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Diversity: Reality or Illusion? A Case Study of Fortune 500 Companies,
Executive Suite Hegemony and Misrepresentations

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Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Business Administration

Terry Edwards

Division of Online and Professional Studies

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Diversity: Reality or Illusion? A Case Study of Fortune 500 Companies,
Executive Suite Hegemony and Misrepresentations

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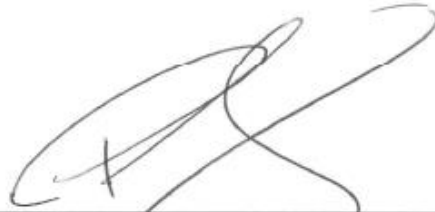
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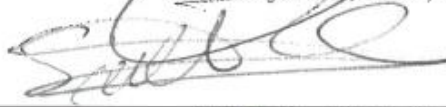
Division of Online and Professional Studies at California Baptist University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

Marginalized individuals face many workplace challenges ranging from discrimination, the lack of promotions, inequitable pay distribution, gender inequality, ageism, and other forms of discriminatory practices. These challenges can be complicated if there is a lack of allies or if a workplace is not conducive to inclusion or diversity. The stigma regarding these issues remains elusive as managers and corporate executives grapple with the changing dynamics of a modernized workforce. Therefore, corporate executives must enact policies and procedures that strive toward balance and equal representation within the workplace. This study examined executive suite hegemony and its impact on diversity. The purpose of this research was to provide significant insights into the barriers that ethnic minorities face within Fortune 500 companies. From these insights, corporate executives and managers on every level within organizations can make informed decisions on how to manage diversity. Organizational culture consists of a certain set of values or beliefs that are unique to an organization. A specific belief system shapes the culture of an organization and its governing behaviors through the implementation of policies and procedures that influence many business practices. From this research, the role of corporate governance has emerged as one of the significant factors affirming its vital role in cultivating diversity in organizations. Affirmative action policies to remedy gender, racial, age, and other forms of discrimination have been implemented in corporations worldwide. Implementation of affirmative action policies enhances corporate governance and contributes significant impacts to diversity.

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DEDICATION

In memoriam, I dedicate this body of work to my grandmother Catherine “Mama Cat” Redmond Robinson. Her unconditional love, nuturing, and sacrifices made so many things possible for me. Being reared by my grandmother has been the greatest experince of my life.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever.” Psalm 136:1
(NIV)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture consists of a certain set of values or beliefs that are unique to an organization, and the belief system will shape the overall identity by governing behaviors, shaping values, and/or through the implementation of policies and procedures that influence its business practices. Organizational culture influences performance and ultimately contributes to how successful an organization can be. Diversity and culture within any business setting must be well adapted to the changes of modern business practices while seeking to retain talented and motivated individuals from diverse backgrounds (Warrick, 2017). Leaders have the ultimate responsibility to develop strong teams and are challenged to create work environments that align organizational strategies to their decision-making process. Leadership styles affect culture as leaders bring underlying assumptions and deep belief systems to their leadership style. However, how people are treated within an organization is one of the determining factors contributing to that organization's overall reputation and success. Additionally, organizational culture has an influence on day-to-day operations impacting the decision-making process of leaders. Effective leadership can foster an environment of inclusivity that maximizes efficiency and productivity, which can be demonstrated through action and diversity management policy.

Despite considerable gains in legal rights and acceptance of a diversified workforce, the fight against stigma and discrimination remains long and challenging. Many Fortune 500 companies have implemented protective, diversity, and inclusion policies in line with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and state and local laws protecting all employees from harassment and discrimination. The enactment of the U.S. Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1972 was a landmark step in promoting diversity and equality in the workplace (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). From the researcher's perspective, diversity is an area of concern about diversification at the executive level. From a leadership perspective, the hegemony or hierarchy of White, male-dominated executive suites has been the traditional standard within Fortune 500 companies. According to Yurkevich (2020), Marvin Ellison (Lowe's), Kenneth Frazier (Merck), Roger Ferguson (TIAA), and Rene Jones (MT Bank) are the only Black chief executive officers (CEOs) leading Fortune 500 companies. Therefore, as businesses become modernized and diversified, there is a need for executive suites to reflect their workforce appropriately.

Diversity management can be defined as the planning and implantation of organizational systems or practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while the disadvantages are minimized (Rawat & Basergekar, 2016). Diversity management is designed to provide equal opportunity for employees. In modern business practices, diversity management has translated into policy and procedures designed to foster an environment of inclusion. Although organizations have different paradigms or views on diversity, these views eventually shape their philosophy on diversity. This research is significant as studies indicate that companies in the top quartile of financial earnings with a significant mix of gender, race, and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above the national industry medians (Rawat & Basergekar, 2016). Therefore, diversity can be considered a competitive differentiator. The challenge for most organizations is how to progress from a monolithic organization to a plural diverse organization.

Problem Statement

The problem to be addressed is the role of hegemony culture within Fortune 500 companies and the impact that hegemony has on ethnic minorities who wish to progress to executive-level positions. Various organizations are implementing diversity policy and procedures into the recruitment process. As the workplace becomes integrated, future workgroups will comprise diverse individuals from various backgrounds as the sociocultural movement is transformed by the socioeconomic progression of ethnic minorities (Cletus et al., 2018). Rapid diversification within the workforce will challenge people's perception of specific demographics such as race, language, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical disabilities. Given these diverse challenges, corporate executives must adopt a corporate strategy that is inclusive of diverse talent. Other factors to consider that are prominent within the modernized workplace include but are not limited to sexual orientation and religious and political ideologies (Cletus et al., 2018). Diversity can be the compulsory link between the corporate mission, vision and goals, and the organization's overall performance. Existing studies indicate that diverse organizations were more likely to have greater profitability margins.

The challenges of diversity persist in Fortune 500 companies as managers and employees are consistently challenged with coexisting while carrying out goals and mission of the organization. The underbelly of racism and sordid negligence experience by an African American employee at Tesla has demonstrated the need to be more inclusive and accepting of diversity. Tesla's corporate image was once again stigmatized as an ex-employee was awarded \$137 million dollars in a discrimination suit for racial abuse (Stapleton, 2021). In a San Francisco facility, ex-employee Owen Diaz was

subjected to racial harassment and a hostile working environment. This hostile environment included daily racial epithets, which included swastikas and graffiti of racial undertones, while working at Tesla from 2015 to 2016. According to the lawsuit, Diaz reported this behavior to supervisors, and Tesla struggled to surmount negative behavior or painted a façade of the issue pertaining to unfair or unequal treatment under the law. As a result, a jury found negligence and awarded Owen Diaz \$6.9 million in damages for emotional distress and \$130 million in punitive damages (Stapleton, 2021). Continuing discussions on diversity and inclusion have moved once again to the forefront while Tesla was attempting to have a reckoning on its moral distaste and contempt on race relations (Stapleton, 2021). This entanglement is the latest racial discrimination lawsuit that has plagued Tesla. This organization through arbitration was also ordered to pay \$1 million to another employee who had similar experiences of racial epithets at Tesla's Fremont facility (Stapleton, 2021). Organizations must ensure an environment that is welcoming for employees regardless of cultural, religious, or social views. Multiculturalism or several distinct cultural and ethnic groups are a mainstay within 21st-century organizations.

Diversity can be defined as the collection of conscious understanding that requires a deeper appreciation and understanding of humanities, culture, and the environments that shape the attributes of different individuals (Cletus et al., 2018). This study aims to investigate or illuminate the challenges individuals face regarding cultural and institutionalized discrimination preventing ethnic minorities from reaching the executive suite. Through an extensive review of the existing literature on diversity, the researcher highlighted any barriers or existing discrimination based on race, age, gender, sexual

orientation, and religious beliefs. The researcher also attempted to understand the role of hegemonic culture and whether hegemony plays a significant role in preventing the progression of ethnic minorities to the executive suite. Hegemony highlights power in a cultural sense and can be defined by leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others (Lears, 1985).

The overall concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect between different groups of people. Diversity also denotes a mutual understanding of the unique attributes inherent in individuals (Cletus et al., 2018). Workplace diversity, however, must go beyond the standard acknowledgment of inherent birth characteristics an individual is born with. Workplace diversity continues to present many challenges for organizations. These challenges include but are not limited to inclusion, equal representation on executive boards, fair pay for women, lack of mentorship, and equal access to promotion opportunities. Although women and minorities represent the workforce in large numbers, these groups continue to lack representation at top-level management positions within organizations, including but not limited to Fortune 500 companies and their respective “C-Suites” (corporate senior management). Moreover, these groups are expected to assimilate into the majority culture within organizations (Rawat & Basergekar, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to examine how diversity can be managed on various levels within Fortune 500 companies by addressing any biases that prevent ethnic minorities from reaching executive-level positions. Existing research indicates a positive correlation between diversity within the workplace and an employee’s productivity

(Hayes et al., 2020). Therefore, diversity within a workforce is not binary or categorical but instead can be thought of as reflecting a continuum anchored at one end by surface-level diversity. Surface-level diversity can be defined by sex, race, disability, and age group. On the other hand, deep-level diversity can be defined as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and spiritual belief systems (Hayes et al., 2020). Surface-level and deep-level diversity work in tandem and depend upon the individual, and one individual can represent many diverse aspects by one trait or a combination of diverse traits. Biases are introduced when managers or leaders improperly impose or introduce their personal beliefs into the work environment. One of an organization's leadership responsibilities is to create and enforce policies that encourage individuals from any group to join and participate in the workplace. Within most organizations, diversity and inclusion groups are available for individuals to join at free will. This approach might be considered diversity while also enhancing the capacity of all organizational members to perform at high levels, which might be thought of as inclusion (Hayes et al., 2020). Therefore, diversity management must be managed from every level within the organization, from human resources to business units. Persons in a position of power can glean additional insights on the importance of having equal representation at the executive level.

Background of the Problem

Diversity, when appropriately managed, can improve overall aspects of organizational performance by lending enhancements to global competitive advantages, enhancements of creditability with stakeholders, and overall improved creativity and innovation from employees. The diversity dividend can be referred to as the organization's performance enhancement that can be attributed to diversity.

Organizational performance includes financial performance and the psychological and sociological outcomes derived from the input of human capital gains from fostering a diverse work environment (Martins, 2020). In modernized corporate culture, diversity can be categorized by two major lines of thought. First, diversity focuses on antidiscrimination and equal opportunity through the development of corporate policy and procedures. Second, diversity can be expanded by initiating programs covering topics such as race or gender diversity. When referencing inclusion, current research points to a clear distinction from diversity. Although diversity and inclusion are linked together in many instances, diversity addresses variety, and inclusion addresses access to power (Martins, 2020). Diversity has mainly sought to include women, individuals of color, and other marginalized groups that have not traditionally had access to the workforce. Inclusion seeks to address decision making by creating equal access to decision making while leveling the playing field for individuals who desire upward mobility within organizations. Therefore, organizations have the unique responsibility of managing diversity and inclusion simultaneously, and leaders must design programs to shape the dynamics of diversity and inclusion.

Strategic leaders have a prominent and essential role when shaping organizational culture. Typically, when referencing strategic leadership, it can be referred to the top tier or upper echelon of leaders within an organization. CEOs, executive vice presidents, and executive operational officers act as pivots between internal and external stakeholders for an organization. In many instances, the overall views and goals of an organization are designed by strategic leaders and often filtered down to lower level managers to foster

and nurture the vision. Therefore, strategic diversity leadership is the shaping of the meaning of diversity within an organization by senior leaders (Martins, 2020).

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to expose the levels of diversity in Fortune 500 companies. The study findings are expected to become a virtual exhibit in concluding whether diversity is a reality or an illusion. Advocates of diversity have used many different strategies to increase diversity in most global corporations. Examples include focus groups, employee resource inclusion groups, and diversity summits. The extent of investment in money and resources is vast, and the finding of this paper will provide a barometer on the effectiveness of their strategies. Advocates of diversity can use the findings to analyze whether their approaches are feasible or must change tack to motivate organizations to increase diversity at the executive-suite level. Future research on diversity in the workplace may use the findings of this study to develop a conceptual framework on diversity affecting organizations. The following research questions (RQs) were designed to answer whether diversity is a reality or illusion for minority management-track employees. This research will provide executives, leaders, and employees greater insights into specific challenges pertaining to diversity and inclusion that ethnic minorities face.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards compare to the U.S. population?

Null Hypothesis 1 (H_1): The racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards will mirror the population of the United States.

Alternative Hypothesis 1 (A₁): The racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards will not mirror the population of the United States.

RQ2: Do minority management track employees of Fortune 500 companies view their organizational career trajectory positively?

Null Hypothesis 2 (H2): Minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies will view their career trajectory positively.

Alternative Hypothesis 2 (A₂): Minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies will not view their career trajectory positively.

RQ3: Does the diversity within the Fortune 500 company board mirror that of the organization's upper management?

Null Hypothesis 3 (H3): The diversity within the Fortune 500 company board will mirror that of the organization's upper management.

Alternative Hypothesis 3 (A₃): The diversity within the Fortune 500 company board will not mirror that of the organization's upper management.

RQ4: What identifying factors do diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies report as being a significant barrier to the executive board room?

Null Hypothesis 4 (H4): Diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies will not report any significant barriers to the executive board room.

Alternative Hypothesis 4 (A₄): Diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies will report significant barriers to the executive board room.

Theoretical Framework

Lack of diversity at the executive-suite level is anchored on a variety of theoretical foundations such as the cognitive diversity hypothesis. The cognitive

diversity hypothesis holds that many cognitive perspectives lead to personal bias and stereotyping, leading to a lack of diversity at the management board level. According to Luanglath et al. (2019), one critical cognitive perspective that leads to bias, discrimination, and stereotyping is personal culture. Culture shapes how people perceive, believe, and reason out issues. Another theoretical foundation explaining the lack of diversity at top management is the social identity theory, also referred to as the similarity-attraction paradigm. According to the theory, people tend to interact with others they share similarities. The theory makes it more likely for a company with White directors to prefer more White executives than non-Whites. Similarly, a company founded by a woman would tend to employ more women executives than men (Luanglath et al., 2019).

The importance of diversity at the executive-suite level of the organization cannot be overemphasized. Organizations with a diversified executive suite have been known to experience increased productivity (Hassan et al., 2017). A diverse executive suite allows for the analysis of divergent ideas and processes. Further, diversified talents, skills, experiences, and perspectives among the executives provide the organization with a vast pool of talents to increase productivity. The level of creativity on a diversified executive board can contribute to a high functioning organization that is in tune with the various level of that organization. A diversified executive improves the cultural awareness in the organization. Executives from diverse backgrounds and experiences share their diverse perspectives on an issue and work together to reach a standard solution. Work relations also improve when the company has a diverse executive suite.

The researcher's goal of this research is to determine or highlight whether being an ethnic minority presents unique challenges or barriers as it pertains to achieving

executive-level positions within Fortune 500 companies. The research problem can be considered a social and/or psychological phenomenon. A social phenomenon is an internal or external factor that affects a person's behavior or opinions (Beck, 2020). The participants in this research described how this social phenomenon, being a member of a minority group from a personal perspective, may present unique challenges while they attempt to matriculate to higher levels of leadership. This justifies the reason that this research followed a quantitative case study research design.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity Overview

Diversity in the workplace has been a concern for most corporate organizations across the globe. Over the last 2 decades, there have been efforts to push for increased diversity at the executive-suite level of organizations (Hassan et al., 2017). Advocates of diversity posit that people need to have differences in background, experiences, and perspectives. Employers must ensure that employees are of different genders, races, and faith. Diversity has become an essential element of good corporate governance. However, despite the efforts by organizations to promote diversity at the board and executive levels, the demographic makeup of executives indicates that there still exist hegemony and misrepresentation of some genders and races. Hegemony and misrepresentation of some races and genders in the executive level of the organization are indications that the strengths and potential of the misrepresented genders and races are not acknowledged. Thus, the organizations do not value the synergy that comes with valuing the differences among employees in the workplace. According to Madera et al. (2019), valuing the differences among employees from diverse backgrounds, races, and genders is critical for the success of an organization.

Diversity and inclusion lead to a thriving workplace that has a fair work culture. Diversity promotes respect and valuing of the differences and skills that each employee brings to the workplace. A workplace that promotes diversity has an inclusive environment with equal opportunities for every employee regardless of their belief, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, ethnicity, age, color, and gender. In some countries, the government has created laws that promote fair and equal opportunity to

employees in both public and private entities (Madera et al., 2019). Employers are also encouraged to create policies that promote diversity, inclusion, and equality in the workplace. The business world is increasingly becoming globalized, and organizations need to take advantage of the diverse range of skills and competencies to attain a competitive advantage. The lack of diversity at the executive level narrows the organization's ability of decision making. Thus, for an organization to attain a competitive advantage in the market environment, which is becoming globalized, there is a need to increase diversity at the executive-suite level.

Gender Bias Discrimination

Gender-based bias, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping, which lead to a lack of gender-based diversity at the executive level of management, has been a critical topic of study over the last 2 decades. A study by Connor et al. (2019) noted that women are highly disadvantaged in taking top management positions because of prejudice by men. The prejudice by men is a systemic perspective that was created by society and culture. Women are gentle, caring, and emotional based on their traits, and they do not portray self-confidence, independence, and competitiveness, rendering them less aggressive in top leadership positions according to stereotypes. Women's physical traits subject them to gender-based prejudice, undermining their career progression to top management positions. Another study by Fernandez-Mateo and Fernandez (2016) noted that women in management positions had developed a belief that men are better suited for top management positions than women. In a self-reporting survey done to assess whether women in managerial positions seek board positions, the study established that women in management are happy serving in lower management positions than board-level

positions. This attitude of serving in lower management positions for some women can be attributed to work-life balance, familial responsibilities that traditionally lie with women, and barriers experienced by women when they seek upper management positions (Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2016).

Gender inequality is a form of discrimination that threatens equality of inalienable rights and freedoms. Therefore, the goal of equality is to have equal distribution of prosperity, power, and benefits for all marginalized individuals (Parmer, 2021). From a historical perspective, the road to women's rights concerning polarizing issues like a woman's choice and equal pay has been the center of debate for years. Regarding equal pay rights, women make on average \$.80 for every \$1.00 that men make. However, 83% of the economic purchasing power in the United States is held by women (Parmer, 2021). The inclination to favor one gender over the other must be addressed if an inclusive work environment is to be achieved. Gender bias can be an unconscious form of bias if male supervisors favor male counterparts over their female counterparts for promotions, positive annual reviews, or pay scale advances for men although women may hold the exact same position within the organization.

For organizations to improve in this area of inequity, organizations must commit to the implementation of programs that combat microaggressions toward women and create an organization that is gender diverse by placing females in various roles throughout the organization. In addition, women in managerial positions and executive leadership positions are viewed favorably by subordinate employees within the organization. The promotion of women where hiring practices are intentional for this vulnerable group is known as positive discrimination (Parmer, 2021). The intentionality

is specific because it allows for disadvantaged women to gain leadership positions within organizations. Finally, it is important for companies to have a culture of transparency and disclose managerial leadership positions while striving for a culture of diversity and inclusiveness.

Race-Based Discrimination

Race-based prejudice in the top executive suite is a growing concern in the globalized business environment. Research has established that non-White or people of color are less represented in executive-suite positions (Paluck et al., 2021). However, despite the consistency in study findings that non-Whites are less represented, the Whites do not perceive it as a reality. In the United States, racism has steadily reduced over the last 50 years. The country has developed laws that discourage discrimination based on race, and organizations have emphasized and developed policies that promote fair treatment and nondiscrimination based on race in the workplace. According to Madsen and Andrade (2018), racism can be unconsciously done, and those who commit discrimination do it without intent when exhibited through this unconscious form. Racial prejudice against non-Whites is considerably high within organizations, and the vision of having diverse top management remains a myth.

Companies have devised many strategies to improve workforce diversity. Many of the top corporate organizations across the globe have embraced recruiting a diverse workforce. However, as the employees climb the career ladder, top management remains biased at the apex of the ladder. The lower levels of management indicate a higher level of diversity, but the top level or executive level always has elements of bias. Ethnicity and gender diversity have not been realized since the industrial age. According to Hassan

et al. (2017), the lack of diversity at the executive level of management or leadership is attributed to underappreciated barriers deeply rooted in people's beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts.

Organizations exist because of the contributions of individuals. Individuals portray different feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that shape the decisions and operations of the organization. Personal bias and stereotyping are the critical cause of lack of diversity at the top management levels. The concept of bias and stereotyping is developed over time through socialization. People born in communities where women cannot take leadership roles tend to develop deep stereotypes about women holding top leadership positions. Another cause of stereotyping is historical actions that promote stereotyping. In the history of the United States, people of color or non-Whites were considered inferior and were not provided equal opportunity in society. Despite the change in laws promoting diversity in society, the notion that non-Whites are inferior compared to Whites exists in modern society. Thus, the origin of the lack of diversity in top-level management positions can be attributed to the individual and institutional bias and discrimination (Hassan et al., 2017).

Racial challenges coupled with sexual minority identify may prove to be a significant barrier for marginalized individuals seeking to matriculate to upper executive positions in Fortune 500 companies. Many companies have invested resources to enhance tolerance and promote, but the fight continues for ethnic and minority groups. According to Movement Advancement Project (2013) research, people of color who identify as homosexuals are at a higher risk of losing their jobs than their White counterparts. Research by Aranda et al. (2015) supported this argument by stating that

only 26.5% of African Americans as compared to 53.8% of Whites are ready to disclose their sexual identity as lesbians or gay. Additionally, racial affiliation escalates this limitation for African Americans because of strong cultural values steeped in religion. Although education disparity, socioeconomic factors, homophobia, and other issues are not limited to African Americans, more work is needed to for a shift to properly quell the effects of these issues on marginalized communities.

LGBTQ Insights on Diversity

Bias-motivated violence against LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) individuals is one of the fastest-growing forms of hate violence in the United States. Violence against the LGBTQ community is not a new phenomenon. Research has indicated that LGBTQ individuals are 2.4 times more likely to be the victim of a hate crime than Jews, 2.6 times more likely than Blacks, 4.4 times more likely than Muslims, 13.8 times more likely than Latinos, and 41.5 times more likely than Whites. For LGBTQ people of color, the rates are significantly higher than their White counterparts (Kehoe, 2020). Hate crimes motivated by racial bias historically represent over half of the annual total of hate crimes reported in the United States. Therefore, it is important to understand how race and racism contribute to hate crimes toward LGBTQ individuals. While racial bias criminology literature has pointed to several forms of bias, it is also important to understand how certain forms of prejudice carry over to other bias motivations (i.e., racism). Regarding LGBTQ hate crimes, evidence shows that the role of the perpetrator is mixed. The assailant in certain situations can be known or unknown (Kehoe, 2020). The heterogeneous nature of LGBTQ violence was motivated by pure disgust and prejudice in which the unknown assailant picked their victims by random

based upon their sexual minority status and gender identity. Successful interventions and prevention strategies aimed to prevent anti-LGBTQ hate are palpable. LGBTQ hate crimes substantially impact the lives of victims, the LGBTQ community, and the larger society around them (Kehoe, 2020).

Discrimination, once easily identifiable, has now shifted into what is known as microaggressions. Microaggressions can be defined as daily, seemingly harmless indignities that send negative messages to minority group members. Furthermore, unique microaggressions exist for individuals who possess more than one stigmatized identity (Fattoracci et al., 2020). Racial and ethnic minorities tend to face racism unlike any other microaggressions that the heterosexual community may face. Racism coupled with microaggressions is experienced at higher levels for the LGBTQ community.

Microaggressions tend to reduce or minimize the human attributes of a person. For example, when heterosexual people keep a circle of gay friends because they are “fun” or “feisty,” this sometimes signals to gay individuals that they are reduced to entertainment (Fattoracci et al., 2020). Covert racism is a form of racial discrimination that is subtle and under the radar, not obvious to the attentive observer. This type of racism is concealed in the fabric of society and is often done in passive ways. Microaggressions identify, quantify, and qualify covert racism. These four categories must be considered when referencing this form of racism: microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations, and environmental microaggressions. Microassaults are an undercover form of racism that could include epithets or harassing behaviors. Microinsults include unfairly criticizing personal identities through demeaning encounters. Microinvalidations occur when dominant group members invalidate the experiences of minority group members,

for example, when the heterosexual community minimizes the feelings or experience of homosexual individuals. Last, environmental microaggressions alienate women and ethnic minorities from important community recognition or contributions (Fattoracci et al., 2020). There are common attributes between the four types of microaggressions describe above, which include the expression of negative messages to targets, the perpetrator's denial of target experiences, and the reinforcement of dominant societal values with the corroboration of heterosexist and racist stereotypes. The vitriol pointed toward the LGBTQ community sets the precedents that marginalized individuals who do not fit within the traditional context of heterosexual normative society, highlighting that minorities are expected to assimilate to the dominant culture. The intersectionality of race or ethnicity and sexual orientation influences the opinions of others. Although dominant culture tends to grapple with inclusion and diversity, society is moving toward inclusivity of all cultures and sexual orientations. Microaggressions toward marginalized communities produce higher levels of social isolation and anxiety for individuals attempting to fit the mold of what is perceived as normal in society.

Ethnic Minority Educational Disparity

For ethnic minorities, educational disparities exist, and traditionally the access to education has been challenging for minorities. The lack of well-supported educational systems is responsible for the lack of representation of minorities in Fortune 500 companies. Pastrana (2016) supported this argument by arguing that sexual orientation and having a connection to the LGBTQ community deny many people of color from getting scholarships. This may be significant as a new reveal relative to this research. Question 7 and Figure 8 shows that many participants of this survey identify with the

LGBTQ community. According to Darling-Hammond (1998), schools serving many students of color and marginalized groups received fewer resources in comparison to Whites' institutions. The inability to ascend to top management jobs is attributed to inadequate financing, the schools' position, and unequal resource allocation. The struggle for equal education rights is still ongoing, and many institutions have become more accommodating to African American learners. Despite this assertion, Wodtke (2012) argued that well-educated Whites are less likely to support any policy initiative promoting racial diversity. The ideological perspective held by many Whites is that of sustaining the status quo, implying that top management jobs are reserved for the elite.

The inadequacy in resource allocation is responsible for unequal employment. Since the inception of the EEOC, researchers have conducted many studies to determine the impact of low-level jobs on students' performance and life achievement. Darling-Hammond (1998) stated that small class size, familiarity with the surroundings, curriculum, and the educators' qualifications contribute to the success of students. Such opportunities are minimal in ethnic minority dominated communities. Level of income, human perception, and educational attainment adversely impact the mental status of an individual. According to the American Psychological Association (2017), 39% of American children grow in poverty, and ethnic marginalization indicates a higher rate of psychological health issues that hamper progress in life (American Psychological Association, 2017). Many ethnic minority individuals feel they have reached self-actualization once they acquire enough money to survive. The earning rates are unequal with African American workers earning 72% lower than Caucasian men.

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses an individual's hierarchy in a society based on financial well-being (Bosworth, 2018). If an individual SES is low, the chances of living a fulfilling life diminish. There are several factors that affect the educational opportunities and contribute to the socioeconomic gap between the have and have nots of society. A particular issue identified within the literature regarding the zero-tolerance policy has created issues that affect the urban and heavily minority populated schools. Overzealous and punitive approaches that characterize the criminal justice system have seeped into the education system as schools are funneling children into the criminal justice system because of the zero-tolerance policy.

African American males are the most affected by the emergence of a school-to-prison pipeline. According to Heitzeg (2009), the United States promises free and compulsory public education, which is an indication that all persons have equal access to their "American Dream." However, this promise is just an illusion, primarily for the African American minority. Changes in education policy have exacerbated inequalities in the education system. Instead of building an atmosphere of learning, opportunity, and engagement, some schools' practices blur the distinction between an educational institution and jail (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020). Implementing zero-tolerance policies has created a situation in which educational institutions are directly or indirectly tracking students into the criminal justice system. It is a disturbing national trend, and the Blacks make up most of those who end up in juvenile detention. Considering the many socioeconomic factors affecting the African American minorities, their children would benefit from education and counseling services to mold them into productive society members.

Policies such as zero tolerance have allowed schools to criminalize the violation of minor school rules, and the police end up criminalizing the culprits for behavior that educators could handle and correct. Because of the lack of resources predominately affecting urbanized areas, marginalized students end up being the most affected (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020). The lack of resources and proper sponsorship contributes significantly to reducing the number of educated minorities within the school system. Individuals who are overexposed into the criminal justice system are unlikely to continue pursuing their educational goals, especially if they are lost in the system because of recidivism. The policies also encourage suspending and expelling students, thereby forcing them into the streets. School to prison pipeline increases an individual's risk of incarceration even in the future.

Ethnic Minority Stigmatization

Manifestations of homophobia, transphobia, racism, stigmatization, and violations against people with nontraditional sexual orientations are not endemic to the United States only. Christian values and traditions are challenged with providing equal rights for LGBTQ individuals. For example, in Ukraine, homosexuality is openly condemned by the church as homosexuality is seen as an inadmissible phenomenon (Matviiko & Shkoliar, 2019). Although these issues are not new to society, research has explored the devastating impact that certain stigmas have had on the homosexual community. The study of stigma is important as researchers attempt to study gender issues, equality, and human rights. The study of stigma will help prevent social divisions between heterosexual people and representatives of the LGBTQ community (Matviiko & Shkoliar, 2019).

Stigmatization adds undue stress and therefore can exacerbate the unfulfilled areas of emotions that LGBTQ individuals tend to suffer with over time. When referencing stigmatization within the LGBTQ community, stigmatization based on sexual orientation is a special kind of stigmatization. Sexual stigma (based on sexual orientation) ties to any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. Stigmatization is a socially widespread plague in communities that do not understand homosexuality with views that constantly remain in judgment of a community that is not fully understood or not spiritually aligned with traditional religious values (Matviiko & Shkoliar, 2019). There are three varieties of stigma. First is felt stigma (meaning the person's expectation of stigmatization). Second is internalized stigma or self-stigma (hidden negative attitude toward oneself and their own homosexual desires). Third is enacted stigma (open behavioral expression of stigma). The most significant effects of stigmatization based on sexual orientation include inequality between heterosexuals and homosexual people, which is expressed and fixed in hierarchal relations within society and correlates with discrimination (Matviiko & Shkoliar, 2019).

