollars in 2010 (EEOC, 2011) -- a figure that does not include additional monetary benefits awarded in litigation.

Due to this unfair treatment, many minority employees must continue to strategically negotiate their positions within organizations as they attempt to stabilize themselves in a hierarchy that at times distributes power to them unequally based on their race. This unequal distribution of power then becomes magnified as expected power differentials already exist in the employer-employee relationship. Based on this assertion, it is essential to understand the effects of power as supported through relevant research.

Specifically, research pertaining to French and Raven's (1968) power bases should be explored as it contains several findings regarding power and its effects on both

superiors and subordinates in a workplace. For example, researchers have noted expert and referent power to be power bases highly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among employees (Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980). Furthermore, related research found that superiors that used prosocial power tactics, such as expert and referent power, were perceived to be more competent, credible, and trustworthy (Teven, 2007), had more committed employees (Yukl & Falbe, 1991), and were rated higher in regard to managerial effectiveness by their employees (Yukl & Falbe, 1991). In addition, research supports that the use of these two power bases, expert and referent, led to an employee's having heightened perceptions of organizational support (Carson, Carson, & Pense, 2002).

On the contrary, extant research supports that superiors who are perceived to use both coercive and legitimate power have negative effects, such as negative job satisfaction and employee satisfaction (Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1986; Richmond et al., 1980). Additional research strengthened the finding that supervisors who use legitimate and coercive power are also seen as less credible by employees (Teven, McCroskey, and Richmond, 2006). Based on these findings, I believe that it is both beneficial and worthwhile to both parties that employees' perception of superiors' power be studied within the context of racial discrimination in order to further understand the process that led to the complaint and legal filing and to extend current research regarding the perceptions and effects of differing power bases in the workplace in this context.

Additionally, I believe that it is worthwhile to explore the types of communication strategies that employees report enacting in order to cope with or resolve the act of employer racial discrimination. This type of research will give scholars insight on the

communicative process an individual goes through before deciding to file an official legal complaint. Moreover, by studying this decision process through the eyes of the subordinate group, as suggested by Orbe's (1998) co-culture theory, researchers will also have the opportunity to understand how an employee's communicative strategies are altered before, during, and after a racial discrimination complaint.

Therefore, the goal of this case study is to examine the influence of power on an employee's decision to file a legal racial discrimination complaint through the lens of Orbe's co-culture theory. Specifically, the communication strategies that lead up to and follow the filing of such a complaint are of interest in this case study. The study will first focus on relevant literature regarding co-culture theory and power in organizational settings. Five proposed research questions will follow the review of relevant literature. The methods used during this study are included in Chapter III, followed by the fourth and fifth chapters that include results and discussion, respectively.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Co-Cultural Theory

A paradigm shift in intercultural communication came about as researchers began to recognize that the majority of research pertaining to culture's effect on communication was explored predominantly from the perspective of the dominant groups in society, therefore neglecting the perspectives of subordinate group members (James, 1994; Orbe, 1995; Skinner, 1982). As a result, several intercultural communication scholars posited that intercultural communication research was both incomplete and splintered due to this bias. Consequently, researchers (i.e., Kramarae, 1981; Orbe, 1998; Smith, 1987) began to embrace the perspectives of subordinate group members (women, people of color, gays, lesbians, disabled, young and elderly people, etc.) in order to help minimize the fragmented and deficient knowledge present in intercultural communication. By soliciting these viewpoints, researchers anticipated that intercultural communication would become more inclusive and representative of society. Orbe's (1998) theory of co-cultural communication exhibits this altered emphasis.

Co-cultural communication, as established by Orbe, "refers to interactions among persons from different co-cultures" (Orbe, 1998, p. 2). Strategically, Orbe used the word co-culture in order to adequately acknowledge the presence of many cultures within society in the United States. Moreover, the term co-culture was also selected in order to extricate any connotations of superiority or inferiority among cultures. However, due to the unequal distribution of power among the existing co-cultures that is inherent within society, as argued by critical scholars, a dominant group (European American, middle or

upper class, heterosexual, male) naturally emerges. Groups that are muted or marginalized based on characteristics of age, sex, sexuality, disability, or religion continue to exist, and Orbe labeled them co-culture groups. These groups had also been previously labeled by researchers as subordinate, inferior, minority, subcultural, muted, and/or nondominant (Folb, 1994; Kramarae, 1981; Stanback & Pearce, 1981). However, Orbe (1998) continued to advocate the use of the word co-culture in the study of intercultural communication in order to “signify the notion that no one culture in our society is inherently superior to other co-existing cultures” (Orbe, 1998, p. 2).

The theoretical framework of co-cultural theory, as described by Orbe (1998), provided a means to explore the communication among dominant group members and co-cultural group members from the perspective of the co-cultural group. Based on this perspective, co-cultural theory was anchored in two existing theories that help establish its foundation: muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Smith, 1987). Both muted group and standpoint theory are theoretical frameworks that focus on minority groups within society.

Muted group theory was originally introduced by anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener, and was later introduced into the communication discipline by Kramarae (1981) in order to explore the experiences of women as a marginalized group (Orbe, 1998). In muted group theory, Ardener (1978a) and Ardener (1978b) posited that a hierarchy exists in society that privileges certain individuals over others, as a result forming a dominant group, which “determine[s] to a great extent the communication system of the entire society” (Orbe, 1998, p. 8). Consequently, individuals who are not part of the dominant group often have little voice, therefore becoming muted.

Moreover, as the marginalized groups become muted, the dominant group retains the power to create the criteria used to evaluate communication among both dominant and minority groups – naturally privileging their experiences over others. Research using muted group theory as a lens highlights the asymmetrical power distribution and its effects on society, and especially on communication. Communication scholars have most commonly used muted group theory to explore the experiences of groups that have become muted due to their gender (Clair, 1993; Kramarae, 1981) and ethnicity (Orbe, 1994; Orbe, 1998; Parker, 2003). However, more recent research has extended the theory to explain the way that the theory can be applied to understanding muted voices in organizational settings (Cowan, 2007; Hagan, 2008; Kofoed, 2008; Meares, 2003; Meares, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004) and in the realms of health communication (Burnett et al., 2009; Hoover, Hastings, & Musambira, 2009).

The second theory that provided a foundation for co-cultural theory was standpoint theory. Standpoint theory was originally introduced through feminist sociology scholarship as a means to provide women's experience a voice (Harding, 1991). In standpoint theory, feminists postulate that women have a distinct perspective as they are able to observe the dominant culture from a vantage point outside of it. Consequently, women's shared experiences should be embraced as they offer a point of view that other members of society have not experienced.

Scholars have often used the theoretical perspective of standpoint theory to understand the perspectives of women (Gates, 2003; Hartsock, 1983) living in a male dominated society. However, other scholars (e.g., Smith, 1987; Swigonski, 1994; Wood, 1992) have advocated the use of standpoint theory to explore the experiences of other

subordinate groups. Most recently, feminist standpoint theory has been used to understand the lived experiences of subordinate groups in organizational settings (Allen, 1998; Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999; Dougherty, 1999; Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Gates, 2003; Wanca-Thibault & Tompkins, 1998), as students (Kinefuchi & Orbe, 2008; Pawlowski, 2006), culturally (Droogsma, 2007; Martinez, 2005), and in various areas of health communication (Ford & Crabtree, 2002).

Ultimately, theoretical assertions of muted group theory coupled with the tenets of standpoint theory offer co-cultural theory a means to explain and explore the communicative practices among dominant and subordinate groups in society from the perspective of the subordinate groups. Based on the theoretical coupling of these two theories, Orbe (1998) introduced five premises positioned in co-cultural theory:

1. In each society, [Orbe (1998) asserts] a hierarchy exists that privileges certain groups of people; in the United States these groups include men, European Americans, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, and middle and upper class.
2. On the basis of these varying levels of privilege, dominant group members occupy positions of power that they use—consciously or unconsciously—to create and maintain communication systems that reflect, reinforce, and promote their field of experience.
3. Directly and/or indirectly, these dominant communication structures impede the progress of those persons whose lived experiences are not reflected in the public communication system.
4. Although representing a widely diverse array of lived experiences, co-cultural group members—including women, people of color, gays, lesbians, bisexuals,

people with disabilities, and those from a lower socioeconomic status—will share a similar societal position that renders them marginalized and underrepresented within dominant structures.

5. To confront oppressive dominant structures and achieve any measure of “success,” co-cultural group members strategically adopt certain communication behaviors when functioning within the confines of public communicative structures. (p. 11)

### *Co-Cultural Communicative Practices*

Initially, the epistemological assumptions structured by Orbe (1998) were used to guide research that explored the phenomenon of communicative experiences of co-cultural groups in society. Four preliminary phenomenological studies explored the communicative practices that underrepresented group members used when communicating with the dominant group (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992; Orbe, 1994; Orbe, 1996; Roberts & Orbe, 1996). From the four mentioned studies, a typology of 26 practices emerged that framed the ways that co-cultural group members communicated with the dominant group (Orbe & Spellers, 2005): (1) avoiding, (2) averting controversy, (3) maintaining interpersonal barriers, (4) emphasizing commonalities, (5) exemplifying strengths, (6) mirroring, (7) dissociating, (8) dispelling stereotypes, (9) manipulating stereotypes, (10) embracing stereotypes, (11) developing positive face, (12) censoring self, (13) extensive preparation, (14) overcompensating, (15) communicating self, (16) educating others, (17) intragroup networking, (18) strategic distancing, (19) ridiculing self, (20) using liaisons, (21) increasing visibility, (22) confronting, (23) gaining advantage, (24) bargaining, (25) attacking, and (26) sabotaging others.

Avoiding is operationalized as an individual avoiding a person, conversation, or topic. Two strategies emerged that contain an avoiding aspect: avoiding or averting controversy. The first form, avoiding, encompasses physical distance (Orbe, 1998). For example, individuals may refrain from attending certain places or gatherings in order to avoid interaction with the dominant group (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). The second form of avoiding that occurs is categorized as averting controversy. Averting controversy refers to an individual maintaining a safe level of distance from certain conversations or topics that could possibly cause friction with the dominant group (Orbe & Spellers, 2005), such as topics of sexism or the glass ceiling (Orbe, 1998).

A third strategy that emerged through the phenomenological studies was labeled maintaining interpersonal barriers, defined as using verbal or nonverbal cues to indicate to a dominant group member that interaction is not desired (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). For example, an individual may avoid eye contact or position their body in such a way that interaction is impossible. It is noted that maintaining interpersonal barriers surfaced when application of physical or conversational distance was not possible (Orbe, 1998). Emphasizing commonalities was a fourth strategy that emerged through research. In this strategy, individuals focus on the similarities of the differing interlocutors by “promoting a utopian society in which ‘people are people’ and cultural differences are not as significant as shared human experiences” (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 58).

Exemplifying strengths is a fifth strategy noted in research. In this strategy, individuals of a co-cultural group attempt to promote their group’s strengths by identifying and emphasizing achievements and contributions of their group while in conversation with dominant group members (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). By invoking this

strategy, co-cultural group members are attempting to empower their group and remove or lessen the superiority label from the dominant group (Orbe, 1998). Mirroring is an additional strategy that materialized through research. In this strategy, individuals are attempting to downplay any differences, and emulate behaviors of the dominant group (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

Dissociating is a seventh tactic that emerged, which is defined as an individual making a concerted effort to disconnect himself from the co-cultural group by avoiding any behavior that is stereotypically associated with the said group. More simply stated, the individual attempts to blend in with the dominant group by avoiding certain categorizing characteristics (Orbe, 1998). Dispelling stereotypes is an additional strategy used by co-cultural groups when communicating with dominant group members. Dispelling stereotypes is noted as “largely unconscious and ‘natural’” (Orbe, 1998, p. 64), and occurs when an individual’s natural behavior is contradictory to stereotypes assigned to the co-cultural group.

A related strategy to dispelling stereotypes that surfaced is termed manipulating stereotypes. In this strategy, individuals use the stereotype to manipulate the behavior of the dominant group. For example, a Latino man may act hot-tempered in order to intimidate a White male (Orbe, 1998). Embracing stereotypes is a strategy where individuals choose to adopt the dominant ideology regarding certain stereotypes in order to be in control of that certain characteristic. Orbe (1998) suggested that gay men adopted a common stereotype that made them more educated about fashion, design and color. Additionally, by individuals embracing the stereotype they are re-establishing the characteristic as the norm, which then should receive less attention.

An eleventh strategy that was noted through research was labeled developing positive face. Developing positive face pertained to co-cultural group members appearing “more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members” (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 176) during conversational interaction. Individuals also noted that they would remain silent when dominant group members would offer disparaging comments regarding their co-cultural group. This strategy was labeled censoring self. Extensive preparation was an additional strategy that was noted in research, consisting of co-cultural group members participating in cognitive rehearsal prior to communicating with the dominant group. Simply stated, the co-cultural group member will prepare and practice what they will say to the dominant group member prior to the anticipated interaction (Orbe, 1998).

Overcompensating was also identified as a strategy used by co-cultural groups when communicating with the dominant group. In overcompensating, the individual will exert great efforts to appear worthy to the dominant group by working twice as hard as other individuals to seek the approval of the dominant group (Orbe, 1998).

Communicating self was a fifteenth strategy that was noted by researchers. In this strategy, individuals often contain strong self-concepts, and interact with the dominant group in an authentic and open manner in order to “normalize the ‘abnormal’” (qtd. in Orbe, 1998, p. 72). Educating others is highly related to the concept of communicating self as it allows the individuals to take a role in teaching dominant group members about the norms and values of their co-cultural group. This strategy is noted to be both useful and essential in gaining acceptance of the co-cultural group by the dominant group (Orbe, 1998).

Intragroup networking was an additional strategy employed by co-cultural group members when interacting with the dominant group. This strategy refers to older, more experienced co-cultural group members advising younger, less experienced members how to act within the dominant society. Conversely, in the strategy of strategic distancing, the co-cultural group member will strategically distance herself from other co-cultural group members in order to be seen as a unique individual as opposed to a member of a co-cultural group (Orbe & Speller, 2005). Individuals often do this by avoiding participation in organizations, social gatherings, or meetings that are attended by only certain co-cultural group members (Orbe, 1998). By doing this, they are able to distance themselves from the characteristics attributed to that particular co-cultural group, and, as a result, become more individualistic.

A nineteenth strategy noted in co-cultural communicative strategies is labeled ridiculing self. This strategy occurs when individuals attempt to achieve distance between themselves and the co-cultural group by ridiculing or demeaning their group. As a result, these individuals hope to appear more like the dominant group and be accepted as an in-group member (Orbe, 1998). Using liaisons is an additional strategy that co-cultural group members employ when interacting with the dominant group. In this strategy, the co-cultural group members attempt to identify allies from the dominant group to assist them in their interactions with individuals from the dominant group. However, individuals noted that it is often difficult to locate dominant group members who are trusted by the co-cultural group and are willing to act in that capacity (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

An additional strategy that emerged through research is labeled increasing visibility, which occurs when a co-cultural group member strategically places himself in the direct view of the dominant group as to make his differences visible as he attempts to alter the mentality that different is wrong, and consequently will lead to co-cultures being accepted in dominant structures (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Many co-cultural group members also described becoming more aggressive in their interactions with dominant group members. One particular strategy that was used was labeled confronting. In this strategy, individuals may “us[e] more coarse language, contentiously question dominant policies and practices, display aggressive nonverbals (like getting ‘in someone’s face’), or giving dominant group members ultimatums” (Orbe, 1998, p. 80). An example of this strategy would be bringing a lawsuit against the dominant group.

Gaining advantage is an additional confrontational strategy used by co-cultural group members. In this strategy, members of co-cultural groups will intentionally vocalize the oppressions of their group as a way to provoke emotions of awkwardness and remorse from the dominant group in order to gain an edge. Bargaining is noted as overtly or covertly arranging with the dominant group to ignore co-cultural differences. Attacking is a strategy where co-cultural group members personally attack dominant group members with the desire of affecting their self-concept. Lastly, sabotaging others pertains to co-cultural group members undermining the abilities of dominant group members in order to gain advantage in the dominant structures of society. For example, co-cultural group members may bad mouth a company or individual that is part of the dominant structure or steal supplies to alter profits. This behavior is often justified by the

co-cultural group member by attributing their behavior as payback for past historical experiences of their group (Orbe, 1998).

Orbe (1998) noted that the above-mentioned practices were not meant to be mutually exclusive nor comprehensive. Instead, the practices merely represented the strategies that were identified in early phenomenological studies that served to provide a framework for co-cultural theory. After the strategies were established, research shifted to the ways that individuals select a strategy to employ in particular communicative interactions, which were defined as co-cultural factors (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

### *Co-Cultural Factors*

According to Orbe (1998), six factors influence a co-cultural group member's decision in selecting a strategy to employ when interacting with the dominant group:

Situating within a particular *field of experience* that governs their perceptions of the *costs and rewards* associated with, as well as their *capability* to engage in, various communicative practices, co-cultural group members will adopt certain communication orientations—based on their *preferred outcomes* and *communication approaches*—to fit the circumstances of a specific *situation*. (p. 129)

Orbe and Spellers (2005) noted that preferred outcome refers to the co-cultural group members' preference for the result of the communicative interaction and the ultimate relationship with the dominant group member. Based on the early phenomenological studies conducted, three options emerged for preferred outcome: assimilation, accommodation, and separation (Orbe, 1998). Assimilation refers to a co-cultural group member's attempt to eradicate any cultural differences in order to fit in with the dominant

culture. An accommodation perspective insists that the dominant group recognize and appreciate the differences of the co-cultural group, and reinvent society so that all life experiences are accepted. Separation is a third alternative where individuals seek to maintain identities apart from the dominant structures.

A second factor noted by Orbe (1998) that influenced the strategy selected by the co-cultural group member is field of experience. Field of experience is the notion that all individuals have unique life experiences that shape their communication patterns. As such, each individual has a different perception of what may be considered appropriate or effective based on past communicative experiences. Therefore, based on an individual's sum of their skills and knowledge, different communicative strategies may be selected.

Abilities are a third factor that Orbe (1998) suggested influenced the selection of communicative strategies. This premise noted that all individuals contain unique personalities. As a result, some communication strategies will not be selected by certain individuals as it is not consistent with their personality. For example, a naturally timid individual may not select a strategy that requires him/her to be aggressive or confrontational.

The situational context is an additional factor that influences the choices of co-cultural group members as they select a communication strategy to employ during communication interactions with dominant group members (Orbe, 1998). The situational context is altered by specific characteristics of the situation, such as: "where the interaction occurs, who is present, and the particular circumstances that facilitate the interaction" (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 178). Through this specification, Orbe (1998) noted that no one communication strategy can be deemed appropriate for a specific type

of situation, as minute details of the situation will alter the communication experience, and, as a result, make all situations unique.

A fifth factor introduced by Orbe (1998) that influenced the selection of communication strategies is termed perceived costs and rewards. This factor introduced the notion that individuals must consider the possible consequences of their behavior, and analyze the cost and rewards of employing a particular strategy. Therefore, the selection of the strategy is strategic because individuals desire for the rewards to outweigh the costs. Consequently, certain strategies cannot be used in a particular situation if the cost is too high.

The last factor that influences the selection of a communication strategy that was introduced by Orbe (1998) is communication approach. Based on related research, Wilson, Hantz, and Hannah (1995) noted that communication approaches could be described as nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive. Borrowing from this research, Orbe & Spellers (2005) noted that individuals behave nonassertively when they appear to be nonconfrontational and inhibited, and when they are willing to place others' needs above their own.

Aggressive communication occurs when individuals are more hurtfully expressive and controlling, and choose to place their own needs above others' needs. Individuals who take into account both their needs and the needs of others, and actively express their thoughts are deemed assertive communicators. Moreover, the coupling of this factor (nonassertive, aggressive, and assertive) with the factor of preferred outcome (assimilation, accommodation, and separation) introduced a way in which to categorize the 26 strategies that were initially introduced and consequently created nine

communication orientations, defined as the stance co-cultural group members assume in daily interaction: nonassertive assimilation, assertive assimilation, aggressive assimilation, nonassertive accommodation, assertive accommodation, aggressive accommodation, nonassertive separation, assertive separation, and aggressive separation (Orbe, 1998).

#### *Description of Co-Cultural Orientations*

The nine communication orientations were developed through a coupling of communication approach (nonassertive, aggressive, and assertive) with the factor of preferred outcome (assimilation, accommodation, and separation) (Orbe, 1998).

According to Orbe (1998), individuals using a nonassertive approach to assimilate with the dominant culture by emphasizing commonalities, developing positive face, censoring self, and averting controversy is termed nonassertive assimilation orientation. However, individuals who choose to downplay cultural differences in a more assertive fashion (i.e., extensive preparation, overcompensating, manipulating stereotypes, bargaining) represent the orientation of assertive assimilation. A third communication orientation is termed aggressive assimilation. In this orientation individuals use the strategies of dissociating, mirroring, or strategic distancing in order to fit in at the expense of others' views and rights.

The nonassertive accommodation orientation, according to Orbe (1998), represents individuals who want their co-cultural identity acknowledged and appreciated, but employ strategies such as increasing visibility and dispelling stereotypes in order to do so in a nonassertive manner. However, individuals who choose to do so in a more assertive way (i.e., communicating self, intragroup networking, using liaisons, educating

others) represent the assertive accommodation orientation. Individuals that want their co-culture to be accommodated, but communicate this in an aggressive way, create the orientation of aggressive accommodation. The strategies used in this orientation are confronting and gaining advantage.

The last three orientations represent individuals whose preferred outcome is separation (Orbe, 1998). In short, these individuals use communicative practices that foster segregation among co-cultural groups. Individuals may do this in one of three manners. Individuals who maintain a level of separation through avoidance or by maintaining interpersonal barriers make up the nonassertive separation orientation. Individuals that foster separation in an active manner (i.e., communicating self, exemplifying strengths, embracing stereotypes, intragroup networking) create the orientation of assertive separation. Lastly, individuals who maintain a level of separation more aggressively (i.e., attacking, sabotaging others) engage the aggressive separation orientation. Based on these noted communication orientations established by Orbe (1998), along with the previously mentioned theoretical conceptions of co-cultural theory, researchers were provided a framework to qualitatively explore the communication strategies of co-cultural group members when interacting with dominant group members (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Co-Cultural Communication Orientations*

	Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Nonassertive	Avoiding	Increasing visibility	Emphasizing commonalities
	Maintaining interpersonal barriers	Dispelling stereotypes	Developing positive face
			Censoring self
			Averting controversy
Assertive	Communicating self	Communicating self	Extensive preparation
	Intragroup networking	Intragroup networking	Overcompensating
	Exemplifying strengths	Using liaisons	Manipulating stereotypes
	Embracing stereotypes	Educating others	Bargaining
Aggressive	Attacking	Confronting	Dissociating
	Sabotaging others	Gaining advantage	Mirroring
			Strategic distancing
			Ridiculing self

Note. Adapted from "Constructing Co-Cultural Theory," by Mark P. Orbe, 1998, p. 110.

*Methodological Application of Co-Cultural Theory*

Birthered in four phenomenological studies, co-cultural theory provides a way for scholars to explore and understand the communication strategies used by co-culture group members as they interact with dominant group members. As noted in Orbe (1998),

this theory is unique as it explores the communication through the perceptions of co-cultural group members as it seeks to insure that subordinate groups retain their voice in a dominant society. As a result of this goal, one essential is for co-cultural group members to speak for themselves as they elaborate on their lived experiences. This level of intimacy is secured through qualitative methods. As such, scholars applying co-cultural theory to their studies often use interviews, focus groups, and narratives to secure data for their studies in hopes to better understand and analyze the behaviors and cognitions experienced by co-cultural group members. However, through attempts to make the findings of various co-cultural studies more generalizable and application of the theory more attractive to quantitative scholars, a valid and reliable instrument has been developed to measure the conceptions introduced within the theory (Lapinski & Orbe, 2007). Regardless of the instrument's inception, many researchers applying co-cultural theory continue to do so using qualitative methods despite some noted methodological limitations that exist with qualitative procedures.

#### *Review of Co-Cultural Literature*

Based on the theoretical framework provided by Orbe (1998) for co-cultural theory, various studies have been conducted in order to expand the knowledge regarding the communication strategies used by co-culture groups to communicate with the dominant group. Several scholars have used Co-Cultural Theory to explore the communicative experiences of individuals who represent various co-cultural groups in society, such as women (Lapinski & Orbe, 2007), people of color (Gates, 2003; Kama, 2002; Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008; Miura, 2001; Parker, 2003), individuals with disabilities (Cohen & Avazino, 2010; Fox, Giles, Orbe, & Bourhis, 2000), minority

students (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004; Urban & Orbe, 2007), homosexual individuals (Kama, 2002), and, most recently, dominant group members when they become the minority (Harris, Miller, & Trego, 2004; O'Hara & Meyer, 2003).

These communication experiences can be best reported and understood when grouping according to particular locations, such as in organizational (Buzzanell, 1999; Cohen & Avazino, 2010; Gates, 2003; Lapinski & Orbe, 2007; Parker, 2003), educational (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004; Urban & Orbe, 2007), and public (Groscurth & Orbe, 2006; Orbe, 2004 ) settings. Through these noted studies, along with other relevant research, co-cultural theory has extended the knowledge of how specific co-cultural groups strategically communicate with the dominant group in particular situations.

*Organizational setting.* Research using the concepts of co-cultural theory has been applied in the organizational setting. Buzzanell (1999) urged business professionals to consider the tensions and performance burdens co-cultural group members may experience during employment interviews. Buzzanell posited that the discomfort is a result of employment interviews being more suited to dominant group members in regard to interviewing practices (e.g., sample responses to interviewing questions, interviewing behaviors, and appropriate attire). Therefore, co-cultural group members feel they must adjust their behavior to mirror the behavior of dominant group members.

Consequently, this mirroring often leads to unnatural behavior by co-cultural group members as they seek to satisfy conventional expectations. As a result of their forced, unnatural behavior, Buzzanell (1999) speculated that many co-cultural group members are often not offered the employment positions that they interviewed for. This result is unfortunate to Buzzanell; therefore, she called for business professionals to

become familiar with the communicative strategies (e.g., Orbe, 1998) that co-cultural group members may employ during interviews. With this knowledge, she stated that employment interviewers can “attempt to cultivate equal competition for all interviewees” (p. 134).

Seeking to extend the knowledge regarding co-cultural group members’ use of communicative strategies within organizations, Gates (2003) sought to explore how African American women and men interacted with other individuals in organizations. Although Gates used the methodological assumptions of standpoint theory to guide her study, Orbe’s (1998) influential factors (preferred outcome, field of experience, costs and rewards, situational context, communication approach, and abilities) were used to interpret and better understand the responses of the participants. Ultimately, various strategies emerged that explained the communication tactics of participants: checking yourself, isolation, speaking out, remaining silent, journaling, intimidation, and showing appreciation. Although the thematic analysis of the interviews created a unique categorization of themes, the researcher suggested that it would be advantageous for future researchers to compare and contrast the strategies to those advanced by Orbe (1998) to possibly uncover new strategies, and, as a result, advance the scholarship of co-cultural theory.

In a similar study, Parker (2003) examined leadership development in 15 African American women who all held upper-level executive positions within large, predominantly White organizations within the United States. As part of the study, the researchers sought to determine the communicative strategies of resistance and transformation used by participants to advance through their careers. Data were collected

from interviews held with the 15 participants. The researchers indicated that the communicative strategies used by the women were diverse and ranged between three communication orientations: nonassertive separation, aggressive accommodation, and nonassertive assimilation. This range emphasized the diversity in women's approaches to interact within a dominant culture organization, according to the researcher.

More recently, Cohen and Avanzino (2010) conducted a study to determine how disabled organizational members experience and negotiate organizational assimilation. The researchers held interviews with 24 participants in order to secure data for the study. Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed in order to answer the research question presented. Findings suggested that when participants negotiated perceptions of the disabled with their co-workers, they did so using strategies from the assertive accommodation and nonassertive assimilation communication orientations. Furthermore, when disabled individuals negotiated interactions with other co-workers in the organization, they employed strategies from three orientations: nonassertive accommodation, assertive accommodation, and aggressive accommodation. Lastly, assertive accommodation, nonassertive accommodation, and nonassertive assimilation strategies were utilized when the disabled participants negotiated one's own disability.

*Educational setting.* Research using the framework of co-cultural theory has also been applied to understand the communication strategies of students who can be considered a co-cultural group. In 2003, O'Hara and Meyer analyzed the discourse of 20 Ball State University students who shared their experience of interacting with lesbian women at a women's music festival. Unlike previous research, the 20 students were of the dominant group, but became the minority group when they attended the music festival

where they encountered many lesbian women. The analyzed discourse revealed the strategies that the participants used to manage their talk about lesbian women. Findings of the studies suggested that an overwhelming amount of the discourse about this homosexual community by the 20 participants focused on emphasizing separation between the two groups, although done in assertive, nonassertive, and aggressive manners. These findings, according to the researchers, exhibit the complications co-cultural group members may encounter communicating with dominant group members when such blatant attitudes of separation continue to exist. Such complications were well expressed in a 2002 study by Kama where gay men discussed the difficulty they have communicating in a heterosexual society that misrepresents their identity through the media. Its findings showed that Jewish-Israeli homosexual men yearn for a normal representation in the media as it may allow them to be accepted within society as current representations cause them to separate from society, and force them to live in the margins of society.

Orbe and Groscurth (2004) used co-culture theory to explore communication patterns of first generation college (FGC) students at campus and at home. Specifically, the researchers presented two research questions to guide their study. The first question sought to determine which particular co-cultural communication orientations and practices were displayed and employed by FGC students when interacting with others. The subsequent question explored whether differences existed in how FGC students communicated in different contexts, specifically on campus and at home. The authors posited that the finding of the study would be beneficial in understanding the communication experiences of FGC students, which in turn would help educators better

serve the needs of FGC students who have often been classified as high-risk students regarding retention and academic success as they transition into college.

Data for the study were obtained from a larger project that was conducted over a two-year period. The data comprised of 13 focus group discussions and four in-depth interviews with 71 FGC students and 8 FGC graduates. Participants were students from various Midwestern college campuses. All discussions and interviews were transcribed, analyzed into themes, and were then categorized into the appropriate communication orientations and strategies presented in co-cultural theory.

Findings indicated that when communicating on campus, FGC students' experiences represented three of the communication orientations: nonassertive assimilation, assertive assimilation, and assertive accommodation. Within the three noted orientations, specific communication strategies emerged as students described their communication experiences on campus. Specifically, communication experiences that were categorized as nonassertive assimilation often noted how FGC students emphasized commonalities between themselves and other students during their interactions. Additionally, FGC students also noted evoking the censoring self strategy by avoiding conversation with other students regarding the lack of formal educational history in their families.

Assertive assimilation was a second communication orientation exhibited by FGC students. FGC students often noted that in regard to their academic work they had to work harder, try harder, and extensively prepare in order to catch-up to the other students. Others stated they felt they had to try harder to belong. These comments indicated that students employed the strategy of overcompensation to communicate with the dominant

group (non-FGC students). The last communication orientation that emerged from the communication experiences provided by FGC students was assertive accommodation. This communication orientation was displayed by FGC students that were open about their life and academic circumstances with their peers and tried to dispel any stereotypes they may have had regarding FGC students. Additionally, students representing this orientation also employed the strategies of intragroup networking and liaisons.

FGC students' communication at home was also analyzed to determine whether differences in both communication orientations and strategies emerged as a result of a differing context, as posited in co-cultural theory. In order to retain a way to fairly compare school and home communicative experiences, FGC students' shared how they communicated with family members about their college experience. From their experiences, four communication orientations emerged: nonassertive assimilation, nonassertive separation, assertive separation, and assertive accommodation.

Nonassertive assimilation represented students who claimed to censor themselves by remaining silent about their college experiences in order to save face for family members who may not understand. Other FGC students indicated the importance of communicating with family members despite the challenges. This orientation was deemed nonassertive separation. FGC students who stated that they consciously separated themselves from their families by not communicating with them constituted assertive separation. More specifically, both nonassertive and assertive separation orientations employed the strategies of maintaining personal barriers, embracing stereotypes, and educating others in their communication with family members.

The last orientation that was represented in FGC students' communication with family members was assertive accommodation. This orientation was enacted when FGC students spoke about communicating with younger family members and friends about the college experience in order to motivate them to pursue a higher education, as well. These experiences employed the strategy of communicating self. Thus, as seen through the overall findings, students did report differences in the ways they communicated on campus as opposed to home. Ultimately, the researchers suggested that the findings are helpful in understanding the communication experiences of FGC students as their status may be linked to larger educational implications.

A similar study was conducted by Urban and Orbe (2007) regarding international students on U.S. campuses. Sixty-two narratives composed by international students from 30 different countries were analyzed in order to shed light on how international students overcome the challenge of being the outsiders communicatively. Specifically, two research questions guided the study. The first question sought to establish how international students described their communication experiences with those of foreign cultures. The second question sought to explore how international students negotiated their foreign status communicatively.

Findings of the study indicated that international students often dispelled stereotypes by educating others regarding their co-cultural group. As a result, they were able to negotiate their foreign status. Others reported employing the strategy of overcompensation by extensively preparing for interactions with the dominant group in order to insure that a positive communicative experience would occur. Finally, many international students indicated that they would emphasize their commonalities with other

students and use liaisons in order to negotiate and diminish their foreign status. Similar to previous research (e.g., Orbe & Groscurth, 2004), the researchers speculated that the findings from this study are crucial to understanding international students' experiences on U.S. campuses in order to help better serve them.

*Public settings.* Researchers have also used co-culture theory to explore communication present in the community. Orbe (2004) presented a case study that marked the development, progression, and results of a civil rights health project implemented in the state of Michigan. Differing from previous research, this article discussed how co-culture theory was applied and used to guide the dialogues that were held during the course of this project to insure that traditionally marginalized voices would be centralized and heard. In reflection, Orbe (2004) noted the practical benefits surfaced when “communication theory and research me[t] practice to address important social issues” (p. 206).

Co-culture theory has also been used as a lens to explore civil rights discourse that was publicly expressed. Groscurth and Orbe (2006) analyzed the discourse of 375 participants in order to “understand the terms upon which marginalized members of society engage in civil rights discourse, as well as how they express their self-understanding through the use of co-cultural communicative practices” (p. 125). Although participants within the study represented various cultural groups in differing settings, the researchers posited that the study offered an opportunity to understand the communicative experiences of traditionally marginalized groups regarding a common experience. Findings of the study established that participants primarily employed strategies associated with assertive assimilation, assertive accommodation, and

aggressive accommodation communication orientations when engaging in public dialogues regarding civil rights issues. The researchers suggested that these findings, along with past and future related research, will assist in “work[ing] toward[s] a greater understanding, community, civility, and social justice” (p. 139).

Matsunaga and Torigoe (2008) used co-cultural theory to explore the methods that Japan-Residing Koreans used to manage their ethnic identity. The researchers posed two research questions to guide their study. Research question one sought to determine the “associations between the identity management of Japan-Residing Koreans and their preferred outcome, communication approach, abilities, field of experience, perceived costs and rewards, and situational context” (Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008, p. 355). Furthermore, the researchers questioned whether any other distinct mechanisms influenced Japan-Residing Koreans’ identity aside from the co-cultural theory’s six existing factors, which was presented as research question two.

Several publicly available narratives written by Japan-Residing Koreans were analyzed to gather data to answer the two research questions mentioned above. The narratives represented individuals of various ages, gender, education, and social status in order to maximize variability and explore the phenomenon from different angles. The six co-cultural factors were applied to each narrative in order to account for the identity management act. Any information that could not be accounted for using the six co-cultural factors was explored to determine whether a new factor had emerged.

Findings of the study indicated that the preferred outcomes of Japan-Residing Koreans emerged as polar opposites. Many Japan-Residing Koreans desired to assimilate with the Japanese and blend in while others both implicitly and explicitly worked against

assimilation. Regardless of personal desires, many individuals reported that it was essential to assimilate as the rewards for assimilating outweighed the costs at certain times. However, when possible, Japan-Residing Koreans noted that a level of separation was both desired and necessary. For example, it was not necessary to marry Japanese to receive societal rewards, therefore, they did not. As a result, they maintained a level of separation.

The communication approach used by individuals often corresponded to the preferred outcome. Those who desired to separate often had a more aggressive approach; whereas, a more subtle approach was used by those seeking to assimilate or accommodate. Additionally, it was noted that an individual's personal ability level often influenced their communication strategies. For example, those who could speak Japanese well often accommodated or assimilated.

Additionally, the analysis noted that an individual's past field of experience also influenced the way that his ethnic identity was managed along with the perceived costs and rewards of assimilating or separating. Lastly, the situational context also appeared to influence the manner that individuals maintained their ethnic identity. Thus, analysis of the narratives indicated that all six co-cultural factors influenced how Japan-Residing Koreans maintained their ethnic identity, which answered research question one. After much scrutiny of the narratives, the researchers also determined that one additional factor influenced how ethnic identity was maintained by individuals. This additional influence was accounted for through the notion of personal level collectivism vs. individualism. Therefore, dependent on an individual's desire to be more individualistic or collectivistic, ethnic identity would be maintained at different levels and manners. As a result of this

additional influence, the researchers posited that they extended the findings of co-cultural theory by explaining how Japan-Residing Koreans maintain their ethnic identity through their communicative strategies.

As researchers continued to use co-cultural theory to exhibit how co-culture group members used particular strategies to communicate with the dominant group, Camara and Orbe (2010) broadened the use of the theory by exploring how co-culture group members responded communicatively when they experienced an overt act of discrimination. More specifically, the researchers sought to explain which orientations and strategies were enacted during these defined moments. Additionally, the study also sought to establish whether certain cultural groups enacted certain orientations and strategies more than others, and whether their responses changed based on the type of discrimination (race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation) that had occurred.

The sample included 260 stories of discrimination that were analyzed. Of the 260 stories, a vast majority (75%) were situated within two communication orientations: assertive accommodation and nonassertive assimilation. In assertive accommodation, communicating self was the strategy most often employed. Emphasizing commonalities, self-censorship, and avoiding were the three strategies that most often were employed by individuals that enacted the orientation of nonassertive assimilation. Moreover, the findings of the study indicated that “substantial commonalities existed across comparisons of sources of discrimination and cultural groups” (Camara & Orbe, 2010, p. 17). However, responses to particular acts of discrimination were significantly diverse. Overall, the findings of the study offered insight as to how co-cultural members respond communicatively to overt acts of discrimination.

### *What Does Co-Cultural Theory Teach Us?*

Knowledge regarding intercultural communication has been extended through the various studies that used co-cultural theory. Namely, findings of co-culture theory have reinforced the notion that co-cultural group members' experiences with the dominant group are unique based on various influential factors. As a result of this uniqueness, it is essential for co-cultural group members to have a voice in communication research in order for their thoughts to be accurately reflected. Additionally, the findings also support the notion that communication choices made by co-cultural group members involve a high level of strategic cognition influenced by a preferred outcome. Co-cultural group members recognize that interaction with dominant group members will probably influence their societal position; therefore, their communication must be both strategic and well thought out. Moreover, findings of co-cultural theory research also reinforce the notion that power largely influences the way subordinate group members communicate with dominant group members. The strategically negotiated communication used by minority group members is due to the unequal distribution of power in a society that privileges White, protestant, heterosexual males. Power has been assigned according to personal attributes. The more distant an individual is from this description, the less power he/she possesses. As a result, co-cultural group members must attempt to diminish the effects of the unfair distribution by strategically communicating with those in power. However, at times, a subordinate group member chooses to cease to personally negotiate, and secures legal assistance to assist him/her in the matter as exhibited in the filing of a racial discrimination complaint. According to Camara and Orbe (2010), this filing process is a different strategy from the strategy of using liaisons as it is a more

formal process. The researchers noted that this new strategy deserved further exploration in order to understand when and how individuals seek to employ this strategy. In order to respond to this call, I believe that it is first necessary to explore the way that power works in an organization.

### Power

Power is ubiquitous. Diekmann, Goodfriend, and Goodwin (2004) asserted that occupational, political, economic, relational, and individual powers permeate all levels of society. Based on this apparent saliency, the study of power is essential in research in order to fully understand human interaction and communication.

For power to be incorporated into research, it was first necessary to define power in such a way that the term moved from being solely conceptual to a measurable variable. As a result, power was operationalized “as a relationship between two or more actors (individuals or collectives) in which the action of one is determined by that of another or others” (Zey-Ferrell, 1979, 141). Additionally, it was noted that power could only exist within social relationships or through the process of interaction when “person A has power over person B [because] A has control over some outcome B wants” (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 168). Based on this assumption, through combined efforts, several researchers (e.g., Etzioni, 1959; French & Raven, 1968; Warren, 1968; Weber, 1957) identified four major sources of power: position, knowledge, personal attributes, and traditional values. Power gained through personal attributes and traditional values can be seen in the previous discussion regarding superior and subordinate groups in society; however, power obtained through position and knowledge requires further discussion.

French and Raven (1968) extended research on power by categorizing five types of social power existent in interpersonal relationships: reward, coercive, referent, expert, and legitimate. Each power type can be defined as:

1. Reward power. Person A has reward power over person B when A can give some formal or informal reward, such as a bonus or an award, in exchange for B's compliance.
2. Coercive power. Person A has coercive power over person B when B perceives that certain behaviors on his or her part will lead to punishments from A, such as poor work assignments, relocation, or demotion.
3. Referent power. Person A has referent power over person B when B is willing to do what A asks in order to be like A. Mentors and charismatic leaders, for example, often have referent power.
4. Expert power. Person A has expert power over person B when B is willing to do what A says because B respects A's expert knowledge.
5. Legitimate power. Person A has legitimate power over person B when B complies with A's wishes because A holds a high-level position, such as division head, in the hierarchy. (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 168)

As a result of this contribution by French and Raven (1968), a shift in power research occurred as researchers began to explore the various effects of power types on human interaction in various contexts. Among those who embraced this addition were scholars seeking to understand relationships in the organizational setting. Organizational power will be further discussed in this paper as it is relevant to the topic of racial discrimination in the workplace.

### *Organizational Power*

French and Raven's (1968) typology of power has been embraced by many scholars in organizational communication research as they attempt to better understand the relationships in organizations, namely, superior-subordinate relationships. These relationships have been explored both vertically and horizontally, with focus on the effects of power on various aspects of the relationship -- such as job satisfaction (Richmond et al., 1980), fairness (Paulsel, Chory-Assad, & Dunleavy, 2005), effects on colleagues (Campbell, White, & Durant, 2007; Pettit, Vaught, & Pulley, 1990; Richmond et al., 1986), upward influence (O'Neil, 2004), employee performance (Carson et al., 2002), and competence (Dunleavy, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010).

Research has also been conducted establishing that a supervisor's personality may also influence the power types he employs with his employees. For example, Goodstadt and Hjelle (1973) showed that managers who were externally controlled tended to use more coercive power than managers that were internally controlled. Additionally, both Goodstadt and Kipnis (1970) and Kipnis and Lane (1962) found that managers who lacked confidence tended to employ coercive power, as did managers who did not trust their employees (Riccillo & Trenholm, 1983). Moreover, Dunleavy et al. (2010) established that organizational members who were perceived as honest as opposed to deceitful were considered more powerful by their coworkers. However, organizational members also found coworkers higher in expert and referent power when the coworker deceived others by withholding versus distorting information.

Richmond et al. (1980) used the five bases of power conceptualized by French and Raven (1968) to determine which power bases mediated the Management

Communication Style (MCS) of a supervisor; Richmond and McCroskey (1979) previously determined that a manager's communication style was highly associated with employee job satisfaction. Specifically, employees who perceived their managers to be more employee-centered reported higher levels of job satisfaction than employees that perceived their supervisors to be more boss-centered. As a result of this finding, Richmond et al. (1980) sought to extend research by determining whether particular power bases influenced employees' perceptions of their manager's communication style.

Subjects of the study were 250 public school teachers and 171 managers from various organizations who made up two sample groups. Results of the study indicated that both samples associated coercive and legitimate power with a *boss centered* management style; therefore associating with negative job satisfaction. Additionally, both samples positively responded to a manager's use of referent and expert power, which they perceived as a more *employee centered approach*. However, reward power was not found to significantly mediate a manager's communication style. The findings of this study were consistent with previous research (i.e., Day & Hamblin, 1964; Hurwitz, Zander, & Hymovitch, 1968; Thibaut & Ricken, 1955) indicating that employees' perception of power types being employed by managers would directly affect employee attitudes regarding their manager and their job.

Similarly, Richmond et al. (1986) sought to determine the relationship between a supervisor's use of power and affinity-seeking strategies and employee satisfaction. Specifically, the researchers determined that behavioral alteration techniques (BATs) used by management that were associated with coercive or legitimate bases of power had a negative effect on employee satisfaction. Additionally, BATs that fell into the

categories of reward, referent, or expert bases of power were found to be positively related or not related to employee satisfaction. Moreover, a 1992 study by Johnson found similar results indicating that employees who reported that their supervisors used prosocial power compliance-gaining tactics (e.g., communicating friendliness or liking), as opposed to antisocial power compliance-gaining tactics (e.g., punishing activity or psychological activity), were perceived as more communicatively competent. Teven (2007) extended this finding by establishing that perceived levels of competence, credibility, trustworthiness, and goodwill increased for supervisors that employed prosocial power tactics.

Yukl and Falbe (1991) echoed these findings as they also found that managers who used personal forms of power (e.g., expert or referent), as opposed to position-based forms of power (e.g., legitimate or coercive), had more committed employees and were rated higher in regard to managerial effectiveness. Additionally, Teven et al. (2006) found that an employee's perception of a supervisor's use of legitimate and coercive power was related positively to a supervisor's level of Machiavellianism, which negatively affected the supervisor's credibility.

A study by Carson et al. (2002) sought to determine how the various social power bases influenced an employee's perception of organizational support and an employee's willingness to engage in service recovery activities with a customer. The researchers believed that the findings of the study would be beneficial in helping foster a healthy relationship among a healthcare organization, service provider, and consumer – a triad that often has strained relationships due to mistakes and oversights that are inevitable within the organization. Specifically, the researchers questioned whether employees that

felt a higher level of support by their organization would be more willing to partake in service recovery strategies, such as appearing apologetic or empathetic towards a customer, without being prompted by management when mistakes had occurred.

Findings indicated that a supervisor's use of expert, referent, and reward power led to an employee's perception of organizational support; however, these social bases did not result in more quality service exhibited by the employees. Instead, it was the use of coercive power by the supervisor that prompted employees to engage in recovery activities with a customer. This finding extended research by indicating that employees' level of satisfaction with their organization does not necessarily determine their relationship with outside consumers and customers. Therefore, supervisors must continue to monitor employee behavior in regard to customer service and apply penalties for inappropriate or indifferent behavior exhibited by the employee.

Also seeking to understand exhibited behaviors in employees, O'Neil (2004) sought to determine whether gender differences existed in upward influence tactics used by employees. Upward influence tactics were conceptualized as "communication that is used intentionally by lower-power participants to change the behavior of higher-power participants in organizations" (p. 127). Simply stated, does an employee's gender determine the way he communicates with superiors when attempting to modify a superior's behavior or decision? To secure data, 309 public relations practitioners were surveyed. Results of the study indicated that gender did not account for differences that existed in upward influence tactics used by employees. Instead, the researcher posited that the employees' perception of power usage by managers was a more determining

factor in accounting for the communicative differences exhibited by employees when employing upward influence tactics.

#### Culture and Power's Role in Employee Racial Discrimination Complaints

According to Orbe (1998), there is an “inextricable relationship between culture, power, and communication” (p. 131) as culture and power highly “influence the process of communication” (p. 131) for individuals. In the case of racial discrimination in the workplace, a minimum of two levels of power differentials exist for employees who are members of co-cultural groups based on their race and the inherent employer-employee hierarchy embedded in organizations. Therefore, minority employees must attempt to strategically communicate with the dominant group based on these two existent power differentials in order to negotiate a desirable position. However, at times, such a position is neither negotiated nor secured as exhibited in racial discrimination complaints.