Religion itself assumes a significant part in the criticism of LGBTQ people, especially for gay individuals who are Christian but identify as LGBTQ. Deep traditional and cultural values within the African American community present extra barriers for gay Black males. As a result, these challenges or barriers often bleed into the personal and professional lives of these individuals. The strongest manifestation of stigma is the lack of acceptance from the community, religious community, and family. LGBTQ individuals desire acceptance, acknowledgment, and respect that heterosexual individuals are offered freely with no upfront cost or biases. There are some serious consequences

for LGBTQ individuals because of stigma. For example, suicide, decrease in self-esteem, apathy, and mental disorders to name a few.

The fear of homophobia coupled with stigma often manifests into various forms of hate toward LGBTQ individuals. In 2011, the international organization Human Rights Campaign reaffirmed on International Human Rights Day the need for legal protections, suturing this need with policies and laws to address the violence and increased hate toward the LGBTQ community. President Obama identified anti-LGBTQ discrimination as the next frontier of international human rights, framing it as a “global challenge” that is central to the U.S. commitment to promoting human rights (Mayers, 2018). Pushing the “love is love” message is in direct opposition to the traditional stance the United States has had since its inception. The establishment of international antidiscrimination laws was to address the specific violence and opposition that is directed toward gays and lesbians (Mayers, 2018).

Under the Obama administration, the rights of LGBTQ individuals progressed as economic paradigms shifted with moralism and militarism to vigorously defend the rights of this marginalized community domestically and abroad. This included providing swift and meaningful tactics and actions protecting vulnerable LGBTQ refugees or asylum seekers. Juxtaposing the policing of global anti-LGBTQ rights and the protection of its victims, the 2011 International Human Rights Day and the underlying politics represent a new shift in U.S. policy regarding this specific subset of human rights (Mayers, 2018). Many view the enunciation of gay rights as the next level or tier of human rights that were folded into existing civil rights legislation. Although the rejection of same-sex laws was enacted years ago, the reversal of the antiquated laws and policies had to account for

the development of equal economic policies, equal rights protections, civil rights protections, and international human rights.

The importance of asylum seeker protection was due to vulnerable subjects victimized by regressive cultures who must subsequently be rescued by and assimilate into a more advanced society that is more tolerant of gay rights. It is important to understand that the laws introduced in 2011 were never designed to challenge personal ethics or morals. However, these laws were designed to provide equal protection under the constraints of the law. This reinforces the concept of humanitarianism.

Humanitarianism in its simplistic definition examines the universal rights of individuals everywhere, and therefore who are interested as a nation to consider the human rights of all individuals from a global perspective (Mayers, 2018). For gay rights, this humanitarianism view includes or considers gender identity, sexual identity, coming out publicly, and other rights pertaining to the LGBTQ community to include the added protection of legislative laws that act as a barometer of social progress (Mayers, 2018).

More importantly, it is important to understand how hate crimes against LGBTQ individuals are seen under the law. The legal concept of immutability has been instrumental in defining the normative gay (male) victim of violence. The traditional unchanging views of gender have hindered the progression of how the legal system views hate crimes against gay individuals. The Refugee Act of 1980 stated, “Someone who has experienced persecution or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Mayers, 2018, p. 144). The law was amended under the Obama administration to include persecution or violence toward sexual minorities. This covering under the

asylum seeker law adds another layer of protection for individuals that desire to seek asylum in the United States. Although the Obama administration was very progressive in gay rights, there was little done to shift the traditional culture within organizations.

There are significant barriers that still exist preventing African American gay Black males from ascending to executive-level positions. About particular social groups, many view this as the distinguishing factor for gay individuals. It is no doubt that gays share a common and immutable characteristic. These immutable characteristics have never been truly accepted by heteronormative society, and for Black males, the challenge is greater as gay Black males debunk the traditional definition of masculinity by deconstructing the stereotypical definition of Black masculinity defined by African American culture. An important supreme court case in 2018 *Hernandez-Montiel v. INS* crossed back to equal protections under the law and further enforced the concept of immutability (Mayers, 2018). The case concluded that a person's sexual identity is such an integral part or aspect of one's identity, it is not appropriate to require a person to repudiate or change his or her sexual orientation to avoid discriminatory treatment (Mayers, 2018). This ruling was significant and further established that renouncing self-identity as a protection mechanism is not acceptable in the view of the law, releasing many individuals from the internalized heterosexism mechanisms many gay individuals use as a survival mechanism. This case also inferred that the equivalency of same and opposite-sex couples' relationship longevity, stability, and commitment, and parenting outcomes supports assertions that homosexuality and bisexuality are normal expressions of human sexuality that do not interfere with a happy, healthy, and productive life. Given those assumptions, sexual orientation and the intimate personal relationships to which it

is linked comprise an essential component of personal identity, and it should not be required to change (Mayers, 2018).

However, there are still significant legal challenges in how the judicial systems see violence or hate against LGBTQ individuals. Although violence against men, specifically public (i.e., nonrelational) sexual and physical violence is often more legible as sexuality-based persecution. The judges' interpretations of gay male claimants' experiences are also infected by gendered assumptions (Mayers, 2018). This means that the implicit biases that some individuals possess often bleed into the judgments, making it harder for legal protections to be established. Although the law is to be neutral, the human factor of biases and our affinity to what individuals naturally think or are drawn to will have some effect on how people view ethical or moral issues. However, contemporary *hate crime laws* derive from the 1968 Civil Rights Act, which authorizes federal prosecution and punishment of anyone who willfully injures, intimidates, or interferes with any person because of his race, color, religion, or national origin. Building on the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (1990) and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (1994), the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009) authorizes federal financial and law enforcement assistance to state and local jurisdictions in cases involving bodily injury because of the actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability of any person (Mayers, 2018). Like the Civil Rights Act, the Shepard-Byrd Act sets out tiered maximum punishments to include fines and imprisonment in relation to the content of the offense (Mayers, 2018). President Obama signed the hate crimes law in 2009, expanding the scope and liability of hate crimes.

Diversity Statistics

The level of diversity in senior leadership positions like the executive-suite level has not reached the aspired levels. Advocates of diversity in the workplace have developed many strategies to promote diversity in the senior management levels of the organization, but the pace of diversity is relatively meager. These strategies include educational opportunities pertaining to social justice issues, sensitivity training, and conscious and unconscious bias training. A survey done in 2018 noted that in the S&P 500 board seats, 27% of the seats were held by women, while men held 73% of the seats (Díaz-Fernández et al., 2020). The same study established that women held only 19% of the board seats in the mid and small-cap companies' boards while men held 81%. The study findings indicate a lack of gender diversity at the board level where executives make decisions for organizations.

In a study by Luanglath et al. (2019), it was established that the non-White ethnic minorities represented only 10% of executives in Russell 300 companies while native Whites held 90% of the executive positions. An analysis of the executives in Fortune 500 companies indicates that only 9% were non-White, and only 7% of the executives were women. The vision of having top management that is diverse remains a myth. Many of the top corporate organizations across the globe have embraced recruiting a diverse workforce. However, reemphasizing as the employees climb the career ladder, top management remains biased at the apex of the ladder. The lower levels of management indicate a higher level of diversity, but the top level or executive level always has elements of bias. Ethnicity and gender diversity have not been realized since the industrial age.

According to Hassan et al. (2017), the lack of diversity at the executive level of management or leadership is attributed to underappreciated barriers deeply rooted in people's beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts. Organizations exist because of the contributions of individuals. Individuals portray different feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that shape the decisions and operations of the organization. However, for diversity and inclusion to be truly effective, these thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs should not go unnoticed by top executives.

The road to gender equality and persistent obstacles within the workplace, such as gender bias and gender stereotyping, have created significant balances when marginalized individuals attempt to reach a glass ceiling. In addition, microaggressions and negative behaviors within the workplace have exacerbated diversity and equality issues while companies grapple with remedies for creating a gender-diverse workplace for women and other ethnic minorities (Parmer, 2021). Gender equality is the equal distribution of prosperity, power, and benefits for women and men. Examples may include equal access to education, healthcare, equal employment opportunity, and the ability to own property. Gender inequality and challenges in discrimination against women remain a threat within the workplace regarding equal rights and workplace freedom. Moreover, research has indicated that only 4.8% of Fortune 500 companies have had a female chief executive officer (CEO) between the years of 1972 and 2018 (Parmer, 2021). In addition, pay equality remains a hot-button issue as women on average make \$.80 to every \$1.00 earned by men. However, 83% of the economic purchasing power within the United States is made by women (Parmer, 2021). Women have long fought for equal pay and representation within corporate America. Corporate

executives with decision-making power should remedy internalized microaggressions, whether subtle, preconscious, or unconscious. All forms of microaggressions are innocuous dilapidations that insult members of oppressed, systematically underprivileged, or marginalized groups (Parmer, 2021).

Women are not the only marginalized group in the workforce, but the vertical segregation under the class ceiling has traditionally not allowed women to be promoted. Older White men have traditionally operated the hierarchy within Fortune 500 companies. The glass ceiling metaphor is indicative of the imagery threshold where job advancements, higher salaries, and better career opportunities reside. However, marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, have not advanced through to reach a glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is not the only barrier women have faced within the workplace, but gender stereotyping is traditionally viewed as sexual objects driven by emotions and the expectation of certain behaviors from women. Women expected to conform or be more lady like may downplay their capabilities to give the illusion of not having leadership capabilities, contributing to the lack of a strong leadership presence even in middle manager positions (Parmer, 2021).

A disquieting amount of stigma and discrimination in the workplace forces many LGBTQ employees and executives to remain in the closet despite the implementation of antidiscrimination policies. According to a 2018 survey by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 53% of the respondents revealed that they had found their coworkers making jokes about gay and lesbian people (Longarino, 2019). About 20% of LGBTQ employees said their colleagues had suggested they dress more feminine or masculine (Longarino, 2019). Non-LGBTQ employees who participated in the survey also reported

treating their colleagues differently because of their LGBTQ sexual orientations. For instance, 36% of non-LGBTQ respondents said they would feel uncomfortable if they heard their LGBTQ colleagues discuss dating (Longarino, 2019). These figures reinforce the challenges that hinder many LGBTQ individuals, especially gay Black males because of possible double discrimination from ascending to the C-Suite of the Fortune 500 companies. Survey results of a 2018 Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Workplace Equality Program revealed that at least 46% of LGBTQ workers disguise their sexual orientation for fear of mistreatment and discrimination by their colleagues or bosses (Longarino, 2019). Executives are more likely to remain closeted than ordinary employees. A 2016 Credit Suisse survey reported that approximately 72% of LGBTQ senior executives had not openly revealed their sexual orientation at work (Longarino, 2019). The implementation of formal LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices may convey a step in the right direction, but the lack of accession of self-identified LGBTQ Black males to executive leadership of the Fortune 500 companies reflects the reality of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace. It is less probable that gay Black men working in the Fortune 500 firms perceive their work environment as LGBTQ-supportive when none of those companies are led by an openly LGBTQ Black or ethnic minority. According to Webster et al. (2017), LGBTQ employees working in organizations with "supportive formal LGBT policies and practices, informal climates, and relationships reported more positive work attitudes" (p. 193). Enlightening the traditional professional community about the challenges ethnic minorities face will assist concerned bodies in implementing policies that will increase their participation at the executive management level.

According to Aranda et al. (2015), only 26.5% of African Americans versus 53.8% of Whites are ready to disclose their sexual identity as lesbian or gay. In addition, people of color who identify as homosexual are at a higher risk of losing their jobs than their White counterparts because of discriminative practices. Racial affiliation escalated this limitation against African Americans because many choose not to speak out against current cultural family traditional values steeped in religion.

Implementing remedies has been challenging across various industries, and societal norms should not be the expected norm if companies desire to make proper changes related to diversity and inclusion. Male-dominated industries such as technology, construction, architecture, and engineering remain challenging as these business sectors have traditionally encompassed deep-rooted underlying assumptions about marginalized groups (Parmer, 2021). Companies must heighten awareness of their organizational culture by examining their existing norms, policies, procedures, and practices to clarify potentially marginalized groups within the workplace. Challenging corporate culture must be strategic while seeking to address microaggressions and gender equality by creating corporate governance that is inclusive and less discriminative.

Value Creation

Ethical considerations have been discussed, and the current debate on the effects of gender diversity within top management teams remains. Firms must assess value creation and entrepreneurial success while competing in global markets. Value creation can be achieved through the capacity of individuals to absorb, integrate, and exchanged information throughout various levels within an organization (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). This value creation can be achieved through collaborative efforts from people resources with

various backgrounds and abilities. This capability affords corporations the ability to thrust beyond their rivals in dynamic and fluid environments as well as the ability to discover new outcomes that generate income and create competitive advantages.

Innovation is a social process by which efforts are usually made in a collaborative team approach. The characteristics that each person exhibits influence the organization through strategic decision making. These decisions may influence company goals, the allocation of business unit resources, project management, and other technical decisions involved in strategically positioning the organization to compete (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). However, gender diversity is not fully achieved within top management teams at Fortune 500 companies. Therefore, further studies are needed to better understand how gender diversity, ethnic minority representation, and other marginalized individuals can successfully contribute to a corporation's behavior and innovative influence; Spain's government-mandated the need for equal representation for women in 2007. Diversity quotas were implemented as an initiative to foster the representation of women in top management positions.

When innovation is discussed, it is the primary representative of product innovation and process innovation. However, people's innovation can be attributed to the level of diversity represented within the organization. Thus, innovation combining product, process, and people can be summarized as the organization's performance and the ability to adopt new ideas, processes, and products driven by the contributions of a diverse team (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). Innovation does require the willingness to share knowledge and experience that ultimately can be utilized to increase a firm's performance. Diversity refers to the level of heterogeneity distributed in organizations.

Diversity consists of the differences of the individuals that are reflected within the organization. Demographic diversity includes noticeable characteristics such as age, sex, race, nationality, and education level (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). However, traditional demographics within the executive suite allow decisions to be inequitable.

Upper echelons theory suggests that executives make decisions that influence an organization's performance consistent with their cognitive base or executive orientation. Observational experiences are systematically related to executive orientation's psychological and cognitive elements (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). This approach ultimately determines how information is analyzed and filtered through organizations. Having equal representation provides a holistic approach to strategic decision making.

Global Diversity

Diversity within global populations has been transformed by socioeconomic and other factors that affect how humans interact. Organizations are continually exploring strategies to exploit diversity while attempting to gain a competitive advantage. However, the exploitation of diverse resources has not matriculated to upper-level executive positions within Fortune 500 companies. Rapid diversification challenge an individual's perception of demographic factors on race, language differences, ethnicities, gender, age, and physical disabilities within the workplace (Ruiz-Jiménez, 2016). Other factors such as sexual orientation, SES, religious and political ideologies have become prominent diverse topics within modern organizations. Given the factors on diversity mentioned above, organizations enact policies and procedures to foster diversity and inclusiveness. However, because of the lack of representation of ethnic minorities at the

executive level, the dearth of diversity and the impact of their inherent leadership style remains a challenge for organizations.

When considering inherent traits or characteristics of individuals, one must have a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of humanity, cultures, and the mutual respect of the qualities and experiences of individuals with different attributes. However, when one considers the different aspects of diversity, one foregoes the acceptance of the peculiar differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Cletus et al., 2018). Workplace diversity has become a recurring feature within human resources as the concept of workplace diversity and its role in management has become an integral process on how companies compete on a global scale. Companies are currently adapting policies and strategies, which include marketing an environment that is inclusive and welcoming, to appeal to future talent to be effective.

The fluid dynamic of business requires companies to embrace inclusion in the face of diversity. Workplace diversity can improve critical thinking and problem solving within organizations as employees with different backgrounds can successfully utilize their professional backgrounds to effectively improve strategic operations and the execution of management decisions (Cletus et al., 2018). For organizations to be successful, cognitive biases must be addressed regarding managers' behavior and decision-making process in charge. For example, gender-related issues such as pay inequity, lack of promotion, and unfair decision making toward the male-only point of view remain issues for many organizations.

Communication is a critical tool for creating and maintaining cohesion about corporate goals and values. Communication creates cohesion in the workplace and is

crucial to the attainment of organizational goals. Every individual brings their distinct experiences to the work environment, and the contributions of everyone can enhance the quality of work, productivity, and their loyalty to the corporation in which they serve. On the other hand, poor communication or the lack of communication can present significant challenges for corporations. Ineffective communication can affect project deadlines and cause incorrect goal assumptions, decreased employee productivity, lack of collaboration, and workplace conflicts. Multicultural diversity should be considered a pertinent factor when organizations determine communication style (Cletus et al., 2018). If an organization is linear in its approach to diversity, corporate executives cluster communication at the top and filter it down to employees, typically after decisions have been made regarding the overall strategic operations of the company (Cletus et al., 2018).

Generational Gaps

Racial bias, gender bias, and communication are not the only issues affecting diversity within modern organizations operating in the 21st century. To understand the many facets of diversity, understanding generational gaps within the workplace and the resultant effect caused by the lack of communication and adhesion between the newer and older generations. Segregation of generations may present challenges about strategic plans or directions required for the progression of organizations. Specifically, the change in career cycles varies from generation to generation, and the experiences and views of problems that corporations face will have different outcomes depending on the decision-making process from each generation. The challenge becomes how to properly merge the decisions from each generation while making effective strategic decisions that secure the trajectory of that organization for long-term growth. In theory, generational gaps exist

between traditionalists, baby boomers, generation X, millennials, and the iGeneration (Cletus et al., 2018).

Traditionalists were born before 1945 and were molded into disciplined and self-sacrificing individuals. Baby boomers were born from 1945 to 1964 and raised during economic prosperity and suburban wealth. This generation influenced the stay-at-home mother generation. However, research indicates a shift in this generation and their return and prominent presence within the workforce. Generation Xs were born between 1965 and 1980 and were raised in the era of working mothers. This generation is characterized as independent, resilient, and adaptive to the work environment. Millennials were born between 1981 and 1999 and can be described as the most child-centric generation in modern history. Millennials typically express themselves as confident but tend to conform to the expectations of their parents. This generation is the largest generation that is within the workforce. The iGeneration was born in 2000 and beyond. Research indicates that this generation can quickly pick up and generate new skills because of their exposure to information technology (Cletus et al., 2018). Bringing the diaspora of generations together will create an environment that is diverse and inclusive. When considering the impact of diversity on generations within an organization, human resource professionals desire to bridge the gap between younger professionals and older professionals. Attitudes toward either group can shift the dynamics within the workplace, impacting diversity and inclusiveness.

Negative attitudes and discrimination against workers based on whether they are young, older, or mid-age limit their social and economic contributions in the workplace and adversely impact their health. The existing body of research shows widespread age

discriminatory practices in the workplace, especially those targeting older workers (Barrington, 2015). A common myth about older adults is that they are inflexible and resistant to learning new skills. Refusal to hire, promote, or retain workers because of their age has informed many antidiscrimination movements worldwide. Despite research and policy attention on ageism in the workplace, age stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination remain a significant barrier against employees' productivity, organizations' sustainability, and economic progress.

Although researchers have unearthed extensive ageism in the workplace, including its various manifestations, types, victims, and perpetrators, there is a significant gap regarding the impact of ageism on older workers' health and work in the workplace (Dionigi, 2015). Employers are also responsible under the ADEA to create a work environment that is free from hostility or offensive behavior that allows harassing someone because of their age (Barrington, 2015). In 2014, 45% of unemployed 55- to 64-year-olds were reported as unemployed long term (Barrington, 2015). During this same year, only 33% of 25- to 34-year-olds were employed for long periods of time. The benchmark or timeframe for this analysis was 27 weeks or longer, the average during the calendar year 2014 for older job seekers. Although some employers utilize older workers for the expertise and to gain a strategic advantage, research indicates that there are still stigmas concerning older workers within the workforce. The main stigma is lag or slowness and the inability to adapt to modern technology such as computerized systems (Barrington, 2015). The law Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967 was designed to protect individuals over the age of 40 from workplace discriminative practices (Barrington, 2015). The ADEA applies not only to hiring and firing but also to

pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other conditions of employment (Barrington, 2015). The insights pertaining to generational gaps allows professionals to develop policy and practice approaches to improving the workplace to ensure an age-friendly work environment. This discussion will broaden a manager's perspective or scope to understand age discrimination, generational gaps, prejudice, and stereotyping within the workplace.

Impact of Ageism on Diversity in Modern Organizations

As the proportion of older adults in the global population rapidly grows, ageism has become significantly widespread, especially in the workplace. Although there is an emerging movement to protect everyone from overt discrimination regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, religion, race, and other diverse characteristics, age discrimination permeates many workplaces globally. Ageism, which is described as prejudicial attitudes toward old age, the aged, and the aging process, may be propagated by older adults or people of the younger generations. Discriminatory practices against older adults, especially in employment and other social roles, have been systemic. Systemic stereotyping of older adults in the workplace reduces their productivity opportunities and undermines their personal and professional dignity.

Ageism negatively impacts the health and wellbeing of seniors in the workforce. Despite older workers not necessarily being less educated, less healthy, less productive, or skillful than younger employees, ageism persists in the workplace. This form of discrimination inhibits the inclusion process, and diversity is not fully achieved if all workers, regardless of age, are not fully integrated into the daily dynamics of workflow.

The number of older adults working-age population in the United States is projected to rapidly increase in the coming decades. According to AARP (2018) (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons), there are over 117.4 million Americans aged 50 plus, many of whom plan to work past the age of 65. The number of older adults will rise from the current 46 million to 98 million in 2060, increasing from 19% to 29%. As people older than 65 continue to live longer because of improved healthcare, their presence and influence in the workplace are likely to grow. Older adults want to remain longer in the workforce than the previous generations that retired earlier. The higher the increase of seniors in the workforce, without any concerted efforts to prevent age discrimination in the workplace, the more ageism complaints could rise to the detriment of the U.S. economy, health, and wellbeing of older workers and their families.

Ageism has been systemic (K. Harris et al., 2018). Although antidiscrimination laws such as the U.S. Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) have aimed to protect older adults from numerous forms of discrimination during recruitment, promotion, and retention, it has been difficult for age discrimination claimants to prove that age was the primary factor to a discrimination claim as ruled by the Supreme Court in the case of *Gross v. FBL Financial Services* in 2009 (K. Harris et al., 2018). The view that older workers are less flexible, trainable, and efficient, lacking the necessary physical capabilities and technical proficiency has been pervasive.

During economic and health crises, age discrimination becomes more severe globally, policy efforts notwithstanding. According to Suh (2021), age discrimination complaints related to hiring and firing during the 2007–2009 Great Recession increased by 3.4%. Evidence also shows that older job applicants get fewer callbacks compared to

their younger counterparts with equivalent resumes. The growing age discrimination in hiring, promotion, and retention increases the unemployment rate among older adults. Besides, many older workers believe that age is a disadvantage when seeking jobs (Suh, 2021). More senior job seekers, especially women and individuals from minoritized racial groups, find it more difficult to find jobs than men and individuals from the White majority.

Age discrimination costs the United States and global economy significant economic contributions. In 2018, the U.S. economy lost an estimated \$850 billion to its GDP because of age discrimination. The figure is equivalent to the cumulative size of the Pennsylvania economy (AARP, 2018). The AARP (2018) approximates that the figure could rise to 3.9 trillion in 2050. Despite such significant losses, only a few employers are taking steps to create work environments responsive to older workers' needs. If the U.S. economy lost over \$850 million in 2018 because of age discrimination (AARP, 2018) and organizations continue to ignore such vital facts about the reality and impact of ageism in the workplace, the detrimental effects could cost companies a lot more than ever before. Firms are losing opportunities to benefit from older workers' capabilities and experience because of failure to pay attention to evidence regarding ageism.

The relationship between ageism and health and the work of older adults has marginally captured researchers' interest. A literature search revealed that many scholars exploring ageism-health associations have not focused on specific age brackets. Although original research studies examined the association between ageism and the health and work of older adults, recent reviews have demonstrated the interaction between age discrimination and health and career. Chang et al.'s (2020) review revealed

that ageism leads to significant adverse health outcomes. There seems to be a systematic review that negative age beliefs affect older adults' health more if they are less educated. Culture-based age stereotypes and negative self-perceptions (individual ageism) are as averse to older adults' health as institutional policies and practices that reinforce ageism (Chang et al., 2020). Although Chang et al.'s (2020) study that investigated the global reach of ageism on older persons' health provided a good foundation for examining the relationship, it did not include the impact of age discrimination on individual workers' work.

Enhancing positive perceptions and stereotypes toward older workers could contribute to higher productivity. According to a meta-analysis by K. Harris et al. (2018), in countries and industries where older employees are viewed as more reliable, such as Australia and healthcare, workers aged 50 or more were more likely to be more committed, loyal, and productive to their organizations. However, negative perceptions and stereotypes toward the older staff members decreased the performance and productivity of the affected generations of employees (K. Harris et al., 2018). The evidence suggests that ageism is a significant barrier to attaining and maintaining job satisfaction. Therefore, research knowledge should inform policy and practice approaches to reduce age discrimination and its impact on workers, organizations, and economies. This informed knowledge will provide mutual levels of understanding within the organization while pursuing inclusivity.

The Need for Diversity Management Programs

In modern organizations, the issues about diversity continue to present challenges for managers. Some challenges may include a nontraditional standard of defined gender

roles, microaggressions, or other discriminatory practices that affect marginalized individuals. Organizations must create a program that is sustainable to address current challenges and future challenges. Given the challenges and the sensitivity to diversity, all leaders must understand the policy and be adept on all guidelines to curtail discrimination, harassment, and any acts of hostility toward marginalized individuals. Organizations can address workplace biases by identifying bias factors such as racism or negative biases held by managers and employees. Diversity management training programs must positively impact diversity, organizational performance, and workplace management. Complex training programs with vision and stakeholder engagement must be empowering by infusing diverse skills to work in teams. Programs must be rewarding and involve valuable input from stakeholders to formulate and execute diversity and training programs (Cletus et al., 2018). Diversity programs should defend against resistance and change that affects the sense of belonging from marginalized individuals.

The lack of diversity is not only a challenge at the executive level or C-Suite. Corporate boards are the collective guardians of an organization's overall mission and goals but are primarily controlled by older White men (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2019). The lack of gender diversity and minority representation on corporate boards implies that diversity can potentially have ethical and financial implications. Diversity efforts are a key component in shaping an organization's culture. Therefore, the lack of diversity within American companies comes with a hefty financial tag and limits national economies impacting GDP (Hum, 2020). The lack of diversity can also impact innovation, weaken revenues, and impact employee retention. Diversity can be defined as the human attributes, perspectives, identities, and backgrounds that shape individuals,

and inclusion is a dynamic state of operating by which individuals or groups can feel respected, valued, safe, and fully included (Hum, 2020). Companies residing in the top quartile of ethnic and cultural diversity outperformed other organizations by 36% in terms of profits in 2019, which was up from 33% in 2017 and 35% in 2014 (Hum, 2020). Inclusive policies must reflect the image of the organization by driving cultural and values to be inclusive of diversity and inclusive pursuits. The percentage of women on American executive boards is approximately 30% for S&P 500 companies, and 24% for small cap companies. By comparison, in European companies, women comprised 36% on average at large cap companies in 2021. It can be deduced that Europe sees a link between gender representation on executive boards and higher returns on equity (Hum, 2020). Boards that lack gender diversity can also be less effective with corporate governance, which can have negative financial impacts on an organization's operational performance. Women have made progress regarding senior leadership albeit few women have made some progress with establishing equality in the workplace. The increase of corporate women who serve on boards of organizations has heightened the awareness of stakeholders, investors, consultants, and the working public in general (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2019).

Countries like Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden have mandated specific policies that have specific quotas for increasing gender diversity on corporate boards (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2019). However, on a global scale, the appointment of women to corporate boards remains minuscule. Traditional corporate culture, power eagerness with the desire to accel within organizations, and hypermasculinity affect social gender roles. The masculinity dimension is a definite factor associated or

contributory to traditional gender roles for men and women. Gender schema theory assumes that societal members have culture-specific cognitive structures concerning role expectations for females and males in general (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2019). When either gender operates outside the expected norm, evaluative processes about the appropriate roles for men and women start the gender schematic process. The pressure to conform to what society expects can be detrimental, but modulating effects on modern corporate culture could be the key to creating more diversity.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion remain debatable with most Fortune 500 companies depicting divergent images from societal expectations. Managing top companies is viewed as the epitome of achievement in society. More representation in top-level management means higher chances of resources trickling down to the communities of origin. The debate continues to grow because of the limited diversity in Fortune 500 companies. A vast gap exists regarding race, gender, education background, and place of origin, which increases misrepresentation. According to a study by Haldar et al. (2020), gender misrepresentation on the top management levels is responsible for social inequality. The researchers found that these differences are responsible for negative social capital (Haldar et al., 2020). There are only 41 women in top level executive positions overall in Fortune 500 companies. This translates to 8.1% of the CEO positions. In an article published by CNBC, Lorraine Hariton said that “there is more work to do” (Connley, 2021, para. 6), further supporting her argument that “clear targets and measurements to increase representation through the senior leadership and CEO pipelines” need to be set in all companies (para. 9). Having a diverse management board

is seen as leverage to achieving social inclusivity, improved performance, and increased innovation. Embracing diversity in management has a massive benefit to a company.

Gender affiliation issues such as the LGBTQ community have less representation in Fortune 500 companies. As many seek to speak about their gender openly, not much has been achieved. Currently, only three CEOs identify with the LGBTQ community and are in the top management. Racial representation is not exercised in this number because none of the CEOs identify with the minority groups. Tim Cook of Apple Inc, Jim Fitterling of Dow Chemical Company, and Beth Ford of Land O'Lakes have openly identified with the LBGTQ. This demonstrates that there is low representation of LGBTQ in CEO positions in fortune 500 corporations (Fairbanks, n.d.). In the Supreme Court ruling on the protection of LGBTQ community rights under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the judges forbade any form of discrimination in the workplace based on gender, religion, and race (Aspan, 2020).