At the time a discrimination act occurs, past research (e.g., Camara & Orbe, 2010) told us that individuals employ a variety of communicative strategies to resolve the act; however, the framework of co-cultural theory, Camara and Orbe noted, does not presently include a strategy that encompasses the act of filing a legal complaint as no studies have explored the communication decisions and strategies that lead to or occur within this context. Therefore, details of this new strategy remain unknown. The new strategy may be a product of many other failed communicative attempts, a strategy employed by only certain communication orientations, or a more direct route influenced by lack of job satisfaction, managerial trust, and/or employee perception of organizational support. Perhaps it could be a combination of the three. However, if the latter of the list influenced an employee's decision to file a legal complaint, perhaps a

manager's perceived power usage may also be a culprit for such a formal and legal strategy.

Without a full understanding of this phenomenon, organizations continue to be vulnerable to an act that can result in financial ruin. Moreover, a lack of research in this area may also leave scholars pondering whether such an experience by an employee permanently alters their usage of communicative strategies with the dominant group. If so, how? Through the use of co-cultural theory and its influence from standpoint theory, this phenomenon can be more deeply explored, understood, and explained. First, however, process and implications involved in an employee's filing a formal legal complaint should be explored.

#### Title VII of Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, according to the United States Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012c), was created:

[T]o enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the districts courts of the United States to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes. (p. 1)

As such, Title VII of the Civil Rights act of 1964 protects employees from employment discrimination on the basis of race and color, national origin, sex, or religion. Specific to

race discrimination, this act dictates that “it is unlawful to discriminate any employee or applicant for employment because of race or color in regard to hiring, termination, promotion, compensation, job training, or any other term, condition or privilege of employment” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012a, pg. 1). As a result of this act, if any employee of a protected class believes that he/she has been discriminated against by their employer based upon the above mentioned criteria, he/she may receive relief by initiating a charge of discrimination with EEOC.

In order for a charge to be deemed valid and qualify for investigation by EEOC, the individual must follow a process previously determined by the governing office in a timely manner. Anti-discriminatory laws allow individuals 180 days from the day the discriminatory act took place to file a charge.

Filing a charge can be done in one of two ways (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012b). The first option is for a person to file a charge in person at a local field office. At this time, an interview will be conducted by EEOC to collect all needed information in order to investigate the charge. A second option is for individuals to file a charge through mail. If filing a charge by mail, EEOC asks the employee to provide a letter that contains the following information: name, address, and telephone number for both the employee and employer, the number of employees employed with the organization, a short description of the events that are perceived as discriminatory, a statement on why the employee believes they were discriminated against, and the signature of the employee alleging discrimination. Whether pursuing filing option one (1) or two (2), after all required and needed information is collected, EEOC will compile all submitted information onto an EEOC charge form and will ask the employee to sign it.

This signed form will then become the official EEOC charge form submitted for record and investigation. In order to maintain confidentiality of the employee, any information submitted to EEOC by an employee will not be shared with the employer until a formal charge has been recorded.

Once the charge has been submitted for record, the employer will receive notice of the charge within 10 days along with a copy of the official EEOC charge form. Once both parties have been issued a copy of the official EEOC charge form, they are both given the option to participate in a mediation process, which will attempt to help both parties reach a voluntary settlement. Both parties must agree to the mediation process for it to occur. If one or both parties declines mediation or if the mediation process fails, the employer is then asked to give a written answer to the formal charge. At this time an investigation by EEOC begins and a caseworker is assigned to the case. Additionally, both parties are made aware that retaliation by an employer towards an individual who has filed a charge or someone who takes part in the EEOC investigation or lawsuit is unlawful and additional charges may be added.

The investigation is highly dependent upon the information that is gathered and analyzed in each specific case. At times, EEOC will visit the organization to conduct interviews. More often, EEOC will interview witnesses over the telephone and request documents by mail. If an employee refuses to cooperate with the investigation, a subpoena will be issued in order to obtain needed documents, testimony, and to gain access into the organization. Additionally, if initial results of the investigation reveal the EEOC has no jurisdiction over the complaint, the charge will be closed, and both parties will be notified.

According to the most recent figure issued by EEOC on average, each charge took approximately six (6) months to be completed, and for a determination of result to be issued to both parties (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012b). However, at times, EEOC noted that the length of the investigation becomes cumbersome for many employees; therefore, EEOC allows a Right-to-Sue to be requested by the employee if 180 days have elapsed since the date the complaint was received by the office. This form then allows the employee to file a lawsuit in the appropriate court in their jurisdiction. If the employee chooses to pursue this path, the case will be closed by EEOC and no further investigation or action will be taken by this governing board. It must be noted that no lawsuit alleging discrimination based on race or color can be filed in the court system without first having received a notice of a Right-to-Sue by EEOC.

If a full investigation is conducted, EEOC noted that several options then become available to the employee based upon the result of determination issued (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012b). If a thorough investigation finds that no violation has occurred, the employee will receive a Notice-of-Right-to-Sue, which grants permission to file a lawsuit, and the case is then closed with EEOC. If EEOC's determination dictates that a violation was found in accordance with Title VII of the Civil Acts Right of 1964, the governing agency will attempt to reach a voluntary settlement with both the employee and the employer. If this settlement is unsuccessful, the legal staff of EEOC or the Department of Justice will review the case in order to determine if they will choose to file a lawsuit on the employee's behalf. If they decide not to file the lawsuit, a Notice-of-Right-to-Sue will then be issued to the employee and a lawsuit can then be filed in the court system. EEOC reports that they file approximately 300 new

discrimination lawsuits each year. Ultimately, regardless of the result, a Notice-of-Right-to-Sue will be obtained by any individual that files a discrimination complaint against their employer as long as appropriate procedures are followed. As previously stated in the introduction, in 2011, EEOC reported that 99,922 discrimination charges were filed with their office of which 35,890 (35.9%) of these charges alleged race-based discrimination against their employers and were seeking relief under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### Research Questions

In order to better understand the perception of management power usage and the communicative strategies used by four minority women before, during, and after filing a racial discrimination lawsuit against their employer, the following research questions are presented to guide the study:

Orbe's (1998) co-cultural theory asserted that the situational context highly influences the type of communicative strategies employed by subordinate group members as they negotiate their position with the dominant group; therefore, the following question is proposed:

RQ1: What communicative strategies do participants report using to communicate with their employers regarding the acts of discrimination prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC?

Research using co-cultural theory has sought to determine the types of communicative strategies used by subordinate groups in a variety of contexts; however, no focus has been placed on how individuals gauge the success of their communicative attempts. Therefore, the following question is proposed:

RQ2: Why did the participants gauge their pre-EEOC complaint communicative strategies as unsuccessful?

Research supports that management use of power can affect the superior-subordinate relationship in various ways. As such, the following question is proposed:

RQ3: What types of power did the managers exhibit through the participants' perspectives?

Filing a legal complaint against employers is an aggressive approach. However, it is unknown whether the complainant seeks to assimilate, accommodate, or separate during the process of the investigation. Therefore, the following question is proposed:

RQ4: After filing an official complaint with EEOC, what types of communicative strategies were used by the complainants when communicating with others in the organization?

After the completion of the legal process, the complainant's employment is often severed with the involved organization. Consequently, the employee must find employment with another organization. Presently, how an individual's communicative orientation is altered following an employee racial discrimination experience remains unknown. Therefore, the following question is proposed:

RQ5: How did this racial discrimination complaint experience change the manner in which the participants now communicate with their present employers and co-workers in an organizational setting?

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the methods that were used in order to obtain data to answer the research questions presented.

#### Co-Researchers

In a case study like this, a narrow sample proved to be beneficial as Orbe (1998) noted that the situational context could significantly alter the communicative strategies employed by individuals. Based on this assertion, by studying the experiences of four individuals from the same organization during the same time period, the experiences and communicative strategies exhibited by each individual were able to be appropriately compared and contrasted, which allowed for a more anchored analysis. Additionally, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) indicated that the comparison of stories told by different individuals can reveal how these individuals differ although they “occup[y] the same social-structural position” (p. 26).

As such, four minority women who all filed a racial discrimination lawsuit against the same employer were recruited to be the co-researchers for this study. Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling in order to insure that data gathered was illustrative of the study population and appropriately answered the research questions proposed. Individuals were asked to participate as co-researchers in this study, and were asked to give their verbal consent as outlined in Institutional Review Board (IRB) materials and approved. The term co-researchers will be used as in previous research (e.g., Gates, 2003; Orbe, 1994) in order to indicate the vital role participants play in the

study by providing the necessary data. Gates (2003) also indicated “this term promotes empowerment by designating a more equitable distribution of the credit for th[e] research” (p. 2).

The co-researchers’ ages ranged from 36 to 62 years old. Three of the co-researchers were African American, and one co-researcher was Mexican American. All four co-researchers were employed with the same organization for at least five years prior to the discrimination filing, with the most senior employee being employed with the organization for over 20 years. The organization was a small non-profit establishment that employed approximately 35 employees; therefore, all four co-researchers were familiar with the same organizational culture during the same time period. Of the four individuals, one held a position that was in upper level management, one held a mid-level management position, and the remaining two individuals worked in the capacity of case managers.

In regard to the racial discrimination complaint filed against the employer, all four women were required to submit a discrimination complaint with EEOC before receiving a right-to-sue. As part of the EEOC process, both the women and the organization were asked to submit documentation to support their stance. Based on the submitted information from both sides, EEOC determined the validity of the complaints and issued a right-to-sue based on their protocol and/or investigation for all four women. Consequently, each filed a lawsuit in the appropriate district court. Ultimately, all four women participated in successful mediation hearings under the advisement of their

attorneys and avoided court litigation by accepting settlement offers. As a result of the successful mediation, both EEOC and the governing court have recorded all cases as closed.

Although all cases have been settled, the identity of all four women will not be revealed nor the identity of the organization be disclosed within this case study. This withholding of identity will insure a high level of privacy for the co-researchers, and will also protect the organization from the possibility of additional monetary loss as details of the complaints will be made available to the public through this study. The researcher obtained IRB approval of techniques for maintaining confidentiality for this proposed study in order to protect those involved.

In this study, confidentiality is essential and is provided for the participants as the disclosure of their names link directly to court records, which include the name of the organization that was sued. For this reason, the researcher used pseudonyms in order to identify the co-researchers. Co-researchers were allowed to develop this pseudonym in order to insure that they were provided ample opportunities to contribute to this study. The researcher, with the assistance of the co-researchers, also developed a pseudonym to identify the organization. Additionally, any accidental or incidental mentions of the organization name or employees within the organization during the interviews were blacked out by the researcher in the transcripts to further insure confidentiality. The researcher also requested that the IRB allow the waiving of participant consent forms as they could also reveal the identity of the participants. This waiver was approved as,

ultimately, identifiable information of the participant is not essential to the protocol of this case study.

The researcher took various additional steps to maintain confidentiality of the data, such as using data encryption software and securely storing printed data documents in locked locations. Additionally, the researcher insured that audio recordings of the interviews and transcriptions of these interviews were only accessible to the researcher.

### Narratives

Qualitative methods were used to conduct this study. Specifically, I interviewed the co-researchers and asked them to provide narratives regarding the events that surrounded their complaint. I also asked them to provide narratives that revealed the communicative practices they used to communicate with superiors and other employees before, during, and after the complaint process. These narratives also helped establish the types of power used by superiors. Additionally, other interview questions were included in order to obtain information regarding the individuals' years of service with the organization, positions they held, etc.

I sought to collect data through narratives as it has been asserted that humans are story telling creatures (Bochner, 2001; Fisher, 1987; Goodall, 1996, 2005) that approach their social world in a narrative mode; therefore, storytelling is a very basic and universal activity used by all humans to symbolically order their lives, and "are pivotal to a rich and nuanced understanding of social phenomena" (De Fina, 2009). As a result, story making is an embedded art in all humans, and, "stories just emerge, naturally, as a primary way that we relate with each other" (Poulos, 2008, p. 128). Spector-Mersel (2010) reciprocated this thought by noting that every individual, family, organization, and

group has a narrative. Fisher (1987) elaborated that it is through the stories that humans tell that one can understand human discourse and behavior as they provide details of “conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends” (p. 24), that provide insight to how one recreates and understands life. Additionally, according to Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, and Fix (2004), narratives also provide useful information by deriving meaning from “events, feelings, and emotions experienced during and after the events, and lessons learned from the events.” Furthermore, Fisher (1987) asserted that by analyzing human communication through storytelling, one can better understand specific aspects of an individual’s life, such as their values, which can reveal items of importance, irrelevance, transcendence, etc.

Various scholars have also asserted that narratives permeate organizations (Brown, 1985; Clair, 1993; Cortazzi, 1993; Delamont, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Kelly, 1985; Mishler, 1997; Thomas, 1995) often providing insight into the culture of the organization by revealing aspects of the culture, such as the organization’s values (Meyer, 1995), goals (Kreps, 1990), expected behaviors (Martin, 1982), relationships with co-workers (Sias et al., 2004), and employees’ perceptions of how they meet the organization’s mission and their job responsibilities (Jones-Bodie, D’Enbeau, & Dohrman, 2008). More recently, Venette, Sellnow, and Lang (2003) asserted that metanarration, stories that arise after a primary story and extend the understanding of the initial story, can be used strategically by the organization to protect, restore, or repair their image during organizational crisis. Consequently, Meyer (1995) asserted that narratives are then “important for creating a person’s sense of organizational reality” (p. 211). Therefore, it would stand to reason that

others' narratives offer researchers a way to gain access into the organization and understand the culture that exists.

Moreover, narratives empower individuals as they are able to share their stories (Creswell, 2007) in their own words (Anderson & Jack, 1991) since the testimony of all individuals is equally deserving of attention (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). By using their own words through stories, participants often find it easier to speak about situations that may otherwise be difficult to express (Kirkwood, 1985). Additionally, narrative inquiry keeps the researcher's focus on interpreting the meaning that the participants hold regarding a life experience (Creswell, 2007) as "[I]f life stories are not a mere cluster of dates, facts, or incidents, but a selective unfolding of events and experiences that have played a crucial or meaningful role in the narrator's life" (Kama, 2002, p. 197). Stories shared by participants explain how they have attributed meaning to a particular life event. This explanation is essential as it helps the researcher understand why and how a "person bec[ame] who s/he is" (Kama, 2002, p. 197), and prevents the researcher from leaning on merely their own understanding of how the elements of the story work together to create an experience for the participants.

Coles (1989) noted that asking individuals to tell a story as opposed to asking them to answer scripted questions often results in a more detailed and elaborated explanation as individuals no longer see themselves as a mere research specimen; instead, they are a unique individual sharing their story. Through this shared experience, the researcher often is able to see how insignificant details fall into place and become important (Conville, 1997). Moreover, Meyer (1995) noted that "narratives have been found to pervade organizations, serving to convey information, communicate the culture,

and orient members to organizational goals and ways of life” (p. 211); therefore, narratives provide a useful way to understand a person’s perception of the organization, which has become their constructed reality.

Narratives also allow the researcher to conduct a thematic analysis of the narratives provided. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural theory as the lens to analyze the narratives. Analysis of the narratives assisted in gaining a deeper knowledge of the strategies used by the co-researchers to communicate with the dominant group before, during, and after the lawsuit. Through the narratives, the researcher was also able to analyze the power types used by the employers as perceived by the employees.

### Research Design

To obtain a first or central narrative, the researcher assessed and reviewed the original complaint documents submitted to EEOC as each complainant was provided with a copy of her filed charge to have for her records. This document was beneficial for two main reasons. First, it helped the researcher develop further questions to ask the co-researchers for elaboration of narratives at the time of the interview. Secondly, the document was useful in helping the individuals remember some key details they had forgotten since the case had been settled.

### Interviews

In depth interviews were conducted in order to secure data. A research definition of interview was incorporated, which refers to an interview as “a face-to-face verbal

interchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons” (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954, p. 449). Each initial interview ranged from twenty-five (25) to sixty (60) minutes. This time range has been previously used and supported by others in similar studies (e.g., Orbe, 1994). Subsequent interviews were held with two of the five co-researchers in order to elaborate on responses and/or clarify responses.

Orbe (1998) noted that “in-depth interviews are only effective when researchers can create a topical protocol of general, open-ended questions that allow each co-researcher to inductively explore topical areas that represent salient issues in her or his own experiences” (p. 40). As such, the interviews in this case study followed an open ended/general interview guide approach (Nelson, 1989; Patton, 1983) to insure that all interviews covered the same topics. However, the interviewer allowed for some digression from the topics in order to preserve a true dialogue with the respondent (Creswell, 2007), as noted in a conversational interviewing strategy (Van Maanen, 1990).

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Co-researchers were asked to assist in the transcription process by clarifying any word, thought, or sentence that the researcher was unable to decipher. This step was taken in order to insure accuracy of the transcriptions. Notes regarding the setting as well as nonverbal impressions of the co-researchers were taken by the researcher as experts have noted that this information may later assist in analyzing the data (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). All interviews were held at a location suggested by each co-

researcher. Co-researchers were provided a copy of the transcripts in order to insure accuracy, and were allowed to make revisions or submit additions to their transcripts as they saw appropriate.

### Analysis

After all interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher analyzed the transcripts with the goal of understanding and answering the proposed research questions. As suggested in Creswell (2007), the analysis of data began with several thorough reads of all transcripts in order to get a feel for the data on hand, and allow for thoughts and/or ideas to be written in the margins. After the researcher was comfortable with the transcripts, analysis of the narratives began. Analysis began by going through the transcripts and isolating the narratives offered in the participants' responses. Operationally, narrative was defined as in a 1995 study by Meyer that offered the following definition: "any sequence of events (a plot) together in time or causally related, with organization-related characters, which takes place in a setting somehow related to the organization" (p. 214). After this step had occurred, the researcher began to analyze each research question accordingly.

In order to answer research questions one and four, the researcher used Orbe's (1998) co-cultural theory as a lens to explore the narratives offered by the co-researchers. Specifically, the researcher used the existing categorical system offered in co-cultural theory, which lists various communicative strategies used by minority group members when communicating with the dominant group. By using this lens, the researcher was able to determine which communicative strategies were used by the co-researchers during

different phases of their complaint. Although Orbe's (1998) categorical system was initially used to explore the narratives offered to answer research questions one and four, the researcher also looked for emerging categories if narratives did not fit into existing categories. McCracken's (1988) guidelines were used in order to guide the emergence of new categories as it has been widely used in studies within the communication discipline (e.g., Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Wright & Orbe, 2003). McCracken (1988) offers the following steps for thematization of data, and they were therefore used:

- (a) initial sorting out of important from unimportant data; (b) examination of the slices of data for logical relationships and contradictions; (c) re-reading of transcripts to confirm or disconfirm emerging relationships and beginning recognition of general properties of the data; (d) identification of general themes and sorting of the themes in a hierarchical fashion, while discarding those that prove useless in the organization; and (e) review of the emergent themes for each of the transcripts and determination of how these can be synthesized into themes.

(p. 19)

McCracken's (1988) guidelines were also used to help answer research questions two and five as no existing categorical system existed regarding the questions proposed. Therefore, the researcher sought to establish a categorical system in order to extend current theory. Research question three sought to determine the types of power used by management on a daily basis as perceived by the co-researchers. French and Raven's (1968) power types were used as a lens to analyze the narratives provided to answer research question three. As in research questions one and four, McCracken's guidelines

were used when narratives did not appear to fit into French and Raven's existing power types, and new categories needed to be established.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Community and Organizational Information

According to an unnamed source, the organization is located in Central Texas. In 2010, the city was noted to have a population of 93, 200. The racial make-up of the city was 83% Caucasian, 5.4% African American, 1.4% Native American, and 1.7% Asian. The source also noted that 38.5% of the population was of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.

The organization where the acts of discrimination occurred was a small nonprofit organization located within the city that employs under 40 employees. The organization is governed by a seven member board, which is appointed by the Mayor of the city. Day to day operations of the organization were overseen by an Executive Director hired by the board of directors. Mid-level management positions included a finance director and a programs director. Under these two positions, several positions existed as non-managerial positions.

#### Research Question One

Research question one sought to establish which communicative strategies participants reported using with their employer regarding the acts of discrimination prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC. Based on a thorough analysis of their transcripts, several types of communicative strategies were identified by each participant.

*Susie*

Analysis of Susie's transcript identified the following communicative strategies prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC.

*Using liaisons.* During the course of Susie's pre-EEOC communicative experiences with her employer, Susie's narrative indicated that she approached the board for assistance:

[W]e decided to write a letter to the board to let them know. And they had a meeting and they listened to us but they didn't do anything about it. They gave us some pizza and acted liked they cared, but it didn't fix anything.

*Averting controversy.* Susie's transcript also revealed that she would shy away from topics she believed to be controversial when she stated:

Basically, every morning I reported to work going directly to my office. I made it a point to only engage in conversations with those that had absolutely nothing to do with the racist practices within the organization. Those that were directly involved, I only communicated with only when necessary and never initiated any small talk. If ever pulled into a water cooler conversation, initiated by my harassers I simply gave succinct and unemotional answers that did not foster additional conversation. I was distrustful and paranoid with everyone in the organization.

*Avoiding.* This third communicative strategy was identified in Susie's transcript when she discussed how she tried to maintain a safe distance with the dominant group:

I did not initiate any communication with them unless I had to. I only spoke to them when they spoke to me. I would avoid them. I was very irritated with them, and I didn't trust them. I also thought they were going to fire me.

#### *Lu-Lu*

Analysis of Lu-Lu's transcript identified the following pre-EEOC communicative strategies:

*Using liaisons.* Lu-Lu's transcript indicated that she approached the board for assistance with the matter stating, "I drafted a letter to the board asking to have a meeting with them about what had occurred, and how I felt that I was unfairly terminated." Due to her termination, Lu-Lu experienced no further communication with others in the organization prior to filing an official EEOC complaint after this meeting was held.

#### *Karla*

Analysis of Karla's transcript identified the following communicative strategies:

*Using liaisons.* Through the analysis of Karla's transcript, she indicated trying to receive the support of previous management regarding the manner in which the board of directors was treating her, "I [discussed my treatment] with a few, a manager, a program manager, but they had no authority."

*Avoiding.* Karla also indicated that prior to filing her EEOC complaint, she began avoiding any communication with her superiors, “only when necessary and only regarding work [did I speak to her].” She also noted that she “could not speak to anyone.”

*Maintaining barriers.* Karla noted that she in a sense imposed a psychological distance from co-workers who were part of the dominant group as she perceived they were afraid to speak to her fearing the negative response of their superiors, who were members of the dominant group:

You know, everyone, to me, was friendly but as soon as I knew that that attitude was going around as far as if they had communication with me something could happen to them, I did not want that to happen to the other individuals. It was a very difficult decision, so it hurt me that the employees didn't communicate with me for whatever reason, but I also understood that they needed to protect themselves.

Karla elaborated on this sentiment by adding, “I did not blame the individuals, and I knew they had to protect their jobs, their families, their money, their income, and so I was kind of shut down from everyone.”

### *Bella*

Analysis of Bella’s transcript indicated the following communicative strategies:

*Using liaisons.* Bella indicated that she appealed to the board hoping to receive relief from the discriminatory acts she was enduring:

I tried to appeal to the board because I knew that I couldn't appeal to the management because of the things told to me. So I went to the board to tell them what was happening. How and what the management was doing and saying about us. I did this in a letter to the board in the form of a letter.

Bella indicated that although the board never addressed with her the letter personally, she did feel temporarily relief from her superiors; however, she noted that “things got better for about a week and then they returned to the same way.”

*Avoiding.* Bella shared that she began to avoid communication with her superiors and other co-workers of the dominant group:

I just stopped talking to them and would avoid them because they just seemed to continually antagonize me and other minorities within my department. Because two of us were black, and one was a white woman who was friendly with us, and she told me that they encouraged her to get an office away from us, and to move closer to them. They just kept doing things like that to show how they were trying to divide us or ostracize us. They just started knit picking us. Any piece of paper we would leave out we would receive a memo telling us we needed to start picking up after ourselves. Just stuff like that. We felt like a red headed step-child. We were just being scrutinized about everything. They told us everything we did wrong, but never about anything we did right. And, obviously, we

were doing things right because we were still in compliance with rules and regulations.

### *Summary of Strategies*

Analysis of transcripts indicated that a variety of communicative strategies were used by co-researchers when communicating with superiors regarding the acts of discrimination prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC (see Table 2). In total, four communicative strategies were identified in transcripts. Two of the communicative strategies were nonassertive separation strategies, one strategy was assertive accommodation, and one strategy was a nonassertive assimilation.

Of the strategies mentioned, all four co-researchers reported using the assertive accommodation strategy labeled *using liaisons*, which indicated that they “identif[ied] specific dominant group members who [could] be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance” (Orbe, 1998, p. 17).

Three of the four co-researchers indicated employing a nonassertive separation strategy labeled *avoiding* as analysis of their transcripts indicated that they “maintain[ed] a distance from dominant group members [and] refrain[ed] from activities and/or locations where interaction [was] likely” (Orbe, 1998, p. 17). An additional nonassertive separation strategy was used by one co-researcher as their transcript highlighted their use of *maintaining interpersonal barriers* by “imposing, through the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, a psychological distance from dominant group members” (Orbe, 1998, p. 17). Furthermore, the nonassertive assimilation strategy *averting controversy* was

identified in one co-researcher’s transcript as she indicated that she “avert[ed] communication away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas” (Orbe, 1998, p. 16).

Table 2

*RQ1: Communicative Strategies Used Prior to Filing Complaint*

Strategies Used	# of Participants using Strategy	Sample of Examples
Using Liaisons	4	We decided to write a letter to the board...  I [discussed my treatment] with a few but they had no authority.  I drafted a letter to the board...  I tried to appeal to the board.
Avoiding	2	I didn’t communicate with them unless I had to.  I just stopped talking to them and would avoid them...
Averting Controversy	1	I . . .only engaged in conversations with those that had absolutely nothing to do with racist practices.
Maintaining Barriers	1	I was kind of shut down from everybody.

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to determine why co-researchers gauged their pre-EEOC communicative attempts with their employer as unsuccessful. Through thorough

analysis of each transcript, the following narratives and responses were used to answer research question two.

*Susie*

Susie shared the following sentiments regarding her superiors' response to her pre-EEOC communicative strategies:

*They gave us some pizza.* At this time, I saw enough game playing in the organization. I knew what was going on. And at this time the organization environment was horrible. The secretary was running the show, and she was doing it in a hateful manner so we decided to write a letter to the board to let them know. And they had a meeting, and they listened to us, but they didn't do anything about it. They gave us some pizza and acted like they really cared, but it didn't fix anything. They still let her run the organization even they were saying racist things, and they were out of control. They really acted like they were listening to us, but there was no change by the secretary and finance director.

Later in her interview, Susie reiterated this sentiment when she added:

*They did nothing.* We had that meeting with the board about a week earlier and they did nothing. I knew they weren't going to listen to me when they didn't even do anything about people using racial slurs and then they go off and hire her as the executive director. I knew approaching the board again was a waste of my time. They had three letters telling them about the racial issues, and they told us they would take it under

advisement, and then they hired her. I knew that I was going to get nowhere with them.

Ultimately, Susie noted her pre-EEOC communicative attempts as unsuccessful when she was not interviewed for a position that she believed she was qualified for.

Susie stated the following:

*They didn't even interview me.* Next thing we know they hired the secretary for the executive director position. After they knew that she used racial slurs about calling us niggers and spics, because we had told them. This is when I started to think I'm going to file an EEOC complaint. Because they didn't even interview me for the job, and I was more than a secretary.

*Lu-Lu*

Lu-Lu shared two incidents that helped her determine that her pre-EEOC communicative strategies were unsuccessful. Lu-Lu first shared how she first attempted to "reason" with the Executive Director immediately after he terminated her:

*I tried to reason with him.* I just sat there and I looked at him and told him I couldn't believe that he was firing me because I wouldn't tell him something that someone said. I tried to reason with him. I tried to tell him how I had promised my employees that our conversations would remain confidential. I told them this because I wanted them to be honest, and I wanted them to know that they wouldn't get in trouble for telling how they really felt about how the organization was being ran. I wanted them to trust me so that we could get to the root of the problem and find out why

they were performing so poor. I knew their morale was down, and I needed to know why to increase productivity in my departments or I was going to have to answer to that. I really tried to make him understand why I wouldn't reveal that information to him. And then he said that if I didn't leave he would call the police.

Later in her interview, Lu-Lu shared a second incident that occurred that assured her that her pre-EEOC communicative strategies were unsuccessful, therefore guiding her to file a formal legal complaint with EEOC:

*His decision to fire me was to stand.* A few days later, I drafted a letter to the board asking to have a meeting with them about what had occurred, and how I felt that I was unfairly terminated. I had been working for the organization for over 20 years. I had always been a loyal employee working myself up the organization ladder so to speak. I had no written write ups in my 20 years there. I wanted them to understand why I hadn't shared the information with my boss. I knew he told them only his side. I wanted them to hear my side. They agreed to meet with me. They listened to my side, and didn't say very much. Just asked questions. I answered them. And they made a decision and told me that his decision to fire me was to stand.

Lu-Lu noted that she was unsatisfied with their decision, therefore deciding to file a formal EEOC complaint alleging racial discrimination since "there were times when there had been people placed over me who didn't have the experience or knowledge that I had." Furthermore, Lu-Lu noted in her interview how she felt being referred to as a

“black bitch” and a “nigger” by the finance director: “I really felt sorry for them to have to fling around names like that. I know I did not like it. It did not feel good, but I just kept going.” This alleged behavior by the finance director was also included in Lu-Lu’s official EEOC complaint.

*Karla*

Analysis of Karla’s transcript indicated that she initially gauged her communicative strategies as unsuccessful when she addressed her concerns with the original management: “I [discussed] with a few, a manager, a program manager, but they had no authority. So no one could do anything because of the board of directors. Everyone was afraid. Everyone would go to work with fear.”

She then shared an explanation that indicated that communicative strategies with new management were, ultimately, nonexistent:

*No other person to complain to.* I could not speak to anyone. I was in charge of the human resource side of it, which I did a lot of work for that regards to human resource. So I could not complain to myself. We had no other person to complain to. The next was the board of directors, which, they were the ones using tactics, unethical tactics to manipulate the organization and the people. And other than the board, the next step, I believe, would be the government or local government. And with me not having the financial background or backing of other individuals, my concern to them would be negligence [sic].

Karla also noted that unfair practice regarding minorities ultimately led her to file a formal racial discrimination complaint with EEOC as she noted the following:

*They used it at times to their favor.* All of the, the organization included different races. Situations were happening to a lot of people that were Hispanic, that were Black, and without any reasoning to that. Again, the organization to me, as a human resource administrator/payroll clerk, I felt that is the way that you, you do run your organization through the policies. A lot of the policies were not used or utilized. They were only followed during the processes that the directors thought, and when they wanted to use the policy book, handbook. And so they used it at times to their favor, and they didn't use it when it wasn't to their favor. And it was utilized to the other individuals that were Hispanic or Black.

*Bella*

An in depth analysis of Bella's transcript indicated that her pre-EEOC communicative strategies were gauged as unsuccessful as she perceived her appeal to the board to be unhelpful:

*Bought us pizza.* I remember [in a meeting] they addressed the climate. Because I told them in the letter that the administrative staff was being racist. So they held this meeting and bought us pizza and told us that they understood our concerns and they were going to look into things. And that is all they said.

She later in the interview indicated why she believed this meeting to be unhelpful:

*To appease me.* I think they let people vent about the organization so that they could act liked they cared. But, they were just going through the motions of making it appear like they addressed this issue, but nothing

came of the meeting. Things got better for about a week and then they returned to the same way. So that is when I really knew that the meeting was just held to appease me.

She then shared why she ultimately decided to pursue an official EEOC complaint as she found her pre-EEOC communicative strategies to be unsuccessful:

*It wasn't a fair game.* When I started seeing white individuals being moved into positions that I knew there were other minority people who were more qualified for, and when I saw that I knew it wasn't a fair game. I knew that it was now out of my control. I tried to address it in house but they did nothing and now the imbalance was still there. I knew there was nothing I could do that would work, so I knew I had to now or it was going to get worse and I was going to quit, which I think that is what they wanted, or I was going to end up getting fired.

#### *Summary of Strategies*

Co-researchers shared various narratives and responses that established why they gauged their pre-EEOC communicative attempts as unsuccessful. On average, each participant provided three responses that detailed why they believed as they did. However, after using McCracken's (1988) guidelines to guide the emergence of a categorical system, responses naturally fell into two categories.

The first category to emerge was *inaction by liaisons in the organization*. In this category, co-researchers indicated that they believed that they had exhausted the assistance of liaisons within the organization. Additionally, in this category, co-researchers stated that they believed their pre-EEOC communicative attempts to be

unsuccessful when liaisons in the organization, often their superiors, did not act on the information given to them. Instead, they believed the actions of the liaisons to be placating.

The second category that emerged was *continued perception of unfair practices*. In this category, co-researchers provided narratives and responses that indicated that they gauged their pre-EEOC communicative attempts to be unsuccessful when they perceived that discriminatory acts against them by their employers continued to occur within the organization. All four co-researchers noted that this continued discrimination was the deciding factor in their decision to file a formal EEOC complaint.

### Research Question Three

Research has supported that managements' use of power can affect the superior-subordinate relationship in various ways. As such, research question three sought to establish what types of power the management exhibited, overtly or covertly, through the co-researchers' perspective. A thorough review of participants' transcripts exhibited both the absence and presence of several of French and Raven's (1968) power types.

#### *Susie*

Review of Susie's transcripts revealed the following regarding the use of power:

*Reward power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management's usage of reward power were not identified in Susie's transcript.

*Coercive power.* Review of Susie's transcript produced a single example of the use of coercive power by management as she conveyed that everyone "started sweating bullets" as they believed they may be fired:

And [work] was really stressful. We all started to worry about our job security because we saw that all the old upper management got fired or resigned, and we always feared if all the new management and board would run us off too. We still kept doing our job, but we knew they were not being fair with us and we didn't trust them.

*Referent power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management's usage of referent power was not identified in Susie's transcript.

*Expert power.* Throughout the course of her interview, Susie made several references that indicated that a presence of expert power was absent in the superior-subordinate relationships in the organization. Speaking of management, Susie recalled:

I think they leaned a lot on the head counselor, but they must have had some knowledge. But without the head counselor, I don't think they would know the answers or would even begin to know where they would go to get the answers. One [supervisor] though I think had not a clue.

She reinforced this absence of expert power when she shared the following regarding a separate supervisor: "And they put this white man named X in charge who had less time in a management position, and had less education than anybody else, but all of sudden he's in charge of everybody else." She further elaborated on this sentiment by indicating that others in the organization contained the expert knowledge to perform the

job more successfully, but were overlooked, she believed, due to the race of the qualified individuals:

I thought it was unfair that X had been the interim for about a year and she had worked for the organization for over 20 something years and they always came to her for assistance, but then they decided to open up the job and accept applications for her job.

You would think she would have been the shoe in for the job based on her knowledge, and since they let her run the organization for 1 year and it did well. Why did you take applications? We all knew though it was because of her race, because she was black. And because of all the other stuff we had heard that the secretary and finance director would say about not working for a black bitch.

Susie further elaborated on the replacing of the black woman with the white man by establishing that there were others in the organization that contained more knowledge than the white man they chose to fill the position:

So we were then thinking well why didn't they put X in charge.

She was next in line, she was already a manager, and she had a Master's degree. But they skipped her. We knew why because of what was said about X, and how they wouldn't work for a nigger. We knew it was because X was Mexican; they didn't want to work for her either. And the person under X was me, and

I'm black and I have a Master's degree, too, but they skipped over me too, and they put that white man over all of us.

Susie then indicated that the White man was also fired, and a White consultant was called in, whom according to Susie, "knew barely anything about the organization. She always had to ask us what to do and what is this and what is that."

Ultimately, Susie specified that the executive director position was filled. However, again, she noted the lack of knowledge of the selected candidate, "next thing we know they hired the secretary for the executive director position" and then compared her own knowledge and skill to the hired candidate:

They didn't even interview me for the job, and I was more than a secretary. I had been with the organization for seven years.

I had a Master's degree. I was in the military and had a lot of leadership experience, and they hired the secretary over me who had only a high school diploma, no management experience, but she was White.

*Legitimate power.* Reference to legitimate power surfaced in Susie's interview when she shared why she continued to accept orders from management, "I still did what they told me to because it was my job, but I didn't trust them because they were not doing things fairly," and "It was my job and they were the people I worked for. They were my boss. . . so I just did it because they were my boss and that's why I did it."

*Lu-Lu*

A thorough review of Lu-Lu's transcript exhibited the following regarding her superiors' use of power:

*Reward power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management's usage of reward power were not identified in Lu-Lu's transcript.

*Coercive power.* Lu-Lu's transcript produced a single example of the use of coercive power when she shared why she chose to communicate with new management less frequently, "It seemed as though you were afraid to say too much because you didn't know what they would take that you said and turn it into something else to get you fired."

*Referent power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management's usage of reward power were not identified in Lu-Lu's transcript.

*Expert power.* Lu-Lu shared an incident that indicated the lack of management containing expert power when she stated, "there were times when there had been people placed over me who didn't have the experience or the knowledge that I had." She elaborated on this statement by sharing the following story:

There was young man who was there, he came way after I did, and because he had a degree, he was a male who didn't know anything about [our job], but they opened a position and labeled it something that I had never heard of before. In that position, the knowledge you should have had, he did not have it, but he got the position.

*Legitimate power.* Lu-Lu shared her view of why she chose to follow work orders given by her supervisor when she stated, “it was just day to day operations. . . We just got our job done.”

*Karla*

A thorough review of Karla’s transcript exhibited both the absence and presence of several of French and Raven’s (1968) power types by her superiors. They occurred as follows:

*Reward power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management’s usage of reward power were not identified in Karla’s transcript.

*Coercive power.* Several instances of coercive power were identified during the analysis of Karla’s transcript. The first instance was touched upon when Karla spoke about the tension that had plagued the organization with the appointing of new management:

It was very sad for everyone else involved, even in the organization because we all had jobs and wanted to keep them. I don’t think I would be in an organization for ten years and hate it. I enjoyed what I did, I enjoyed being with coworkers, but with the board and the organization, the whole organization was working in fear, it was just crazy.

She expounded on her fear of the motives of new management by adding,

I hated coming to work. I did not know what would happen when I showed up at 8:00 in the morning,” and “[t]hey continued to, I believe, harass me while I was at work and torture me knowing that I had to go to work and make a living and pay my bill, and they, I believed, enjoyed the torture that they did and the fear that they communicated with the employees.

*Referent power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management’s usage of referent power were not identified in Karla’s transcript.

*Expert power.* Analysis of Karla’s transcripts indicated that subordinates noted little, if any, expert power. She expressed this view on repeated occasions during the course of her interview. Her first mention was when she indicated that a change in management occurred after previous management had been replaced. She shared how the board of directors managed this change during the transition period:

It was the board of directors, or the board, who had no communication with the employees, did not know the organization, did not know the positions did not know the policy, or the handbook of the organization.

She elaborated by providing her opinion of new management’s knowledge by stating:

She became a supervisor, and I believe at that point I knew that there was some discrimination being involved because the

lady did not have a degree. She had no management skills, no accounting skills, and I was told to help her.

Karla later compared the knowledge base of her two new supervisors to her own knowledge:

Both of the individuals were Anglo and they did not have any, they may have had the skills and knowledge of accounting, but they did not have any experience, as stated in the handbook. They did not have the education to back that up, as well as the information of the overall program. And with ten years experience, I felt I had more tenure and knowledge than the others.

Karla further discussed her direct supervisor's lack of knowledge by adding, "So I knew that she had no knowledge of any type of work. I felt sorry for her anyway so I did help her."

*Legitimate power.* A single instance of legitimate power was located in the transcripts of Karla when she stated, "I did respect the individual and I did show her the instructions on what I was asked to do."

### *Bella*

A thorough review of Bella's transcript exhibited both the absence and presence of several of French and Raven's (1968) power types.

*Reward power.* Examples or reference to managerial behavior that would indicate management's usage of reward power were not identified in Bella's transcript.

*Coercive power.* Bella's transcript revealed an instance of coercive power when she shared why she continued to do as her new supervisor instructed:

I already feared that if I didn't do what they told me to do, they were going to get rid of me, too. I believe that a lot of what they said was done to find a reason to clean us out or push us out and hire new people because they knew we wanted and liked the way things use to be and didn't agree with the way they were doing things now so I think they had an agenda to push us out and find people who were not use to the way things use to be ran.

*Referent power.* A single instance of referent power was identified during the analysis of Bella's transcript. This instance occurred when she spoke about how she was willing to receiving instruction from her previous supervisor based on the supervisor's "good nature":

She was good natured. She was understanding. She understood people went through things, and she worked with them. She was just very approachable. She was very humble. If you walked into the building any given day and didn't know she was a supervisor, you wouldn't know because that is how humble her spirit was.

*Expert power.* Three instances of reference to expert power emerged in Bella's transcripts. The first instance is when she spoke again about her previous supervisor:

When I first started working there I was told of her tenure there. I knew out of anyone there, she knew what she was talking about. She knew what was going on. If there is anyone I need to listen to, it would be her. She was an expert in what she was doing.

This description of her previous supervisor was then contrasted with new management when Bella expressed her opinion regarding the knowledge level of new management:

It was awkward because I was hired under certain conditions, and then when new management comes in and they have a particular skill or background, but they don't really know how OUR organization runs and they make particular changes that they think will be productive are actually counterproductive.

She continued, "You had changes that were made by people who didn't seem to know how the organization ran. And they seemed to be trying to fix something that wasn't broke."

*Legitimate power.* A thorough analysis of Bella's transcript indicated a single instance of reference to legitimate power when Bella explained why she continued to perform the tasks given to her by her new supervisor:

It was my job. You are not going to sacrifice your career or income because of something that changed in your workplace, you are just going to just do it because they told you to do it.

*Summary of Power Types Noted*

Thorough analysis of the transcripts indicated that four of French and Raven's (1968) power types were referenced by co-researchers during their interviews: coercive, referent, expert, and legitimate power (see Table 3). Reference to reward power was not identified in transcripts. Reference to coercive, expert, and legitimate power were mentioned by all four co-researchers in their transcripts. Reference to referent power was mentioned by one co-researcher when she was speaking about her "old" supervisor before a change in management occurred.

Table 3

*RQ3: Power Types Noted by Co-Researchers*

Power Types	# of Participants Noting	Sample of Examples
Coercive	4	It seemed as though you were afraid to say too much...to get you fired.  I already feared that if I didn't do what they told me to do, they were going to get rid of me, too.
Expert (absence of)	4	He didn't know anything...  I knew she had no knowledge of any type of work...
Legitimate	4	We just got our job done.  I just did it because they were my boss.  You are just going to just do it because they told you to do it.
Referent	1	She was good natured.

#### Research Question Four

Research question four sought to establish what communicative strategies co-researchers reported using when communicating with others in the organization after filing an official racial discrimination complaint with EEOC. Based on thorough analysis of their transcripts, the following strategies were identified for each individual.

##### *Susie*

Susie shared the following narratives that exhibited the communicative strategies she used with others in the organization after filing an official EEOC complaint against her employer.

*Avoiding.* Susie indicated in her interview that she continued to avoid communication with others in the organization after filing her EEOC complaint:

I remained the same. I spoke to them when they spoke to me. But I never shared any information with anybody else. I didn't try to involve anybody else in the organization. I felt an injustice was done to me so I filed the complaint, but I wasn't trying to involve anybody else.

*Overcompensating.* Susie also indicated through her responses that after filing her official complaint, she also had to overcompensate as she feared making any mistake and losing her job:

I made it strictly on prayer sometimes. It was nerve-wracking. Every day was a day when I wondered if I would have a job. I knew I couldn't make

any mistakes because they were looking for any reason to fire me. So that was exhausting. That was stressful.

*Filing charges.* Susie also indicated that all communication with others in the organization regarding the lawsuit ceased except by her attorney and EEOC when she indicated, “[a]ll communication was done through EEOC.”

*Lu-Lu*

Communicative strategies employed by Lu-Lu after filing an official EEOC complaint were virtually non-existent as her employment with the organization had earlier been severed. All communication held between the two parties was done through her attorney and EEOC. Therefore, it is noted that Lu-Lu employed the strategy of *filing charges* although narratives and responses depicting this communication were not present in her transcript.

*Karla*

Similar to Lu-Lu, Karla’s communication with others in the organization became severed when she resigned her position with the company. Therefore, all communication between the two parties was also virtually non-existent aside from communication held by her attorney and EEOC on her behalf. As such, it is noted that Karla employed the strategy of *filing charges* to communicate with others in the organization after filing an official EEOC complaint although narratives and responses in her transcript are not present.

*Bella*

Bella shared the following narratives and responses that exhibited the employment of various communication strategies when interacting with others in the organization after filing an official EEOC complaint.

*Avoiding.* Bella initially indicated that she continued to avoid communication with dominant group members in the organization after filing an EEOC complaint:

I became more standoffish. I knew they were looking for anything I did or say wrong. So I knew to leave everybody alone and keep to myself because they were always willing to make something out of nothing. So I censored myself a lot and just tried to speak when spoken to. I just started to drawn [sic] in. I felt like I had to protect myself.

*Overcompensating.* Bella's transcript also indicated that she employed the communication strategy of overcompensating when she shared the following:

There was a lot of anxiety. Mostly after I filed the complaint. I even had to go to the doctor and get medicine for it. It was so hard because you knew they were watching everything you did and looking for reasons for them to write you up. They had to show that I wasn't a good employee and there were reasons I didn't receive a promotion so I just had to watch everything I did. I had to be perfect. It just brought me down. It drove me mad.

*Filing legal charges.* Although not present in Bella's transcript, it is noted that she employed the strategy of *filing charges* when she solicited the assistance of EEOC to help rectify her racial discrimination complaint.

### *Summary of Strategies*

Research question four sought to establish what types of communicative strategies were used by the complainants when communicating with others in the organization after filing a formal EEOC complaint. After thorough analysis of all co-researchers' transcripts, it was found that the two individuals (Susie, Bella) that continued to work with the organization after filing their official complaint with EEOC employed strategies that Orbe (1998) labeled as nonassertive separation, assertive assimilation, and aggressive separation. The other two co-researchers' (Lu-Lu, Karla) employment with the organization was severed prior to filing an official complaint; therefore, no communicative exchanges were held between the employee and organization after the legal filing, therefore, providing no data for analysis (See Table 4).

The nonassertive separation strategy used by the two employees that continued their employment with the organization was *avoiding* as they both indicated that they attempted to avoid communication with others in the organization. *Overcompensating*, an assertive assimilation strategy, was also reportedly used by the two co-researchers that continued their employment when they felt they had to perform close to perfection as they feared that any negative occurrence involving their performance would lead to their termination.

The emergence of a new strategy, *filing charges*, was noted by all co-researchers during their interviews. Although this strategy is very similar to that of *using liaisons*, the researcher determined, after thorough analysis of the transcripts, that *filing charges* was a far more aggressive approach than *using liaisons*, which Orbe (1998) labeled as an assertive accommodation approach. As such, the researcher also noted that *filing charges* was an approach that ultimately sought separation “through ‘whatever’ means necessary” (Orbe, 1998, p. 117.) Presently, Orbe’s aggressive separation strategies only include *attacking* and *sabotaging others*, neither of which accurately depict the action of filing charges. Therefore, through the guidelines of McCracken (1988), the researcher believes that the transcripts support the emergence of a new strategy, *filing charges*.

Table 4

*RQ4: Communication Strategies Used After Filing Complaint*

Strategies Used	# of Participants using Strategy	Sample of Examples
Avoiding	2	I spoke to them when they spoke to me. . . But I wasn’t trying to involve anyone else.  I became more standoffish.
Overcompensating	2	I knew I couldn’t make any mistakes because they were looking for any reason to fire me.  I had to be perfect.
<i>*Filing Charges</i>	4	All communication was done thru EEOC.