Racial diversity remains a significant issue in Fortune 500 companies. Craig (2021) argued that every CEO wants to manage a company that looks more like their communities. Even though this seems like progress toward achieving diversity, a significant problem emerges precisely concerning biasness in hiring. Companies need to do more to disclose their actual image to the public (Wahba, 2020). The only Black female CEO was Ursula Burns, who headed Xerox, but unfortunately, she stepped down in 2016. The concern about misinterpreting misrepresentation is slowly gaining traction. Despite these concerns, only 1% of Fortune 500 CEOs are Black, forming 13% of the population. Wahba (2020) stated:

They include Marvin Ellison at home-improvement retailer Lowe's (No. 44), Kenneth Frazier at pharmaceuticals maker Merck (No. 69), Roger Ferguson at financial services company TIAA (No. 81), René Jones at M&T Bank (No. 438) and Jide Zeitlin at Tapestry (No. 485), who became CEO of the company that owns Coach and Kate Spade in September. (para. 2)

Further, 29% of the companies do not have even one Black board member. Latinos account for 5% of the managers even though they account for 18.4% of the American population (Craig, 2021). Representation at the C-Suite level is seen as an opportunity to speak to the people directly and influence their perception about society.

A diverse workplace is noted as a significant contributor to company success. According to Reiners (2020), 41% of managers have their priorities aligned on different things without achieving diversity and inclusion. These priorities may include a keen focus on financial targets and stakeholder expectations. As a result, diversity and inclusion are not always a primary focus. Further, diverse management was found to boost revenue by 19%. When top managers identify with minority groups, a vast client base is attracted to its products. This translates to higher sales.

Additionally, value creation, executive-level performance, and racial inclusivity are ensured whenever diversity is upheld. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that \$112.7 billion is spent annually by organizations to settle racial discrimination cases. The repercussions escalate further when it comes to social inequality; high unemployment among the minorities because of the poor image portrayed in public makes the communities poorer. Such misrepresentation has seen organizations such as Black Lives Matter emerge to advocate for equality. Worse, lack

of racial diversity denies qualified professionals their rightful positions (Cronin, 2020). Hiring becomes a personal affair in which only those affiliated with the company get the jobs no matter their performance qualification. Diversity has been found to play a leading role in addressing corporate social responsibility issues when they occur. According to Evans et al. (2020), having influential community individuals ensures that people have a higher chance of reasoning with the management. Community influential leaders act as agents of corporate social performance. For the company to access the community, it should connect well with them by employing its members.

According to Field et al. (2020), many companies do not have a racially diverse board of directors, and very few ethnic minority managers ascend to a leadership position as compared to their counterparts. This reinforces the idea that diversity is an illusion, and more work is needed to achieve results. Moreover, appointment criteria are not applied when recruiting executive-level leaders (Field et al., 2020). Although the guidelines are well-stipulated, the terms change, and the likelihood of diverse individuals getting such positions lessens when appointing directors.

A study by Lori et al. (2019) found that having women on the board of directors increased the return on assets. Bahrain is one of the Muslim-dominated countries that allows only men to hold leadership positions. Despite the rigid will to change religious ideologies, the recent call for diversity has seen a change in management in many companies in the country (Lori et al., 2019). A study conducted by Othmani (2021) expressed similar sentiments by stating that gender diversity increases bank performance. The positive results recorded indicate that diversity is vital to achieving tremendous success. In a study Abebe and Dadanlar (2019) conducted on 452 firms, they found that

companies that hire more women and minority group members have fewer lawsuits about discrimination. The researchers found that a diverse board of directors better understands society (Abebe & Dadanlar, 2019). Corporate governance is said to improve when a company hires more leaders from minority groups.

Cognitive Diversity Theory

The cognitive diversity hypothesis holds that many cognitive perspectives lead to personal bias and stereotyping, leading to a lack of diversity at the management board level (Bright et al., 2019). Research shows that diversity plays an integral role in improving the performance of a group (Bright et al., 2019). When people from diverse backgrounds work together, there are greater chances of developing better ways of addressing issues. The cognitive hypothesis postulates that physical features such as race, age, and sex influence how team members contribute to a group. These and many other demographic characteristics can help a company succeed through utilizing ideas from members of minority groups. Further, scholars have found that racially diverse teams perform better because the freedom of sharing ideas increases the efficiency of decision making and innovation (Bright et al., 2019).

According to BasuMallick (2020), “Great minds think differently” (p. 1), and companies promoting cognitive diversity are likely to address cultural inefficiencies efficiently. Workplace diversity is essential because people from diverse backgrounds have unique ways of solving problems. This is beneficial to the company and its interests to attract more customers. In a report compiled by Deloitte, it was found that “cognitively and demographically diverse teams can enhance innovation by 20% and reduce risk by up to 30%” (BasuMallick, 2020, p. 3). The call for diversity has seen

companies initiate plans to have over 75% of its workforce be inclusive and diverse by the end of 2022. The benefits of embracing diversity seem to have resonated with many companies, forcing them to apply cognitive diversity theory in their management.

Cognitive diversity theory can function effectively to elevate companies through the use of technologies. Diverse thinking tools, engagement tools, and cognitive collaboration platforms can help managers understand the value diversity can play in solving problems in an organization. Assessing employee's performance and recommending them for top management roles can be made accessible through cognitive thinking tools.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory posits that humans tend to see those from their in-group as heterogeneous while those belonging to the out-group as homogeneous (Bright et al., 2019). The perception that people belonging to a particular group behave the same and are not easy to engage is responsible for excluding minorities from Fortune 500 CEO positions (Bright et al., 2019). Spending more time with members of a particular group can have a long-term effect especially judging others as inferior or problematic (Bright et al., 2019). Favoritism is bound to thrive from such groups, which ensures members from privileged groups get employed but qualified minorities are disregarded. Members of the in-group dominate hiring, promotion, and rewards while out-group members continue to play minor roles as a result.

Social identity theory from the initial works developed by Henri Tajfel has expanded from the original definition of intergroup identity to looking at the overall phenomenon of social identity between related groups (Brown, 2019). This intergroup

behavior rests on a couple of assumptions. First, it assumes that people sometimes see themselves as individuals, and second, they will see themselves as group members or the interpersonal-intergroup continuum with individuals with a common interest (Brown, 2019). In the latter, social identities become engaged from a cognitive and evaluative perspective. Positive distinctiveness is formulated as group members desire to see themselves positively. This search for positive distinctiveness may take a social construct of superior or inferior status contingent on social-structural factors. These social-structural factors may include the permeability of group boundaries, the perceived legitimacy of the group's social status, or the overall makeup of the social system (Brown, 2019).

Therefore, social identity theory can be higher based upon intergroup hierarchy within or outside of the group. A distinctive feature of social identity theory is that it seeks to integrate subjective aspects of group membership (identity) with features of the social environment (the nature of intergroup relations in society). The fusion of these two concepts defines social identity theory by offering insights into various intergroup dynamics such as ethnicity, gender, and nationality. Social identity theory primarily focuses on marginalized or stigmatized groups and attempts to explain when these stigmatized groups will be motivated to seek social change. However, the question remains whether marginalized individuals desire to leave the comfort of their intergroup if the boundaries are permeable or easily passable. According to social identity theory, some group boundaries are permeable if individuals hide or do not disclose their identity to gain upward mobility. Social mobility may be a default choice when marginalized groups deploy survival techniques or manage coping skills (Brown, 2019).

In recent years, social identity theory has sought to offer new insights regarding prejudice and racism. The 20th century experienced sectarian violence in regions such as India, Lebanon, and Ireland. In the United States and the United Kingdom, traditional forms of prejudice based on skin color were not as blatant but subdued as attitudes shifted to anti-immigrant and Islamophobia narratives. Intergroup hostility like genocide affected regions such as Rwanda, the Balkans, and Sierra Leone (Brown, 2019). These are just a few examples of discrimination and how social identity theory attempts to employ a detailed analysis between social groups. Social identity theory can offer fundamental insights on these forms of discrimination regardless of the form of prejudice, whether Islamophobia, workplace discrimination, ageism, religious intolerance, or prejudice directed at sexual minorities.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance can be defined as having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes related to behavioral decisions and attitude changes. Recent research indicates that cognitive dissonance and self or social identity are connected through binary associations (Jaubert et al., 2020). For example, the associations or experiences that Black professional males have in corporate America are drastically different from the experiences of other ethnic minorities such as Asian women. Although the experiences of ascending through various levels of organizational management can be similar in terms of racism, intolerance, or microaggressions, the associations between their binary connections culturally make the experience(s) different. Notwithstanding that, women have unique challenges that make it harder to break the glass ceiling. Although women have made significant progress, female representation on boards remains low (Markoczy

et al., 2020). A survey conducted with 6000 firms in 49 countries found that female directors held just 12% of board seats (Markoczy et al., 2020). These low numbers continue to prompt researchers to identify the risk and barriers that women face regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

The importance of board leadership is essential and integral to the overall operation of organizations. Board leadership is responsible for governance and resource provisions. Existing research indicates that women tend to be more diligent regarding their work ethic and bring unique human capital to boards that benefit board decisions (Markoczy et al., 2020). When one considers women's contributions, it is still surprising that women only make up a small percentage of corporate board composition. Factors to consider are women's labor market participation, education level, and the percentage of senior leadership that women make up as pertinent factors that could affect board leadership. For diversity and inclusion to be progressive, it is essential to understand the motives and biases of decision makers regarding the composition of executive boards. In particular, the biases of the inner circle may have a direct impact on who gets appointed.

Biases are swayed toward the in-group of the decision makers, and social identity theory supports the concept that decisions are made from familiarity when decision makers consider board appointments. These in-groups may have established relationships from previous corporations, professional organizations, or a professional network. Therefore, the playing field is not about women and other ethnic minorities who desire executive level or board positions within Fortune 500 companies. Also, dominant members of the high-status group may show favoritism toward specific genders because of similarity attraction without showing aggression toward the out-group

(Markoczy et al., 2020). The similarity attraction assumes that individuals tend to infer similar attributes from notable characteristics such as gender. Male executives may favor other male executives with the presumption or bias of knowing the work ethic of their counterparts. Hence the need for expansion of the executive suite allowing for greater levels of inclusion and diversity.

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory states that firms should engage parties from different sectors to acquire the most needed resources (Çeltekligil et al., 2019). These resources may include specialized skills, access to innovation, or the use of technology to solve modern business practices. These resources are scarce, and appealing to many individuals may be necessary. In this case, expanding the market and covering areas dominated by minorities require leaders who understand their traditions. This theory proves why it is essential for Fortune 500 companies should have higher racially diverse management. Adopting new strategies to promote diversity is necessary (Çeltekligil et al., 2019). Resource dependency theory's assumption is that uncertainties increase with higher competition, and that limits the company's success. The model encourages transitioning from a closed entity to an open system in which companies provide better services beyond their familiar environment and engage different professionals.

Directors are responsible for bringing resources such as skills and innovation to a company. Resource dependency theory, diversity of ideas and skills, can benefit a company in many ways. The CEO can guide employees in the right direction by providing solutions from diverse cultural perspectives. The community is a resource and identifying with a person can help a company secure loyalty and free access to a broad

market. Long-term development goals should be based on diversity and good market accessibility. Human resources exploit such opportunities, and companies can achieve this milestone by employing CEOs from diverse cultures. According to Wasserman (2014), founders who exercise complete control of the company limit the level of creativity (Wasserman, 2014). The value of an entity increases with the rate at which the owner embraces diversity.

Fields et al. (2005) investigated applying the resource dependency theory in the employment of minorities in private sector companies. It became evident that most companies have many people of color in management-level jobs, but those individuals have low chances of ascending to top management jobs (Fields et al., 2005). The procurement and managing resource supply become challenging, especially when a company needs to operate in areas dominated by people of color. Such inefficiency is attributed to the lack of managers people can identify with in the company's top management.

Agency Theory

According to the agency theory, an agent performs transactional activities on behalf of the principal(s). In this case, a company can delegate its decision making to its agents (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). This has a significant impact on the overall performance of the company. Initially, the principal has the trust of the closing parties. Engaging an agent ensures that the company's influence expands beyond its horizons. The agent incurs no loss in the process because the principal funds all activities. Conflict may occur within the process, and managing the board ensures the agent sticks to the established strategies (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). The exciting part is that having more women in

management has been ideal for monitoring board conflicts. It is, therefore, clear that diversity is vital for the operation of any company. Both parties benefit in the long term. Fortune 500 companies will gain trust among minorities while uplifting the lives of the less privileged.

According to Gayle et al. (2018), the compensation package is vital to executives, and this demonstrates why different communities feel represented if their member occupies the top position. They are understanding the benefits that CEOs accrue from a company vital to understanding why it matters for different races. Hiring decisions and investments are directed to communities depending on the management. This means, higher profitability translates to better CEO pay (BasuMallick, 2020).

The behavior and performance of a business when the founders manage it are unwelcoming. The hiring process favors people from a particular group to ensure consistency. Because the lack of diversity limits creativity, vagueness trickles in, reducing the growth of the company.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory attempts to address gendered racism, negative stereotypes, prejudice, and oppression by addressing the perceived stereotypes of African American individuals. There are typical intersections of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender scripts between marginalized groups within race. For example, Black women and Black gay men experience some identical issues of workplace inequality and research indications conflation between the two groups (V. T. Harris, 2016). The challenge for Black males is how to change the narrative of perceived behavior. Unfortunately, the racializing of hegemonic masculinity starts in childhood for Black males. Black boys are

seen as deviant, confrontational, troublemakers, verbally abusive, and fighters. These labels then become the brand of the Black male that follows into adulthood (V. T. Harris, 2016). Additionally, being a gay Black male in certain parts of the country indicates an intersection of various identities. The challenge for a gay Black male then becomes where and how do I fit or mold into societal norms. Critical race theory attempts to address the attitudes of neutrality, color-blindness, and mediocracy of racism. Racism is endemic and being ingrained into the fabric of certain segments of American society (V. T. Harris, 2016). Race relations is a sensitive topic for most and could possibly remain an unquestionable variable in diversity if researchers do not challenge conventional thinking on the issue. More importantly, one must understand the socio-structural context of power that attempts to erase the experiences of marginalized individuals (V. T. Harris, 2016). The help address this normalization of the gay Black male, a new theory has recently emerged.

Quare Theory

Quare theory describes a concept of sexual identity development for Black males, acknowledging their lived experiences as valid forms to cultivate a self-consciousness. Quare theory appropriately recognizes ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and gender identities in understanding the development of gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning Black males (V. T. Harris, 2016). Quare theory supports the theoretical concept of men as gendered beings, believing that men too encounter a gendering process beginning as biological males who transform into socially constructed men because of interactions and lived experiences (V. T. Harris, 2016). Therefore, social constructivists acknowledge the broad spectrum of gendered masculinity based on ethnicity, age, and class. It should be

noted that quare theory intentionally includes ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and gender identities in the discussion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people of color, and other queer theories assume a more generalist point of view (V. T. Harris, 2016). Quare theory attempts to demystify the lived experiences of the LGBTQ community of color while attempting to address heterosexism and other phobias related to the queer community.

The intersectionality of critical race theory and quare theory examines certain qualities that are projected on marginalized individuals. There are certain qualities that distinguished the binary of male versus female. However, for some individuals, the lines are blurred regarding clear distinctions on sexuality. For many African American LGBTQ individuals, having a clear understanding of where they lie on the spectrum affirms a sense of identity with a specific community. However, it is important for individuals to have a clear understanding of the social forms of hatred, stigma, and prejudice that have an impact on LGBTQ identities and relationships (Clarke, 2019). Epistemic injustice has an impact on social identity causing individuals to compromise, bargain, or hide who they are. For LGBTQ individuals this type of injustice causes them to create facades or does not allow these individuals to flourish into who they are. These impacts are broad and wide, affecting personal and professional life. For the African American community, the stigma of being gay is inherently against traditional family values. The experiences of African American males have encouraged scholars to further consider how the interaction of race and gender influences the overall experiences of masculinity. Expanding the knowledge of quare theory and how queer Black men challenge heteronormative masculinity will help professionals within fortune 500

companies to make better decisions on how to manage this marginalized group (Jourian & McCloud, 2020). It should be noted that the Black queer experience is not a monolith, and the identity of manhood, masculinity, and the Black queer man's socialization into society may show up in different forms. The queer Black man experiences and socialization into patriarchal behaviors and stereotypes are inevitable (Jourian & McCloud, 2020). Quare theory examines how these traditional stereotypes are challenged by discussing the feminine attributes of queer Black men. In addition, quare theory also calls out the erasure of Black queer people and Whiteness as normativity permeating certain segments of society. Quare theory also reflects on the process in which people of color have always attempted to manage to survive in a White supremacy society (Jourian & McCloud, 2020). From the perspective of quare theory, researchers can have a deeper understanding of Black queer experiences and knowledge constructions at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class to critically interrogate the notions that have limited or suppressed the Black queer experience. Insightful reflections can be gleamed from the experiences of marginalized individuals that may be shaped by Whiteness, colonialism, racism, and traditional stereotypes of cultural communities. Many ethnic minority groups continually reconstruct their identities within different contexts, becoming adaptable to perceived challenging situations. For Black queer men, debunking the images of hypersexualized and heteronormative views of manhood have become the norm (Jourian & McCloud, 2020).

Organizational Culture and Diversity

Organizational culture can be defined as a set or collection of values, expectations, and practices that guide the actions of all team members. The philosophy

or overall mission of the organization varies by industry, but the overall culture will have a few of these key elements such as purpose, team ownership, a sense of community, and effective leadership that analyzes the overall operation from a strategic viewpoint.

However, organizational culture can be convoluted at best as organizations seek to improve diversity and inclusion initiatives. Although culture may be based on an organization's vision, values, norms, or beliefs, these shared beliefs may or may not be aligned with employees' expectations. Therefore, tension arises when an organization's corporate culture or workplace culture does not align with the trajectory of the organization's workforce. Therefore, organizational culture may influence employees' identity with their organization (Olsen & Martins, 2016).

Business leaders are vital and are wholly responsible for communicating and shaping corporate culture. Corporate culture evolves and establishes parameters for a behavior framework in which employees can contribute to the success of the corporate culture. Considering workplace culture, leaders can be influenced in various areas of modern business practices. Culture has become synonymous with how leaders treat employees, customers, and stakeholders when everyone must be seen as more valuable than the organization itself (Olsen & Martins, 2016). Organizations that are adaptive to culture are dynamic and entrepreneurial in their approach by seeking the opinions and expertise of a diverse workforce.

Business leaders are tasked to act responsibly while managing various task within their perspective organizations. Business ethics as defined by modern business practices are a set of values or morals that define how people are governed within an organization. Although this definition is broad, business ethics coupled with corporate social

responsibility attempts to address an unethical behavior by establishing set policy and procedures that support standard operating procedures attempting to bridge the gap between responsible business practices while meeting stakeholder demands. The intellectual structure of business ethics is typically made of four major components. These components are corporate social responsibility, morality and social contract theory, ethical decision making, and stakeholder theory (Leiva et al., 2016). These four components must be aligned with organizational goals and strategic initiatives to remain competitive on a global scale. Corporations must constantly balance idealism tempered with realism while focusing on financial performance, social performance, corporate reputation, engaged consumers, satisfaction of stakeholders, and the overall motivation of employees toward improved productivity (Leiva et al., 2016). Managers must be cognizant of the multilevel view when making decisions that would impact the performance or the reputation of the organization. Therefore, diversity should not be viewed as a last resort option but as a necessity that enhances the performance of the organization while striving to meet its goals to improve organizational culture and corporate social responsibility.

Organizational culture and ethical business practices impact employee performance. Employee perception of its leader's ethical decision making, or the lack thereof, strongly influences job performance and employee decision making (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). Managers must strike a balance between the need for power and the expression of empathy when managing employees. How individuals view themselves directly influences their ethical or unethical decision-making process, which impacts

organizational culture. Narcissism has been shown to impair ethical judgement, even for individuals who have self-proclaimed as religious (Cooper & Pullig, 2013).

Diversity should not be stagnant but fluid over time as employees interact and learn successful sustainability practices within corporations. With an increase in workforce diversity, corporations have developed various programs to manage the effects of diversity within their organizations. Employee resource groups (ERGs) that help describe the diversity management approach have become commonplace with corporations. However, these diversity management programs are not attractive to all employees. The attractiveness of these management programs depends upon employees' perception of these programs and whether employees feel there is a real value add while participating in these specialized programs.

Maximizing diversity management programs to achieve a business objective can be tricky for organizations. Diversity management programs should not be a quick fix or band-aid fix to meet stakeholder requirements. Diversity should be viewed as a terminal fix adding value to a desirable end to which employees maintain their identities relative to the dominant organizational culture (Olsen & Martins, 2016). The process of acculturation or assimilation is a challenge that can change the social construct of an organization. Existing research indicates that diversity should be viewed as a moral or social responsibility, signaling that organizations have a vested interest in creating a diverse workplace. Specific signals about the nature of an organization's value on diversity can influence employees' perception of how they will be evaluated and selected/rejected when attempting to matriculate through an organization (Olsen & Martins, 2016).

Given the historic societal factors, ethnic minorities have less impact than Whites on culture overall. The integration strategy or assimilation approach may give ethnic minorities equal influence over culture in organizations. The maintenance of diversity management programs must be holistic and inclusive in their approach by proactively recruiting diverse talent and an integration strategy that is beneficial to performance outcomes.

Modern business practices and expansion into globalized markets have heightened the need for diverse competencies that require a varied range of skills that are needed to gain a competitive edge. Diversity within the workforce can encompass the gender, racial-ethnicity, and diversity in age and are a few factors that organizations must consider (Ansari et al., 2016). Existing research links productive organizations to diversified management programs that produce positive outcomes regarding group performance, creativity, and increased problem solving within organizations. Diverse organizations that have higher levels of staff motivation, staff retention, reduced recruitment costs, improved employer image, and improved talent pool have all contributed and significantly benefited from various policies. Strategic advantages are evident when managers or corporate executives understand how to utilize diverse resources best.

Organizations have many viewpoints on how to manage diversity. Advocates of diversity stress the importance of pushing the boundaries of the status quo that go beyond the mandated human resource requirements. Effective diversity management programs are implemented to be inclusive and stress the importance of creating a conducive environment for growth and development. The goal of diversity management programs

should be to create a work environment that fosters the optimum utilization of diverse human resources irrespective of gender (Ansari et al., 2016). However, differences concerning the perception and the importance of diversity dictate how corporations respond and highlight their willingness to support a diverse workforce.

Traditional organizations struggle with identifying and connecting to diverse resources. Also, these organizations may not be reflective of the communities in which they operate or serve. Existing research highlights the band-aid approach to meeting diversity because of compliance and legislative requirements. Nevertheless, many companies are not reaping the perceived benefits of diversity because of their lack of understanding and response to diversity (Ansari et al., 2016). For organizational culture to be correctly aligned to diversity management, managers must be committed to selecting qualified diverse talent and have the appropriate level of commitment, effective strategy, transparent communication, and substantial changes to antiquated processes committed to sustaining diversity. This commitment to sustaining diversity has failed at the executive level within many organizations considering that most Fortune 500 executive boards and C-Suites lack diversity.

Occupational closure is a concept in which predicting the professional arena with the masculine identity and ideology has deprived women and other ethnic minorities of a value-add contribution of skills and professional capacity to contribute equally to the success of organizations. Predominately controlled by White men, the diversity gap or occupational closure gap has limited the movement of qualified talent within the ranks of most organizations. The repeated closure throughout the years, dubbed the name “boys club” or “glass ceiling club,” has made it challenging for women and ethnic minorities to

close the equality gap at the executive level. Consequently, this discriminatory practice limits the movement of qualified employees and can harm the attitudes and behaviors of employees, which could render a less productive workforce (Ansari et al., 2016). All forms of exclusion and occupational closures should be analyzed from a more significant vantage point by investigating the gender system within organizations, formal policies or procedures, and the attitudes of the decision makers that drive everyday practices.

Several factors contribute to gender bias, ageism, occupational closure, and racism within the workplace that inhibit diversity and inclusion. For ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, women, and other marginalized groups, the argument can be made from the examination of the literature that all the differences that contribute to the exclusion of certain groups can be attributed to the structure of organizations and the characteristics of how men in power view diversity. Specifically, when referring to gendering and gender roles, men in power decide the division of labor and allowed behaviors, and social interactions between managers and employees are highly controlled. Although there are existing laws to prevent gender discrimination within the workplace, masculine principles are still dominating corporations' authoritative structure, contributing to the overall organizational culture (Ansari et al., 2016).

Multiculturalism has infiltrated 21st-century organizations as corporations seek a competitive edge while conducting business in global markets. The flow or influx of new generation employees has led human resource professionals to focus on talent differentiation. The personalization of multicultural organization environments and corporate culture requires employees to engage with groups from different cultural backgrounds, and cross-cultural communication has become a standard but intricate

process of everyday workflow (Li et al., 2021). Human resource professionals are tasked with working through several issues related to diversity and inclusion while balancing human capital. Cultural differences and cultural barriers are essential factors that affect employee behavior and performance. Cultural communication and the ability to manage human capital toward an inclusive work environment have propelled conversations about sustainability in the context of organizational cultural diversity.

Sustainability programs influence the innovative behavior of individuals within organizations. Research indicates the following three factors contribute to the innovative behavior of employees. The first focuses on the individual characteristics of employees, such as personality, self-efficacy, knowledge, and ability. Second, innovative behaviors can also focus on job characteristics such as task complexity, job autonomy, feedback systems, and rewards. Last, innovative factors can also focus on organizational factors that include organizational leadership, organizational atmosphere, organizational systems, human resource management systems, and overall organizational culture (Li et al., 2021). Organizational culture can be a driving force for innovation for organizations seeking an open learning culture or green culture. An employee's ability to manage cultural diversity in a cross-cultural environment can be complex, mainly if they have limited knowledge of how their culture fits within an organization's mission. However, knowledge sharing is a method individuals can deploy to help others or cooperate with others in problem solving or conception of new ideas. The simple concept of knowledge sharing can drive employee engagement that can bridge performance gaps.

Establishing strategies that promote inclusiveness can improve organizational culture and ensure diversity is upheld within an organization. The promotion of

inclusivity is vital, and organizations can approach it from diverse angles.

Acknowledging differences and understanding the value of gender and racial diversity within an organization can help to improve inclusivity. Organizations that fail to adopt vibrant policies that encourage fair recruitment face backlash from the public. Provision of mentorship and allowing people to learn from directly performing their duties can ensure good performance. Different factors can influence how workers operate within an organization. LGBTQ members find it hard to express their views if the environment is not accommodating. Similarly, people of color cannot freely interact in a work environment that is dominated by Whites. Inclusivity is about being mindful of others and promoting a fair environment for all.

Having a well-structured organizational culture increases the motivation for employees to work hard. According to Jelki (n.d.), a successful organization has a culture that contains beliefs, strategies, and a structure that every employee follows as they develop their career. Many CEOs express dissatisfaction with the approach of hiring employed by Fortune 500 companies. The lack of hierarchical and functional organization of the company can limit performance. Despite their color and background, workers need to understand what it takes to become a CEO within the company. Such a people-oriented cultural design can ensure smooth career growth and development (SHRM, 2021). From the hiring process, promotion and appraisal, everything should be outlined for workers to assess where they stand within the company.

Grossmann (2021) proposed that educating managers on the benefits of diversity in the workplace can encourage them to promote engagement. A diverse workplace is a recipe for creativity. Organizations are looking for mechanisms to address global

challenges that slow their growth. Further, ensuring employees develop their careers and improve the workplace environment requires having inclusive policies. Establishing offices in different communities and allocating them a particular share of the available position can increase inclusivity. Although this does not guarantee accession to the top position, the level of performance in the job can build trust with the board of management, which can increase the chances of becoming CEO (Grossmann, 2021). Further, mentorship programs that provide employees an understanding of their role in a company can serve as an opportunity to become a manager. CEOs can attract quality talent, which demonstrates why Fortune 500 companies need to promote diversity.

Structuring organizational culture to embrace diversity can improve a company's profitability. According to Hariton (2020), 21% of the companies that embraced gender diversity had the opportunity to achieve high profitability. Further, ethnic and cultural diversity was said to increase the company's revenues by 33% (Hariton, 2020). This indicates that Fortune 500 companies can benefit immensely if they promote many managers from diverse races into CEO positions. Currently, every S&P 500 company has a woman on its board. This indicates that women, just like men, are taking their position management roles. An accelerated initiative to achieve diversity will improve many U.S. multinational companies' face and ensure their services become acceptable.

Corporate Governance and Diversity

Corporate governance has a significant impact on cultural diversity in a corporate setting. Corporate governance remains an essential mechanism that public and private organizations use to ensure the interest of all stakeholders is sustainable when looking to ascertain future growth and development. Corporate governance's purpose is to ensure

that companies are fair and honest to all stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, and society. Organizations that follow best corporate governance practices accrue significant benefits such as better access to capital, increased employee productivity, and a steady increment of investment and productive relationships with all stakeholders. Recently, diversifying corporate boards has become a major global policy issue, a development that affirms the vital role that corporate governance plays in cultivating diversity in organizations. Affirmative actions implemented worldwide to remedy gender, racial, ethnic, age, and other discriminations in listed companies have also targeted corporate boards. Implementing best practices in corporate governance can enhance diversity in organizations (Mustafa et al., 2018).

In the recent past, corporate governance has emerged as a severe global policy issue. Different countries continue to enact and enforce various laws and regulations to tighten loopholes exploited in significant scandals that left detrimental consequences to multiple stakeholders (Sarhan et al., 2018). The role of corporate governance in diversity and inclusiveness in organizations is unmistakably huge. It provides a system that appreciates fairness, appreciation of differences, and participation of diverse members in the decision-making process. The benefits of diversity cannot be achieved without practicing effective governance. Relationships among various groups and stakeholders are founded on quality corporate governance practices such as transparency and accountability. Communication among diverse individuals and groups is made possible by implementing corporate values that enhance diversity and inclusiveness.