*\*Filing Charges* is not currently included in Orbe’s (1998) existing typology.

### Research Question Five

Research question five sought to determine how the co-researchers' racial discrimination experience changed the manner in which they communicate with their present employer and co-workers in an organizational setting.

#### *Susie*

Based on a thorough analysis of Susie's transcript, the following changes were noted:

*I'm careful with what I say.* Susie reported that she often finds herself censoring and monitoring what she says in the presence of others in her current organization in order to avoid her words being taken out of context. She expressed this change when she stated, "I never want things taken out of context. I never say jokes that could be considered racial," and "I've become more aware of discriminatory issues or anything that could be considered discriminatory."

*I keep it about the job.* Susie noted the emergence of a second change in the way she communicates with her co-workers by stating, "I just do my job. I keep it about the job." She elaborated on this change by noting, "I use to be in the past more open and talk about business and personal stuff too, but now I just keep it about the job." She noted that she is particularly vigilant about not being involved in workplace gossip as a result of her experience, "I'm also very careful not to get pulled into the gossip. So when other employees come to me, I avoid the conversation."

*I always find myself making comparisons.* A third change that emerged in Susie's communication with individuals in her current organization involved how she responds to issues she perceives to be unfair. Unlike in the past, Susie stated, "I always find myself making comparisons of what is going on regarding employee relations, whether things are fair or unfair. If I think something is discriminatory against me, I speak up quickly now. I don't let those things build up. I go to my supervisor and express my concern if I think something is unfair." She also noted that as a supervisor in her current position that she "make[s] sure to be fair to people who work underneath me. I make sure that nobody can say I am being unfair or discriminatory."

#### *Lu-Lu*

Based on a thorough analysis of Lu-Lu's transcript, the following changes were noted.

*You just really can't trust anybody.* Lu-Lu noted in the course of her interview that it is now difficult to trust individuals that she works with in any capacity. She expressed this sentiment when she shared, "I have become very careful with the things that I would say to people because it did teach me a lesson that you cannot say everything to everybody. Because people will take what you say and use it against you. You just really can't trust nobody. Even if it seems like they like you and are friendly with you, you just never know."

*Just talk about the job.* A second way that Lu-Lu's experience has changed the way she currently communicates with others she works with was revealed when she

indicated that “it is just better to stay to yourself and just talk about the job - about things that are needed to complete the job that you are assigned to.” She also implied that individuals should not have friends at work when she indicated that individuals should leave unrelated work topics “for your home or for your friends. Solely speak about work at work.” Lu-Lu admitted that it is quite difficult to remain loyal to this regime when she explained, “of course at times I find myself getting involved in personal topics, but as soon as I realize it, I make sure to stop myself and refocus my attention to work.”

*Put everything in writing.* Analysis of Lu-Lu’s transcript also revealed a third way in which her communication with others has changed since her experience by stating that individuals should strive to put all correspondence in writing as it may be needed at a later time: “it is very important to put everything in writing if you ever have an issue and you want to address it. That way what you say can’t be changed. And it lets you make sure you are saying what you want to say. And you have proof if it is ever questioned.” Lu-Lu admitted that she has not always followed this method; however, “[she] wish [she] had, but now [she does].”

### *Karla*

Based on a thorough analysis of Karla’s transcript, the following changes were noted:

*I don’t hesitate to communicate.* Karla’s transcript indicated that she has not let her racial discrimination experience affect the way she communicates with others in her current organization in a negative manner. She expressed this by stating, “I still give

everyone the benefit of doubt. They have treated me very well. They have not shown me any kind of discrimination. So, I don't hesitate in visiting with them about certain issues." However, she ended this statement by saying, "as of yet." She elaborated on the latter portion of her statement by indicating that she was aware that a similar racial discrimination experience could present itself in her current employment; therefore, she attempts "to try to avoid it as much as possible" as she feels that "racial discrimination is in every organization" whether it is currently occurring or not occurring "racial discrimination in some form or fashion is in the workplace."

*I notice racial statements more.* Through her experience, Karla noted that she is more likely to notice when individuals make statements regarding race. She elaborated on this change by recalling and sharing a particular incident:

One day they wanted everyone to wear a white shirt to signify something, I don't recall whether it pertained to innocence of children or the military, but one lady said, 'I don't have to wear a white shirt, I am white.

Karla noted that she "cringed" when she heard this statement understanding that such a simple statement could be received negatively and create a host of problems. Therefore, she tends to try to avoid participating in conversations where race is the topic at hand.

*I pretend not to hear racial comments.* The third change that is noted by Karla's transcript is that if she hears someone make a racist statement, she is more apt to "pretend

[she] didn't even hear it." She recalled that in the past she was more likely to approach a situation more confrontationally if she felt someone had been racist; however, she shared that the level of emotional stress that she experienced during her racial discrimination complaint experience has made her shy away from getting involved in another similar situation as she "[doesn't] want to do it all over again." Instead, she would rather "act like she just didn't hear it."

*Bella*

Based on a thorough analysis of Bella's transcript, the following changes were noted.

*I start feeling the anxiety.* The first way that Bella noted that her communication with current coworkers has been affected by her racial discrimination experience is that she becomes anxious quickly when casual yet uncomfortable conversations regarding race surface:

To be perfectly honest with you, I am scared to work. I burn out real easily. I'm scared to work. I rather just find a reason not to do anything than to return into something like that. I notice with the jobs that I have had since then, I burn out real fast. I start feeling the anxiety when things start happening or being said because I feel like I'm going to have to relive that experience again. Things just get very overwhelming.

*I'm very careful.* A second way that Bella reported that her communication with others in the workplace has been altered is through the level of caution that she pays in what she says and how she responds to what others have said. She shared the following story to clarify her point:

In one situation in particular, we had a man on the floor that made a lot of racial jokes, and it made me real mad. I never went to anybody about it because I didn't want to be seen as trouble maker again and I didn't want my life to be uprooted again. For the most part, I feel that it is such an old school mentality that continues to exist around me and that is what bothers me. Yes, we won and they gave us money, but now I go somewhere else and it still the same thing, nothing different, it really depresses me.

*Everyone is suspect.* A third way that Bella recognized that her communication with others in the workplace has changed is that she finds everyone to be suspect. She indicated that this level of suspicion causes her to overly communicate at times so that she can try "to figure out what everyone's motives are. I put them under the magnifying glass." She also indicated that the more she can get others to talk, the more she knows where others really do stand, and whether she can trust them. Bella noted that this is a large change from before her experience as she initially described herself as a laid back individual that did not really speak much.

#### *Summary of Strategies*

Co-researchers shared various narratives and responses that established how the way they communicate with others in an organization has been altered since their racial

discrimination experience. Specifically, each participant provided a mixture of three responses and narratives to explain these alterations. The researcher used McCracken's (1988) guidelines to guide the emergence of a categorical system to note these changes. Thorough analysis of all responses indicated the emergence of three categories that capture the co-researchers noted changes.

The first category that emerged from analysis was *limited speech*. In this category, all co-researchers noted the various ways in which their communication with current colleagues in their current organizations is more limited after their racial discrimination complaint experience. All individuals make references to these limitations. Examples of these limitations include: only speaking about job related issues, being careful with things they discuss to avoid misunderstandings, and submitting important communication in writing if needed for future reference. One particular participant indicated that she has yet to limit her speech as she has given current co-workers the benefit of the doubt; however, she later stated that she does censor herself in various ways.

The second category that emerged from the analysis of co-researcher responses was *increased awareness and sensitivity*. In this category, co-researcher responses indicated that they have become more aware of and sensitive to discriminatory acts and statements made by co-workers. Additionally, one particular co-researcher indicated that although their awareness of such comments has become heightened, she will often "pretend" she did not hear the statement in order to avoid the situation. Conversely, the responses also indicated that co-researchers have gained a heightened awareness and

sensitivity to the conversations they have with others in the organization in order to insure that they do not say anything that could be considered discriminatory by others.

A third category that emerged from the analysis of co-researcher responses was that they have become *more suspicious* of others' motives. All four participants indicated that they do not initially trust their co-workers and their motives. As such, this often affects both the quantity and quality of the conversations that they carry on with them as they are unsure of their motives and intents.

### Summary of Results

In sum, the simple act of an employee filing an EEOC complaint against an employer sends a powerful, initial message to the employer. This message communicates the discontent of the employee and their desire to rectify the issue regardless of the negative consequences that the organization may suffer. As a result of this aggressive act, the individual must then strategically communicate with others in the organization to maintain their desired position within the organization. This position is obtained through the communicative strategies the individual selects to employ. Analysis of the narratives reveal four strategies undertaken before filing a complaint, which include *averting controversy, avoiding, maintaining barriers, and using liaisons*.

*Inaction by liaisons* and *continued perception of unfair practices* emerged as clear indicators of the failure of those strategies. Following the filing of an official complaint with EEOC, co-researchers reported employing the strategies of *avoiding, overcompensating, and filing charges*. *Filing charges* emerged as a new strategy that is not currently included in the framework of co-cultural theory. All five of the power sources were noted; however, *referent* power received only slight mention whereas the

absence of *expert* power stood out. The complaint filing also had a dramatic effect on the co-participants' workplace communication going forward into new organizations.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The present case study was conducted because it offered a way to better understand how communication and perceptions of power are altered when racial discrimination occurs at the workplace. In the opening chapters, Co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998) and French and Raven's (1968) power types were thoroughly discussed as both theoretical frameworks provided a lens to further explore this phenomenon. Chapter three outlined the methods that were used to secure the data needed to answer the research questions relating to power and communication strategies. The most recent chapter provided examples taken from the transcripts of co-researchers, which helped answer the five presented research questions. The last chapter of this dissertation highlights several key findings that make significant contributions to understanding formal communication encounters relating to race and power and how they may affect future communication encounters at the workplace. Finally, limitations of the study are discussed, followed by directions for future research.

#### Strategies Employed before Legal Filing and why they Failed

The study's first research question focused on determining which communicative strategies participants employed when communicating with their employers prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC. A noteworthy result indicated that the majority of the strategies used by co-researchers were initially nonassertive separation approaches. Orbe and Spellers (2005) indicated that individuals select a nonassertive strategy when they desire to be nonconfrontational, and are willing to place others' needs above their own. More specifically, Orbe (1998) noted that individuals who employ nonassertive

separation strategies often “further encourage co-cultural separation” (p. 116) through their actions. Thus, although the co-researchers may have felt that an injustice had occurred, they initially chose to react in a nonassertive manner by *avoiding* further interaction with the dominant group unless it was essentially necessary and/or by psychologically distancing themselves as they attempted to *maintain interpersonal barriers*. In addition, they reported a heightened level of mistrust toward the management, which ultimately separated the co-cultures in the organization more.

The findings in this study are similar to Cohen and Avazino (2010), who investigated how individuals with disabilities negotiated discrimination in the workplace. Results from that study noted that nonassertive practices were often used when managing interpersonal interactions with others. However, the present study’s findings are not entirely consistent with Camara and Orbe (2010) that noted that a nonassertive separation stance was used by only 8.7% of their population when responding to discriminatory acts while 51% of their participants employed an assertive accommodation stance. Co-researchers in the present study did indicate employing an assertive accommodation stance; however, it was not the initial response indicated. Some time had elapsed before the employment of this strategy occurred.

It should be noted, though, that the previous study included all types of discrimination in their sample, such as sex discrimination, racial discrimination, and discrimination against sexual orientation. Additionally, the previous study also indicated that only approximately 30% of the discriminatory acts collected occurred at the workplace; whereas this case study solely looks at workplace racial discrimination. Furthermore, this study allows participants to chart the entire process of the

discriminatory act, which results in multiple strategies being employed as the situation unfolded. These methodological and sample differences may account in the differences in results between the two studies. Although this study has differing results in regard to the communicative strategies employed by the recipients of discriminatory acts, the present study contained one similar result to the previous study that asserted that “women [are] twice as likely as men to adopt a nonassertive separation approach” (Camara & Orbe, 2010, p. 106).

Also pertaining to research question one, all four co-researchers ultimately reported using the assertive accommodation strategy of *using liaisons* prior to filing an official complaint with EEOC. Co-researchers employed this strategy when they solicited the assistance of the board of directors and other management regarding the discriminatory act. The significance of this finding is twofold. First, this finding suggests that individuals do not necessarily use only one strategy when responding to an act of racial discrimination. Nor do individuals use only one strategy at a time.

Initially, co-researchers reported having isolated themselves from the situation and the individuals involved. However, it appears that after some time had elapsed, an additional strategy was adopted. This change may be due to the fact the individuals had additional time to reflect on the situation or they began to perceive their current strategy as unsuccessful. As such, as supported thru co-cultural theory, a change in *preferred outcome* may have occurred requiring the adopting and/or abandoning of previously selected strategies.

This finding is significant as it indicates that although the strategy of *using liaisons* is more assertive than *avoiding* or *maintaining interpersonal barriers*, co-

researchers still continued to attempt to handle the situation in-house. This opportunity gave the organization a chance to rectify the issue prior to an official complaint being filed with EEOC. As such, this case study supports the idea that the fate of an organization accused of racial discrimination does not lie solely in the hands of the employee. It appears, instead, that the management also decides the outcome. Therefore, this finding makes evident how essential it is for organizations to contain an established process dictating how each complaint should be handled from its inception as a short time frame may exist for an organization to avoid additional, more formal legal consequences if handled appropriately.

This established process should be instituted into policy and highlighted in training at all levels of employment. The creation of this policy should begin with acknowledgment that acts of discrimination can occur on any given day. As such, it would be beneficial for all members in an organization to be involved in a form of diversity training in attempt to minimize such occurrences. Additionally, in these trainings, all employees should be provided with the established steps for reporting a discriminatory act. Furthermore, these steps should also outline for superiors how such a complaint should be handled. The creation and direction of these steps can be further guided by the findings of research question two which sought to determine why co-researchers gauged their pre-EEOC communicative attempts as unsuccessful. The findings are noteworthy as they provide insight as to why individuals may choose to abandon a certain communicative strategy and/or adopt a new stance.

The findings indicated that each co-researcher, on average, provided three responses as to how they gauged their current strategies to be unsuccessful. McCracken's

(1988) guidelines led to two categories emerging from the analysis: *inaction by liaisons in the organization* and *continued perception of unfair practices*.

In the category of *inaction by liaisons in the organization*, the co-researchers' responses noted that they believed that their pleas for assistance in the matter went unheard as little or no action was taken regarding their complaint against racial discrimination. Additionally, several of the co-researchers noted that they believed that the liaisons often performed actions that merely attempted to placate the situation, but did not sincerely attempt to rectify the issue. An example of this sentiment can be seen in the following response:

I think they let people vent about the organization so that they could act like they cared. But, they were just going through the motions of making it appear like they addressed this issue, but nothing came of the meeting. Things got better for about a week and then they returned to the same way. So that is when I really knew that the meeting was just held to appease me.

This finding suggests that the actions of the organization are highly scrutinized by the complainants. If individuals do not believe that the actions are appropriate or see the actions as simply being used to pacify them, additional legal steps may be taken.

The second category that emerged thru the analysis of the co-researchers' responses was *continued perception of unfair practices*. In this category, the complainants' responses indicated that they perceived that discriminatory acts against them by their employee continued to occur. The following excerpt from a co-researchers' response expresses the essence of this category:

Next thing we know they hired the secretary for the executive director position. After they knew that she used racial slurs about calling us niggers and spics, because we had told them. This is when I started to think I'm going to file an EEOC complaint. Because they didn't even interview me for the job, and I was more than a secretary.

Based on the emergence of these two categories, it is further evident that an employer must establish policy that fosters an unthreatening environment for all parties involved when an act of racial discrimination has been reported. Failure to do so may result in continued and extended action by the complainant and possible future litigation. Specifically, it is essential that the organization maintain an open line of communication with the complainant. It is the recommendation of the author, based on the specific findings of research two, that this open communication be guided through a mediator who has been hired by the organization. It is suggested that this neutral party be responsible for investigating the complaint. Although some may argue the neutrality of an organization-paid mediator, Mares-Dixon (1996) indicated that the term "neutral" requires the mediator to approach the case with an open mind, and treat both parties equally and respectfully as they advocate for the successful process. Moreover, past research has indicated that resolving workplace conflict early through mediation is more cost effective, is less stressful than a formal legal procedure, and more expedient for both parties (DeLeon, 1994; Skratek, 1990). Therefore, it remains beneficial that both parties attempt to resolve the issue in house.

A primary function of this role will be to disseminate information to both parties as the investigation unfolds. This distribution of information can help minimize the

perception that no actions are being taken regarding the situation – a common complaint made by the participants in this case study.

Furthermore, the neutrality of a mediator is imperative as the findings indicate that although an organization may take certain measures to rectify the issue, the complainants maintained a heightened level of scrutiny regarding the present actions of the organization during the process of the complaint. As such, it is critical that all decisions appear unbiased. In addition, the use of a mediator allows insight on the employees' *preferred outcome* (Orbe, 1998) allowing successful mediation to become a possibility, which increase the chances of the incident being rectified successfully in-house. In the instances where mediation is not successful, and a legal complaint is filed with EEOC, the organization may be seen more favorably by governing legal bodies as they attempted to resolve the situation. This favorable position could lead to minimized penalties, such as decreased monetary judgments to the complainant.

#### Perceptions of Subordinate Power

The third research question sought to establish thru the co-researchers' perspectives the types of power management exhibited both overtly and covertly. Relevant research has supported that management's use of power can largely affect a superior-subordinate relationship. Analysis of the transcripts noted that coercive, expert, and legitimate power were mentioned by all four co-researchers. Referent power was mentioned by only one individual, and reward power was not located in co-researcher transcripts.

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding in reference to perceptions of managerial power concerns *expert power*. *Expert power*, which researchers have noted to be a

characteristic possessed by employee-centered superiors, is highly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among employees (Richmond et al., 1980). Additionally, related research (Teven, 2007) found that superiors that used prosocial power tactics, such as expert power, were perceived to be more competent, credible, and trustworthy. It has also been noted that managers that used personal forms of power, such as expert or referent power, had more committed employees and were rated higher in regard to managerial effectiveness by their employees (Yukl & Falbe, 1991). The personal forms of power also led to an employee's perception of organizational support (Carson et al., 2002).

The co-researchers' transcripts indicated that *expert power* was an absent characteristic in superiors. This absence of power can be seen when the women made statements such as, "I don't think they would know the answer," "He didn't know anything," "I knew she had no knowledge of any type of work," and "You had changes made by people who didn't seem to know how the organization ran." This finding could extend existing research as it supports that the absence of a power base may also influence the way a subordinate views their superior. If so, a superior that has no *expert power* may be viewed as less competent, less credible, less trustworthy, and less managerially effective. Additionally, employees that perceive that their superiors have no *expert power* may also contain lower levels of job satisfaction. As a result, it would be reasonable to assume that employees that contain these lowered perceptions may be more likely to perceive a superior's behavior negatively or more apt to file legal charges against this superior or organization.

Furthermore, the absence of reward power can be equally revealing. Reward power was defined by French and Raven (1968) as individual A having power over individual B when individual A can give individual B some type of formal or informal reward, such as a bonus, promotion, or raise. Therefore, the absence of reward power can be telling in two ways. First, this absence indicates that individuals may be less likely to act in the best interest of the organization if they do not believe that their superior possesses the power to reward them for their compliance. As such, they may be more willing to act against the organization as they have nothing to lose, so to speak. Additionally, prior research (e.g., Carson et al., 2002) indicated that a supervisor's use of reward power is highly associated with an employee's perception of organizational support. Therefore, the absence of reward power may indicate that acting against an organization may be easier for an employee who believes that the organization is not concerned with their well-being. Consequently, their behavior results in little or no dissonance regarding their action making it easier for them to act against the organization.

Both coercive and legitimate power also received mention by all four co-researchers. Each co-researcher transcript provided instances that indicated their superiors' use of coercive and legitimate power. Examples of coercive power included statements such as "we always feared if all the new management and board would run us off too," "It seemed as though you were afraid to say too much. . .to get you fired," "They continued to, I believe, harass me while I was at work," and "I already feared that if I didn't do as they told me to do, they were going to get rid of me, too." The presence of legitimate power was also noted in statements, such as "I just did it because they were

my boss,” “We just got our job done,” and “you are just going to just do it because they told you to do it.”

Past research (Richmond et al., 1986; Richmond et al., 1980) has supported that employees associate coercive and legitimate power with a boss centered management style, which associates with negative job satisfaction and lower employee satisfaction. Also, additional research (Teven et al., 2006) found that supervisors that use legitimate and coercive power are also seen as less credible by employees. Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to suggest that an employee may be more apt to file legal charges against their employer if he feels a low level of job satisfaction, and he sees a superior as unreliable and incompetent.

In sum, the findings of research question three extend existing literature by stating that the absence of expert and reward power by a superior may negatively influence an employee’s perception of that superior. As such, it appears essential that superiors in any given organization work to possess this quality as their actions and decisions appear to be more readily accepted and trusted when they contain expert power, as noted in existing research. Additionally, this finding is beneficial to employers as it stresses the importance of selecting and appointing individuals into managerial positions that are perceived to be highly knowledgeable by other employees. Failure to do so may be detrimental to the organization when issues such as complaints of racial discrimination surface as the employee may be less apt to trust the true intentions of his superiors. Ultimately, this mistrust may result in an increased occurrence of formal complaints being filed against employers. The findings of research question three also offer further

guidance to employers by indicating that the use of legitimate and coercive power by supervisors often negatively affects an employee's workplace experience.

Furthermore, past research has also supported that an employee's resistance and compliance to power in organizations can have profound effects on the overall functions of an organization (Collinson, 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Ergi, 1994; Etzioni, 1961). Specifically, Wicks (1998) asserted that resistance to superior power can be detrimental to organizations as organizational structures and individual behaviors may be reciprocally related. As such, actions by management that undermine their own credibility or power may weaken the organizational structures as they are constituted, and the weakening of these structures could certainly be associated with employees dis-integrating or dis-associating with the organization. Consequently, the ties that bind the employees to the organization become degraded to the point that the employees no longer desire to act in the organization's best interest, as they perceive that they no longer have a stake in the organization.

At this point of deterioration, it appears that filing a formal legal complaint against an employer becomes less difficult as they no longer desire to identify with the organization's shared values or goals. As such, little dissonance is existent for the employee as they detach themselves permanently from the organization.

#### Communication Strategies Employed after Legal Filing

The fourth research question established which communicative strategies co-researchers reported using when communicating with others in the organization after filing an official racial discrimination complaint with EEOC. Three communicative strategies were identified. Two of the strategies, *avoiding* and *overcompensating*, are

included in Orbe's (1998) existing typology. A third strategy that surfaced was *filing charges*.

A pivotal moment in the participants' racial discrimination experience appears to have occurred when each individual decided to pursue an official, legal charge against their employer as they gauged their efforts to rectify the issue within the organization as unsuccessful. Although *filing charges* is not a strategy originally noted by Orbe (1998), it has received mention in more current research. Camara and Orbe (2010) noted that individuals' responses to discriminatory acts often led to *reporting the incident*, which they categorized as an assertive accommodation strategy. The researchers further defined the strategy as reporting the act to the proper authorities, and offered the following excerpt as an example:

When I first moved to Houston, I found a job at a retail store. The manager that hired me would always ask me to clean the restroom everyday at closing time and would not ask anyone else to do it. One evening she asked me to clean the restroom and when I told her no she said 'why not, that's what you people are good for.' The next day I reported her to the store manager and after a few months it was resolved. At the time I was upset but now it has become a page in my book of experience. (p. 97)

Although Camara and Orbe's (2010) strategy of *reporting the incident* may encompass the co-researchers' behavior of filing an official, EEOC complaint, it is the current researcher's argument that filing legal charges differs from this strategy in two ways.

First, *filing charges* appears to be a more aggressive approach as it ultimately seeks separation "through 'whatever' means necessary" (Orbe, 1998, p. 117) and allows

an “exert[ion] of [an individuals] personal power” (Orbe, 1998, p. 117). In addition, Orbe (1998) noted that individuals are likely to apply aggressive separation strategies when they view assimilation or accommodation orientations as “ill guided, inconsequential, and potentially destructive” (p. 117). Currently, Orbe’s (1998) categorization of strategies includes only *attacking* and *sabotaging others* as aggressive separation approaches, neither of which accurately depict the action of *filing charges*. Co-researchers noted that inadequate action by their liaisons required them to pursue the matter legally. By filing a legal complaint, they chose to sever their communication with the organization regarding the act of racial discrimination. This choice represents an aggressive separation orientation as the individuals are now allowing others to communicate for them, a choice that ultimately separates them from other members of the organization.

Secondly, the strategy of *filing charges* differs from *reporting the incident* as it more specifically defines to whom the individuals report the incident. In the example provided by Camara and Orbe (2010), the incident was reported to the store manager, who is still a member of the organization. The strategy of *filing charges* only includes instances where the act of discrimination is reported to governing legal authorities, such as EEOC, attorney, or representatives of a jurisdictional court. As such, employment of this strategy appears to represent the co-researchers’ desire for the organization to experience legal ramifications for their discriminatory act, which is clearly an aggressive action. Therefore, *filing charges* should be added to Orbe’s (1998) existing typology as an aggressive separation strategy.

A second strategy of *avoiding* appears to be continual in the communication orientation adopted by the two individuals that remained with the organization during the

EEOC process. This strategy initially surfaced in pre-EEOC communicative strategies, as well. Therefore, this finding suggests that the division created by the individuals continues to be fostered as they seek to physically distance themselves from others in the organization. This distancing may be a direct result of *filing charges*, an act which consequently advises that the individuals should not communicate directly with the organization regarding the act of discrimination unless through EEOC or an attorney. In addition, an individual may employ the strategy of *avoiding* as they are cognizant that they made an aggressive move and now fear communicating with others in the organization.

In addition to *avoiding*, *overcompensating* was also a strategy employed by the two individuals after filing an official EEOC complaint. Orbe (1998) noted that overcompensation occurred when an individual made “conscious attempts –consistently employed in response to a pervasive fear of discrimination—to become a ‘superstar’” (p. 16). The employing of this strategy can be seen in the following transcript excerpt:

I made it strictly on prayer sometimes. It was nerve-wracking. Every day was a day when I wondered if I would have a job. I knew I couldn't make any mistakes because they were looking for any reason to fire me. So that was exhausting.

That was stressful.

In this excerpt, one co-researcher recalls feeling that she had to perform her job perfectly in order to avoid losing her job. This finding exhibits the level of stress individuals continue to endure after a legal charge has been filed on their behalf. In addition, Orbe (1998) noted that individuals who employed assertive assimilation strategies, such as overcompensating, “may reinforce co-cultural stereotypes and power differences

associated with an ‘us-them’ mentality” (p. 112). As such, by overcompensating, co-cultural group members may be strengthening the existing dominant structures as they continue to alter their behavior for the dominant group.

#### How Communication is Altered in Future Employment

The fifth research question sought to understand how the co-researchers’ racial discrimination experience changed the manner in which they communicate with their present supervisors and colleagues in their new organization. Overall findings indicate that an individual’s communication may be mostly negatively affected by this experience. Analysis of participant responses using McCracken’s (1988) guidelines indicates the emergence of three categories that represent how an individual’s communication at a new organization may be altered: *limited speech*, *more suspicious*, and *increased awareness and sensitivity*.

The first category of *limited speech* encompasses how individuals noted that communication with their current supervisors and colleagues has become more limited. The majority of the co-researchers’ indicated that they often choose to speak only about job related topics with their supervisors and co-workers. This censoring can be seen in the following statement, “I just do my job. I keep it about the job...I use to be in the past more open and talk about business and personal stuff, too, but, now I just keep it about the job.” In the participants’ opinion, this censoring is important in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings with supervisors and/or colleagues.

Furthermore, another participant states that her communication is limited as she only discusses important topics with her supervisors in writing in case she needs to reference the conversation in the future, and so “that way what you say can’t be

changed.” Both examples appear to be highly similar to Orbe’s (1998) existing strategy of *averting controversy*, which indicates that individuals “avert communication away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas” (p. 16), a nonassertive assimilation strategy. This strategy is ultimately harmful as previous research (Waldron, 1991) suggested that subordinates must take part in maintenance tactics, such a personal communication, in order to improve or nurture their relationships with their superiors. Personal communication was defined as talk that included items such as joke telling or the sharing of common experiences. Both are forms of communication that co-researchers reported avoiding. Consequently, this altered behavior can ultimately affect an employee’s transition into a new organizational environment as it hinders the proper development and fostering of workplace relationships.

A second strategy that emerged regarding the co-researchers’ communication practices in their new organizations showed they were *more suspicious*. Simply put, everything said was now suspect as participants automatically did not trust other employees or their motives. As a result of this mistrust, they often distance themselves from other individuals in the organization both physically and psychologically. When compared to Orbe’s existing typology of strategies, this category is highly similar to the strategies of avoiding and maintaining barriers. Both strategies are nonassertive separation orientations. This finding indicates that the co-researchers report employing the same communicative strategies at their new organization as they did with the organization where they experienced the discriminatory act. Therefore, this result implies that an individual’s communicative orientation may be permanently altered as a result of their racial discrimination experience. Additionally, the employment of this

strategy is detrimental to the organization as previous research (e.g., Hubbel & Chory-Assad, 2005) cited that the absence of organizational and managerial trust can contribute to decreased organizational commitment, discourage employment cooperation, and increased employee turnover. This strategy is also harmful to the employee as it works against facilitating positive workplace relationships, which are essential to fostering a healthy organization. However, Hubbel and Chory-Assad noted that both managerial and organizational trust could ultimately be established when employees perceive that supervisors behave justly in procedures, interactions, and distributions.

The third category that emerged from the co-researchers responses' is labeled *increased awareness and sensitivity*. Of the three categories that emerged, this category appears to have a more positive outcome on the participants' communication with others in their new organization. In this category, individuals indicated becoming more aware of potentially offensive statements or discriminatory acts. As a result, they alter their communication with others accordingly to ensure that they, themselves, are not being discriminatory. This category is similar to Orbe's (1998) strategy of *developing positive face* that indicates an individual employs this strategy when she "assume[es] a gracious communicator stance in which one is more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members" (p. 16). The use of this strategy is positive as Eisenberg et al. (2007) noted that a characteristic of effective communication is empathy. As such, this strategy helps foster positive workplace relationships as healthy communication assists individuals in transitioning into their new organizations.

In sum, the categories that emerged in response to research question five all indicate that the participants continued to adopt a nonassertive orientation when

communicating with others in their new organization. This adopted orientation has several positive and negative implications. First, according to Orbe (1998), individuals who adopt a nonassertive assimilation stance may enhance their ability to communicate effectively within the existing structures by adhering to the rules. However, in doing so, these individuals often “promote an unhealthy communication climate that inherently reinforces the dominant group’s institutional and social power” (p. 111). In addition, according to Orbe, individuals that selected a nonassertive separation strategy further reinforced co-culture separation through their actions. Although this action, in a sense, may encourage intragroup unity, Orbe (1998) asserts that the employing of these strategies may cause the organization to foster behavior that hinders the advocating of societal change. As such, co-cultural group members may find it difficult to adopt the identity of the organization if they feel that they and their views are not equally represented. Ultimately, it appears through the findings in research question five that a racial discrimination experience can affect the manner in which individuals communicate in their current organizations in both positive and negative manners. As such, it is essential that individuals be cognizant of these possible alterations and strive to eliminate those which contribute to the fostering of ineffective communication, which can permanently alter the organizational climate.

#### Summary of Major Findings

When an employee files a racial discrimination complaint against an employer, an initial message is constructed by the employee and sent to the employer. This initial message communicates to the organization that the individual believes that she has suffered an injustice, and she is willing to hold the organization accountable for their

actions even if this act results in negative consequences for the organization. In short, the simple act of filing an EEOC complaint is a powerful message sent by the employee.

More specifically, the data from this case study yielded several major findings that can assist scholars in better understanding the manner in which employee racial discrimination complaints directly affect communication in the organization.

First, a key theoretical finding indicates that employees employ various communicative strategies as they seek to communicate with an organization after suffering from acts of racial discrimination. Initially, the strategies selected appear to be nonaggressive and divisive. These strategies are then modified by the individual based on their gauged success, which is seemingly measured by the individual's *preferred outcome*. This finding is noteworthy as past research has alluded to the premise that individuals select one strategy to respond to a specific occurrence, which through this case study, appears not to be the case.

Instead, if a strategy does not evoke a particular desired response from the organization, the employee will then employ additional strategies, which appear to be more aggressive. This finding is noteworthy as it extends theory by supporting that an abandoning of strategies may take place if their worth are gauged as unsuccessful. Furthermore, this finding indicates that employees are not initially aggressive in responding to an act of discrimination. As such, the organization has a window of opportunity to rectify the issue before it escalates into a formal legal complaint.

However, if an employee remains unsatisfied with an organization's response, it becomes more likely that a formal legal complaint will be filed. Additionally, further analysis revealed that the use of power by superiors may also be a contributing factor to

an employee's ultimate decision to file with EEOC. Specifically, the absence of expert power and the primary use of legitimate and coercive power by a supervisor appear to negatively alter an employee's perception of a superior. As such, an employee may be more apt to file a formal legal complaint against a supervisor perceived so negatively.

An additional key theoretical finding pertains to Orbe's (1998) existing typology of communicative strategies as defined in co-cultural theory. Through the researcher's analysis, an additional strategy, *filing charges*, emerged that deserves further investigation in future research and possible inclusion into Orbe's existing typology. This strategy emerged as an aggressive strategy that was adopted when individuals felt that the organization ignored their pleas for assistance and allowed additional discriminatory acts to occur. Currently, the existing typology does not contain an aggressive strategy that encompasses this more formal communicative behavior that invokes a third party intending to be coercive.

A last significant finding exhibits how an employee is affected by an act of racial discrimination in future employment. Specifically, analyses revealed that the manner in which an individual communicates after experiencing racism in the workplace is permanently altered. Consequently, individuals report difficulty communicating with coworkers in their new organizations due to a lack of trust. As such, they report limiting their communicative interactions with others on the job, preferring to speak only about job-related topics. Ultimately, this behavior negatively affects their transition into their new organization. On the contrary, individuals do report communicating more empathically with their new coworkers as they strive to ensure that they are not discriminatory in their own actions.

## Limitations and Future Research

### *Limitations*

A limitation of this case study was the relatively small sample size as only four co-researchers were interviewed. For this reason, these findings cannot be generalized to the broader community based merely on this study alone. Therefore, in order to more deeply understand whether these findings are consistent with others that experience this same discriminatory phenomenon, it is necessary that a larger sample be interviewed.

An additional limitation present in this case study is that individuals were asked to recall the initial act of discrimination that in some cases occurred more than five years ago. Although the individuals had their official complaints to help refresh their memory regarding their initial reactions and sentiments, time may play a factor in altering, even if only minimally, their recollections. As such, if other researchers seek to pursue this line of research, it may be beneficial to recruit participants that have experienced a more recent act of racial discrimination.

A last limitation noted by the researcher concerns the lack of data provided by the participants regarding how each originally communicated with her superiors and other co-workers within the organization prior to the act of racial discrimination occurring. This data may be important as it may indicate that the individuals did not alter their communicative strategies after the act of discrimination occurred. For example, a co-researcher may have originally employed the strategy of *avoiding* even prior to the act occurring. If so, this detail could possibly limit the assumptions that can be made regarding the data collected.

### *Future Research*

Future research can focus on the absence of management power bases perceived by employees to further discover whether the *absence* of a particular power base is equally significant to the power base being reported. For example, does a superior's lack of expert power indicate that an employee is more likely to be less satisfied with his job or find the superior less credible and trustworthy? If so, is it possible that this could increase the likelihood of an employee filing a racial discrimination complaint as opposed to handling the situation within the organization?

Additionally, future research can also focus on other forms of discrimination in the workplace to determine whether individuals of differing genders employ differing responses based on the type of discrimination that occurs. This data would be beneficial to organizations as EEOC reports that only 35,890 of the 99,922 discrimination charges that were filed with their office were race based. As such, other discriminatory acts deserve further focus.

Lastly, future research could explore whether the strategy of *filing charges* deserves mention in the existing typology created by Orbe (1998) regarding communicative strategies employed by co-cultural group members. This exploration would be possible by increasing the sample size of individuals interviewed. Also, by interviewing individuals that report other forms of discrimination (i.e., sex, religion, sexuality), findings could strengthen the need for this strategy to be represented in the existing typology in various contexts.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study exhibited how a single act of racial discrimination in the workplace affects the communicative flow of an organization. Thus, this case study has both theoretical implications as well as practical applications. Theoretically, this case study extends co-cultural theory by exhibiting how individuals choose to strategically communicate with superiors and coworkers after experiencing an act of racial discrimination in the workplace. Additionally, it demonstrates how this act of discrimination permanently alters an individual's future communicative experiences in current organizations. Furthermore, this case study offered insight and practical advice for superiors and organizations who are accused of racial discrimination by an employer. Ultimately, through expanded knowledge and proper guidance, organizations can possibly prevent being one of the 35,890 employers that are filed against for racial discrimination yearly.

## APPENDIX A

## TRANSCRIPTS

Susie

Interviewer: Can you begin by telling me how many years you were with the organization?

Susie: Seven years

Interviewer: How many of these years were you at the managerial level.

Susie: Three years

Interviewer: How many positions did you hold while you were with the organization?

Susie: Three, the last three years is when I held two positions at the managerial level.

Interviewer: Okay, your paperwork indicates that you began working for the organization in 2001. Upon entering into the organization, can you tell me what the climate of the organization was like.

Susie: I enjoyed the climate of the organization. In the organization, the people I directly worked with, we had a very light hearted relationship where we could laugh and talk while we did our jobs. And there was no back stabbing going on, and we would assist in helping doing our jobs, so we all got along well. Management, I didn't have to deal with management that often. At that time management, ummm, they stayed away from us because the lead counselor at that time knew how to do her jobs so it wasn't like they had to watch over us to make sure we were getting the job done. Management didn't too often come bother us at that time. But eventually, even before my lawsuit, I did notice that there were issues within management, but it didn't effect our department.

Interviewer: What type of issues did you see?

Susie: I wasn't aware of it at the time, but there was a lot of gossip going on, backstabbing. Particularly with the person who was involved with the accounting department. She was always having issues with our department wanting to cause problems with us because she always felt left out. But she tended to always had problems that she would try to pull us into. Management tended to listen to her quite a bit which would cause problems with the lead person, and they were personal issues, so she would attack her and try to get management to look badly at here. But there was no unfair treatment going on yet, just a lot of office politics going on.

Interviewer: Now you mentioned that management was standoffish from you all...

Susie: Right

Interviewer: But when you all did communicate, what type of communication did they use with you all. For example, when they had a task they needed you to do or a work assignment, how did they communicate that to you?

Susie: They were always very cordial and very nice. They would always just come in and say hey this is what we need done, can we get this done, and they would always talk to the head counselor, and she would let them know that we could get it done or would let them know what we needed in order to get it done. On a few occasions though they did come to me personally and say would you be interested in doing this or could you do, but they were always very nice and cordial. I never sensed any friction between me and them it was always just hey can you do this or that. They were also very laid back. They worked with you and you worked with them. They were approachable and they listened.

Interviewer: Did you feel at that time that the management at that time had the appropriate knowledge to be within their positions?

Susie: I think that executive director, being that I never spoke with them about functions, It is hard to say, but I think they leaned a lot on the head counselor, but they had some knowledge. But without the head counselor, I don't think they would know the answers are would even begin to know where they would go to get the answers. One individual though I think had not a clue, but since the head counselor knew so much, you could never see that he didn't know what was going on, but he at least knew where to go get the information.

Interviewer: So looking at this upper management, you would say that their knowledge was somewhat was limited and they relied often on people under them to get the job done?

Susie: Yes,

Interviewer: So when the individuals had work assignments to give you, you obviously did them. Why did you choose to follow the orders that they gave you although you knew they really didn't know what they were talking about?

Susie: Well, the assignments were jobs that I could do because I would find out how to do them. I would just research it, and with trial and error sometimes, I would figure out how to do it.

Interviewer: But you did what they told you to?

Susie: Yes

Interviewer: Why did you choose to do what they said?

Susie: It was my job and they were the people I worked for. They were my boss. But, nobody ever asked me to do something that was immoral so I never had to question them so I just did it because they were my boss and that's why I did it.

Interviewer: So you did the job because they were higher than you and that was what they were asking you to do, so that why you did it.

Susie: Right

Interviewer: Okay, so at this time, the organizational climate was good, did this ever change?

Susie: Yes, when there was a change in management. The top two individuals were being scrutinized and they got tired of it and they left. We had an interim at that time. At this time the organization became very explosive. There was an issue with the board. The board was very interesting. There were problems going on between the board and upper management. And, a lot of mistrust was going on. So then the interim resigned. And the lead counselor became interim executive director for at least a year, and then about in a year they started looking for an executive director.

Interviewer: Did you see a shift in the organizational climate at this time when management was changing?

Susie: Yes, there was a change. The change I still feel unscathed by the change because I tend to be in my own bubble cuz I do my own stuff. But the change was between the upper management and the secretary. Because the secretary we found out was causing all the problems because she was leaking information to the board. Looking back on it, I think it was a lot of misunderstanding with the board because the board didn't want to hear anything the board had to say because they didn't trust them because of the secretary and what she had told them?

Interviewer: Did this mistrust affect anyone else in the organization? Such as the subordinates?

Susie: I did start feeling the change in the climate in the organization because things we did were very scrutinized. So we went to speak to the management because we didn't like how they were treating us. But the new management didn't seem to care. The new management didn't do their job and the board was believing them. So yes it started to affect everyone in the organization. There was no trust. I still did what they told me to because it was my job but I didn't trust them because they were not doing things fairly.

Interviewer: So initially, with old management, you said it was a pleasant climate in the organization, but with the new management you say it became more unpleasant.

Susie: Yes, there was a lot of gossiping going on and backstabbing. And it was really stressful. We all started to worry about our job security because we saw that all the old

upper management all got fired or resigned and we always feared if all the new management and board would run us off too. We still kept doing our job, but we knew they were not being fair with us and we didn't trust them.

Interviewer: So we saw a climate change in the organization due to the change of management at this time?

Susie: Uh-huh. We use to come to our job and enjoy it, but the mood of the organization now all changed. We all started sweating bullets. Now, of course, we couldn't really work normal, work came like to a halt, because we were always trying to figure out what the board and upper management were doing pertaining to us because we didn't know what was going on. They kept us out of all the know in the organization. We use to know what was going on with the old management. Now everything seemed to be a secret to us. Nobody would tell us anything. Upper management hardly ever spoke to us and when they did we knew we couldn't trust them because we had heard that they believed we were all loyal to all the old management and they believed we could not work for them because our loyalties were with old management because we didn't agree with why and how they got fired? Things got really bad and eventually the interim director resigned. Then, it got even worse when the head counselor, our friend that worked in our department got promoted to head interim executive director after the other interim resigned.

Interviewer: How did it get worse?

Susie: Once she became the interim director, the board seemed to shift its focus on her now since all the old management was gone. You would think the waters would have calmed, but they didn't.

Interviewer: And what was the management style of this new interim executive director?

Susie: Because we had worked with her in the past, we liked the way she managed us. She would tell us what to do and we would do it. Also, she worked for the organization for 20 years, and we knew she knew what she was talking about, she was very knowledgeable, so we did whatever she told us to do because we knew she knew exactly what to do. You learn a lot of what to do and what not to do in 20 years, so we respected that.

Interviewer: Did the organizational climate change during this time?

Susie: There was still a lot of mistrust in the organization. The secretary and the finance person spent a lot of time building up opposition against XXXX. It wasn't a pleasant work environment. We always knew they were up to something. We knew they didn't like XXXXX, we didn't know why, but we knew they didn't like her and then they didn't like us because they knew we were really close with her because we had worked in the same department. So the secretary and finance director started telling the board a lot of stuff about XXXXX, about how she didn't know what she was doing, and that she was

playing favoritism with us. But, how could she not know something? She worked for the organization for 20 years. She started off as the secretary and worked her way up. No, she didn't have the education, but 20 years of knowledge counts for something. But, anyway, they made the board feel like she didn't know anything. And because the board was mostly white, and the secretary and finance director were white, and XXXX was black, the board sided with them. I heard that they said they would never work for a nigger. And because I'm black too, I knew they felt the same way about me.

Interviewer: Can you share with me a story that exhibits how you communicated with coworkers or managers at the organization when you already knew that unfair things were being done based on peoples race BUT before you filed an EEOC complaint?

Susie: Basically, every morning I reported to work going directly to my office. I made it a point to only engage in conversations with those that had absolutely nothing to do with the racist practices within the organization. Those that were directly involved I only communicated with only when necessary and never initiated any small talk. If ever pulled into a water cooler conversation, initiated by my harassers I simply gave succinct and unemotional answers that did not foster additional conversation. I was distrustful and paranoid with everyone in the organization; therefore, I only would divulge in conversation with the only other Black American that was also experiencing the racism.

I had to work very hard not to be controlled by anger because of the hostile work environment cultivated by my managers. Daily I reported to work realizing I was a target I could not allow my reactions to the days events to be triggered by anger. I was angry because I did not deserve the unfair treatment I was subjected to nor the lack of promotion.

Interviewer: You bring up the issue of race, at some time you end up filing a racial discrimination complaint against the organization.

Susie: Correct

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened to make you file this complaint?

Susie: Well, I thought it was unfair that XXXX had been the interim for about a year and she had worked for the organization for over 20 something years and they always came to her for assistance, but then they decided to open up the job and accept applications for her job. You would think she would have been the shoe in for the job based on her knowledge, and since they let her run for the organization for 1 year and it did well, why did you need to take applications. We all knew though it was because of her race and because she was black. And because of all the other stuff we had heard that the secretary and finance director would say about not working for a black bitch. And because the board was an unfair board, and they were white, and the two white ladies kept feeding the board stuff about XXXX, they eventually just hire a white man for that job, who had less experience and knowledge about the organization, and they demoted XXX. They said it

was because she didn't have the education, but he only had a bachelor's degree. Anyway, they hired him and moved her back down.

Interviewer: How did you all know that the racists comments were being made.

Susie: Well, an employee in the finance director I guess felt guilty and told us. She was white, but she was married to a black man, so she felt bad she said so she would tell us what her boss and the secretary were saying. That is who would tell us.

Interviewer: So, once again, the organization is under new management?

Susie: Yes, and he was okay. But he knew he needed his job so he started playing both sides. It was like it was us against them.

Interviewer: Us against them, what do you mean by that?

Susie: It was the Mexicans and Black people against the white people. But now all the higher ups were White again. Because they were racist they didn't let XXXX keep that job. Like planned, he ended up firing XXXXX. This is when a lot of the racial discrimination issues started. So when XXXX was fired, within two or three weeks, the newly hired executive director resigned. It was then that we really started noticing unfair treatment. Because the board members came down and started realigning the organization. And they put this white man named XXXX in charge who had less time in a management position, and had less education than any body else, but all of a sudden he's in charge of everybody and everything. So we were then thinking well why didn't they put XXXXX in charge. She was next in line, she was already a program manager. And she had a master's degree. But they skipped her. We knew why because of what was said about XXXXX. And how they wouldn't work for a nigger, we knew it was because XXXXXX was Mexican, they didn't want to work for her either. And the person under XXXXXXXX was me, and I'm black and I have a Master's degree too, but they skipped over me too, and they put this white man over all of us. We really knew this was racist. And because the white lady that felt guilty also kept telling us about what they were saying about us. Then the atmosphere of the organization kept getting worse and worse. Because the white man was hard to deal with and we all started having problems with him. Needless to say, XXXX resigns because she couldn't believe she was not hired for the job. The sad thing was that the white man that got hired, he wasn't calling the shots. The secretary and the finance director were calling the shots. And they were telling the board a lot of stuff that was not true about employees. But just the employees that were black and Mexican. Eventually, they demoted this white man, and we didn't have an executive director. And he eventually got fired to. It was like the board was running the organization through the secretary and the finance director. And they hired a consultant. And she knew barely anything about the organization. She always had to ask us what to do and what is this and what is that. At this time, I saw enough game playing in the organization, I knew what was going on. And at this time the organization environment was horrible. The secretary was running the show. And she was doing it in a hateful manner so we decided to write a letter to the board to let

them know. And they had a meeting and they listened to us but they didn't do anything about it. They gave us some pizza and acted liked they cared, but it didn't fix anything. They still let her run the organization even though they were saying racists things. And how they were out of control. They really acted liked they were listening to us, but there was no change by the secretary and finance director.