Corporate governance as a system of balancing the interests of key stakeholders has diverse definitions because of multidisciplinary perspectives. According to Mustafa

et al. (2018), corporate governance is “a mechanism which ensures the interest of shareholders are in accordance not only with their interest but other stakeholders as well” (p. 208). Effective corporate governance systems are established to ensure a balance of the long-term interests of various stakeholders, such as shareholders, employees, management, customers, suppliers, regulators, and the overall society. Effective governance in companies leads to compelling offerings of quality products and services. Quality corporate governance increases value in companies.

There is a significant relationship between corporate governance and organizational performance. A study involving over 1500 American companies revealed a positive correlation between effective corporate governance and an organization’s value (Mustafa et al., 2018). Corporate governance helps the board and the CEO work smoothly with senior leadership teams to build a bond of trust between the organization and its community of stakeholders. The corporate values of each organization are the backbone of building solid relationships with various stakeholders. Good governance facilitates the transparent sharing of accurate information with multiple stakeholders (Sarhan et al., 2018). Internal and external stakeholders need to be well informed of various critical issues happening in the organization. For instance, customers expect accurate and timely information on products and services and other queries to facilitate buying decisions. Other stakeholders have different interests that require a system to balance them. For example, employees demand fairness in benefits from the company. Transparency and fairness can only be achieved in an organization that continually cultivates effective corporate governance practices. Other critical issues may be related

to finances, and good corporate governance plays a vital role in transparency related to all levels of operations within organizations.

The quality of corporate governance affects a company's revenue, return on investment capital, and total return of shareholders (Mustafa et al., 2018). Leading a company effectively and efficiently ensures an increase in the value of assets and shareholders' share value. As companies strive to meet the interests of various stakeholders, including social justice, diversity, fairness, and accountability, the most important mechanism to achieve this goal is to establish an effective corporate governance system. The national and global financial crises and corporate scandals such as Worldcom and Enron have led to increased attention to the role of corporate governance on organizational and overall economic performance (Mustafa et al., 2018). Failing governance systems deny companies and economies the benefits of value growth.

Corporate governance provides mechanisms that reinforce fairness, responsibility, and transparency in organizations' working and decision-making processes. In a reactive and proactive attempt to ensure best governance practices, legislators have enacted laws and regulations to seal loopholes that previous masterminds of scandals exploited to harm various stakeholders (Mustafa et al., 2018). The consequences of financial scandals such as Worldcom were devastating. They revealed the weaknesses in existing corporate governance systems that allowed unscrupulous people to defraud customers, government, employees, shareholders, and other stakeholders. Quality corporate governance is seen as instrumental in improving the corporate board's accountability and transparency to protect the interests of all stakeholders (Báez et al., 2018). A sound governance system

in firms is the foundation of the board's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandates of conformance and performance.

Although many countries have made tremendous progress in improving education and healthcare access to disadvantaged groups such as women and ethnic minorities, diversity in corporate organizations is still a global policy issue. Underrepresentation of women in corporate boards, senior leadership positions, and other decision-making tables has received considerable attention since the late 20th century. The disproportionate gender, ethnic, racial, and sexual orientation ratio of directors and senior executives illuminates the deep-rooted biasness and inequality emanating from the social ethos of unequal society (Singh, 2020). Nevertheless, such disproportionality in diversity in organizations can be reduced or eliminated through effective corporate governance practices.

The relationship between corporate governance and diversity in organizations is revealed in the recent global discourse on the composition of corporate boards. For the board to make sound decisions that drive social justice in the company, its membership needs to reflect ethnic, racial, gender, age, disciplinary, educational, sexual orientation, and other forms of diversity in society (Goyal et al., 2019). A corporate governance system that provides women, young people, and minorities with the same opportunities as other dominant groups, including access to jobs in senior management, can end the harmful discrimination of the past (Goyal et al., 2019). Present governance best practices include positive discrimination or affirmative actions to end inequalities and discriminative policies (Báez et al., 2018). As many stakeholders show a growing consciousness concerning social concerns such as gender, racial, ethnic, age, and sexual

orientation discrimination, the role of corporate governance in diversity has become more apparent. Equality is a major issue in the public and private sector and the uptick of social justice issues has exacerbated many inequities within organizations. Although the workforce has become more diverse, research still indicates a strong gap between certain levels within organizations and how executives view diversity altogether (Goyal et al., 2019).

Board diversity influences corporate performance. The inclusion of individuals from different gender, ethnicities, races, age, social orientations, and professional diversities affects the quality of their decisions that affect the company's functionality and distribution of power and resources among all the stakeholders. The diversity of the board brings with it a significant network of resources and experiences that enhance the quality of financial and nonfinancial decisions. With individuals from various professional and social backgrounds, the board can understand the interests of various internal and external stakeholders (Mustafa et al., 2018). To raise the corporate governance standards and meet the interests of all the stakeholders, diversity within the board, senior leadership, and across the human resource remains an essential feature that every private and public organization should pursue.

Corporate governance's role in enhancing fairness within the organization stretches to incorporate diversity and inclusion. Effective corporate governance practices are required to support the full appreciation and participation of diverse members of the community of stakeholders. Although boards of directors and senior leadership have focused on enhancing the representation of more diverse stakeholders such as employees, organizations need to focus on inclusion to fully achieve diversity outcomes (Ashikali et

al., 2021). Corporate governance can provide inclusion mechanisms that assist organizations in reaping the benefits of diversity.

Good governance practices provide an inclusive climate in which stakeholders from diverse backgrounds feel free to participate in the organization's affairs. Different stakeholders have different interests that the board needs to take care of in a balanced way. Employees need an inclusive working environment. Within the board and senior management, diversity allows for the use and accommodation of a wide range of perspectives in the decision-making process (Ashikali et al., 2021). The composition of the board reflects the company's level of embracement of diversity.

Corporate governance makes diversity management easier by establishing organizational values that embrace all the differences among the members of the community of stakeholders. According to Ashikali et al. (2021), quality corporate governance allows the integration of differences: "The norms and expectations of being open to differences and valuing them are emphasized" (p. 500). When an organization chooses corporate governance practices that actively seek and support different ideas and perspectives, employees and other stakeholders develop feelings of belongingness (Ashikali et al., 2021). Therefore, good governance fosters an environment in which everyone has an opportunity to be themselves. Regarding corporate governance, there are two basic principles that complement each other that corporations should consider. First is social justice that leads to providing women and minorities equal access to jobs and senior level opportunities. Corporations must implement policies and procedures that address discrimination to properly manage the issues of any disadvantages of the past. The second principle is access to diversity within the corporate boards or management

boards by tapping into emotional intelligence of managers. Managers can control, express, or interpret interactions from the interpersonal relationships that are established through either judicious means or empathetic means. Firms that are significantly diverse experience significant global advantages and financial advantages (Ashikali et al., 2021). The challenge is how do boards move from a homogenous nature to a heterogenous nature of diverse talents with a more modernized approach to business practices.

As corporations move to modernize traditional business practices, gender diversity on corporate boards has become a focal point of discussion. Corporate boards bear the responsibility for ensuring that corporate governance is inclusive of race, gender, education, and professional experiences that bring a holistic approach to corporate decision making (Kamalnath, 2018). However, the focus to go beyond the standard groupthink of an equal representation of gender diversity might require policy and procedures to mandate equal representation on corporate boards. When considering groupthink, the positions of power must go beyond a simple rationale of equal accessibility of gender on corporate boards. The interest in diversity can be attributed to an increase in shareholder value and interest in the overall performance of organizations. Therefore, levels of diversity within organizations may be an antidote to groupthink, thus allowing boards to become more effective (Kamalnath, 2018). For the purposes of this analysis, groupthink can be defined as the practice of thinking or making decisions in a manner that discourages creativity or individual contributions when attempting to solve a problem. There is a level of harm or danger that can be attributed to groupthink when leaders are so alike, and the growth of individual contributions and creativity can become stifled. Promoting gender equality and diversity can result in enhanced reputation for

companies with a deeper connection to customers. The most important role of directors on the board is corporate governance (Kamalnath, 2018). However, shareholder incentives should not be the only motivator to petition for diversity. The goal is to have shareholders ingrained within the workings of organizations by understanding the underpinnings of how organizations work. Diversity from the shareholder perspective has traditionally taken a back seat to profits. A crucial aspect about boards is that they are not an aggregate of individuals but rather a complex group that develops their own culture of decision making within organizations (Kamalnath, 2018). Therefore, to understand how this group derives certain decisions, it is important to understand individual director motivations and the group dynamics overall. Understanding these motivations minimizes groupthink. Although board independence has gained acceptance as a remedy for corporate failure, diversity has not gained the same level of acceptance. Corporate boards are susceptible to groupthink by assenting to the status quo, impeding proper decision and monitoring functions.

Cultural Intelligence and Cultural Diversity

Cultural intelligence assesses an individual's ability to adapt to new cultural environments effectively. Existing research of Hofstede et al. (1990) highlighted the lack of cultural appropriation in the workplace and the need to manage a culturally diverse environment effectively. Cultural diversity is a specific form of intelligence that focuses on adapting, grasping, reasoning, and behaving effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Li et al., 2021). Widely used across several industries, cultural intelligence also considers an individual's cross-cultural adaptability, communication level, task performance, and innovation ability. Regarding organizational management,

organizations need to focus on the impact of sustainable innovation by closely examining the grassroots efforts related to diversity management of employees on the front lines of business operations. The sustainable innovation of employees requires the support of the organizational system, a supportive organizational culture, and the creative ability of employees (Li et al., 2021). This type of innovation can also be influenced by the personal traits of employees reflected in personal ability, psychological motivation, and behavior performance.

Cultural intelligence is connected to innovation through cross-cultural adaptation and work adjustment. From the existing research conducted by Akresh and Frank (2016), there appears to be a lack of adaption in general as many Fortune 500 companies have traditionally only focused on profits or the bottom line. Cultural assimilation is one of the most common examples of modern interconnectedness (Akresh & Frank, 2016). Civilization gets stronger whenever people from various ancestral backgrounds, cultures, nationalities, and beliefs unite. Cultural assimilation has a unique perspective on matters. It claims that our most significant attribute is similarity; hence, it strives to eliminate opposing viewpoints. Even though multicultural groups surpass nondiverse groups by 35%, people fear the unfamiliar (Akresh & Frank, 2016). It is no doubt that organizational cultural differences exist, and the manifestation of cultural diversity within organizations have lasting impact on the behavior and attitudes of employees. However, organizations must have the ability to recognize when it is significant to adapt relative to diversity and inclusion culturally. Many organizations have diversity and inclusion programs to facilitate an integrative culture, but many failed to examine these groups' interrelations or commonalities. In organizations like Microsoft, various inclusive groups

such as BAM (Blacks at Microsoft), WAM (Women at Microsoft), GLEAM (LGBTQ Network), and others attempt interconnectedness. Knowledge sharing and cultural intelligence are significant factors that can positively impact the overall culture of an organization.

Group differences between cultures can hinder a fragmented organization if managers or executives do not have a keen or heightened sense of cultural diversity or cultural awareness. Diversity climate theory and related research have proposed that employee attitudes toward others depend on how organizations treat them, and the diversity climate of organizations can be infectious (Li et al., 2021). Trait activation theory emphasizes matching individual traits and organizational climate, highlighting that those traits are activated when the organizational climate accepts certain group traits. Cultural intelligence, sustainable, innovative behavior, knowledge sharing, and organizational cultural differences significantly impact diversity and inclusion.

Group differences related to diversity envelop the individual attitudes of those who promote diversity within their organization. Self-interest can be the determinant factor when promoting the diversity efforts of specific groups within the workplace. Women, LGBTQ, veterans, and other diversity groups are different in attitudinal reactions to levels of diversity (Gardner & Ryan, 2020). As organizations continue to focus on diversity and inclusion, maximized support may come from allyship and the shift in attitudes toward marginalized groups. A shift in acceptance or tolerance can be attributed to some change when the majority demographic offers unwavering support for the group that may be viewed as minority or inferior. The ability to influence how organizations see diversity and inclusion requires a shift in understanding how diversity

connects all individuals. Considering race, gender, religious freedom, and the other tenants of diversity, underrepresented individuals can effectively promote diversity by confronting the self-interest of individuals. Marginalized individuals should be a part of diversity and inclusion initiatives such as designing training programs, messaging, and communication regarding diversity efforts (Gardner & Ryan, 2020). The challenges of breaking stereotypical norms within organizations are challenging. Social challenges about diversity and inclusion challenge the status quo. Therefore, companies must be cognizant of how to maximize the challenges related to diversity.

Leadership Style and Diversity

The conceptualization, development, and identification of different leadership styles are as old as the emergence of leaders. Every leader employs a different leadership approach to influence their followers into achieving the desired organizational goals and objectives. Business leaders agree that their behavior anchored in leadership frameworks impacts the employees differently. Besides, each situation leaders face demands that they apply the appropriate approach specific to that context. Therefore, there exists a general perspective that leadership is considerably situational. Although most leaders have a unique way of directing, coordinating, and supervising their subjects, an effective leader knows when to change tactics and uses various leadership philosophies to align people to a common goal. Organizational success is dependent on the ability of leaders to navigate hindrances confidently and with the most efficient tools at their disposal. Consequently, every leadership style conceptualized has distinct, identifiable features reflected in the leader's beliefs, behavior, and actions and their impact on the followers, which ultimately

can have a more significant effect on diversity initiatives within organizations. In essence, diversity is significantly impacted by leadership style.

Leadership has various definitions. It is a social influence process through which a particular individual seeks the support and participation of their subordinates to achieve common organizational goals (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Alkahtani (2015) defined leadership as an established and dynamic personal relationship in which a person supervises, directs, and coordinates other people to perform a common task. On the other hand, style is construed as a leader's behavior while holding the position of authority. It is how the leader exerts influence on followers (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Therefore, one can lead in numerous ways, including some common styles such as transformational, contemplative, authoritarian, democratic, transactional, and democratic. However, existing research conducted by Randel et al. (2018) indicated that most employees who desire leadership diversity connect to two distinct styles: transformational and contemplative leadership.

In the hugely competitive global market, it is essential that every leader becomes knowledgeable and employs effective leadership styles to influence followers and align them to the common organizational goals. Organizations with influential leaders have a significant competitive advantage over those that possess poorly endowed leaders. Alkahtani (2015) argued that different leadership approaches influence organizational performance differently. With the globalization of labor, consumers, and products, contemporary organizations need dynamic leaders who not only understand the complexities of the global market but also apply different styles to build effective relationships with their followers to motivate them into achieving the desired goal

(Chaudhuri et al., 2015). These perspectives reveal that there is a huge necessity for researchers to actively refine information on existing leadership styles while presenting it in a manner that is easier to understand and positively impacts the current and aspiring leaders.

Transformational leadership has become one of the most common paradigms when addressing leadership issues in various sectors of society. The term *transformational leadership* can be traced back to the late 20th century when the researcher named Burns coined the term in 1978 (Molero et al., 2007). However, the style has undergone various stages of development to become an essential consideration by multiple managers. Alkahtani (2015) contemplated this approach to concentrate on developing both the followers and their needs. Transformative leaders focus on improving the value system for the employees, inspiring and motivating them while instilling morality into their abilities to become more productive and highly satisfied. Chaudhuri et al.'s (2015) contribution is that transformation leadership results from integrating past experiences into the future course of action by incorporating innovative ideas and intellectual stimulation into the process. Thus, the significance of the style cannot be ignored in any corporation.

Many scholars have studied the relationship between transformational leadership and other styles of leadership. Molero et al. (2007) comparatively analyzed transformative leaders side by side with transactional leaders and different approaches such as autocratic and democratic. After a thorough investigation, the researchers found that the effects of transformative leadership are firmly related to other styles such as democratic and relations-oriented (Molero et al., 2007). Alkahtani (2015) examined the

differences between transformational and transactional leadership styles. His analysis revealed that transformative leaders empower and inspire followers through creative direction, but managers employing transactional style trade benefits with their followers as means of the subordinate's motivation (Alkahtani, 2015). The studies reveal a great deal of a transformative leader's behavior and impact on employees (followers).

Contemplative leadership style emanated from the religious environment. Grandy and Sliwa (2017) defined it "as a virtuous activity; reflexive, engaged, relational, and embodied practice that requires knowledge from within context and practical wisdom" (p. 429). Although their analysis of the conceptualization of contemplative leadership does not involve comparing it with any other style, their contribution illuminates some of the distinctive features that help one identify a manager or administrator employing such a leadership approach. Karakas (2010), in a study of *Spirituality and Performance in Organizations: A Literature Review*, argued that contemplative leadership is reflected in the management paradigm shift toward servant and spiritual leadership. Many leadership scholars agree that servant leadership requires a sense of contemplation (Schuttloffel, 2013). Contemplative leadership involves metacognition or emphasizing the principles that decisions are founded (Schuttloffel, 2013). Leaders who practice this style can be identified based on their focus on meditation, contemplation, and sometimes prayer to become self-aware and develop a social identity that may include other people (Reave, 2005). While it is hugely religious, it is applicable in secular organizational management and can significantly impact diversity and inclusion.

A leadership style is construed as a relatively consistent behavioral pattern of a leader. Developing a leadership style is a process and not an event. Transformative

leaders and contemplative leaders share resemblances in their development. Both leaders borrow from past experiences to influence the future course of action. Chaudhuri et al. (2015) contributed that a transformational leader's qualitative dimension can be observed in their context adaptability and their realignment of perspective with the dynamic environment. Therefore, they utilize their past experiences but with additional input from the existing conditions in their organization to influence their followers. Schuttlöffel (2013) similarly demonstrated that a contemplative leader's development highly borrows from their religious and occupational experience, personal relationships, mentors, family traditions, and other life experiences. Such leaders employ the identity developed from their environment to impart the values they have learned to their subordinates. Experiential leadership is thus prevalent in both styles.

Both transformational and contemplative leadership styles prioritize relationships with their followers as a means of changing behavior. The leadership role involves the primary goal of completing organizational tasks and managing relationships (Schuttlöffel, 2013). Contemplative leaders recognize that building quality relationships is essential in creating a responsive community (Schuttlöffel, 2013). Schuttlöffel (2013), in her analysis of contemplation practice in Catholic school leadership, insisted that exceptional leaders communicate with their subordinates and convey the importance of each follower in achieving the organizational goals. Transformative leaders are equally intense in their relational engagement with their followers. They concentrate on changing people's hearts and minds, inspiring and motivating through vision. Managers employing this style stimulate emotions in their subjects and transform them individually and at the organizational level (Alkahtani, 2015). Therefore, like contemplative leaders,

transformational leadership proponents see value in the kind of leader-follower relationships.

Vision is also a significant facet of both contemplative and transformational leadership styles. While contemplative leaders are inherently reflective on their process of making leadership decisions, their meditation gives them clarity of the vision and mission that they subsequently instill in their followers (Schuttlöffel, 2013). Chaudhuri et al. (2015) described transformative leaders as individuals who “are internally driven visionaries” (p. 396). They focus on vision realization and cultivate momentous self-generating ideals within the moral framework (Alkahtani, 2015). Nevertheless, their visionary views are mainly inspired by their religious affiliation unlike transformational leaders motivated by diverse contexts.

Although transformative leaders primarily emphasize the development of the employee value system, contemplative leaders’ primary emphasis is the principles upon which decisions are made. Managers who favor the transformational leadership model uphold employees’ interests, outwardly generating awareness and acceptance of the assignment and purpose among the followers, thus empowering the growth and development of subordinates to act for the group’s well-being and not their self-interests (Alkahtani, 2015). Molero et al. (2007) added that such leaders invest heavily in changing the values and attitudes of the subordinates. On the other hand, those leaders aligned to the contemplative model centrally focus on “their thinking regarding their decision-making processes and outcomes” (Schuttlöffel, 2013, p. 82). For instance, within Catholic school leadership, managers reflect on the principles of the Christian values, Catholic theological perspectives, and the church traditions that explicitly

influence the way they lead their people (Schuttloffel, 2013). Therefore, the two differ in where their attention is directed.

Meditation and self-awareness are the two most important pillars of contemplative leadership whereas transformational leadership is broadly founded on idealized authority, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized contemplation.

Although sharing the aspect of reflection during decision making, the two styles differ in what the leaders contemplated. In contemplative leadership, the individual examines the principles that inform their innate aspirations (Schuttloffel, 2013), but a transformative leader reflects on the interests of their followers (Chaudhuri et al., 2015).

Transformational-modeled leaders also inspire innovation and creativity while shouldering all the risks and uncertainties for the organization's benefit, an aspect that is blurred in the contemplative paradigm (Chaudhuri et al., 2015). Additionally, although each leader demonstrates intellect, the transformational leader desires to motivate subordinates to think independently. Contemplation modeled leadership practice, on its part, stresses the leader's cognitive processing; the follower's thoughts are secondary.

Although both transformative and contemplative leaders are hugely admired in the spheres of leadership, managers employing transformational leadership approach win massive following because of their academic and inspirational motivation ideals cultivated through the contextual examination of the needs of the followers and the realignment of the followers' attitudes and behaviors to the organizational task. On the contrary, contemplative leaders are hailed for their wisdom derived from constant meditation and ethical knowledge (Schuttloffel, 2013). Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa exuded wisdom absorbed from self-awareness reflective sessions

(Schuttloffel, 2013). Thus, the contemplative leadership style draws much of its philosophical ideologies from religious practices (Grandy & Sliwa, 2015).

Transformational leaders, however, are more schooled in social psychology and organizational theory (Chaudhuri et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the two frameworks often borrow from each, especially on vision, reflection, and cultivation of values and idealized influence or charisma. From the research, many scholars agree that there is significant admiration of the personalities who cultivate influence through their unique ideas and visions while influencing the trajectory of diversity in positive ways.

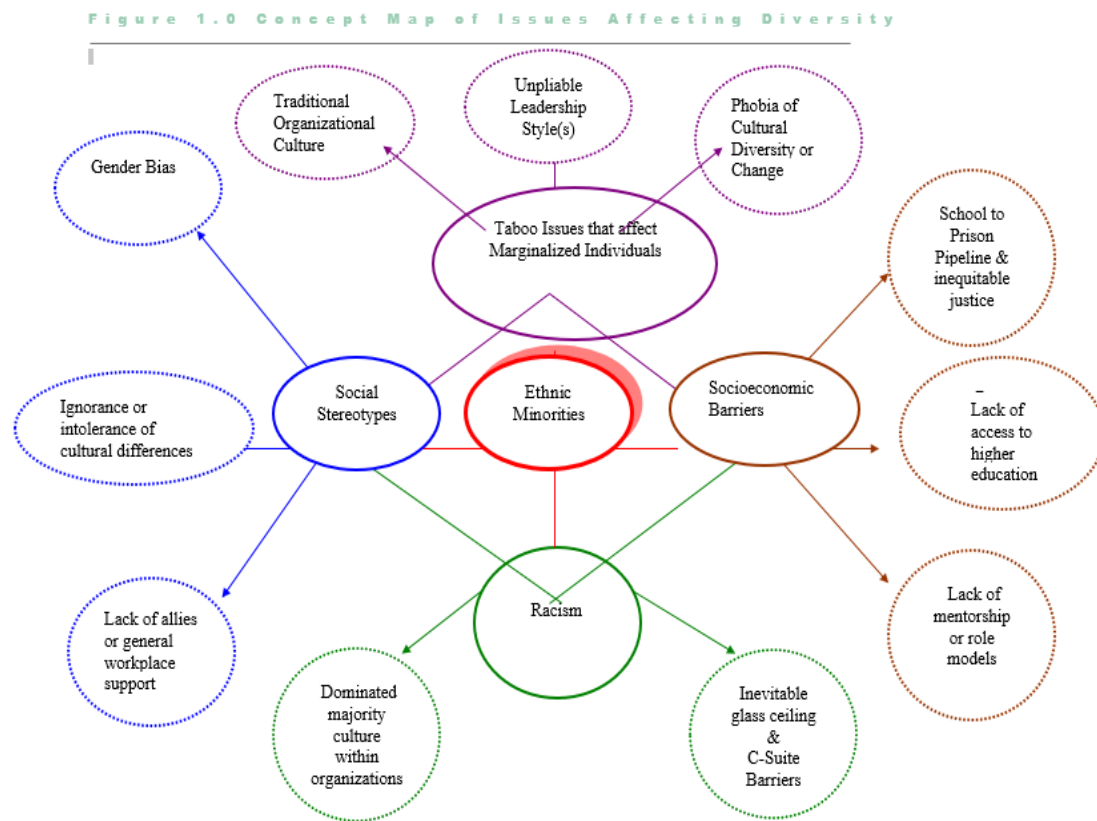
Leaders have traditionally focused on race, ethnicity, and gender when framing diversity management conversations. To enhance the conversations of diversity, employers must consider employees' skills, education, backgrounds, and experiences of various cultural groups. The mixed effects of diversity appear to reflect the setting of a specific industry and may also be driven by contextual factors such as growth orientation and innovative strategy of the organization (Andersen & Moynihan, 2016). How leaders respond to diversity can shift the internal factors of organizations for individuals desiring to understand, manage, and contribute to diversity initiatives. New innovative concepts must be corralled and championed to affect real change.

The concept map in Figure 1 depicts some of the issues that affect ethnic minorities on corporate diversity within Fortune 500 companies. The aim of this research was to expand and contribute to the existing literature base by examining some of the significant issues that have inhibited ethnic minorities and marginalized individuals from ascending to executive-level positions in Fortune 500 companies. The issues highlighted in the literature review discussed several issues, including racism, stigma, gender

inequality, leadership styles that affect diversity, organizational culture, and other issues that have impacted the progression of marginalized communities at work. Modernization of organizations and culture, coupled with the progression of equity, have highlighted the need to become more inclusive and progressive of all individuals. The lack of diversity for ethnic minorities in executive-level positions indicates the need to address specific barriers. Processes must be enacted to ensure diversity is achieved at every level, including methods designed to break the inevitable glass ceiling. Thus, this study sought to explore whether diversity is a reality or illusion. It provided a case study of the Fortune 500 companies, executive-suite hegemony, and misrepresentation as indicated by the research.

Figure 1

Concept Map



CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There is a need for evidence-based practices based in quantitative research to efficiently consider and regulate individuals of diverse social identities and backgrounds. Institutional leadership in most organizations have challenges in diversity, and the possibility of compelling assimilation inhibits the sense of inclusiveness with organizations. For the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the phenomenon of the social experiences of the research participants for a quantitative approach by using the null hypothesis statistical test (NHST) model as the basis for this study. The NHST model has no control group in quantitative research but primarily tests the null hypothesis. The researcher considered various theories proposing a long-lasting change that targets diversity. Null hypothesis statistical testing model is a numerical extrapolation by which an experimental aspect is examined against a hypothesis of no significant relationship or cause focused on a given observation (Mueller & Hancock, 2009).

The NHST model in quantitative research enables the calculation of the probability of seeing an outcome as extreme as a test statistic, supposing the Null hypothesis of no outcome is appropriate. Similarly, the use of NHST model in quantitative research methodology is always justified instead of expended as an automatic default and single cornerstone system. In view of that, the NHST model can be precisely applied in quantitative theoretical predictions; thus, both effect and power sizes are calculated as well as intended by the developers of the mechanism. This Fortune 500 case study explores whether NHST-based theories succeed in allocating adequate information to determine how plausible a theory's assumptions keep and

whether a model postulation is plausible enough to be appreciated. The quantitative phenomenological research begins by examining the lived social experiences of the research participants to clarify the given issues that emerge when the theoretical assumptions are assessed using NHST. The background of the two theories—intersectionality and Mead’s social behaviorism—is discussed in the NHST theoretical framework and must be considered because both have significant impacts on diversity.

Intersectionality is a theory that originates from Black feminist theory because it is generally concerned with the amalgamation of social identities such as gender, class, race, and the manners in which oppression builds and intensifies for people in the society. According to Mueller and Hancock (2009), intersectionality theory was used because of its concentration on social identities and the expedition of dominance or authority as a reaction to them. The approach under review—intersectionality—clarifies the rapport amid power systems and their functionalities concerning intersecting social identities. Furthermore, the model is the essential conceptual input that women’s research has made.

On the other hand, intersectionality can be defined as a “sophisticated and vibrant structure” that follows various guidelines. More to the point, these principles of the theory consider insisting upon antiessentialism and differences in people, resisting additive concepts, parallel groups, and concentrating on intersecting categories’ nature. Mueller and Hancock (2009) used an analogy to define the theory as an intersection with traffic flowing through it. This Fortune 500 case study pictures discrimination, ageism, gender biases, and other ethnic minority challenges as flowing from various conduits simultaneously with catastrophes and occurrences influencing or impacting individuals from many directions at any given time. Figure 1 in Chapter 2, the conceptual

framework, was intended to capture some of the catastrophes ethnic minorities are challenged by.

Undeniably, intersectionality is used to understand and articulate the complicated and cumulative ramifications highlighting the nature of having various social identities in inequitable societal systems. The importance of applying intersectionality as a research tool is to comprehend the multifaceted oppression nature further and hence develop the possibility for creating social change and may impact constructive alteration in institutional culture. The researcher asserts that an underlying criticism of social experiences brought by diversity in the workplace is to help people comprehend the encounters and perceptions as distinct instead of changing the fundamental dynamics of oppression and power. In addition to this, the key objective should be contemplating the manners in which various groups of identity structure people's lives (Tan, 2008).

Intersectionality theories have concentrated on three identity and diversity aspects of social experience concerning class, gender, and race and approaches in which these groups can cooperatively reinforce each other. First, identity entails the categorizing attributes of a person that consider gender, class, or race but may also consider another aspect such as job status, languages, or cultural understanding. Conversely, gender, race, age, and ethnic minority educational disparity were a few topics examined for this quantitative phenomenological research. The theoretical application for an expedition into comprehending Fortune 500 companies is not well-structured; nonetheless, it may allocate a significant opportunity to realize how social experience endeavors are acquired and impacted by the intersecting identities of workers in an institution (Hinesley, 2011).