Interviewer: So they were in charge?

Susie : Yes they were the puppets for the board but they were looking to hire this consultant as executive director. Of course she was a white woman. They were going to hire her to keep from having to let any minority move up. But she stays on as a consultant and decides she doesn't want to be the executive director, but she wants to be the program manager so they decide to open up a job announcement for the position, because the rest in line were minorities, and they weren't going to give us the job. So I decided I would apply for the position. Next thing we know they hired the secretary for the executive director position. After they knew she used racial slurs about calling us niggers and spics, because we had told them. This is when I started to think I'm going to file an EEOC complaint. Because they didn't even interview me for the job, and I was more than a secretary. I had been with the organization for seven years. I had a Master's degree. I was in the military and had a lot of leadership experience, and they hired the secretary over me who had only a high school diploma, no management experience, but she was White. They didn't even interview me for the job. We were all saying this was wrong. This is when I put a letter in the mail to EEOC. I put the letter in the mail because of racial discrimination because I was passed over for a promotion that I should have had. One being the program manager and I wasn't even considered for the executive director position, and I was passed over by all Caucasian people who had less knowledge and education than me.

Interviewer: So when you initially saw that racial discrimination was occurring, and you were passed up for a position that you believed should have been yours, did you speak to anyone regarding this situation?

Susie: No, I did not, because we had that meeting with the board about a week earlier and they did nothing. I knew they weren't going to listen to me when they didn't even do anything about people using racial slurs and then they go off and hire her as the executive director. I knew that approaching the board again was a waste of my time. They had three letters telling them about the racial issues, and they told us they would take it under advisement and then they hired her. I knew that I was going to get anywhere with them.

Interviewer: At this point, what type of communication did you have with management at this point.

Susie: None, I did not initiate any communication with them unless I had to. I only spoke to them when they spoke to me. I would avoid them. I was very irritated with them, and I didn't trust them. I also thought they were going to fire me.

Interviewer: How did the members of the organization find out that you had filed an EEOC complaint?

Susie: The employees found out through management. Management found out when EEOC had contacted them.

Interviewer: So how was your communication with individuals in the organization once when they found out you filed the complaint?

Susie: They never approached me. I remained the same. I spoke to them when they spoke to me. But I never shared any information with anybody else. I didn't try to involve anybody else in the organization. I felt an injustice was done to me so I filed the complaint, but I wasn't trying to involve anybody else.

Interviewer: So, eventually, other members found out about EEOC complaint. How did they treat you?

Susie: I didn't see any changes in coworkers until we went to mediation with EEOC. At this time, coworkers seemed to pull away from me. And it seemed like they had to pick a side. The one who told us about all the racial slurs we were being called, she somehow got promoted to assistant director and she was only a temporary worker, now she didn't even talk to me. She pulled away. And another coworker, we were friends, and he cold turkey quit talking to me. And another coworker told me that she was told to not talk to me because I didn't even like her. She said she was forced to take sides. And was told to report to them anything that I did.

Interviewer: So, obviously, the organizational climate changed at this point.

Susie: Yes, it was already hostile, and now it was directed at me. They wouldn't have had a problem with me had I never filed the complaint.

Interviewer: How long did you work at the organization after you filed the complaint with EEOC?

Susie: more than three years.

Interviewer: Did your communication with the management ever change in the course of these three years?

Susie: No, it remained strained. I was emotionally exhausted. And since lawsuits moved so slowly, sometimes, it felt normal and everyone seemed normal, but then something with the lawsuit would come up and the climate would get bad again. I made it strictly on prayer sometimes. It was nerve-racking. Every day was a day when I wondered if I would have a job. I knew I couldn't make any mistakes because they were looking for any reason to fire me. So that was exhausting. That was stressful.

Interviewer: Then can you recall a certain story that exhibits how you communicated with coworkers or managers at the organization AFTER you filed an EEOC complaint?

Susie: I was more guarded in my general conversations second guessing everything I would say. It was very important to me to still perform my job to the best of my abilities despite my circumstance to the strength of my character would stand out in drastic contrast compared to my harassing managers and coworkers. I knew I deserved promotion based on my experience and work record and that I was being treated unfairly it was important that this be evident. In short, I kept to myself as much as possible and performed my job.

Interviewer: In those three years, you never spoke with any upper management or board member about the complaint.

Susie: Never. All communication was done thru EEOC.

Interviewer: In these three years did you ever consider dropping your charge?

Susie: I never considered dropping my charge. I questioned my decision initially based on a fear factor. What if it worked against me, what if I lost my job, and then what would I do? I had a good job financially, what would I do if I lose it. It took me a long time to file because this was on my mind. It was months before I made a formal complaint because it was a huge decision. Because it could be life altering. My children were still small. Can I risk possibly losing my job. But once I was convinced within myself that my assessments were accurate and I decided to do it, I never considered dropping the charge. And my mother had told me that if I didn't say anything they would continue to do it.

Interviewer: When did you ultimately leave the organization?

Susie: When we had a successful mediation, and I received financial compensation for the complaint that both parties agreed on, I was also told I had to resign and I had to sign that I would never apply for a position with that organization again. In this sense, I won. But I lost when they weren't really ever held accountable for what they did. Everybody got to remain in their position. Yes, they had a financial loss, but they should have lost their jobs. But they got to keep their jobs. And we also had to sign a confidentiality statement that said we would could not share the details of this lawsuit with anyone. So we basically were paid to shut up.

Interviewer: Are you currently employed?

Susie: Yes

Interviewer: Has this experience changed the way that you communicate with others in your new organization?

Susie: Yes

Interviewer: How?

Susie: I'm careful with things I say. I never want things taken out of context. I never say jokes that could be considered racial. And I always find myself making comparisons of what is going on regarding employee relations, whether things are fair or unfair. I've become more aware of discriminatory issues. Or anything that could be considered discriminatory. If I think something is discriminatory against me, I speak up quickly now. I don't let those things build up. I go to my supervisor and express my concern if I think something is unfair. I also make sure to be fair to people who work underneath me. I make sure that nobody can say I am being unfair or discriminatory.

Interviewer: Do you communicate with management any differently?

Susie: Yes, I just do my job. I keep it about the job. I use to be in the past more open and talk about business and personal stuff to, but now I just keep it about the job. I'm also careful not to get pulled into the gossip. So when other employees come to me, I avoid those conversations.

Interviewer: Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked?

Susie: Basically, when I started working for the organization I sued, my whole goal was to work in a pleasant environment where the merit of my work would allow me to advance. At some point that would happen. My desire was never to have to file a complaint. I just wanted to be paid and promoted because of my abilities alone. Not based on my race. And those things didn't happen, and it wasn't fair. They should have admitted they were wrong when we gave them a chance to, but they didn't and that's why I had file a complaint. It never was my desire to file a complaint. I never wanted to do that, but I just wanted to be treated fairly.

Interviewer: Okay, anything else?

Susie: No, that's all.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Susie: You're welcome.

Lu-Lu

Transcript Lu-Lu

Interviewer: Can you begin by telling me how long you were with the organization?

Lu-Lu: 23 years.

Interviewer: What positions did you hold while you were with the organization?

Lu-Lu: Secretary, counselor, supervisor, inspector, acting executive director and assistant director.

Interviewer: How many of those positions were at the managerial level?

Lu-Lu: Three.

Interviewer: And was this later in your tenure with the organization?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: What were those positions?

Lu-Lu: The supervisor, acting director and assistant director.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about the responsibilities that those positions entailed?

Lu-Lu: Just the general oversight of day to day operations for X and for the X.

Interviewer: So what was your final position with the organization?

Lu-Lu: Assistant Director.

Interviewer: That was your final position?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Looking back when you began, initially with the organization, what would you say was the environment, or climate, of the organization?

Lu-Lu: The beginning was very good.

Interviewer: And then, as it went on, did it change?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you believe made the climate positive about the organization?

Lu-Lu: Good working relationships with the bosses and the other members of the organization.

Interviewer: So initially looking at this period where you say there was a positive climate with the organization, how did bosses communicate with employees at this level?

Lu-Lu: Everyone was equal, on the same level, they just all worked together.

Interviewer: When your boss would give you a task or give you an assignment to do, did you ever have a hard time doing it?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: Why did you not?

Lu-Lu: Because it was just day to day operations. The boss was not a demanding person, we just got our job done.

Interviewer: So you basically did it because that's what you were hired to do?

Lu-Lu: Right.

Interviewer: What was your relationship with the boss at this point?

Lu-Lu: I had a good relationship with him at that point, because mainly, he depended a lot on me to get a lot of things done and that really made us have a better relationship.

Interviewer: So you would say overall that it was a good relationship?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you trust him?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Later in your tenure, you had a switch in supervisors, correct?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: What was the nature of your relationship with this individual?

Lu-Lu: This person, to me, was afraid that I wanted his job, and that I would do something to make him look like he was inadequate at what he was doing. So, the relationship wasn't very well.

Interviewer: Did y'all speak any? Did y'all ever speak?

Lu-Lu: Yes. We spoke several times.

Interviewer: Regarding?

Lu-Lu: Several things.

Interviewer: Such as?

Lu-Lu: Work related things. We spoke about the people there in the office. We spoke about individuals who would like to have my job, or his. So, yeah, we talked about a lot of things.

Interviewer: So it was purely work related?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Y'all would exchange pleasantries? Good morning? Things such as that?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: But never spoke at a personal level?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: Did you ever seek to speak with him on a more personal level?

Lu-Lu: No. It didn't feel like he wanted that.

Interviewer: So you basically would go do your job and go home?

Lu-Lu: Right.

Interviewer: Can you share with me the story of what happened the day you say you were racially discriminated against?

Lu-Lu: First, he asked me to tell him about a meeting that I had had with the maintenance department, and what was said in the meeting. And some things I told him I would not share because I had promised the maintenance department that I would not do it. So I didn't. And he said if I couldn't tell him everything that was said in that meeting then I was fired.

Interviewer: And how was this racial discrimination?

Lu-Lu: Well, that's not the real reason why he fired me. He fired me because of something I would not tell him, but I feel like the racial discrimination came because of other people there, in the office, who wanted to see me gone, and it was racially motivated.

Interviewer: How do you know it was racially motivated?

Lu-Lu: Because of the things that they had spoken about me in the past. Making racial slurs, calling me names, that start with the black B, and so those were racial things that they did. And they also said that a black woman would never be over the Anglo women there in the office.

Interviewer: How did you come about this information? How did you find out that they were using racial slurs against you?

Lu-Lu: There was a lady who worked in the finance department who they had said it to. And she repeated it to me.

Interviewer: How did you initially react to being terminated?

Lu-Lu: Shocked.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Lu-Lu: I just sat there and I looked at him and told him I couldn't believe that he was firing me because I wouldn't tell him something that someone said. I tried to reason with him. I tried to tell him how I had promised my employees that our conversations would remain confidential. I told them this because I wanted them to be honest, and I wanted them to know that they wouldn't get in trouble for telling how they really felt about how the organization was being ran. I wanted them to trust me so that we could get to the root of the problem and find out why they were performing so poorly. I knew their morale was down, and I needed to know why to increase productivity in my departments or I was going to have to answer to that. I really tried to make him understand why I wouldn't reveal that information to him.

Interviewer: And then what happened?

Lu-Lu: And then he said that if I didn't leave he would call the police.

Interviewer: So you left at this point?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Under someone's advisement?

Lu-Lu: Yes. My attorney.

Interviewer: After you left what occurred?

Lu-Lu: A few days later, I drafted a letter to the board asking to have a meeting with them about what had occurred, and how I felt that I was unfairly terminated. I had been working for the organization for over 20 years. I had always been a loyal employee working myself up the organization ladder so to speak. I had no written write ups in my 20 years there. I wanted them to understand why I hadn't shared the information with my boss. I knew he told them only his side. I wanted them to hear my side. They agreed to meet with me.

Interviewer: What happened in that meeting?

Lu-Lu: They listened to my side, and didn't say very much. Just asked questions. I answered them. And they made a decision and told me that his decision to fire me was to stand.

Interviewer: At this point, were you satisfied with that?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: So at that point what did you decide to do?

Lu-Lu: I decided to file a complaint with EEOC.

Interviewer: Saying that you were terminated for reasons regarding race?

Lu-Lu: Yes, because leading up to my termination there had been some ladies in the office who had prompted him to terminate me, he just didn't know how to do it. So he used this as an excuse to terminate me.

Interviewer: So you found that, all along while he was working there, that there was always the desire to have you terminated?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you believe that they were looking for things specifically to have you terminated?

Lu-Lu: Well they felt like they had to have something concrete and this would be insubordination. So that's what they used.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you were treated differently than other individuals in the organization?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: In what regard?

Lu-Lu: There were times when there had been people placed over me who didn't have the experience or the knowledge that I had. But they were given the positions that I felt that if they wanted to make a position I should have had it.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of this?

Lu-Lu: There was a young man who was there, he came way after I did and because he had a degree, he was a Hispanic male who didn't know anything about XXXX, but they opened a position and labeled it something that I had never heard of before. In that position, the knowledge that you should have had, he did not have it, but he got the position.

Interviewer: When you received word from the individual in the finance department that individuals were using racial slurs, you were still working with the organization at this time?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: How did that affect your communication with individuals in the organization at that point?

Lu-Lu: It didn't. I really felt sorry for them to have to fling around names like that. I know I did not like it. It did not feel good, but I just kept going.

Interviewer: Did you change the way you communicated with them?

Lu-Lu: No. Not at all.

Interviewer: Did you communicate with them as often as you did prior to having that knowledge?

Lu-Lu: No, because I knew that they had something up and I was not going to stay there and give them no more reason to find something to fire me for.

Interviewer: So you spoke less with them?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: When you did speak, what was the nature of your conversations?

Lu-Lu: Work related. If it had to be personal it was very brief.

Interviewer: Did this change the climate of the organization?

Lu-Lu: Yes it did.

Interviewer: How?

Lu-Lu: Because it seemed as though you were afraid to say too much because you didn't know what they would take that you said and turn it into something else to get you fired.

Interviewer: So at this point, you really weren't trusting of individuals?

Lu-Lu: No. Not at all.

Interviewer: Once you filed the EEOC complaint, were you with the organization any longer?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: So you had already left the organization at this point?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Did it take you any length of time to decide that you wanted to file a EEOC complaint?

Lu-Lu: No, it didn't take very long. I knew when I left that I should file one because it was too much going on there that was racially motivated.

Interviewer: How long do you think it took you from the time that you were terminated to the time that you actually file the EEOC complaint?

Lu-Lu: Maybe a month to 6 weeks.

Interviewer: At any time after filing the complaint did you ever question whether you should revoke that, whether you should not file?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: So you were always secure with your decision to do so?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: So you never considered dropping the charge?

Lu-Lu: No.

Interviewer: Looking at the way you communicate now with others, have you had a job since working with that organization?

Lu-Lu: No, but I have worked with others in volunteer positions.

Interviewer: Have you worked in any other organization where you have had to speak with others?

Lu-Lu: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you find that the way you communicate with others has been affected in any way in regard to this incident?

Lu-Lu: Yes, I would say that I have become very careful with the things that I would say to people because it did teach me a lesson that you cannot say everything to everybody. Because people will take what you say and use it against you. You just really can't trust nobody. Even if it seems like they like you and are friendly with you, you just never know. So, it is just better to stay to yourself and just talk about the job - about things that are needed to complete the job that you are assigned to. Leave everything else for your home or for your friends. Solely speak about work at work.

Interviewer: Are you able to do that?

Lu-Lu: Of course at times I find myself getting involved in personal topics, but as soon as I realize it, I make sure to stop myself and refocus my attention to work.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Lu-Lu: Yes, I also learned that it is very important to put everything in writing if you ever have an issue and you want to address it. That way what you say can't be changed. And it lets you make sure you are saying what you want to say. And you have proof if it is ever questioned.

Interviewer: Have you ever done this?

Lu-Lu: No, but I wish I had, but now I do.

Interviewer: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Lu-Lu: No.

Karla

Interviewer: Alright, if you can just begin by telling me how many years you were with the organization.

Karla: I was with the organization for ten years.

Interviewer: Ten years. Can you tell me what positions you held within those ten years?

Karla: I held a counselor position, and, accounts payable and payroll position.

Interviewer: Can you tell me the years that you worked for those different positions?

Karla: Yes. As a counselor I worked from '94 until '98. And then accounts payable and payroll were from '98 to 2004.

Interviewer: Okay. Looking at it, what level, were you of any type of level of management in either of those two positions?

Karla: Not...Not so much as in a job description roll. No. No I wasn't.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were just at the employee level?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. When you entered the organization, in you said 1994?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: What was the climate of the organization like?

Karla: The climate was like any organization, that I would think, is just to provide a service to the community.

Interviewer: Okay. And when you were there what was the relationship among bosses and employees while you were there? Was it a happy environment? Was it a?

Karla: Yes, it was a happy environment. Workable environment. There were not a lot of levels of management, other than the director, assistant director and then the employees. So, anyone that had a situation, it would go directly to the director and everything was peaceful as far as I could see.

Interviewer: Okay. So it was a small organization at this point.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you see a growth then, in the organization? Did the organization get larger?

Karla: The organization restructured and acquired other positions because the work load was getting bigger, so a few extra positions were acquired, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Now you, you say that everybody went to the bosses if something came up, so, if there was a problem on the employee level, if you had an issue you just went straight to the directors? Management?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So it just showed that there was a closeness there, that

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: you didn't have a large chain of command, or anything.

Karla: Right. Exactly.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your relationship like with the superiors, or the bosses?

Karla: My relationship was professional and they were very supportive and they just expected me to complete my work. Very, what I thought was a very good relationship with the employees/employers.

Interviewer: So did you ever have problems with things that they asked you to do, work or anything?

Karla: No. You know, my job description was pretty much assisting the community and I knew that, that was the case and occasionally I had to assist the secretary which was not a problem. Any other position that I had to fill in if needed to, I didn't have a situation or problem with that.

Interviewer: Okay. So you had a good relationship with upper management.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And you did your job because that's what you were there to do?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Eventually you filed a racial discrimination complaint?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, there was obviously a change in management at this point?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you walk me through that change of management?

Karla: Well, the change of management was strictly due to the organization being, in a sense, micromanaged by a board of directors, a board committee, and so no longer did the director have authorization for employee situations or things of concern anymore. It was the board of directors, or the board, who had no communication with the employees, did not know the organization, did not know the positions, did not know the policy or the handbook of the organization.

Interviewer: Okay. So basically the individuals who were supposed to be in power, such as a executive director, or managers, program managers, lost their power?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: To the board of directors?

Karla: Yes. Basically they were, they were treated as any other employee and they had no authorization with their subordinates, if you will, on any issues. They could not give any orders or instructions on continuing the programs that they were supposed to be responsible for. They had no authority.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have any direct communication with the board of directors?

Karla: No.

Interviewer: Did you know of any type of relationship of what they may have thought of you, of?

Karla: I had ideas. I had thoughts of how they, what they thought of me, simply because of the way I was being treated and how they spoke to me, so I had a thought about that, yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and what was that thought.

Karla: My thought was that they did not care for me as an employee and did not look at my work, quality of work, the work that I had been doing. So they just automatically dismissed anything that I knew about the organization, or did, or could have helped or could have helped the organization.

Interviewer: Did you ever discuss this concern with anyone?

Karla: I did with a few, a manager, a program manager, but they had no authority. So no one could do anything because of the board of directors, everyone was afraid. Everyone would go to work with fear.

Interviewer: Okay. So you could say at this point that the climate of the organization changed?

Karla: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Because you said initially it was a happy place to work.

Karla: Exactly.

Interviewer: Okay, but, so as the board received more control then you could see that there was more tension in the organization?

Karla: Yes. You know, and it was very sad for everyone else involved, even in the organization because we all had jobs and wanted to keep them. I don't think I would be in an organization for ten years and hate it. I enjoyed what I did, I enjoyed being with coworkers, but with the board and the organization, the whole organization working in fear, it was just crazy.

Interviewer: Okay. When you spoke with the program director about your concerns regarding how the board of director was, perhaps, treating you or not appreciating or acknowledging your quality of work and you found out that there was really nothing he could really do about that, how did you respond to that in the organization? Did it change the way that you felt about having to come to work, or did you?

Karla: Oh, I hated coming to work. I did not know what would happen when I showed up at 8:00 in the morning. There were things said about me in the newspaper that were untrue. There were things said to employees about me that was untrue. All through the board of directors who basically were, hired the director. That was basically their only employee, but they continued to, I believe, harass me while I was at work and torture me knowing that I had to go to work and make a living and pay my bills, and they, I believed, enjoyed the torture that they did and the fear that they communicated with the employees.

Interviewer: Okay. When you, what year did you leave the organization?

Karla: In 2004.

Interviewer: And in 2004, were the executive director and program manager still employed with the organization?

Karla: At the time that I left, no. They were dismissed from their position. Well, the director was dismissed from his position earlier in that year, I believe. And the program manager, I believe, decided to just leave.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you, so you eventually worked under someone else's management then?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. How was your relationship with the individual in the new management position.

Karla: Well, the fact that this person was, in a sense, hired with no publishing of that position. The position that she was hired for was a temporary position. Then she became a supervisor position, and I believe, at that point I automatically knew that there was some discrimination being involved in that because the lady did not have a degree. She had no management skills, no accounting skills, and I was told to help her.

Interviewer: Okay. So you felt, at this point, your skills and your knowledge were just being used to help the organization but you were receiving still no credit for it?

Karla: Exactly. But, as well as what the handbook stated. All job postings for supposed to be posted. It was not posted, and it did not allow for anyone, within the organization or outside of the organization, the opportunity for this position, and this was a federally funded program.

Interviewer: Okay. So policy and procedure, you feel, should have been followed at this point?

Karla: Yes, especially by the board of directors.

Interviewer: Okay. When you were having to help this individual, how was the communication between you two?

Karla: Well, I was upset, naturally, but I did respect the individual and I did show her the instructions on what I was asked to do.

Interviewer: Okay. So you helped her because that's what you were told you had to do.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you fear any....If you didn't help her, was there a fear there that you would lose your job or?

Karla: Well, I kind of knew it was headed that way, and as a manager of certain people, I believe you have to know what they're doing. So I knew that she had no knowledge of

any type of work. I felt sorry for her anyway so I did help her. She did not take any notes. She did not really care for the information.

Interviewer: Okay.

Karla: But I did the training.

Interviewer: How did ya'll get along just on a personal level at work? Was it a strained relationship or did you speak to her only when necessary?

Karla: Only when necessary and only regarding work.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever fear that she was gonna be, that she was unfair towards you or?

Karla: I don't that she, she did not show signs of that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Karla: But, I do feel like she had the power through the board of directors. So, not necessarily did she make the processes that she wanted, she used the board of directors to do that.

Interviewer: Okay. So she had the power?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: And you knew that that power could be used against you if you didn't do what you were supposed to do?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Eventually, as I asked earlier, you did file a racial discrimination complaint with them. What was this complaint? What was the nature of your complaint?

Karla: Well, the nature of the complaint was, first of all, that in that position as a supervisor for the accounting department the job was not posted. The opportunity was not there for me or anyone else. If I did not have the skills then that would have shown through the application process, or anyone else. First of all that was one of the things that I believe that caused me to initiate this cause. And right before I left I was also instructed to assist another individual with my position. So my position no longer, my position existed without me in it. So I was told to train other individuals.