Another theory used in this quantitative research takes account of Mead's social behaviorism theory. According to Tan (2008), the respondents in the quantitative research develop self-images through the social experience they share with their counterparts. Furthermore, Tan asserted that self is an integral part of a participant's personality comprising self-image and self-awareness because self-image is impacted by social experiences. The theory outlines a key postulate regarding self-development. The theory refutes Freud's perception that personality is decided partly by biological undercurrents. Social experiences rely on the participants seeing themselves from their perspective. These experiences may be like each other because many ethnic minorities face common challenges with society. The main method of this quantitative research was to target the social experiences of research participants focusing on inclusivity and diversity. For this reason, the researcher applied a quantitative phenomenological approach because of its concentration on the encounter of employees in Fortune 500 companies who have experienced a similar phenomenon. The survey results highlighted common shared phenomena. In quantitative research methods, NHST depends upon a set of epistemological (based on truth), ontological (based in reality), and statistical (relative to the data findings) methodology in which the truth can be validated through the triangulation of the research data (Stone, 2018). NHST examines the extent to which the observed data may be inconsistent or at odds with a null hypothesis. However, proper triangulation of the data provides insights into research findings by analyzing the critical research questions against all hypotheses. Triangulation helps the researcher understand variations in the data that could be reveal a new phenomenon (Stone, 2018). Design coherence for this quantitative study addressed the proposed research questions through

analysis of the data collected from research participants who had heterogeneous backgrounds. The research was guided by the research questions to better understand a phenomenon through the diverse experiences of the research participants. In the essence of what the researcher is attempting to understand clusters around a few questions, then reflexive thematic analysis is helpful for the researcher to better understand a shared experience as reported by the research participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, reflexive thematic analysis was done within this quantitative analysis.

Sampling Method

Population

The researcher's population target was ethnic minority professionals who currently work in Fortune 500 companies at the midlevel to senior-level positions to uncover any specific barriers to matriculating to the executive level. Because of Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations, the study concealed the identity of all participants while they shared their lived experiences with the researcher. These lived experiences offered insights into the specific circumstances that affect marginalized communities.

Sample Size

A probability sampling design resulted in the researcher selecting managerial professionals working in Fortune 500 companies with midmanager to senior-level career experience. The sample size for this study was $N = 30$. The stakeholders of this study could offer valuable insights on their experiences as minorities working in Fortune 500 companies and a different view on some of the barriers that have prevented minorities from being promoted within the constraints of the traditional corporate culture. The

sampling size for this study was random because of their willingness to participate in the study. The research study was administered or conducted through the following social media platforms: Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Facebook. The study was conducted for a period of 1 month, and a total of 51 participants responded to the survey

Data Collection

A primary data collection source was applied in this research. A semistructured interview with open-ended questions was the method used in this quantitative study. These interviews were conducted utilizing Qualtrics analytical software. The researcher posted the survey questions to the participants then recorded their responses within the Qualtrics software. Beck (2020) advised that the researcher must clearly explain the objective and expectation of the research to the participant. The objective and expectations were outlined for this study. The assumption was that all the study participants could understand and communicate in English. The researcher made sure that all the interview recordings/surveys were clearly labeled based on the participant who answered the research question to avoid confusion during the collection process. This method of Qualtrics surveying was created for individuals who desired a more efficient way to capture data and for those who did not have time to do face-to-face interviews because of constraints. The survey captures the real-life phenomenological experiences of participants through thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Qualtrics transcription software transformed the logged interviews into a readable digital file opened with Qualtrics. The researcher can also perform the transcription manually. The researcher created a survey document with codes, labels, or memos to group similar information. In this step, the researcher must report all findings, build new theories, or expound on existing theories based on the conclusions made from the Qualtrics annotated document analysis to explain a phenomenon. The researcher is not attempting to solve any problem but rather to explain the phenomenon's essence revealed from the research (Dibley et al., 2020). All similar responses are categorized under a similar code or label. The researcher analyzed all results stemming from the respondents who completed the survey utilizing Qualtrics software. This data analysis is functional analysis because all respondents had participated in the survey, and further data analysis was conducted to identify common themes or phenomena. Triangulation of the data helped to identify common themes reported by the respondents. The following section is the survey participants' recorded responses. During this phase, an analytic procedure was conducted to understand the content and analyze the data, inclusive of description, reduction, and interpretation of the results. The researcher needed to have an awareness of any perceptions that captured the experiences of the participants.

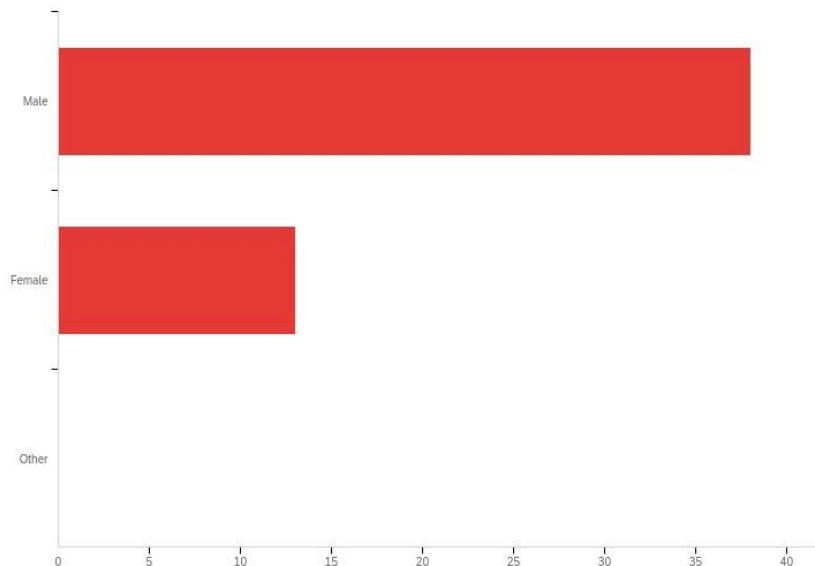
The following are the recorded responses of participants from both parts of the survey taken directly from the transcription software. In this step, all findings are reported exactly as recorded and the researcher can build new theories or build on the existing hypothesis based on the conclusions of the lived experiences of the participants derived from the Qualtrics analytical software.

A total of 51 participants responded to the question regarding gender; 74.51% of participants identified as male, and 25.49% of participants identified as female. In other words, 38 individuals were male versus 13 individuals who were female (see Figure 2).

Figure2

What Is Your Gender?

Question 1 - What is your gender?



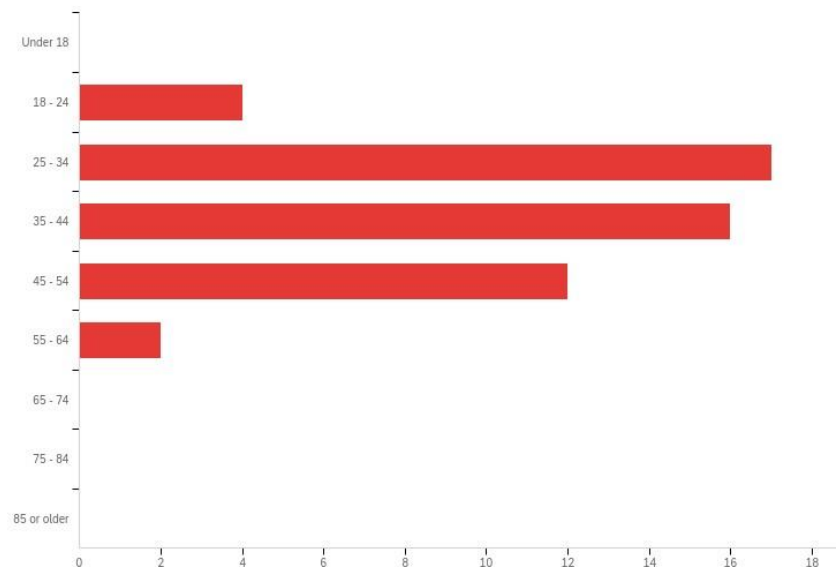
A total of 51 participants responded to the question regarding age. A total of 21 young professionals, 28 middle aged professionals, and two mature professionals. The following is a breakdown of the respondents by age range: for the age range 18-24, a total of four participants or 7.84% of the total respondents; for the age range 25-34, a total of 17 participants or 33.33% of the total respondents; for the age range of 35-44, a total of 16 participants or 31.37% of the total respondents; and for the age group of 45-54, a total of 12 participants fell into this category. Last, for the age group of 55-64, a total of two

participants or 3.92% of the total respondents. From the analysis of the data, many of the respondents were clustered or centered around the middle-aged category, a total of 30, and 21 may be considered as young professionals. The results indicate the various levels of experience in a professional setting at Fortune 500 companies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

What Is Your Age?

Question 2 - What is your age?

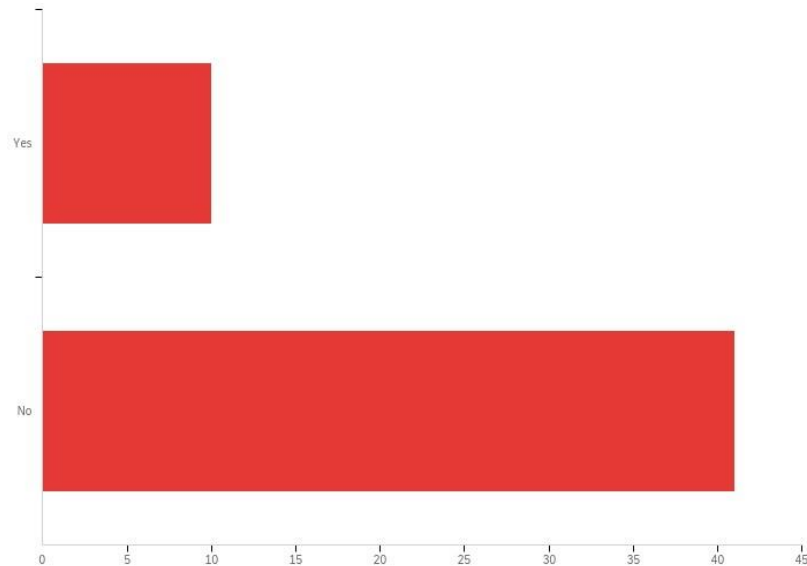


This question was designed to gain a better understanding of the ethnicity breakdown of the participants. A total of 51 respondents answered this question. A total of 41 participants or 80.39% of the respondents do not identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. However, 10 or 19.61% of the respondents did identify with the minority group (see Figure 4). Figure 5 provides additional insights on the racial makeup of the participants from the survey.

Figure 4

Are You Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin?

Question 3 - Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

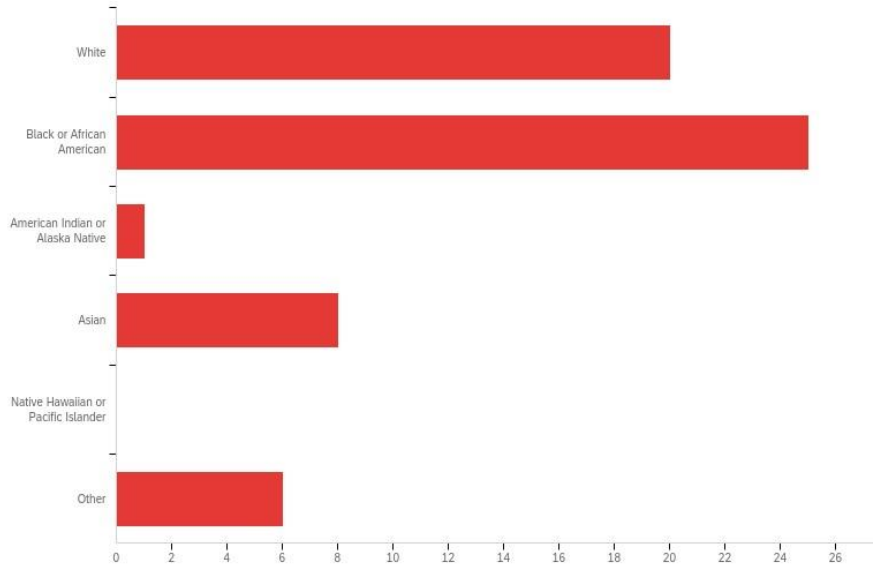


From the analysis, many of the respondents identified as an ethnic minority. The largest representation of respondents identified as African American or Black, 41.67% of the total or 25 participants. Twenty of the participants identified as Caucasian or White or 33.33% of the total, and eight or 13.33% of the participants identified as Asian, six identified as other or 10% of the total who participated in the study, and one participant or 1.67% of the total respondents identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. This finding is significant because the study is designed to answer a key question regarding the lived experiences of ethnic minorities in Fortune 500 companies.

Figure 5

Additional Racial Makeup

Question 4 - How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply.

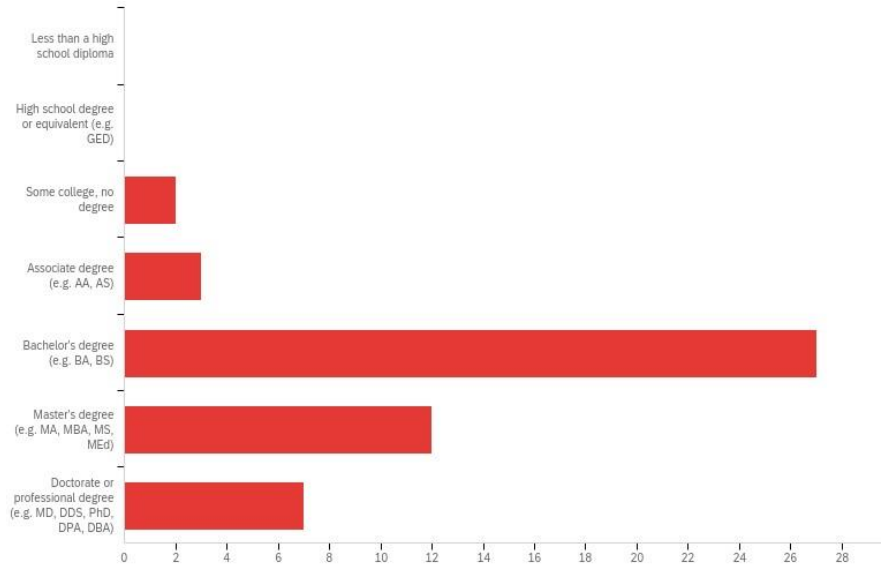


A total of 51 participants responded to the question on the survey regarding level of education. A total of 49 respondents had a college degree. The breakdown of education is as follows: associates degree obtained by three or 5.88% of the respondents, bachelor's degree obtained by a total of 27 respondents or 52.94%, master's degree recipients were 12 out the total respondents or 23.53%, and seven of the participants held a doctoral degree or professional degree, which comprised 13.73% of the total (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Education Level

Question 5- What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?



This statistic is revealing considering the largest demographic to participate in this study was male, and the largest ethnic group represented identified as African American. However, when closely analyzing the data, it does not appear that education was a significant barrier to employment in Fortune 500 companies because of the study finding that 46 participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 48 or 94.12% of the participants were employed full time.

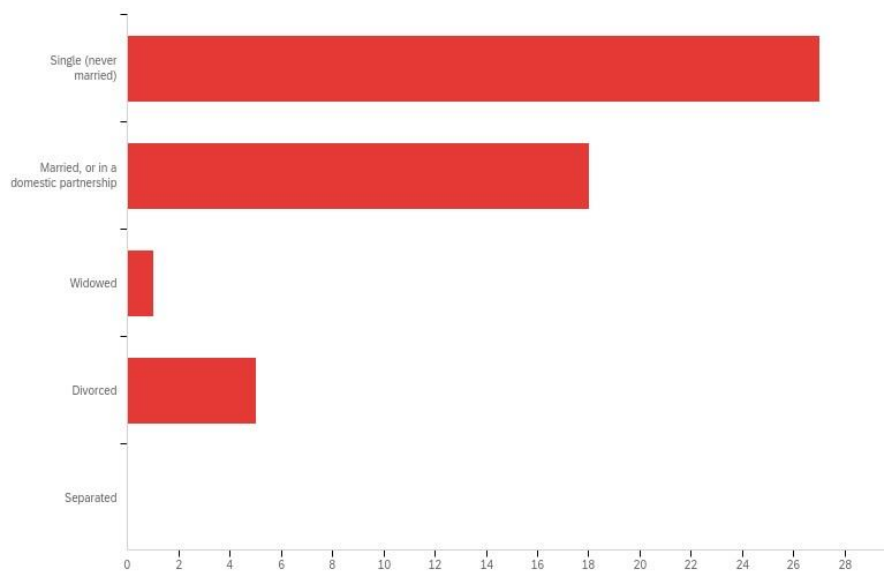
A total of 51 participants responded to the survey question regarding marital status. The largest group represented with 27 respondents indicated a status of single (never married) or 52.94%. The second largest group represented are married or in a domestic partnership for a total of 35.29% or 18 respondents. Five participants or 9.80%

indicated their status as divorced, and only one participant or 1.96% of the total was represented as widowed (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Marital Status

Question 6 - What is your marital status?

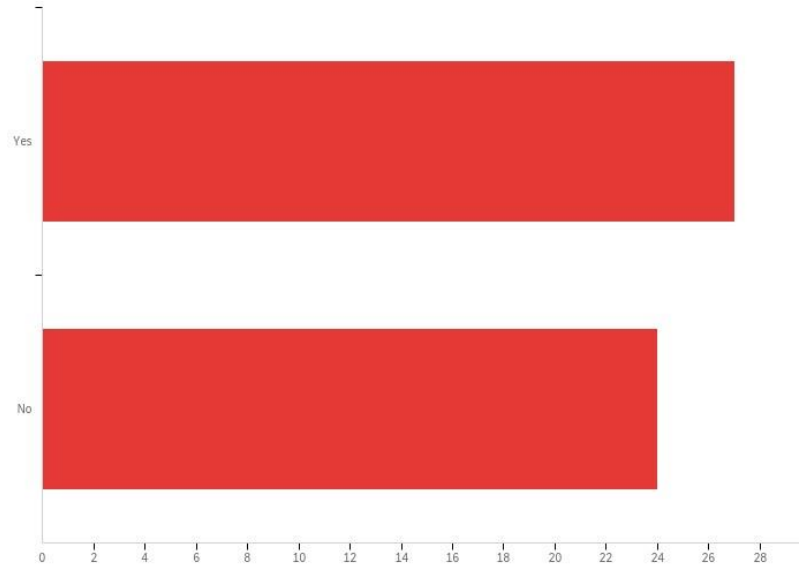


A total of 51 participants responded to the question of the survey regarding identification with the LGBTQ+ community; 52.94% or 27 out of 51 of the respondents indicated that they identify with the (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer +) LGBTQ+ community, and 47.06% or 24 out of the 51 respondents indicated that they do not identify as LGBTQ+. This reveal is significant for this study because the LGBTQ+ community is present within the workforce at Fortune 500 companies but may be an underrepresented minority group or siloed to certain positions with organizations (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Identification With LGBTQ+ Community

Question 7 - I identify with the LGBTQ+ community.

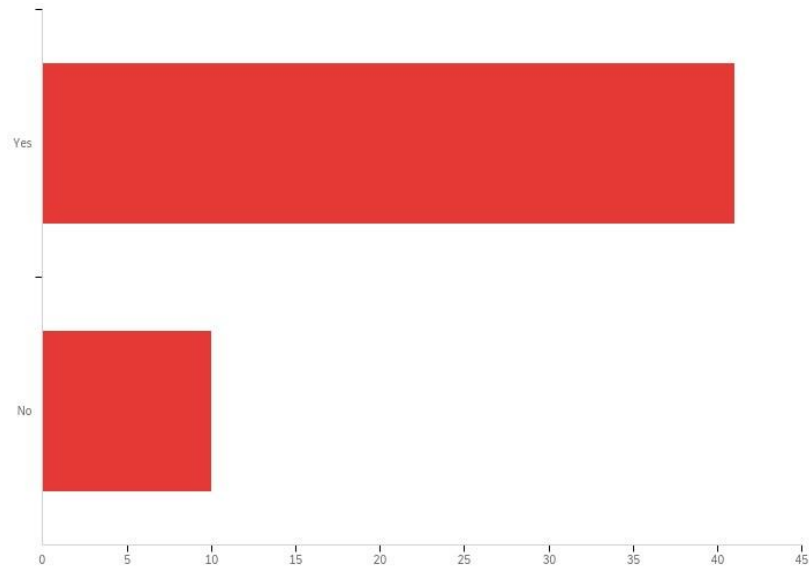


A total of 51 participants responded to the question of the survey regarding working for a Fortune 500 Company; 80.39% or 41 respondents indicated they work for a Fortune 500 company, and only 19.61% or 10 of the respondents indicated they do not work for a Fortune 500 company. With 41 of the respondents indicating “yes,” they do work for a Fortune 500 company, valuable insights can be gleaned for the purpose of this research to determine what significant barriers ethnic minorities currently face within Fortune 500 companies. Figure 9 is a visual description of individuals who work in a Fortune 500 company.

Figure 9

Do You Work for a Fortune 500 Company?

Question 8 - Do you work for a Fortune 500 company?

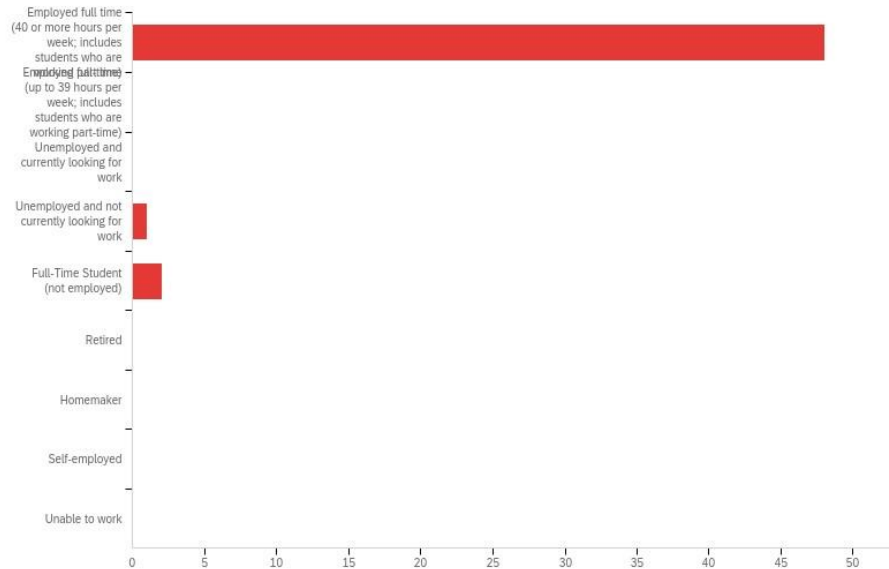


A total of 51 participants responded to the question of the survey regarding employment status; 48 or 94.12% of the respondents are employed full time, and two or 3.92% are full-time students. Only one participant or 1.96% of the total respondents is currently unemployed and not currently looking for work. Figure 10 is a visual representation of employment status.

Figure 10

Employment Status

Question 9 - What is your current employment status?



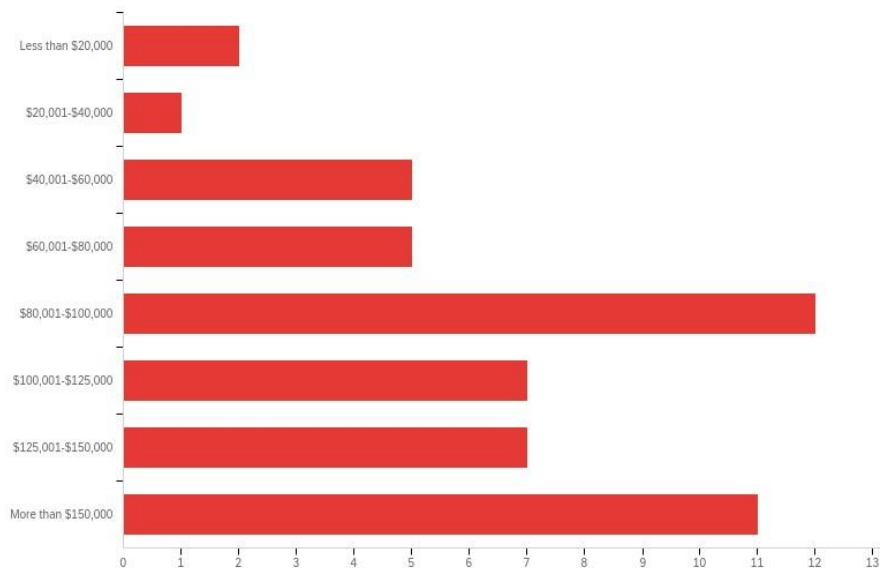
A total of 50 participants answered the question of the survey regarding income level. For income, the study revealed variations between upper and lower limits of reported income. For income more than \$150,000, 11 or 22% of participants fell into this category. For income of \$125,001 to \$150,000 and \$125,000 to \$100,001, 14% or seven participants for each category were represented. Reported income of \$100,000 to \$80,000, 24% or 12 participants fell into this category. Income reported between \$80,000 and \$60,000 and \$60,000 to \$40,000, the survey indicated five respondents for each category, or 10%. For income of \$40,000 to \$20,000 only one respondent or 2% fell into this category, and two or 4% of the respondents indicated an income of less than \$20,000. The income spread is consistent with the level of education obtained from

Question 5, and the employment status from Question 7. Figure 11 is a visual representation of income level.

Figure 11

Income Level

Question 10 - Which income group does your household fall under?



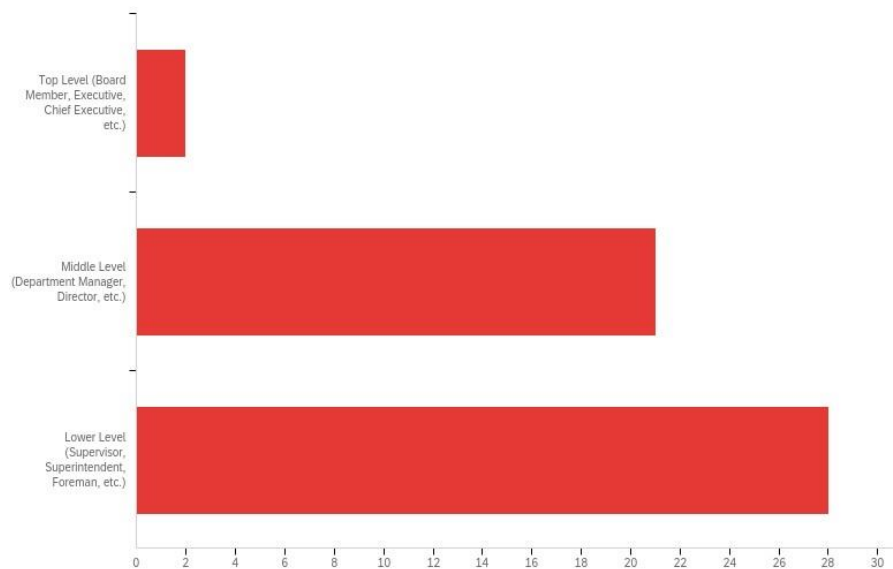
A total of 51 participants responded to the survey question regarding their management level; 28 or 54.9% out of the 51 participants indicated a lower level position as supervisor, superintendent, or foreman; 21 or 41.18% of the participants indicated middle-management status as department manager or director; and only two or 3.92% top-level positions as board members, executives or having a chief title. The level of management indicated are significant because it appears that the participants have the educational status but not the positional status within organizations. It could also indicate that there may be challenges for ethnic minorities to matriculate to higher positions.

For the second part of the survey, the following questions were set up according to a Likert scale in which study participants indicated on a scale of 1-5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For this part of the survey, the researcher also offered participants the opportunity to provide comments or feedback. The following figures are the results verbatim of the lived experiences of the participants. Figure 12 is a visual representation of current management level.

Figure 12

Management Level

Question 11- Current level of management.



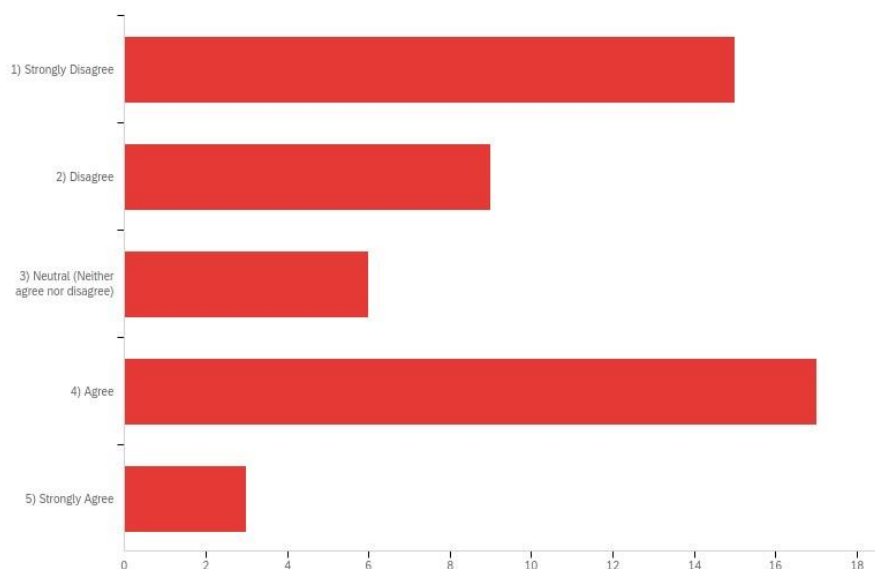
A total of 50 participants responded to the question regarding whether their organization's board room reflects the general U.S. population. The participants had opposing views when responding to this question. Fifteen or 30% of the respondents strongly disagreed that their organization's boardroom reflects the general population of

the United States; 18% or nine of the respondents indicated they disagree; and six or 12% remained neutral. On the other hand, 17 or 34% of the participants agreed that the racial profile of their organization's board room mirrors that of the general population. Additionally, 6% or three participants strongly agree with the position that their organization's board mirrors that of the general population. Figure 13 is a visual representation of if the racial profile of an organization's board mirrors that of the general population of the United States.

Figure 13

Racial Profile of Organization's Board Room Mirrors General U.S. Population

Question 1, Part 2 - The racial profile of my organization's board room mirrors that of the general population of the United States.



A total of 51 participants responded to the question regarding how they view their career trajectory; 45.10% or 23 of the participants agreed that their career trajectory is positive, 15.69% or eight participants strongly agreed that their career trajectory is

positive, 11.76% or six participants remained neutral, 17.65% or nine participants disagreed that their career trajectory is positive, and 9.80% or five participants strongly disagreed with the question that their career trajectory is positive. Figure 14 is visual representation of how individuals view their career trajectory. Overall, the majority of the participants agreed that their career trajectory is positive, possibly indicating a level of optimism. Figure 15 is direct participant commentary regarding career trajectory.

Figure 14

View of Organizational Career Trajectory

Question 2, Part 2 - I view my organizational career trajectory positively.

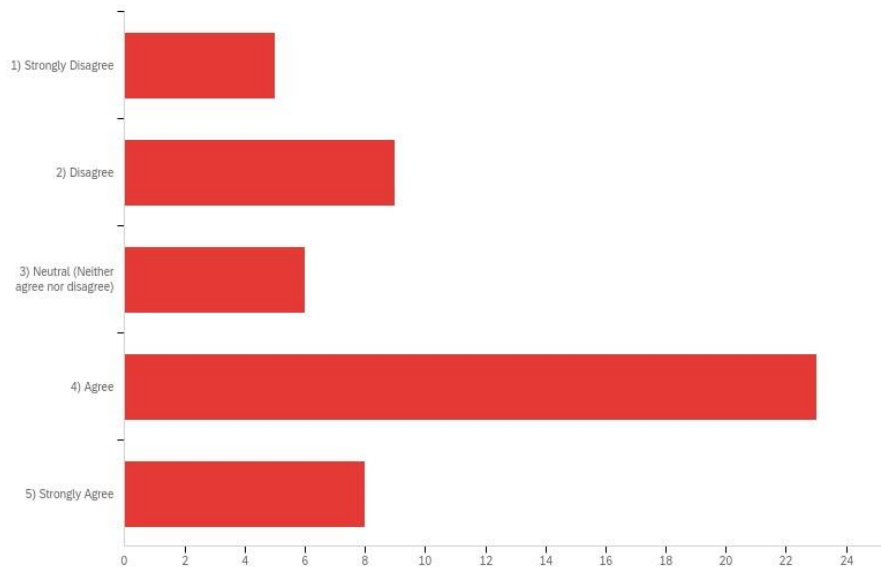


Figure 15

Question 2 Participant Commentary

Question 2, Part 2 Participant Commentary

Describe (optional)
I view my career trajectory positively, but not necessarily within this organization.
I've been passed up for promotions while newer employees have promoted quicker
I'm confident I could progress to any desired level. I've not been interested in progressing past the level where I currently am.

For the question regarding diversity and whether diversity of the company board mirrors that of upper management, 51 participants responded to the survey; 19 or 37.25%, the largest portion of respondents, disagreed that diversity within their company's executive suite mirrors that of upper management; 13.73% or seven participants strongly disagreed that their executive suite mirrors that of upper management within their organization; and 15.69% or eight respondents remained neutral. However, 15 or 29.41% of the respondents agreed with the question that diversity within their perspective companies mirrors that of the upper management, with two or 3.92% of participants strongly agreeing. Figure 16 is a visual representation of how C-Suite executives may mirror diversity in comparison to upper management. Figure 17 is the commentary from participants who decided to provide specific feedback regarding the question about diversity and whether diversity of the company board mirrors that of upper management.

Figure 16

View of C-Suite Executives on Diversity

Question 3, Part 2 - I believe the diversity within my company board (C-Suite executives) mirrors that of the upper management of the organization.

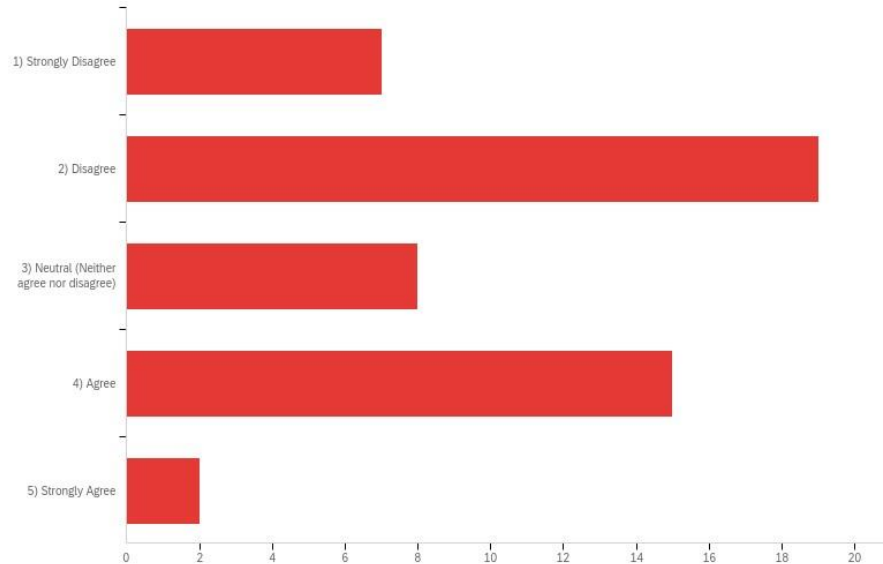


Figure 17

Question 3 Description (Optional)

Question 3, Part 2 Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I don't know
The board does mirror the upper management.
It is predominantly white
There is no racial diversity only gender diversity
There's diversity in other levels of management, but not in the highest level of the organization.

Fifty-one participants responded to the survey question regarding significant barriers, and most of the respondents agreed that there are significant barriers that diverse employees experience when attempting to join the executive board; 45.10% or 23

participants agreed, and 29.41% or 15 respondents strongly agreed; 15.69% or eight respondents remained neutral; and four respondents or 7.78% disagreed with the question. Only one or 1.96% or the respondents strongly disagreed that there are significant barriers that diverse employees face when attempting to join the executive board room. This is consistent with the direct response from Question 3, Part 2 in which participants answered from their own experience regarding the C-Suite in their organizations. Figure 18 is a visual representation of significant barriers that diverse employees experience when attempting to join the executive board room. Some direct participant feedback “is predominately White” and “no racial diversity only gender diversity” alludes to the fact that work within the diversity suite still needs to be addressed. Feedback related to the significant barriers that diverse employees experience are detailed in Figure 19.

A total of 51 respondents answered this question of the survey regarding racism and impact on career trajectory; 31.37% or 16 participants agreed that racism has influenced their career trajectory; seven or 13.73% strongly agree that racism has influenced their career trajectory; 19.61% or 10 of the survey participants remained neutral when compared to the responses from other participants; 23.53% or 12 participants responded they disagree that racism has had an effect of their career trajectory; and 11.76% or six respondents strongly disagreed that racism has affected their career trajectory. Figure 20 is a visual representation of how participants believe racism has had an effect on career trajectory. Some participants chose to provide direct feedback, and their recorded responses are detailed in Figure 21. Figure 21 is direct feedback or participant commentary regarding the effect of racism on career trajectory.

Figure 18

View of Significant Barriers

Question 4, Part 2 - I believe that there are significant barriers that diverse employees experience when attempting to join the executive board room.

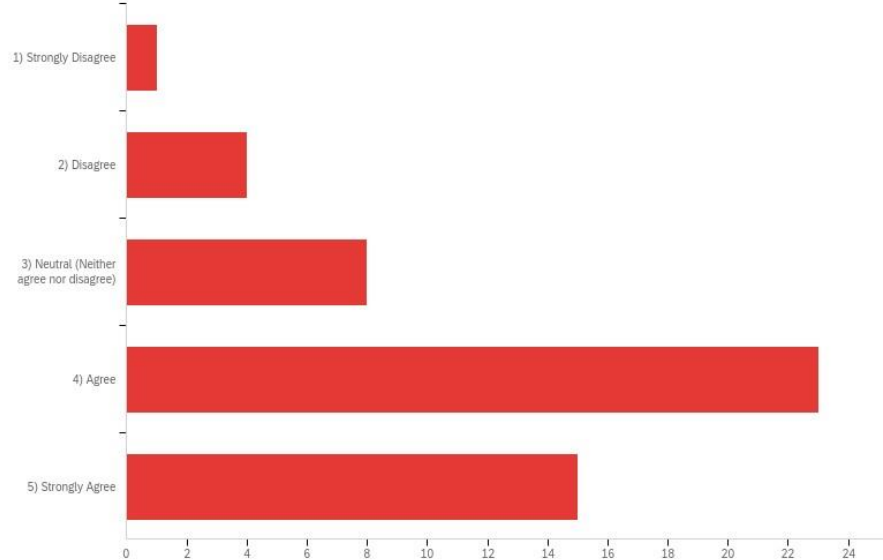


Figure 19

Question 4, Description (Optional)

Question 4, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I don't know.
Lack of mentors, intimidating walking into a room w/only white people
As a black man constantly overlooked
My CEO stated there isn't a diverse pool of candidates to fill the highest levels of the organization. This shows his ignorance of what options are available.

Figure 20

View on Racism

Question 5, Part 2 - I believe racism has had an effect on my career trajectory.

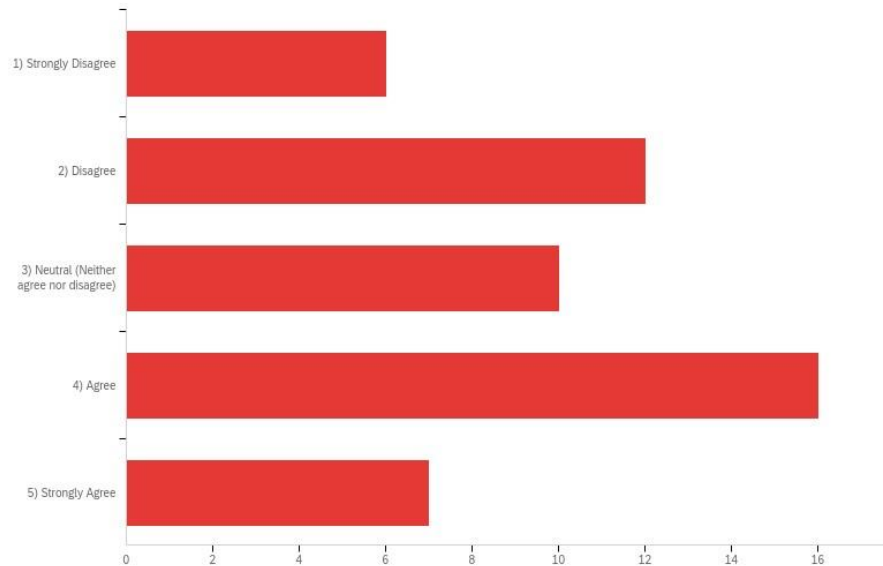


Figure 21

Question 5, Description (Optional)

Question 5, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I strongly agree because of the privileges that I have as a white man are a result of racism, not that I have experienced racism.
I don't believe it's racism, as much as it's sponsorship.
I feel like I've had the benefit of the doubt since I'm a white male. I'm kind of the default of a lot of managers
I've not experienced any form of racism in my career.

A total of 51 survey participants responded to this question regarding expression of opposing views without a fear of consequences; 35.29% or 18 agreed that they feel

comfortable expressing opposing views to leadership without the fear of negative consequences; 9.80% or five participants strongly agreed with the question; 25.49% or 13 participants neither disagreed nor agreed with expressing opposing view to leadership; 17.65% or nine participants disagree that they can freely express opposing view with fear or negative consequences; and 11.76% or six participants strongly disagree with the question pertaining to expressing opposing views to their leadership without the fear of negative consequences. Figure 22 is a visual representation of participant feedback of how individuals can express opposing views to leadership without fear of negative consequences. Figure 23 is direct feedback or commentary.

Figure 22

Expression of Opposing Views Without a Fear of Consequences

Question 6, Part 2 - I can express opposing views to leadership without fear of negative consequences.

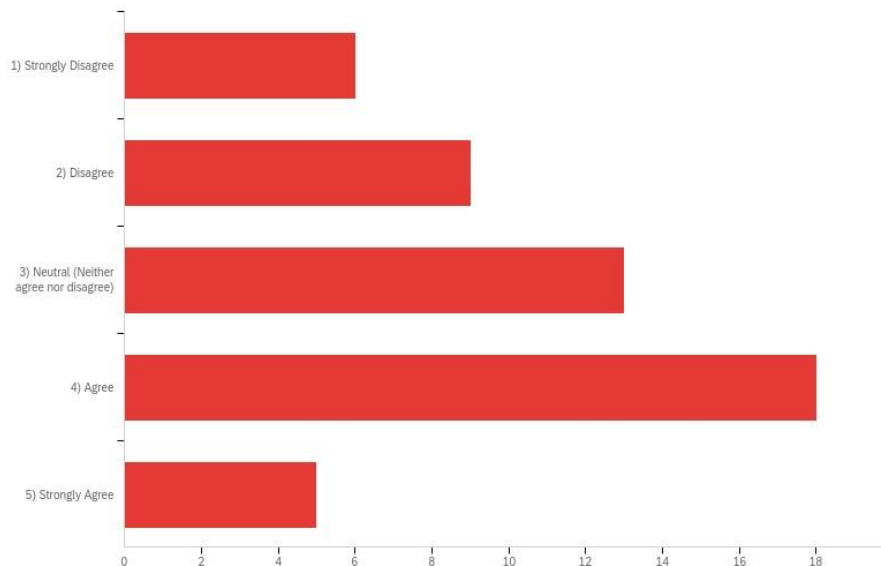


Figure 23

Question 6, Description (Optional)

Question 6, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
Within limits and with whom I'm speaking
Yes, but to a point. If I only complain without offering solutions or if I complain too much I will be viewed negatively.
Up until my current leadership, I've been in sync with the company values. The current management doesn't have my confidence or trust, but I feel this can be said to them without fear of retaliation.

Fifty-one participants responded to the survey question regarding participants' belief that racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around them; 33.33% or 17 participants agreed that racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around them, and 15.69% or eight participants strongly agreed that racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around them. However, 21.57% of respondents remained neutral indicating neither disagree nor agree that racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around them; 25.49% or 13 participants disagreed that racism has influenced the career trajectory of those around them; and only two or 3.92% of the participants strongly disagreed that racism has affected the career trajectory of those around them. From the results, the researcher opines that racism has influenced the career trajectory of those around them while possibly influencing the career trajectory of the participants as well. Figure 24 is a visual representation of participants' belief that racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around them. Direct feedback from participants pertaining to this question is detailed in Figure 25.

Figure 24

View on the Effect of Racism on Career Trajectory

Question 7, Part 2 - I believe racism has had an effect on the career trajectory of those around me.

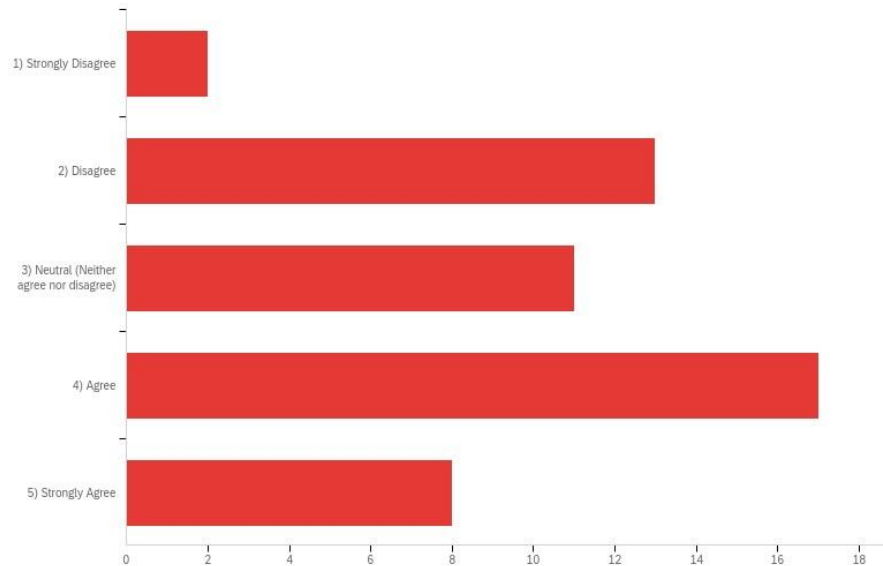


Figure 25

Question 7 Description (Optional)

Question 7, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
People are naturally attracted to those who are most like them and give them a subconscious benefit of the doubt. If there aren't people of color in high positions at a company it makes it harder for people of color in lower positions to get the mentor ship and training necessary to climb the ladder.
I've not witnessed or experienced racism in my organization.

Referencing the ethnicity and the level of comfort when discussing ethnicity at work, the survey revealed that 29.41% or 15 participants strongly agreed that they are

comfortable discussing their ethnicity with colleagues; 39.22% or 20 participants indicated that they agree, or they can discuss their ethnicity with colleagues at work; 11.76% or six participants remained neutral; and 11.76% or six participants disagreed and feel that they do not have the ability to discuss their ethnicity with their colleagues. Only four or 7.84% of the participants strongly disagreed with the position of discussing their ethnicity or cultural background with colleagues at work. Figure 26 is a visual representation of how comfortable survey participants are with discussing their ethnicity with colleagues at work. Some participants offered direct feedback which is listed in Figure 27.

Figure 26

View on Open Expression of Ethnicity or Cultural Background

Question 8, Part 2 - I am comfortable discussing my ethnicity (or cultural background) with my colleagues at work.

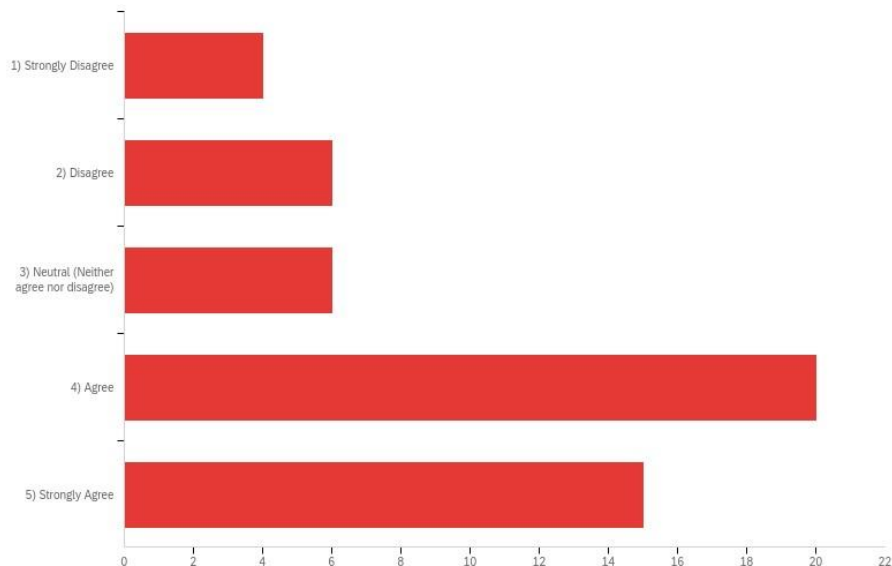


Figure 27

Question 8 Description (Optional)

Question 8, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I don't hold back on discussing my ethnicity and cultural background with my work colleagues. If it makes one of my colleagues uncomfortable for whatever reason, then that's an area for discussion about their biases and not a reflection on me.
As a white male I feel shame in the way that people of color have been treated in the past and I realize that it's a sore subject for a lot of folks. I wish there was something I could do to atone for the mistakes of my past ancestors. Maybe there is but it sometimes feels like a subject I just need to leave alone. But the other side of the coin is that we are all one human family, and we can enjoy and appreciate our differences too. So, there is room for discussion.
To a certain extent and with version people
I'm a proud Jamaican and happy to express this.

For this question, 51 participants responded regarding the work environment that is free and open to the expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs; 49.02% or 25 of the respondents agreed that they work in an environment that is free and open with the expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs; 15.69% or eight respondents strongly agreed with this position as well. However, 13.73% or seven participants remained neutral, and 19.61% or 10 of the participants disagreed that their organization creates an environment for the free and open exchange or expression of ideas, opinions, or beliefs. In addition, only 1.96% or one participant answered as strongly disagree from their experience that their organization does not provide an environment for the equal exchange of ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Figure 28 is a visual representation of the work environment that is free and open to the expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Some of the participants chose to provide direct feedback on this question which is listed in Figure 29.

Figure 28

View on Open Expression of Ideas, Opinions, and Beliefs

Question 9, Part 2 - The organization I work for provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs.

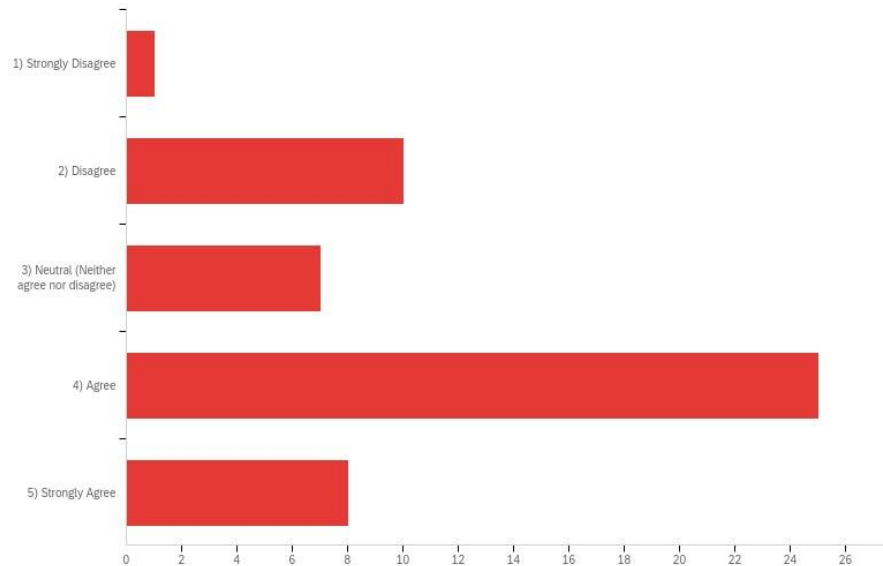


Figure 29

Question 9 Description (Optional)

Question 9, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
On paper, they want free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs. When these ideas are expressed, they are either shot down or "heard" then ignored. As a queer man of color, this occurs almost daily for me.
States this but environment has been otherwise
Only if you agree with the popular idea or opinion

A total of 51 participants responded to this question of the survey regarding challenges in the area of diversity; 47.06% or 24 of the participants agreed that their

organization has challenges in diversity; and 13.73% or seven participants strongly agreed with this position. Only four or 7.84% of participants had a neutral response or neither agreed nor disagreed with this question. However, 23.53% or 12 participants disagreed that their organization has challenges in diversity, and 7.84% or four participants strongly disagreed that their organization has challenges with diversity.

Figure 30 is a visual representation or view of challenges in the area of diversity. Figure 31 is direct feedback from the survey participants who chose to provide additional feedback.

Figure 30

View on Challenges in the Area of Diversity

Question 10, Part 2 - The organization I work for has challenges in the area of diversity.

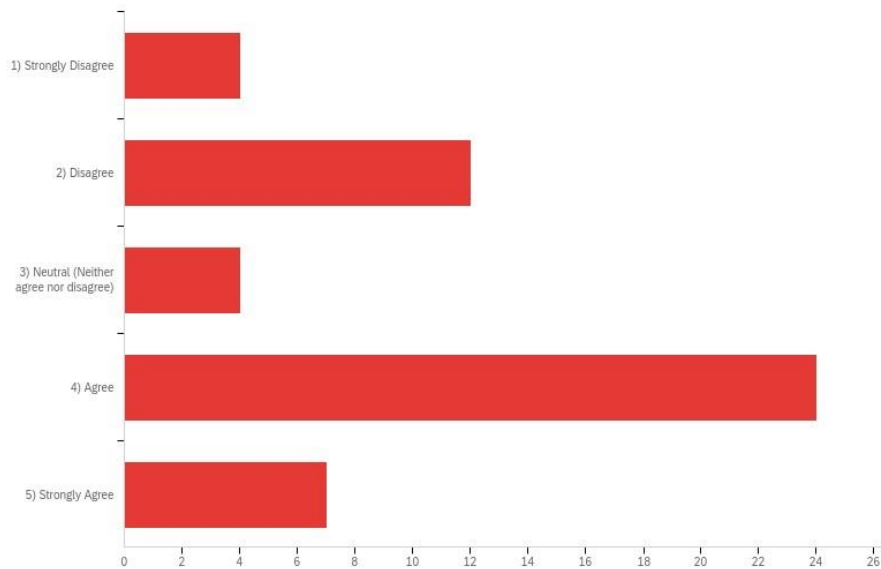


Figure 31

Question 10 Description (Optional)

Question 10, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
Upper- level management is very White and male
Agree because all American organizations have challenges in this space, but I do feel that my organization does much better when compared to others.
Would be nice to see more minorities and women in higher positions
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is a priority for everyone within my organization, including the highest levels of the organization.

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding the C-Suite and how it values diversity; 43.14% or 22 participants agreed that their organization C-Suite executives value diversity; 11.76% or six participants strongly agreed that their organization values diversity; 27.54% or 14 participants answered neither agree nor disagree with the question of their C-Suite valuing diversity. However, 15.69% of the participants or eight individuals disagreed that the C-Suite within their organization values diversity. Only 1.96% or one participant strongly disagreed that the C-Suite within their organization values diversity. The participants who chose to leave direct feedback regarding C-Suite diversity provided thoughtful insights indicating that more work that goes beyond the pretense needed to be done within Fortune 500 companies. Figure 32 is a visual representation of how the C-Suite in the participant's organization values diversity. Participant feedback on this question is detailed in Figure 33.

Figure 32

View on C-Suite and How It Values Diversity

Question 11, Part 2 - The C-suite within my organization values diversity.

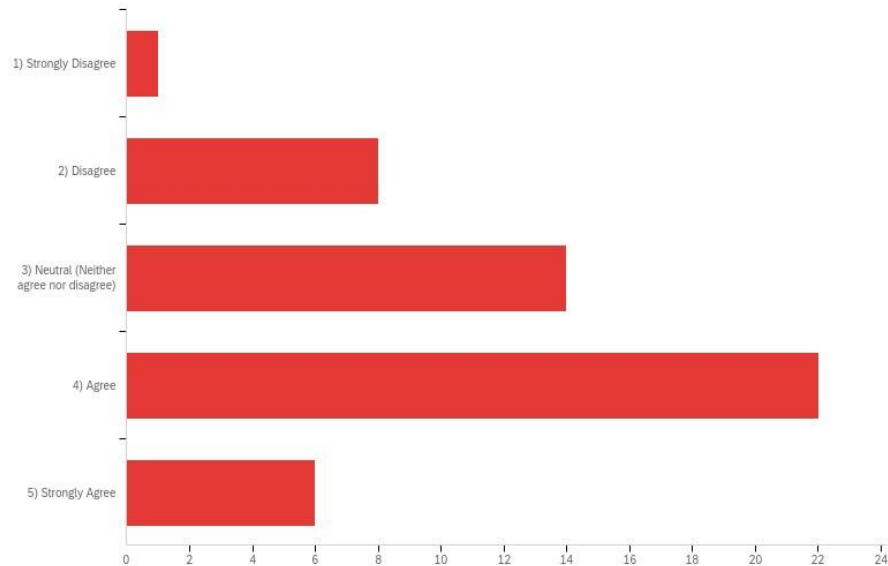


Figure 33

Question 8 Description (Optional)

Question 11, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
They value diversity, but there are not many diverse voices in the Gsuite, so it's difficult to actually tell.
so, they say, but those aren't reflected in the reality of the demographics of the organization
The organization seems to be making an effort for diversity, but it's feels more like a publicity stunt than an actual change.
They def have the best intentions. Sometimes they miss the mark, but they try
They talk diversity but don't actually enforce it
They've stated this is a priority and provide resources for themselves abs the entire company.

A total of 51 participants responded to this research question regarding the viewpoint on unique challenges women face regarding diversity; 49.02% or 25 agreed that women face unique challenges in Fortune 500 companies; 27.45% or 14 participants strongly agreed that women face unique challenges regarding diversity in Fortune 500 companies; 15.69% or eight participants remained neutral by answering neither agree nor disagree; 5.88% or three participants disagreed that women face unique challenges pertaining to diversity in Fortune 500 companies; and 1.96 or one participant strongly disagreed that women face unique challenges related to diversity in Fortune 500 companies. Only one participant chose to provide direct feedback to this research question. From this participant lived experience, women are treated differently than men in certain situations. Figure 34 is a visual representation on the unique challenges that women face in regard to diversity in Fortune 500 companies. Direct feedback from this participant is noted in Figure 35.

A total of 51 participants responded to this question regarding ageism; 27.45% or 14 agree that ageism exists within their organization; 15.69% or eight participants strongly agreed that ageism exists in their organization. However, 27.45% or 14 participants remained neutral indicating they neither agree nor disagree that age discrimination exists within their organization; 25.53% or 12 participants disagreed that ageism exists in their organization; and three or 5.88% disagreed that ageism exists within their organization. Participants seem to be evenly split as to whether ageism exists within their organization. Figure 36 is a visual representation on ageism with organizations. Some participants chose to provide direct feedback, which is detailed in Figure 37.

Figure 34

Viewpoint on Unique Challenges Women Face Regarding Diversity

Question 12, Part 2 - There are unique challenges that women face in regard to diversity in Fortune 500 companies.