Interviewer: What race are you?

Karla: Hispanic.

Interviewer: And the race of the other individuals were?

Karla: Both of the individuals were Anglo and they did not have any, they might have had the skills and knowledge of accounting but they did not have the experience, as stated in the handbook. They did not have the education to back that up, as well as the information of the overall program. And with 10 years experience I felt that I had more tenure and knowledge than the others.

Interviewer: Okay. And you believe that because of your race, other individuals of a more favorable race were promoted above you.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever speak to anyone, regarding this, in the organization, before filing the complaint? So did you ever complain to the board of directors or to any management?

Karla: I, because it was was, you know, oh 7 or 8 years ago, I have forgotten a lot of the details and I've wanted to forget some of that stuff, but, I could not speak to anyone. I was in charge of the human resource side of it, which I did a lot of work for, that regards to human resource. So I could not complain to myself. We had no other person to complain to. The next was the board of directors, which, they were the ones using tactics, unethical tactics to manipulate the organization and the people. And other than the board, the next step, I believe, would be the government or local government. And with me not having the financial background, or backing of other individuals, my concern to them would be negligence.

Interviewer: Okay. You've resigned with the organization? Did you resign prior to filing your complaint with EEOC or was it after?

Karla: It was after I left.

Interviewer: Did you mention any type of racial discrimination in a resignation letter to? Did you write a resignation letter?

Karla: I believe that I did and gave it to the current Executive Director and at the time I told him that I could not work under those conditions and he told me that he wouldn't, he couldn't work under those conditions as well. And he knew eventually that he would be gone.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you mention race in that?

Karla: No, I did not.

Interviewer: Did you mention anything about feeling that you were looked over a position when you were the more appropriate one for that position?

Karla: No, because, to me it was more than just one position. It was about not following through with policy and procedure.

Interviewer: Okay.

Karla: And that included many, many items, not just that one position.

Interviewer: Okay. When you, so you only, you turned in a letter of resignation?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: How long after that, you left the organization, did you file an EEOC complaint?

Karla: Probably 2 weeks or a month after that, maybe.

Interviewer: Okay. And can you just tell me, well basically you have told me, right, what your complaint was, following policies and procedures. Tie race into that. How do you feel? Do you feel simply because they were white you were looked over or?

Karla: No. Not only that. All of the, the organization included different races. Situations were happening to a lot of people that were Hispanic, that were Black, and without any reasoning to that. Again, the organization to me, as a human resource administrator/payroll clerk, I felt that is the way that you, you do run your organization through the policies. A lot of the policies were not used or utilized. They were only followed during the processes that the directors thought, and when they wanted to use the policy book, handbook. And so they used it at times to their favor, and they didn't use it when it wasn't to their favor. And it was utilized to the other individuals that were Hispanic or Black.

Interviewer: Okay.

Karla: And I could see that, and therefore my conclusion was something's going on with the organization that a lot of people, of color, were being discriminated upon.

Interviewer: Okay.

Karla: Me included.

Interviewer: Alright. So when, how long before you actually resigned had you contemplated resigning?

Karla: Really, I had not contemplated resigning. I felt eventually that the organization would get back on it's feet and move forward.

Interviewer: Okay. So it was a last minute decision to resign?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: So when you, you were experiencing discomfort in the organization at this point.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your daily communication like with individuals of the organization?

Karla: Well, because I was being targeted, and other individuals could see that, individuals did not, employees did not want to speak with me. Any communication that they had with me, even though it was professional, they felt they could not talk to me because they would be the next on the list to be harassed or discriminated against. So, and I did not blame the individuals, and I knew they had to protect their jobs, their families, their money, their income, and so I was kind of shut down from everyone.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever initiate communication with other people in the organization?

Karla: Of course I did. You know, everyone, to me, was friendly but as soon as I knew that that attitude was going around as far as if they had communication with me something could happen to them, I did not want that to happen to the other individuals. It was a very difficult decision, so it hurt me that the employees didn't communicate with me for whatever reason, but I also understood that they needed to protect themselves.

Interviewer: Okay. Just moving on to the actual legal complaint that you did file. Why did you decide to file that complaint?

Karla: Well, because I had gone to several trainings on human resource issues. And with the policies, I had gone and traveled to many, often, orientations about human resource rights, individual rights, employee rights. And I just felt that it was purely discrimination on the things that the board of directors was doing to the organization, to the community, and to its employees.

Interviewer: Okay. When did the members of the organization find out you had filed a complaint?

Karla: I'm not sure. I believe that probably EEOC made them aware of the complaint.

Interviewer: Okay. So you had no contact with them? It was strictly through EEOC?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: After this complaint, did you ever question removing your complaint or thinking about you shouldn't have filed the complaint? Did you ever second guess your decision?

Karla: No.

Interviewer: So once you filed it you were sticking with your guns, to say at that point?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Prior to filing, did you go back and forth on whether you should file the complaint?

Karla: Within myself?

Interviewer: Within yourself, yes.

Karla: No. No, I knew that the evidence is there. I had a lot of information. I had plenty of material. I had documentation. I had logs. And no, I did not have any second guesses about what I was doing.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a portion of the relief of being able to file the complaint and not second think it would have been different had you been working for the organization still?

Karla: I'm sorry. Can you rephrase the question?

Interviewer: Had you not resigned..

Karla: Okay. Um-huh.

Interviewer: Do you think it still would have been as easy to file that complaint if you were still an employee there?

Karla: No. It was torture. It was horrible going to work every day. It was just the worst. It was unbelievable. I cannot believe I tolerated it for so long. I'm glad I left. It was a relief. I was just stressed out really, really bad. I actually had some health issues regarding that, but, it was a relief to leave.

Interviewer: Okay. So once you left you had a sense of relief. You could file the complaint and not receive any type of backfire from it, at this point?

Karla: Yes. I felt relief and I knew that the board of directors at this organization would, in a sense, leave me alone because they knew that I had information. And they knew that they were wrong in a lot of the things that they were doing. And, so, yeah, I was very relieved.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have any contact with employees after you resigned from the organization?

Karla: No.

Interviewer: Okay. So you kinda just stayed away from the organization at this point?

Karla: Yes. Yes. I just wanted to forget the nightmare.

Interviewer: Okay. You're currently employed?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: What is your communication like at the organization you're with right now?

Karla: Good.

Interviewer: You work well with everyone?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you ever find yourself altering the way you communicate or looking more closely at what's going on based solely on what happened with this organization?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you explain?

Karla: Well, I'm very careful of, just of other individuals. And I feel that my race is probably hindering my career.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you ever notice that, are you quicker to notice what you feel is racial discrimination going on in the workplace?

Karla: Yes. You know, and it may be happening, and it may be not happening, but I still feel that there is racial discrimination in every organization.

Interviewer: Okay. After you filed the complaint and the organization received word that you had filed it through EEOC, did you ever have any communication with them following the complaint?

Karla: No. Never.

Interviewer: Okay. Perhaps the only communication you had with them was with your lawyer present?

Karla: Yes. Through meetings, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. You ultimately, you left the organization, you stated, and then you filed the EEOC complaint, had no communication with the organization or it's members after that, correct?

Karla: The organization and the employees, no, I had no communication with them.

Interviewer: Okay. But you can say now, at your new employment, that that incident has affected the way that you see things with your current employer now.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Does it change the way that you communicate with your superiors or bosses?

Karla: Well, I believe that in my current position they are, you know, I still give everyone the benefit of the doubt. They have treated me very well. They have not shown me any kind of discrimination. So I don't hesitate in visiting with them about certain issues, as of yet.

Interviewer: So, as of yet means that because of what you've experienced in the past, you know that it could possibly present itself again?

Karla: Yes. And I want to try to avoid that as much as possible.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you find that you keep from discussing, do you ever limit your conversation with employees, or topics of conversations with employees, or perhaps you hear a joke that involves race, do you find that you act differently towards those things now?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: How is that?

Karla: Well, I notice, you know, when people say stuff. For instance, when one instance that happened at work was one day they wanted everyone to wear a white shirt to signify something, I don't recall whether it pertained to innocence of children or the military, but one lady said, 'I don't have to wear a white shirt, I am white. So I immediately just cringed and I could not believe that statement was made. I just know that a simple statement like that can get people in trouble or be taken wrong and I don't want to be around it. I believe discrimination in some form or fashion is in the workplace. And I just, that was not directly to me, she just said it out loud, so I hear it more. I notice it more.

Interviewer: Okay. So you notice it more. Would it be fair to say that you also try to steer clear of it?

Karla: Oh yes. I avoid it. I just pretend I didn't even hear it. I use to be more confrontational if I heard a statement that I found discriminatory, but since my experience, I don't want any part of it. I went thru a large amount of emotional stress, I don't want to do it all over again. I rather act like I just didn't hear it.

Interviewer: Okay. Based on the negative experience that you had to go through?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Alright. That's basically what I have. Is there anything that you would like to add that you believe that I didn't ask or?

Karla: No.

Interviewer: Alright. We're good to go then?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer: Alright.

Bella

Interviewer: Can you begin by telling me how long you worked with the organization?

Bella: I would have to say approximately four years. I would have to say the first two years I worked there under a temp agency, and then two years after that...so approximately four. So about 2002 to 2006.

Interviewer: What position did you hold during that time?

Bella: They referred to it as a XXXXX, basically I was a clerk that helped clients locate XXXX.

Interviewer: So you came in as a temporary worker?

Bella: Yes, but it was full time.

Interviewer: What were your job duties in this position.

Bella: Basically, it was case management. You just made sure that everything that the client needed to do to receive our services was intact and provided so that they could be eligible for our services. Also, we screened the clients to make sure they qualified for our program....our services.

Interviewer: Okay. When you first entered into the organization, what would you say the climate of the organization was.

Bella: The climate of the organization?.....well, it was very good. One of the best jobs that I had ever had that I loved. It was laid back....not to the point that it was uncomfortable, but it was cool and comfortable. Everybody had good repoire. It was nice. You had a good boss and cool co-workers, and you didn't mind getting up and coming to work.

Interviewer: When you were in this position , who did you report to? What was their position.

Bella: Initially, I reported to XXXXX. After that, I reported to XXXXXX.

Interviewer: So your position was not in a management position.

Bella: I was on the bottom of the totem pole, so to speak.

Interviewer: What time of management style would you say that your supervisor had?

Bella: I thought it was excellent. Cuz because of the type of person she is. I'm not making reference to her beliefs or nothing but she was good natured. She was

understanding. She understood people went through things and she worked with them. She was just very approachable. She was very humble. If you walked into the building any given day and didn't know she was a supervisor, you wouldn't know because that is how humble her spirit was.

Interviewer: Was she the individual that gave you job assignments? Told you what needed to be done?

Bella: Yes, initially, when I first started working there she was the one that would tell me what needed to be done, she told all on my level what to do.

Interviewer: When she would give you all your assignments, how did you respond to that?

Bella: Willingly. When I first started working there I was told her tenure there. I knew out of anyone there, she knew what she was talking about. She knew what was going on. If there is anyone I need to listen to, it would be her. And there were never any instructions that were outrageous or out of line, so I did it. She was an expert in what she was doing?

Interviewer: Did you communicate with any of your superiors that were above her?

Bella: No, aside from a hello here or there, we really didn't talk to management above her, we just spoke with her and got all our instructions and tasks from her.

Interviewer: So you didn't receive direction from upper management?

Bella: No.

Interviewer: So, I read that there was a change in management while you worked there.

Bella: Yes, that is correct.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened that caused the change in management.

Bella: Because I wasn't at the top I'm not quite sure of the details, but some management got fired and others quit because I heard there may have been something going on that were questionable about what they were doing. So next thing I knew the majority of everyone at the top was gone, and we had new people filling in and coming in.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what the climate of the organization was at this time?

Bella: It got a little tense.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me why?

Bella: Because you had things that seemed to be flowing very well, and then all of a sudden things got uncomfortable. You had changes that were made by people who didn't seem to know how the organization ran. And they seemed to be trying to fix something that wasn't broke.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the new management?

Bella: I accepted it because I worked there, but it was awkward because I was hired under certain conditions and I learned under certain conditions, and then when new management comes in and they have a particular skill or background, but they don't really know how OUR organization runs and they make particular changes that they think will be productive or actually counter productive.

Interviewer: Did you receive direction from this new management?

Bella: Yes, they gave us direct direction instead of just telling our supervisor.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about how they communicated with you when they did give you direction?

Bella: Umm. They were a lot of give and not a lot of take. They really didn't want any feedback. There was not any getting the people who do the job together and asking their opinion or asking what works for us, they just told us what to do. And then they would make their own conclusions, which weren't always right on how we should do our job. It seemed like now with our new management everything was a storm. It always what they wanted to do, they never gave us a chance to say how we thought something would work for us or if we believe it should work.

Interviewer: So when this individual would give direction, did you still do it?

Bella: Of course.

Interviewer: Why?

Bella: Because it was my job. You are not going to sacrifice your career or income because of something that changed in your workplace, you are going to just do it because they told you to do it. And I already feared that if I didn't do what they told me to do, they were going to get rid of me, too. I believe that a lot of what they said was done to find a reason to clean us out or push us out and hire new people because they knew we wanted and liked the way things used to be and didn't agree with the way they were doing things now so I think they had an agenda to push us and find people who were not used to the way things used to be ran.

Interviewer: You say you believe they had an agenda going. Can you tell what you saw that made you believe this?

Bella: It seems trivial. But they would have people you use to be friendly with they would stop talking to you and then you would see them always snickering when they were around you, and then your friends all of a sudden seemed to be uncomfortable talking to you so you knew something was going on. We use to go to lunch, and then they didn't want to.

Interviewer: Okay, just shifting gears a little, did you ever speak to the new executive director at this time?

Bella: I believe we did a little. But never really nothing in detail. He would just tell us what to do and then would communicate very little with us after this time. Aside from this contact, our communication was nonexistent. I, at the time, found it awkward because my past supervisors that I was use to telling me what to do, the ones that taught me how to do my job, I trusted them because they had proven they knew what they were doing, well, the executive director was telling us things that were questionable compared to what my supervisors would tell me how we should do something? I though this was bad because if this machine is well oiled, things like that, why are we making changes. I could see if the changes were state mandated we had to change it but it was like he just wanted to change the things because he wanted to.

Interviewer: Did you and the executive director ever communicate outside of this.

Bella: No, we just exchanged pleasantries.

Interviewer: Okay, shifting gears just a little again, I read in your paperwork that you eventually decided to file a racial discrimination complaint, can you tell me what happened that made you do this.

Bella: I had already seen three co-workers dismissed just without proper reason or proper cause, but because there were certain people in the organizations that wanted to run it, and I saw three employees ousted because of that and then I saw that all those three were minorities, black and Hispanic, and then I looked back even farther and saw that the three higher management that were dismissed about a two years back were all Hispanic, and I started noticing how they were filling all management positions with Anglos although we served a highly minority community and our town is highly Hispanic. And the people that they were filling there jobs with were less educated and less knowledgeable than the people they dismissed. And then I noticed that the people they had problems with in the organization and were always riding, including me, were minorities, too. It all just started to make sense. I thought this it was racism before, but I would quickly dismiss that thought because I never want to use play the race card with no reason, but more and more I knew it was racially based on how they treated people in the organization. All the minorities were just treated differently.

Interviewer: So you believe that the three individuals that were dismissed was done so based on race?

Bella: Yes, I did. And that was based on something that was told to me from a coworker who was also a friend of mine that they had her trying to pull her in on their side because she was the white woman. And she actually told me one day, because we were really good friends, we had come to be good friends that she actually told me that they were trying to build a wedge by telling her that we were talking bad about her which we never did. They were just sowing seeds of discord because they didn't like that she got along with us minorities and she was white. She also let me know that one day they were standing at the copy machine and one of the supervisor made the comment that they were going to get the niggers out of here, and we will be running this place.

Interviewer: So you had seen in the past that discriminatory acts had been done to other employees who were eventually dismissed, all of who were of minority status?

Bella: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, so what particularly did they do to you that showed racial discrimination.

Bella: In conjunction with what already transpired, they terminated all those minorities, then hire all white individuals will less experience and education, and then they were promoting white people over minorities who had more education and more experience, I knew that I became stagnant. I couldn't every move up either because they never allowed ones over me to move up. And this is why EEOC took my case because it was a trickle down effect. Minorities weren't moved up so like I said I was stagnant.

Interviewer: How did you initially react to this experience.

Bella: I tried to appeal to the board because I knew that I couldn't appeal to the management because of the things told to me. So I went to the board to tell them what was happening. How and what the management was doing and saying about us. I did this in a letter to the board in the form of a letter.

Interviewer: What did he say to you regarding this letter.

Bella: He didn't say anything to me in particular regarding the letter but their was a situation at work where I had several coworkers come to me at work and tell me they were trying to get rid of me and they said they are going to fire you so when I appeal to him with the letter as hard as management was being with me, rude and mean and real snide, once I gave him the letter obviously he gave them that letter because my supervisor came into my office and told me we aren't going to fire you. And then they started to handle me differently, nicer. So obviously he said something to her because they changed towards me. But I knew she wasn't sincere with what she was saying.

Interviewer: I read in paper work that also there was a meeting that was held with the employees of the organization after the letter was sent, do you recall this meeting?

Bella: Vaguely. I remember they addressed the climate. Because I told them in the letter that the administrative staff was being racist. So they held this meeting and bought us pizza and told us that they understood our concerns and they were going to look into things. And that is all they said.

Interviewer: Do you believe they were being sincere?

Bella: No, I think they let people vent about the organization so that they could act like they cared. But, they were just going through the motions of making it appear like they addressed this issue, but nothing came of the meeting. Things got better for about a week and then they returned to the same way. So that is when I really knew that the meeting was just held to appease me.

Interviewer: At this point were you satisfied with their action?

Bella: No way whatsoever.

Interviewer: After this meeting, you said incidents continued to occur?

Bella: Yes, they did.

Interviewer: Anything in particular you remember?

Bella: I just stopped talking to them and would avoid them because they just seemed to continually antagonize me and other minorities within my department. Because two of us were black, and one was a white woman who was friendly with us, and she told me that they encouraged her to get an office away from us, and to move closer to them. They just kept doing things like that to show how they were trying to divide us or ostracize us. They just started nit picking us. Any piece of paper we would leave out we would receive a memo telling us we needed to start picking up after ourselves. Just stuff like that. We felt like a red headed step-child. We were just being scrutinized about everything. They told us everything we did wrong, but never about anything we did right. And, obviously, we were doing things right but we were still in compliance with federal rules and regulations.

Interviewer: When did you decide to pursue a formal legal complaint?

Bella: When I started seeing white individuals being moved into positions that I knew there were other minority people who were more qualified for, and when I saw that I knew it wasn't a fair game. I knew that it was now out of my control. I try to address it in house but they did nothing and now the imbalance was still there. I knew there was nothing I could do that would work, so I knew I had to now or it was going to get worse and I was going to quit, which I think that is what they wanted, or I was going to end up getting fired.

Interviewer: When did the member of the organization find out you had filed a legal complaint? Were you still working with the organization?

Bella: I was still working with the organization.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how the organization reacted to this?

Bella: There was an obvious change in the atmosphere. Everything again seemed to calm down again. So I knew that they knew. They felt I think they had to back off. But I knew it was the calm before the storm.

Interviewer: Did any of your superiors ever approach you about the complaint you had filed?

Bella: No, they didn't.

Interviewer: Had did your communication change with people in the organization at this time?

Bella: It seemed liked they were walking on egg shells when they spoke to me. Like they were trying to feel me out. But they only spoke when necessary. But they asked us more how were, if our weekend was good, things they never did in the past. Our communication went to some pleasantries.

Interviewer: Did the way you communicated with them change?

Bella: I became more standoffish. I knew they were looking for anything I did or say wrong. So I knew to leave everybody alone and keep to myself because they were always willing to make something out of nothing. So I censored myself a lot and just tried to speak when spoken to. I just started to drawn in. I felt like I had to protect myself.

Interviewer: Did your communication with your coworkers in your department change?

Bella: No.

Interviewer: Did your communication with other colleagues outside of your department change?

Bella: Yes. It was like I had the plague. People just didn't speak to me anymore. People I had been friends with now spoke to me less and less. I hated going to work. It really depressed me. I just couldn't believe that here I was racially discriminated against and then I'm punished for speaking up by my colleagues, people I use to be friends with. People who offered me information and let me know what was going on, now it seemed like their loyalty switched. They didn't talk to us anymore. That was hard because I knew that they felt pulled. On my end, I just accepted it because I didn't want to put them in that situation. But the other side was pulling because she later told us they told

her not to talk to us because we were just causing problems and that she was going to end up being pulled into it.

Interviewer: Okay. So once you filed your charge, did you ever consider dropping it?

Bella: No. But it took me a long time to decide to file it. I wanted to believe that it was not because of my race that I was being treated this way. I didn't want to just play that race card because I hate it when people do that just to do it. I needed to be sure that it was racism that was going on and once I was convinced that it was, I never doubted myself. It took me a year and a half to make the decision I made, I was just so overwhelmed and depressed, and I made the decision.

Interviewer: You have alluded to some emotional trauma you felt?

Bella: Yes, there was a lot of anxiety. Mostly, after I filed the complaint. I even had to go to the doctor and get medicine for it. It was so hard because you knew they were watching everything everything you did and looking for reasons for them to write you up. They had to show that I wasn't a good employee and that there were reasons I didn't receive a promotion so I just had to watch everything I did. I had to be perfect. It just brought me down. It drove me mad.

Interviewer: Did you eventually leave the organization?

Bella: Not on my decision. I was on family medical leave. My mother was sick. And when I returned, approximately a week later, I went into my supervisors office she took my keys and said I was suspended. It wasn't until I spoke to my attorney about it, he said I was not suspended, I was fired if they took my keys. But to answer your question, I did not leave willfully, but I did leave, but I was pushed out. I knew that was their intention all along, and they finally had the change they believed to do it because they said that me missing working was affecting the quality of work provided by our department.

Interviewer: Have you worked with another organization after this job?

Bella: Yes. Several months after.

Interviewer: Looking at that employment, do you feel that the way you communicated with individuals working in that organization changed based on what happened to you in your previous employment?

Bella: Yes. Matter of fact, I believe it is still affecting me to this day. To be perfectly honest with you, I am scared to work. I burn out real easily. I'm scared to work. I rather just find a reason not to do anything than to return into something like that. I notice with the jobs that I have had since then, I burn out real fast. I start feeling the anxiety when things start happening or being said because I feel like I'm going to have to relive that experience again. Things just get very overwhelming.

Interviewer: Any other ways your communication has changed with colleagues?

Bella: I'm very careful about what I say and how I respond to others. In one situation in particular, we had a man on the floor that made a lot of racial jokes., and it made me real mad. I never went to anybody about it because I didn't want to be seen as trouble maker again and I didn't want my life to be uprooted again. For the most part, I feel that it is such an old school mentality that continues to exist around me and that is what bothers me. Yes, we won and they gave us money, but now I go somewhere else and it still the same thing, nothing different, it really depresses me.

Interviewer: Has this caused you to communicate differently with your colleagues?

Bella: No. Because I'm grounded in my beliefs. And I don't judge people. I just am very polite to everyone.

Interviewer: Do you ever censor the way you speak with people in an organization.

Bella: No. I think I overly speak trying to figure out what everyone's motives are. I put them under the magnifying glass. Everyone is suspect. And the more I can get you to talk the more I know where you really do stand and helps me know if I can really trust you.

Interviewer: Basically, that is all the questions I have for you. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked you?

Bella: Nothing at the moment, if something comes to me, I will call you and would like to add it.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you.

## APPENDIX B

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL


**THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

**NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

 PROTOCOL NUMBER: **11063004**

 PROJECT TITLE: **Employee Racial Discrimination Complaints:  
Exploring Power Through Co-Cultural Theory**

 PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

 RESEARCHER/S: **Leslie Y. Rodriguez**

 COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**

 DEPARTMENT: **Communication Studies**

 FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

 IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

 PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **07/25/2011 to 07/24/2012**

*Lawrence A. Hosman*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair

*7-26-2011*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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