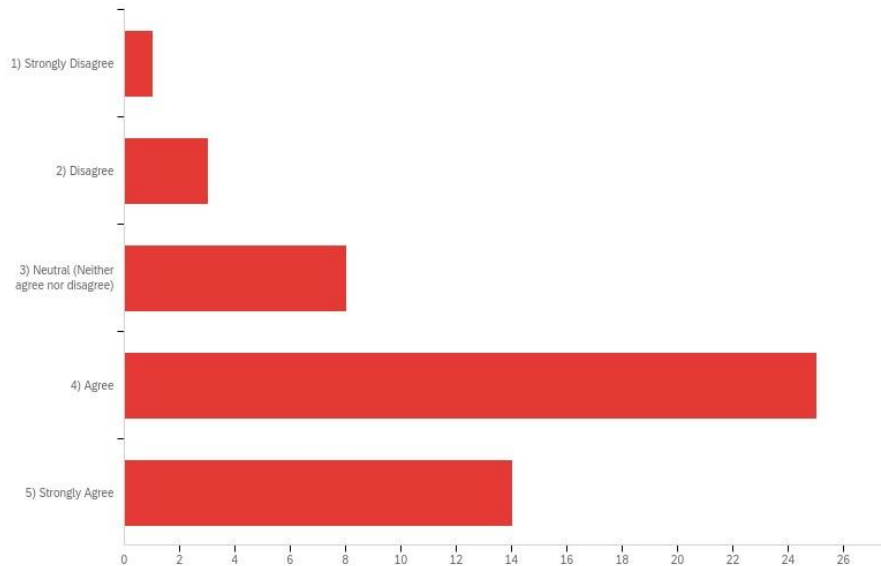


Figure 35

Question 12 Description (Optional)

Question 12, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)

It feels like women kind of naturally defer to men in certain situations. Idk if that's just how they were raised as children but sometimes if a man suggests an idea in a meeting it is given more weight, even if a women has suggested a similar idea before

Figure 36

Ageism

Question 13, Part 2 - Ageism (discrimination based on age) exists in my organization.

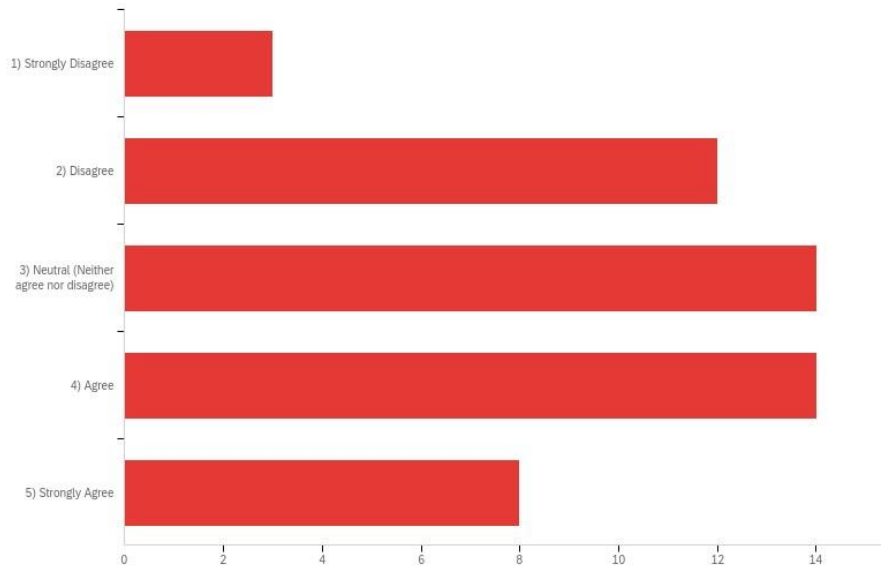


Figure 37

Question 13 Description (Optional)

Question 13, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
Most managers are in their 20-40s, we could use some folks in the 50-70 and beyond range
It is getting harder for me to move up and get offers
I've met a 79-year-old employee and I've seen individuals I believe to be elderly hired and promoted with my organization.

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding whether or not ageism has affected participants' career path; 29.41% or 15 participants disagreed

that ageism has affected their career; 19.61% or 10 participants strongly disagreed that ageism has affected their career; and 19.61% or 10 participants remained neutral indicating agree nor disagree that ageism has influenced the career path. However, 23.53% or 12 participants indicated that ageism has influenced their career path, and 7.84% or four participants strongly agreed that ageism has influenced their career path. Some participants chose to provide direct feedback related to how ageism might have influenced their career path. Figure 38 is a visual representation on whether or not ageism has affected participants' career path. Their direct feedback is listed in Figure 39.

Figure 38

Ageism Has Affected My Career

Question 14, Part 2 - Ageism (discrimination based on age) has affected my career path.

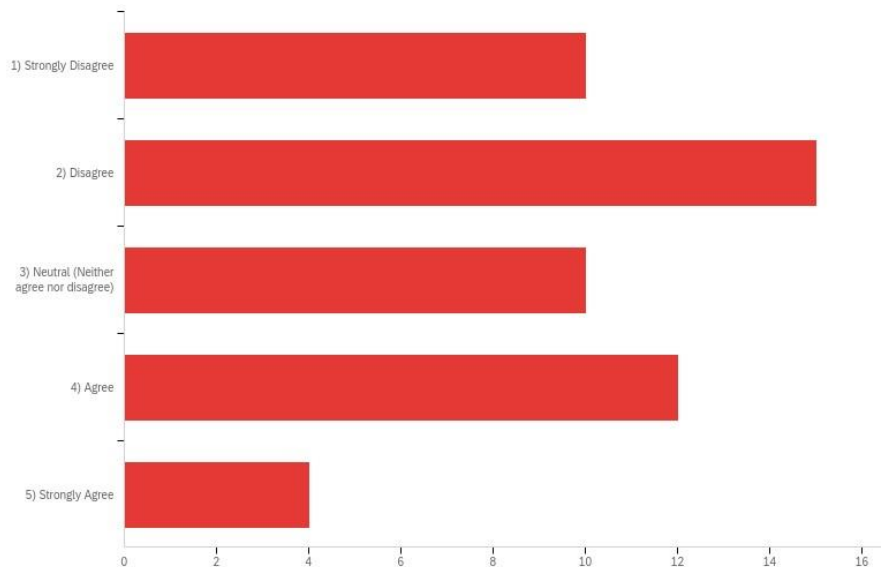


Figure 39

Question 14 Description (Optional)

Question 14, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I'm often perceived that I'm too young to know what I'm talking about. There have been many times where I have made suggestions to positions above me without regard. The same idea is later mentioned (in the same meeting) by someone older and is often well received.
I agree because of the privileges that I have as a young person are a result of ageism, not that I have experienced ageism directly..
I'm in my 30s and being younger I feel I've been given the benefit of the doubt a lot
I'm not considered elderly or young.

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding whether employee resource groups are effective within organizations; 33.33% or 17 participants agreed that employee resource groups (ERGs) are effective within their organization; 7.84% or four participants strongly agreed that ERGs are effective; and 33.33% or 17 participants remained neutral by answering neither agree nor disagree that ERGs are effective. However, 19.61% or 10 participants disagreed that ERGs are effective, and 5.88% or three participants strongly disagreed that ERGs within their organization are effective. The distribution of responses overall appears to be evenly disturbed with no response groups vastly outweighing the other. Figure 40 is a visual representation of whether employee resource groups are effective within organizations. Direct responses from participants are recorded in Figure 41.

Figure 40

View on Effectiveness of ERGs

Question 15, Part 2 - Employee resource groups, within my organization, are effective.

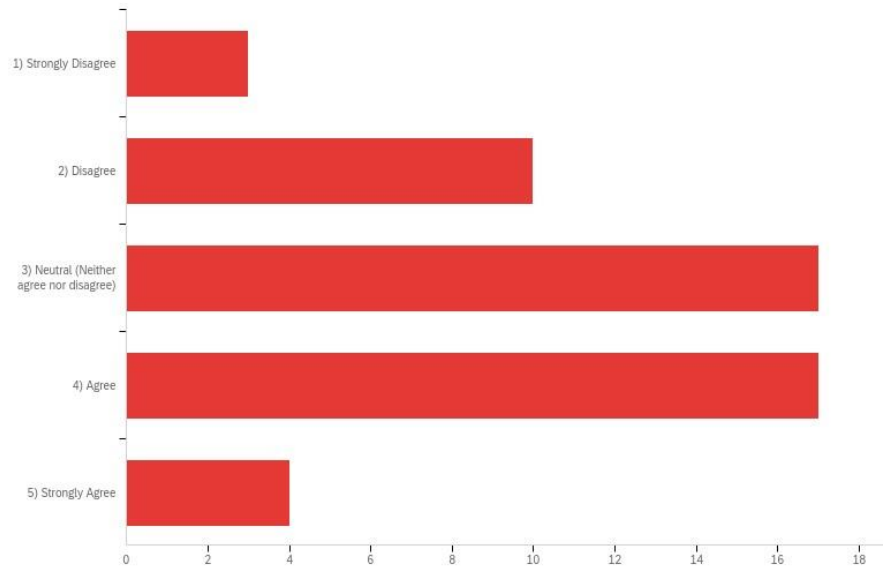


Figure 41

Question 15 Description (Optional)

Question 15, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I manage them so I hope so! (potential bias)
We do not have employee resource group.
Could be better. More resources and money
These groups have effected change within my organization.

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding transformational leadership and its effect on diversity; 43.14% or 22 participants strongly

agreed that transformational leadership influences diversity; 41.18% or 21 participants agreed that transformational leadership influences diversity; and 13.73% or seven participants remained neutral by answering neither agree nor disagree with the question of transformational leadership and its effect on diversity. Only 1.96% or one participant disagreed that transformational leadership influences diversity, and no respondents answered as strongly disagreeing. Overwhelming, about 84% of the respondents who answered this question agreed that transformational leadership influences diversity at Fortune 500 companies. Figure 42 is a visual representation regarding transformational leadership and its effect on diversity. One participant chose to provide direct feedback, which is detailed in Figure 43.

Figure 42

View of Transformational Leadership and its Effect on Diversity

Question 16, Part 2 - I believe transformational leadership (leading by example) affects diversity.

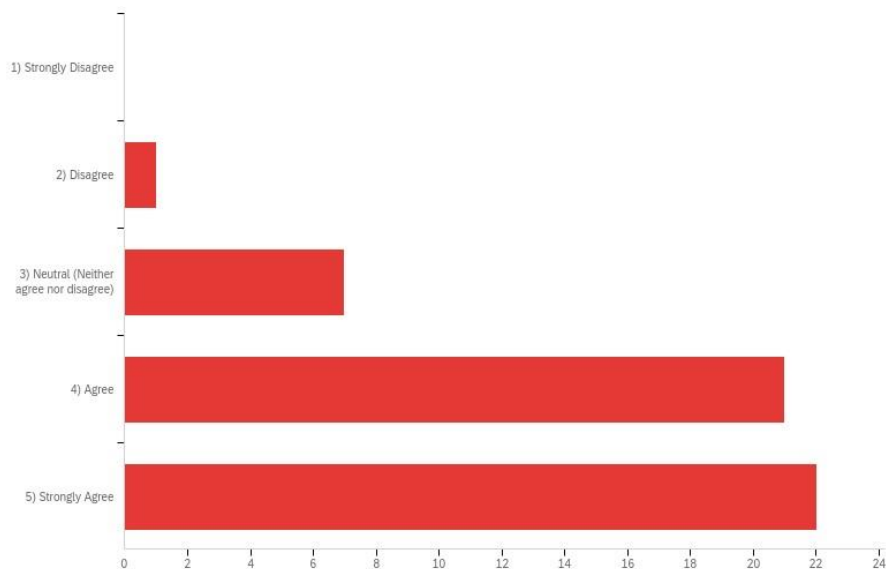


Figure 43

Question 16 Description (Optional)

Question 16, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)

Leading by example is everything. If the boss cares about it, it tends to happen, and vice versa

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding how diversity and inclusion are valued within organizations; 41.18% or 21 participants agreed that diversity and inclusion are valued at their organization; 17.65% or nine participants strongly agreed that diversity and inclusion are valued within their organization; 21.575 or 11 participants remained neutral by answering neither agree nor disagree; 17.65% or nine participants disagreed that diversity and inclusion are valued in their organization; 1.96% or one participant strongly disagreed that diversity and inclusion are valued traits within their organization. Two participants chose to provide direct feedback pertaining to diversity and inclusion. A revelation from the lived experience of one of the participants indicated that diversity and inclusion became an important value after the Black Lives Matter movement. Figure 44 is a visual representation of how diversity and inclusion are valued within organizations. The direct feedback is shared Figure 45.

A total of 51 participants responded to this survey question regarding whether or not diversity is important; 78.43% or 40 participants indicated they strongly agree that diversity is important, and 19.61% or 10 participants agreed. Only one or 1.96% or the participants answered as neutral. Therefore, the research indicates that diversity is extremely important to most of the respondents (98%). Figure 46 is a visual

representation of whether or not diversity is important. Direct feedback from participants regarding representation and the importance of sharing diverse attributes is noted in Figure 47.

Figure 44

View on the Value of Diversity and Inclusion Within Organizations

Question 17, Part 2 - Diversity and inclusion are valued within my organization.

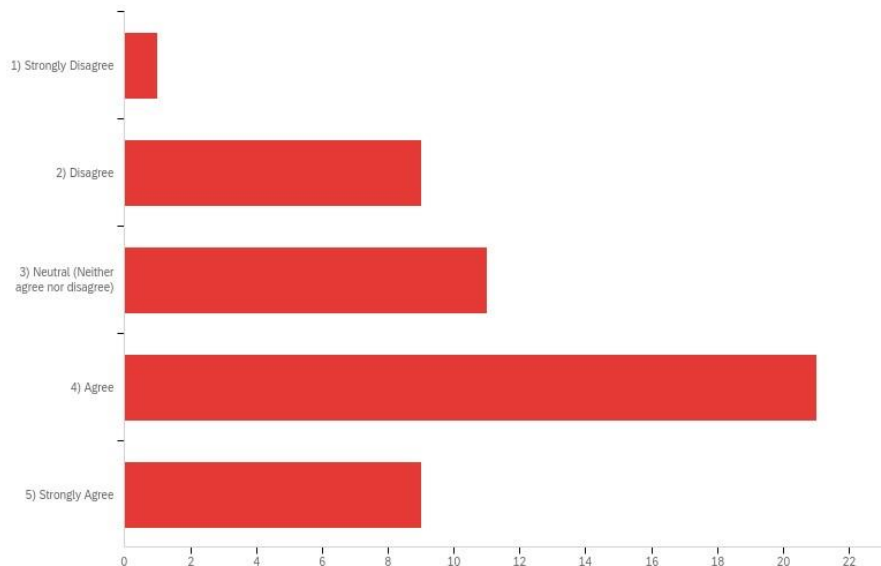


Figure 45

Question 17 Description (Optional)

Question 17, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
Currently yes but previously before BLM no
Again, they talk about it but don't do it

Figure 46

View on the Importance of Diversity

Question 18, Part 2 - Diversity is important to me.

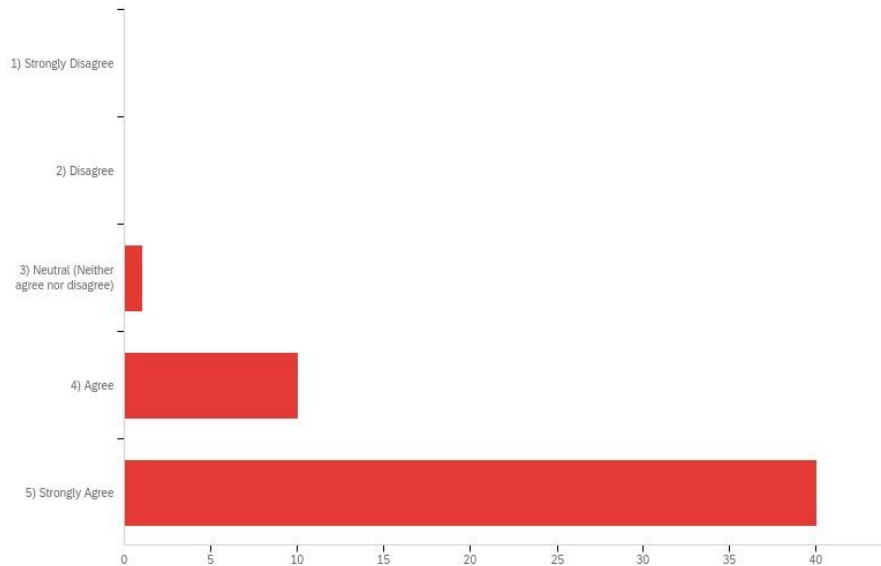


Figure 47

Question 18 Description (Optional)

Question 18, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
Representation matters
It's important for me to share my diverse attributes and to learn from others.

A total of 51 participants responded to this question of the survey regarding how managers handle diversity; 39.22% or 20 agreed that their manager or supervisor handles diversity matters appropriately; and 25.49% or 13 participants strongly agreed. However,

nine or 17.65% of participants remained neutral by answering neither agree nor disagree about whether their direct manager handles diversity matters appropriately and demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion; 11.76% or six participants disagreed that their manager handles diversity matters appropriately; and 5.88% or three participants strongly disagreed that their direct manager or supervisor handles diversity matters appropriately and demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Participant feedback was provided regarding the lived experiences of how direct managers handle diversity issues. Figure 48 is a visual representation of how managers handle diversity. Feedback of participants who provided commentary are detailed in Figure 49.

Figure 48

View on How Managers Handle Diversity

Question 19, Part 2 - My manager (or supervisor) handles diversity matters appropriately and demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

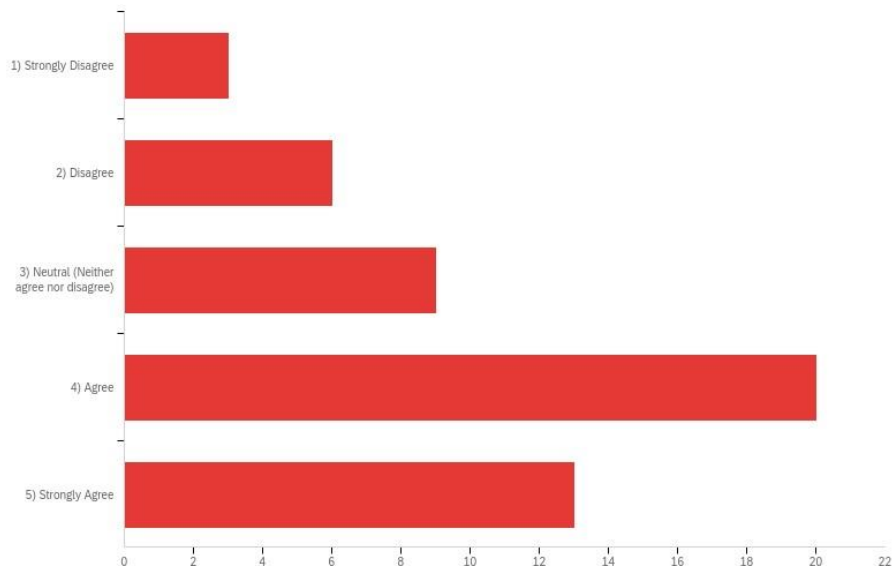


Figure 49

Question 19 Description (Optional)

Question 19, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
When I faced micro-aggressions at work and brought them up to my manager, I was made to feel that it was my fault. Later, my duties were scaled back under the guise of "development" while the aggressor was given an expansion of duties.
I'm the only non-white person on my entire floor so any matters dealing with diversity is not really addressed or talked about.

A total of 51 participants answered this survey question regarding leadership trust. Nineteen or 37.25% of participants remained neutral to answering this question indicating they neither agree nor disagree on whether they trust their leadership within their organization. Fourteen or 27.45% of participants agreed that they trust their leadership. Five or 9.80% of participants strongly agreed that they trust their leadership. However, 17.65% or nine participants disagreed with the question that they trust their leadership, and 7.84% or four participants strongly disagreed. Figure 50 is a visual representation on leadership trust. Some of the survey respondents offered direct feedback on leadership trust within their organization, which is posted in Figure 51.

Research Limitations

The researcher must develop an excellent rapport with the study participants to openly share their lived experiences in truthfulness. Researchers must also demonstrate a high level of empathy to reach deeper into the participants' vulnerability (Mihas, 2019). Vulnerability can be a challenge for the researcher because participants may not be fully transparent about their experiences within Fortune 500 companies.

Figure 50

Leadership Trust

Question 20, Part 2 - I trust the leadership within my organization.

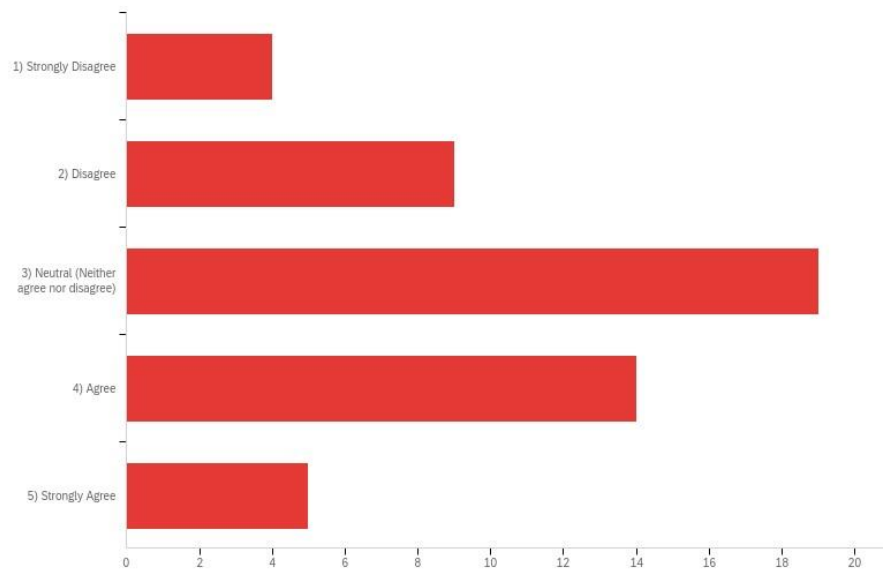


Figure 51

Question 20 Description (Optional)

Question 20, Part 2 - Describe (optional)

Describe (optional)
I trust some of the leadership within my organization
On some things yes. Others no
I've been let down a few times, so I trust with reservations
I'm fairly new. So far, I do but am starting to see things I don't agree with
The more I observe the more I distrust and have an unfavorable opinion.

Interviews, discussions, meetings, and any other method used to gather data in phenomenological research are all time consuming. When the study group is large, time can be limited, reducing the objectivity or accuracy of such research.

IRB approval for such a sensitive topic related to gender identity that affects minority groups directly may have had compliance issues to observe before final approval. For this reason, ideas and opinions obtained from interviewing remained confidential, and the findings of this research did not name any participant. This step of ensuring anonymity improves or protects this research from any legal or compliance issues from this research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Diversity management can be defined as a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued to reach their potential and maximize their contributions to an organization's strategic goals and objectives (Hayes et al., 2020). Diversity management consists of these validated steps designed to be strategically effective for organizations that desire inclusiveness. Diversity management must include top leadership commitment, diversity as part of an organization's strategic plan, diversity linked to performance, measurement, accountability, succession planning, recruitment, employee involvement, and diversity training (Hayes et al., 2020). There are several benefits for organizations that foster environments of diversity and inclusiveness. This type of organizational culture can attract, hire, and retain diverse employees, reduce employee cynicism about unjust organizational practices and policies, encourage productive and cooperative employee behaviors, and ensure that employees thrive in a continually evolving organization. One of the main benefits of inclusiveness is a climate that helps employees personalize their identities by thoroughly engaging with the organizational culture (Hayes et al., 2020). Effective leadership also includes team building and team collaboration. There are evident signs of managers who do not foster inclusive teams. Poor team building includes exclusion, favoritism, and interpersonal antagonism. These are good proxies for ramifications of a lack of commitment to diversity management, which suggests that commitment to diversity management is also an essential leadership function for individual managers. For organizations with intentional efforts, progress on diversity and inclusion has been made. The core focus of diversity programs can vary while

attempting to manage several workplace issues such as general stereotypes, workplace preferences, workplace biases, gender differences, and pay inequity, just to name a few. Last, corporations, organizations, and academic institutions have devoted significant time and dollars to address implicit, explicit, conscious, and unconscious bias. These types of biases have impacted how people interact with their coworkers daily. It is essential to recognize and address these biases to create a work environment that is free from harassment. Diversity management programs must be sustainable and address race and racism, culture differences, gender differences, inherent stereotypes, and other biases that could infiltrate the work environments. The following discussion expounds on some of these issues and connected themes as revealed from the research.

A large portion of the participants from the study identified as African American and identify in some form with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. From the researcher's perspective, insights can be gleaned regarding specific issues of African American professionals who identify with the LGBTQ community and the challenges this sexual minority face while attempting to matriculate to executive-level positions with Fortune 500 companies. The recent past has witnessed a significant rise in the visibility of the LGBTQ community. A considerable portion of the U.S. workforce identifies as LGBTQ. Mistreatment of the members of the minority group forces many to conceal their sexual orientation. Deciding whether to disclose their identities is accompanied by fear and anxiety because of the prevalence of stigma associated with LGBTQ identities (Webster et al., 2017). The lack of African American males self-identifying as LGBTQ in the executive level of the best performing firms leans toward the idea of systematic double discrimination of Black males in the

United States. The portion of African American CEOs managing Fortune 500 companies remains significantly low compared to non-Hispanic Whites occupying similar positions (Webster et al., 2017).

The following objects contribute to identity: sexuality and gender, race and ethnicity, faith or interfaith belief systems, and social class or socioeconomic status (SES). For LGBTQ individuals, many of these attributes are a continual evolution while they are hoping for equality (Clarke, 2019). Recent research points to the new notion that gender identity is not casually related to sexual desire, and both entities can stand alone as separate bodies (Clarke, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial that LGBTQ individuals have a clear understanding as to where they lie within the spectrum of queer identity. It is also important to understand the social forms of stigma, hatred, and prejudice that have an impact on LGBTQ identities and relationships (Clarke, 2019). Systemic injustice has an impact on social identity causing individuals to compromise, bargain, or hide who they are. In addition, for LGBTQ individuals, this type of injustice causes them to create facades or does not allow these individuals to flourish into who they are. These impacts are broad and wide, affecting personal and professional life.

Internalized heterosexism contributes to the lack of diversity in Fortune 500 companies. Internalized heterosexism refers to incorporating stigma against sexual minorities into one's self-concept as a product of social bias (Puckett et al., 2018). Internalized heterosexism may be influenced by social constructs and negative stereotypes or experiences encountered at various stages of life. These types of marginalizing events can have devastating impacts on the mental health and the social interactions of gay men who are struggling with self-identity or self-actualization.

Working through the emotional and cognitive toll of marginalization on one's views of their sexual orientation is one aspect of integrating a sexual minority identity (Puckett et al., 2018). Although there is growing acceptance toward sexual minorities, homosexuality is still considered by some as abnormal behavior regarding sexual orientation, and social bias is very prevalent within today's society. As a product of living within such social contexts, sexual minorities may experience the minority stressor of internalized heterosexism (also referred to as internalized homophobia, internalized homonegativity, or internalized stigma). Internalized heterosexism is associated with multiple mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, considering the undue pressures or influence to adjust to societal norms (Puckett et al., 2018).

From the analysis of the data, 24 or 47.06% of the participants did not identify with the LGBTQ community. This is not to say that these individuals had a negative view of this community. However, heterosexual attitudes toward ethnic minorities does have an impact on diversity. Heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals are a multifaceted issue. Although internalized homophobia inhibits certain behaviors of gay males, attitudes toward this marginalized group are a result of several underlying issues perceived through the lens of the heterosexual community (Davis-Delano et al., 2020). In a qualitative study, 52% of heterosexual participants reported concerns about experiencing unwanted romantic and/or sexual overtures from same-sex suitors as a primary reason for not wanting to be mistaken as a sexual minority person. This research study also reported that in extreme cases, homosexual individuals were murdered because of these advances or overtures (Davis-Delano et al., 2020).

However, there are varied reactions and attitudes toward homosexuality spanning social strata and all socioeconomic levels. Same-sex overtures may threaten group distinctiveness for heterosexual people by suggesting that suitors mistake them for sexual minority individuals and by raising contagion concerns via social contact. Therefore, heterosexual individuals place parameters or limitations on certain behaviors associated with sexual minorities (Davis-Delano et al., 2002). According to social identity theory, people form group-based identities through intergroup comparisons and evaluate their group more favorably than out-groups. Moreover, people are motivated to construct positive social identities through assertions of intergroup distinctiveness. Hence the need for various identities to be established through certain behavioral characteristics. Group distinctiveness refers to perceived dissimilarities between social groups on the relevant social dimensions. This relevant social dimension contributes to the overall negative stereotypes of gay individuals. Dominant individuals within the group are more apt to defend their gender identity position within the group by reinforcing social identity boundaries between themselves and the perceived individuals or group that is a threat (Davis-Delano et al., 2020). As a result, the researcher proposes that heterosexual people with higher levels of sexual prejudice and who desire to be perceived as gender-conforming will be more reactive to establish group distinctiveness through stronger negative reactions to same-sex overtures. For sexual minorities, there is a constant balance of attempting to regulate the perceived attitudes exhibited by heterosexuals while maintaining a constant defense mechanism for protection. Therefore, internalized heterosexism is a defense mechanism that many sexual minorities conform to by blending into societal social norms. Internalized heterosexism tends to bleed into sexual prejudice.

Sexual prejudice is defined as negative attitudes toward sexual minorities. The old-fashioned definition of sexual prejudice is defined as negative attitudes by considering that same-sex relations are immoral and inferior. However, the definition of sexual prejudice has changed over the years as gay rights have become more progressive. Modern sexual prejudice is defined by the negative attitudes toward the movement of equality for gay rights and equal representation (Davis-Delano et al., 2020). Expressions of sexual prejudice allow heterosexual people to distinguish and affirm heterosexual identities through unfavorable evaluations of sexual minority persons. Therefore, heterosexual people with sexual prejudice might be more inclined to assert heterosexual distinctiveness through negative reactions to same-sex overtures. These sexual prejudices show up through distinctive phobias or homophobic actions. Through this study, participants reported exhibiting hypermasculine behavior and feeling anxious around gay men. Some participants went so far as to express the fact that they do not allow gay men in their inner circle of friends. Gay men and heterosexual men have the same gender identity, but gender expression is different. Gay men are viewed as feminine and heterosexual men distance themselves to further assert their masculine identity to distinguish gender distinctiveness. This distinctiveness adds to the feeling of being ostracized, especially for gay men attempting to navigate the social strata in a modern world.

However, when defining sexual identity for queer individuals, identity is not static or confined within an identifiable box. Such identities are likely to shift over time or to contain multiple elements that are commonly imagined outside of LGBTQ communities to be mutually exclusive. Research shows that LGBTQ people often understand their

own sexual and gender identities as overlapping, incomplete, or in flux. This is due to factors that are at once personal and cultural, arising from shifting experiences of the self and processes of self-exploration, hetero- and cis-normative societal pressures, evolving concepts, and terms that emerge from within LGBTQ communities and queer understandings of identity as nuanced and individual (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020).

Gender expression has morphed into many forms, presenting new challenges of acceptance from the heterosexual community. The traditional definition of gender represents a set of identities (not simply a “male” and “female” binary) that are at once culturally constructed and deeply personal. Transgender refers to individuals whose gender does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. Conversely, cisgender refers to individuals whose gender does match the gender they were assigned at birth. Nonbinary refers to individuals who do not identify as either men or women but whose gender identity falls outside the normative traditional definition of gender identity (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020). Identities are viewed as fixed within organizations. The growth of gay rights and social movement agendas have enlightened organizations to recognize queer identity as an important demographic. However, progress is slow regarding organizational culture and attitudes toward homosexuals in the workplace that properly addresses the conflict of gender identity and homophobia.

Although gender identity has been a challenge for African American gay males, gender expression aligned with femininity is a way that same-gender-loving individuals can connect through a greater level of creativity through self-expression. This refashioning one’s humanity and refusing to limit one identity to one kind of expression can make individuals vulnerable to negative attention, in public and in private (Avilez,

2019). For gay males who transgress the traditional lines of masculinity and femininity, the wrath of homophobia stigma can often be overwhelming although these lines may not be clearly defined. There is a constant interplay between masculinity and femininity for gay Black men. This interplay is often referred to as the dual possibilities as queer contingency describing a constant state of uncertainty that derives from the transgression of the protocols of gender expression. This means that the simultaneity of vulnerability and empowerment and the uncertainty that will prevail at any given moment constitutes the terrain of queer contingency.

Although both can be empowering to gay males, for Black gay males the stigma of masculinity is layered in deep-rooted religion and African American culture (Avilez, 2019). Existing research examines the lived experiences to understand both the costs and benefits of constructing masculinity with and through femininity with open expressions as individuals become comfortable with their own gender identity within the LGBTQ community. However, this open expression is not without cost and constant internalized speculation. The term *critical speculation* is used to describe the development of theoretical ideas about sexual minorities based directly from their individual observations of their social encounters with the heteronormative communities. Critical speculative knowledge is a way of moving through society for sexual minorities. Speculation characterizes the everyday chance taking that Black queer people do as they try to evade anti-Black racism, homophobia, and femmephobia. Adapting this survival strategy is an analytical approach used to fit into the social norms mainly as a protection mechanism (Avilez, 2019). The idea or definition of masculinity is typically observed during adolescence; many nonverbal cues are observed to define or shape the idea of what

masculinity is supposed to be in a normal society. For gay Black males, the idea of vulnerability can be intimidating as one questions the constant alignment of masculinity and feminine behavior. The terrain of queer vulnerability can exacerbate fear and deepen internalized heterosexual normative behavior for gay Black males. However, gender fluidity expressed through the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals is a source of vulnerability but also a source of strength as gender expression can be seen as a way out for marginalized sexual minority individuals. Black queerness and Black masculinity can be expressed from a multimodal point of view. The power of Black queerness transcending boundaries, defying protocols that define identity, bucking social regulations, and even liberating desire has become the main agenda for the Black LGBTQ community (Avilez, 2019). One must consider what the implications are when attributing so much power to this marginalized group and consider seeing the world without also accounting for social and psychic pressures that challenge Black queerness.

Racism also has an impact on diversity in Fortune 500 companies; 41.67% or 25 of the survey participants identify as African American. In addition, 27 or 52.94% of the participants identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Domestic terrorism and hate crimes are on the rise in the United States. The Pulse Night Club attacks, in which 49 individuals were killed and 53 wounded, became the deadliest attack on American soil since the September 11th terrorist attacks (A. Harris & Jones, 2017). People of color still receive most of the attacks against LGBTQ individuals. Considering this fact, ally solidarity is needed between queer and people of color activists. This solidarity should span leisure and professional settings. The intersection of racism and anti-queer hate was evident during this horrific time in Orlando. This flagrant display of homophobic,

transphobic, and gun violence fueled the debate on gay rights and access to guns in America. From the majority, the vitriol and hatred spewed from certain cultural corners. However, the liberation of any suppressed community will take allies from other marginalized communities like the Asian, Muslim, and African American communities (A. Harris & Jones, 2017). The Black Lives Matter movement has given rise to the issue of how minority lives are being forcefully taken by authoritative forces or terroristic acts. The #saytheirname campaign in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter movement started because queer lives have for so long been erased by state-sanctioned violence (A. Harris & Jones, 2017). After the Orlando mass shooting, a couple of interesting findings emerged. One of the things that Orlando's tragedy makes possible is the notion that the feeling of terror may be experienced differently in different circuits or different groups but may be exacerbated in queer groups (A. Harris & Jones, 2017). The state of paranoia is a constant state of normalcy as queer individuals navigate a heteronormative world. Paranoia has become a standardized posture taken in queer critique, and it thus has become routine rather than critical thinking. The paranoid move is always about a certain hermeneutic unveiling of an external threat. Such a move becomes routine, or numb repetition, and renders the paranoid subject unable to participate in the intramural protocol of a displaceable self-attentiveness (A. Harris & Jones, 2017). The intersectionality of minority groups and queer allyship is essential for the survival of queer identity within the 21st century. In fact, the progression of LGBTQ rights in part can be attributed to the partnership or allyship of individuals who support the cause of equal rights.

Existing literature establishes the fact that collective trauma has had devastating effects on the gay community (Kelly et al., 2020). Traumatic events such as legal attacks, racism, and homophobia, whether internal or external, can shift the trajectory of a gay person's life with lasting impact that lingers well into adulthood. Historical trauma has been categorized by numerous events shaping history. For people of color, such events as the American Indian genocide and forced removal from tribal homelands, hundreds of years of enslavement and second-class citizenship experienced by African Americans, and the internment of Japanese Americans in the United States are all examples that add additional perspective for how marginalized communities often face significant barriers. The concept of historical trauma has served as both a description of trauma responses among oppressed peoples and a causal explanation for them. Associated historical events tend to be profoundly destructive at a physical and/or emotional level and are generally experienced by many people in a community (Kelly et al., 2020). LGBTQ individuals' historical trauma provided the backdrop for the gay rights movement. When referencing cultural trauma, researchers list three aspects that define this phenomenon. First, the memory of the event or occurrence has negative effects. Second, the event threatens the community's existence or otherwise violates fundamental ideals that the community holds, and third, the memory is indelible or lasting (Kelly et al., 2020). Collective trauma for the LGBTQ community has often invoked painful memories of suppression because of the lack of inalienable rights. LGBTQ individuals are not seen as equal because of cultural norms, and sexual minorities do not fit within the traditional definition of gender identity. For cultural trauma to have a significant impact, the trauma must last through several generations.

Suppression of gay rights, workplace discrimination, gay stigma, homophobic hate crime, and the lack of opportunity to compete have been the narrative for gay Black males for generations. Exploring specific barriers, cultural trauma, internalized heterosexism, racism, and other challenges that affect African American men from matriculating within Fortune 500 companies at the executive level will offer new insights in this area of research. Cultural trauma within the queer community is derived from the lived experiences of individuals bound together by their sexual identity with various levels of trauma experienced at different phases of life. Since the 1970s, political activity seeking to restrict the rights of queer people at the state and local level has been nearly constant adding to the concept of collective trauma. Queer people are more likely than heterosexual people to experience victimization in the form of discrimination and violence. About 56% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in the United States have experienced verbal harassment, 50% experienced sexual harassment, and 44% reported experiences of discrimination (Kelly et al., 2020). Research also indicates that about 20% of sexual minorities of color have experienced a hate crime or an illegal act involving the intentional selection of a victim based on a perpetrator's bias. These actions are based upon prejudice against the actual or perceived status of the victim. Moreover, queer people of color are vulnerable to the negative effects of heterosexism from within their racial or ethnic communities. For this reason, this community builds a support system or network through resilience building through individual empowerment fighting negative stereotypes and legislation that is designed to roll back progressive measures. The resilience effort can also be attributed to the cultural trauma that was

experienced at the genesis of the AIDS crisis that affected the gay community in the early 80s.

Although the queer community is often thought of as a singular cohesive community of nonheterosexual and noncisgender people, it is more accurate to think of it as smaller nodes within a larger network of people with a shared minority status regarding gender and sexual identities. These smaller nodes have traditionally centered on racial and class entities (Kelly et al., 2020). For LGBTQ individuals of color, race has been a significant distinguishing factor that tends to set Black gay males outside the realm of the cohesive community network. The whitewashing of problems has been an issue for marginalized people of color because the lived experiences between ethnicities are different. The reinvigoration of attacks of gay Black men and people of color within the LGBTQ community calls for an honest look at the issues that holistically affect this community.

Homosexuality and Christianity have traditionally not been sanguine in terms of their relationship. Divergent views on morality have always pitted views of the progressive religious community and the LGBTQ Christian community. Although the Christian community has made significant progress on racism, the church has not evolved to be as accepting on the issue of homosexuality. Existing research frames racism and homophobia as forms of enmity or the state of being actively opposed to someone or something (Larsen, 2020). Racism and homophobia cause people to perceive themselves and one another primarily as members of a race or class rather than as having similarities as human beings. Other than hatred and sexual identity/orientation, the associative factors that make humans the same are relative in scope. Dualisms exist between racism

and homophobia where both are designed to attack, demean, and denigrate ostracized individuals who do not align to normal cultural expectations. Racism constructs race and color when sometimes using divisive epithets to divide shared humanity (Larsen, 2020). Racial stigma is at the heart of White supremacy and is ingrained in the minds of people who feel superior to one race or another. White supremacy, or the assertion of racial hierarchy, builds society on evasion and lies that point back to how Europeans viewed humans as property. The institution of slavery over 400 years ago allowed race to become central to America's identity and racial hierarchy to be integrated as the standard by creating value gaps based on race (Larsen, 2020). Christian identity translates the beliefs about the truth of Christianity into the intellectual, cultural, and moral values of Christianity. The issue then becomes how homosexuals who are Christian contend with conflicting views of holy doctrine. Homophobia consists of several layers in which homophobic naming attempts to construct minority identities based on unjust stigmas. These naming constructs constitute sexual minorities as social enemies, simultaneously hiding their humanity and blaming them for the majority's menacing behavior.

The year 2014 was the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, and one of the main points contested at that commemoration was the desire for jobs for underemployed African Americans. Existing research indicates that African Americans were unemployed at twice the rate of Whites, a statistic that has unfortunately not changed in 50 years (Jones, 2014). The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act created passageways for employment and equal representation for African Americans to be represented in professional organizations by outlawing discrimination in the workplace. Although some African Americans benefited from the Civil Rights Act, millions of

Blacks saw their economic situation worsen as jobs disappeared and government support for affirmative action programs and enforcement of workplace discrimination laws waned or were never enforced (Jones, 2014). As educational opportunities become more accessible to minorities, specifically African Americans, educated Blacks have gained access to companies that have been traditionally controlled by White men. However, the access to executive-level positions and opportunities to compete for senior-level positions were designated to an inner circle of close colleagues that held decision-making power. However, significant challenges for Black professionals exist and have illuminated the dimensions of how racial inequality operates and persists in the 21st-century workplace (Jones, 2014). Racial integration is crucial to reversing the effects of segregation. Racially diverse networks benefit from larger social networks by exposing individuals to opportunities that would not be known otherwise. However, this racial integration is still a challenge for Black professionals within the workplace. Existing research indicates Black men tend to negotiate their identity as a numerical rarity in the workplace, alter their presentation or mannerisms, manage their behavior and emotions, and control their relationship with peers while within the workplace (Jones, 2014). These are only a few examples of intersectional pressures of identity that Black men use as adaptive strategies.

According to Kanter's theory of tokenism, tokens experience heightened visibility in the workplace because they are the numerical rarity and appeal to the dominant culture to fit in (Jones, 2014). African American men were more likely to support and maintain friendships with women and other Black men. However, race and gender complicated these relationships and Black men were likely to distance themselves from certain social situations with White women. This brings to the forefront the complicated historical

relationship between Black men and White women (Jones, 2014). Within the workplace, there are three distinct roles that Black men get cast within the workplace. First, the role of “super brother” by which Black men are noticeably more credentialed and have more expertise than their counterparts. Second, the “imposter” predicates that Black men cannot be a part of a professional workplace. Third, the “race represented” in which Black men are the token representative of diversity for the entire organization (Jones, 2014). Throughout all these types of casting roles, Black men must signal and adopt certain strategies that reinforce that they belong to organizations. The intersections of race, gender, and masculinity are always at play for Black men as they navigate their responses in a professional work environment. There is no amount of legislation that can fix the corporate culture of organizations. Black men still face substantial obstacles as working professionals in organizations. Senior managers and executive directors must work to dismantle stereotypes and work to change the trajectory of organizational culture to be more inclusive and tolerant of underrepresented minority groups.

The issues of LGBTQ rights are not only issues domestically, but some of the most contested and controversial issues about gay rights and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals are a global complex issue. Using the Mokken scale analysis by examining 175 countries, Lee and Ostergard’s (2017) research indicated that LGBTQ people face the greatest levels of discrimination in Africa and Asia and the least amount of discrimination in Western states, Europe, and North American regions. In other countries like Africa, homosexuality is prohibited or forbidden. Cross-nationally, in comparison to the United States, there are state laws and societal laws that prohibit homosexuality. Although progress has been made that could send cues that

discrimination against LGBTQ individuals is on a decline, the picture of LGBTQ rights globally is dismal. Small victories within the United States are optimal; however, more work must be done on the global stage to equal protection globally to ensure the rights for all LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ people have faced and continue to face discrimination rooted in homophobia across multiple areas of political, economic, and social contexts. Homophobia and discrimination manifest through formal institutional arrangements and informal, social institutional arrangements (Lee & Ostergard, 2017). Homophobia defined as the fear or hatred of homosexuals may be too broad in scope. This term does not include the implications and consequences of actions that include hostile brutality and openly oppressive behavior exhibited toward gay individuals. In some countries, criminalization of homosexuality is the law and punished consensual homosexual activity is the standard. Rights of individuals are denied, including the right to marry, blocked access to the benefits and privileges associated with unions, disrupted LGBTQ activities related to freedom of association and expression, and discrimination regarding access to governmental services including education, employment, health care, and housing (Lee & Ostergard, 2017). Social identity theorists focus on discrimination and the integrated threat theory of prejudice. Societal groups are formed through social norms in which individuals are categorized by specific attributes of their identity by which they are aligned. In the integrated threat theory of prejudice, individuals also form networks between and within groups to order the differences and similarities they observe in one another and to gauge acceptable and nonacceptable norms of behavior from their perspectives. However, comparisons between groups and labels can create frictions, especially if there is a lack of understanding regarding the differences between groups

(Lee & Ostergard, 2017). Integrated threat theory also states that negative attitudes are formed toward the out-group as the in-group does not recognize or accept the “abnormal” behavior of the out-group. Heterosexuals have historically perceived homosexuals as inferior, primarily by way of the symbolic threats. Symbolic threats refer to the in-group’s perception that the out-group contradicts their own cultural, moral, and traditional belief systems. These symbolic threats are due to the lack of procreation that homosexuals cannot biologically do and the perceived gender-bending roles that challenge the traditional definition of male and female (Lee & Ostergard, 2017).

The religious community also adds to the levels of discrimination that LGBTQ individuals face. Church doctrine in most denominations that are nonaffirming does not support or affirm homosexuality. Gay Christians who actively attend church services are often exposed to rhetoric that is not in agreement with their personal lifestyles. Religiosity is also linked to authoritarianism, which aligns with traditional or conventional structures. As a result, the out-group may be ostracized because of the lack of conformity to traditional norms (Lee & Ostergard, 2017).

By comparison, the elderly are less likely to be accepting of homosexuality. Age is often a measure of the transitions that occur between more liberal and conservative attitudes and how the attitudes shape the outlook on sensitive or controversial issues. Prior studies have highlighted the aging-stability and impressionable-years hypothesis, which suggests that individuals are more inclined toward and susceptible to shifts in attitudes regarding social or political issues when they are young (Lee & Ostergard, 2017).

There are many reasons for this underrepresentation pertaining to the LGBTQ community. First, sexual orientation is generally understood to be a concealable identity unlike gender and race, which can be highly visible. Many individuals within the LGBTQ community choose not to disclose their identity and adopt identity management strategies to conceal their sexual identity. The narrative must be changed regarding the importance of LGBTQ issues. Traditionally, LGBTQ issues are not given the highest priorities. The larger issues of marriage equality and military equality have gained national prominence. Therefore, these issues have thwarted the issues of workplace discrimination related to LGBTQ individuals (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Second, the number of LGBTQ individuals are underrepresented in census data. Because of the fear of harassment and discrimination, LGBTQ individuals do not report household data to the U.S. Census Bureau. Third, LGBTQ scholars may choose not to write on issues pertaining to homosexuality, gender identity, or other issues pertaining to the LGBTQ community out of fear of being stereotyped. However, authors who study marginalized groups can help change societal prejudice, promote equality, and support social justice for LGBTQ individuals (Ng & Rumens, 2017).

In the early 1970s, the focus was on the pernicious effects of homophobia and workplace protections. However, the landscape of diversity and inclusion has evolved into rights for not only LGBTQ individuals but also for women, Asian Americans, disabled persons, and other minority groups like African Americans and Hispanics. This evolution is a result of a direct challenge to affirmative action. LGBTQ individuals were initially excluded in affirmative action efforts, which seek to improve the representation of marginalized groups (i.e., women, racial minorities, indigenous peoples, and persons

with disabilities) in the workplace (Ng & Rumens, 2017). For corporations to take the next step on inclusiveness, policies must be developed to address sexual minority issues to drive organizational change. This change must be inclusive of harassment policies, consideration of domestic partner benefits, preparations to resist hatred and resistance within the workplace, and the commitment of leaders to be allies within the workplace although their personal beliefs might not align (Bell et al., 2011). It is no secret that allyship can be a challenge for individuals who may not have a deeper understanding of the issues that affect LGBTQ individuals. The LGBTQ community has parallel beliefs that gay rights should be separated from religious viewpoints within the workspace. This means that heterosexism should be treated no differently than homosexuality as individuals should have access to equal rights, equal pay, and growth opportunities within the workplace. The most salient and effective way to level the playing field has been through the emotional support of allies who have created inclusive environments for LGBTQ employees (Bell et al., 2011). However, in traditional organizations where gender roles are structured, gender conformity may be the expected norm for LGBTQ individuals. Although there are many examples of discriminative practices within the workplace, creating an environment of inclusion and diversity is relevant as people consider the basic human rights of LGBTQ people. Although there is the autonomy of choice and whether employees desire to disclose their sexual identity, managers play a crucial role in managing diversity that is visible. It is suggested that managing invisible diversity is just as crucial as managing visible diversity (Bell et al., 2011). The decision to disclose sexual identity in any setting can be challenging for the individual grappling with a life-changing decision while attempting to build trust. LGBTQ individuals might constitute a

sexual minority, but there is ongoing theoretical framework to understand diversity and concerns of this group. Inclusion and diversity policy and procedures should not be birthed out of coercion or pressure from the changing view of society, but these policies and procedures must be developed out of a true desire to effect change within organizations that seek to be inclusive of all individuals (Schmidt et al., 2012).

Although the researcher for the purpose of this study did not ask any questions pertaining to religion or religious freedom, it is important to understand how religious freedom can have an impact on diversity for marginalized communities. Title VII inadequately addresses religious freedom and the role this freedom has on impacting the decisions of managerial professionals within the workplace pertaining to LGBTQ individuals. Under current law, the possibility of managers firing employees for being transgendered or gay because of a manager's disdain and religious convictions may be covered or considered as religious freedom. Hence, many cases like *Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC* (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) blurs the lines between protections covered under Title VII and religious freedom addresses in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993 (Robb, 2019). This type of tension is prominent in a few high-profile cases capturing national attention and spurring debates between the LGBTQ community and the religious community. The Supreme Court's decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* is the highest profile example, and circuit courts have also faced this conflict concerning this issue (Robb, 2019; Robinson & Frost, 2017). Last year, the Sixth Circuit heard a case against Kim Davis, a state clerk who declined on religious grounds to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Also, in another case in which a secular business claimed it

could fire a transgender employee because of the person being transgender was against the religion of the business owner's beliefs (Robb, 2019). Through the lens of human resources, both cases had great implications of how LGBTQ individuals should be treated even when their coworkers' or employers' belief systems are antithetical. The perspective can be shifted depending upon how the case is analyzed whether from the antidiscrimination viewpoint or the religious freedom viewpoint. However, it should be noted that employees who suffer adverse employment consequences because their LGBTQ identities conflict with the religious beliefs of their employers have a Title VII right to be free from religious discrimination and religious harassment based on such an identity. Reverse religious discrimination claims allow employees to challenge adverse actions based on their failure to conform to their employer's religion (Robb, 2019).

In early summer 2020, the LGBTQ community experienced a significant win through the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the landmark civil rights law barring sex discrimination in the workplace applies to gay, lesbian, and transgender workers (Robb, 2019). The decision was written by Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch, Chief Justice John Roberts, and the court's four liberal justices. However, Associate Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, and Brett Kavanaugh dissented. Their position to hold opinion or have divergent views from the majority has been consistent with their conservative viewpoints regarding several "hot" button issues. An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender because of certain traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex is a violation of Title VII (Robb, 2019). However, Congress adapted broader language when it came to protections for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace, making it illegal to rely upon a person's sex as cause for

firing the individual. Therefore, any employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law. This ruling from the Supreme Court will have greater implications for other pending litigation in other civil rights discrimination cases. The sweeping influence on federal civil rights laws barring sex discrimination in education, health care, housing, and financial credit are just a few examples that could be directly impacted from the ruling of the high court. Lawsuits pertaining to those laws are pending in lower courts, which are required to follow Supreme Court precedent (Robb, 2019). The cases that were represented in this ruling involved three cases from two men who identified as gay, and one person who identified as transgendered. The text of a 1964 civil rights law barring employment discrimination based on sex and whether that term should be understood to include sexual orientation and gender identity was the central question for the justices to rule upon. Through the ruling of the Supreme Court, they have acknowledged the American idea that every human being should be treated with respect and dignity and that everyone should be able to live openly and proudly as their true selves without fear (Robb, 2019).

Significant rulings in court cases have impacted and progressed the initiatives of LGBTQ individuals. The distinction between discrimination and sex has been traditionally narrowly defined by the judicial system. The narrow definition precluded the passage of Title VII, and despite the limited definition of sex, LGBTQ individuals have found success through court rulings by expanding the definition(s) of how sex is defined (Rotondo, 2015). In *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, the Supreme Court significantly expanded the traditional definition of sex by incorporating discrimination based on noncompliance with gender stereotypes into Title VII's prohibition on sex

discrimination (Rotondo, 2015). The plaintiff, Ann Hopkins, was rejected for partnership at an accounting firm because her employer felt she was too masculine and needed to “walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry” (Rotondo, 2015, pp. 108-109). The Court determined that denying Hopkins’s partnership because she failed to comply with gender stereotypes was discrimination based upon sex or gender (Rotondo, 2015). This opened the door for other cases related to LGBTQ causes that relied upon the definition and ruling from this case. LGBT plaintiffs have relied on Price Waterhouse to argue discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and this is in fact discrimination based on noncompliance with gender stereotypes, and therefore protected within Title VII’s prohibition on sex discrimination.

Many corporations have enacted policies and procedures as safeguards to comply with the definition of protected individuals as defined by Title VII. Although the LGBTQ community is not a protected class on the national level, progressive corporate LGBT-related policies may be an extension of policies and practices designed to foster diversity and create equality for existing legally protected classes such as women, ethnic minorities, veterans, and those with disabilities (Steiger & Henry, 2020). There is growing momentum toward defining LGBTQ persons as legally protected classes in the context of workplace discrimination. The progress made by the Supreme Court regarding marriage equality paved the path to other victories for this marginalized community. Other than healthcare, the Obama administration now has a legacy for fighting for the rights of LGBTQ individuals through the efforts of marriage equality and other inequities influencing the passing of many individual city, county, and state employment

nondiscrimination laws (Steiger & Henry, 2020). However, landmark decisions such as *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which protected the LGBTQ community against workplace discrimination, according to the American Civil Liberties Union is “fragile” and subject to possible allowances for discrimination (Steiger & Henry, 2020). The fragileness is related to the concept of religious freedom, and the possibility of managers using their own discretions to fire or deny employments to individuals who are in direct conflict to their personal religious beliefs. Additionally, the FRA of 1993 may complicate matters, considering how these doctrines protecting religious liberty interact with Title VII are questions for future cases also (Steiger & Henry, 2020). Therefore, with intersecting laws and intersecting beliefs, progress must be well defined to protect all individuals of this community.

There is good reason, then, to include the LGBTQ community as its own protected class independently of sex, but this would require an act of Congress to create and establish laws for this protection. However, efforts to pass national legislation that would include sexual orientation and gender identity expression as a protected class, such as the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, have repeatedly failed in Congress despite multiple reintroductions in Congress (Steiger & Henry, 2020). Prior to the Supreme Court ruling on *Bostock v. Clayton County*, despite the lack of national protected class status for LGBTQ persons, some companies had already included LGBTQ workplace protections and benefits as part of their existing nondiscrimination and diversity policies. This designation for LGBTQ persons is a de facto protected class. However, this raises a question regarding the de facto protected class. Are the extensions of these workplace protections through corporations covered under the protected class legal framework? It

can be assumed that LGBTQ protections are a likely extension of the existing protected class framework within companies with greater prodiversity policies for legislatively designated protected classes. These protected classes are women, racial/ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans (Steiger & Henry, 2020). Companies are migrating more to inclusivity or diversity to gain a holistic view to accomplish organizational goals. It is important to recognize that the world is becoming more diverse, and the general make-up of organizations has shifted from the traditional sterile environment to a more collaborative approach. This approach allows individuals from different work experiences, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds to collaborate in solving some of the organizations more complex challenges.

Considering the positive correlation between diversity within the workplace and an employee's productivity (Hayes et al., 2020) and the responses of the survey participants, may require organizations to go beyond surface level diversity. Therefore, diversity within a workforce is not binary or categorical but rather can be thought of as reflecting a continuum anchored at one end by surface-level diversity. As mentioned earlier, surface-level diversity can be defined by sex, race, disability, age group. On the other hand, deep-level diversity can be defined as sexual orientation, SES, and spiritual belief systems (Hayes et al., 2020). Within organizations, diversity and an inclusion group are available for individuals to join at free will, and organizations must be willing to deal with surface-level diversity and deep-level diversity. This approach as it relates to diversity does not call for individual conformity of personal beliefs but possibly tolerance and acceptance of all individuals within their perspective organizations. Diversity and

inclusion enhance the capacity of all organizational members to perform at high levels, and this approach might be thought of as equitable (Hayes et al., 2020).

From the results of the survey and the researcher's perspective, transformational leadership could have positive impacts on diversity as discussed previously within this research. Transformational leadership style enlists subordinates' support and acceptance of the purpose and assignment through inspirational motivation and idealized or visionary authority. By investing in the growth and development of the followers, the leader hopes to win their trust and backing for the organizational goal (Chaudhuri et al., 2015).

In addition to precise and effective diversity management programs and transformational leadership, from the researcher's perspective, emotional intelligence can be utilized to supplement manager effectiveness pertaining to diversity. Morality and ethics should be the foundation that permeates throughout the organization. Qualities like determination, dedication, and extensive knowledge in a specific area of expertise may not be enough the lead people within 21st-century organizations. There are five key principles regarding emotional intelligence that leaders can employ to maximize performance to improve team dynamics. Emotional intelligence core principles of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills are the hallmarks of this model on leadership (Thory, 2016). This set of skills is highly differentiated from technical skills one might need to complete job responsibilities as an effective leader or manager. Change is inevitable within every organization, considering the global workforce is becoming more diversified. A leader must have the ability to transition with change without losing control of his or her emotions. This may require leaders to set aside personal convictions when leading a group of diversified individuals. Motivation is

a passion that is driven by caring and being connected to the assigned task. Motivation is not merely a gesture for money, but an energy and passion for improvement even in the face of failure. True leaders not only possess motivation but also have an intricate method to motivate all individuals by highlighting specific work qualities that complement the team and the organization. Empathy acknowledges the concern for others when making decisions as leaders. Decisions typically affect multiple business units within an organization. Last, leaders must have great social skills. Having emotional intelligence skills and a solid rapport with one's team will allow managers the ability to lead effectively while managing diversity and inclusion (Thory, 2016). The role of ethics should not be minimized in organizations but used as a teaching model in partnership with diversity management, transformational leadership, and emotional intelligence. Ethics is a set of intrinsic moral beliefs or values that guide moral behavior that should determine how leaders guide organizations. Ethics should advocate on behalf of the organization by determining proactive steps to prevent unethical behavior (Bishop, 2013). Ethical failures have a detrimental impact on the trustworthiness of organizations. Leaders must exhibit self-regulation by limiting implicit bias or attitudes toward individuals by avoiding stereotypes (Bishop, 2013). This research highlighted some of those biases that impact diversity. The juxtaposition of ethics and self-interest can be at odds daily. However, leaders should make sound decisions rooted in great values exhibited through transformational leadership, adherence to diversity management programs, and grounded in emotional intelligence.

Cultural perception of diversity and inclusion in Fortune 500 companies has been a challenge for leaders across various organizations. Considering the participant

feedback, leaders must consider strategic positioning that embraces minority causes with a true genuine interest in diversifying their workforce. However, culture within organizations is not transformed overnight. Therefore, the mentality and actions of leaders must attract and retain different talent with the intention of creating a culture of inclusion (de Souza & Gama, 2020). The interactions and cultural experiences of individuals require diversity management to be understood with various perspectives aside from the personal profiles of individuals. There may be a slight concern on how to install and guarantee an inclusive culture in companies to attract minorities. The goal of inclusion and equitable distribution is to ensure that all employees are treated fairly with equal opportunities and provided the opportunity for equal representation within various levels of the organization if desired (de Souza & Gama, 2020). The process of change must be guided by leadership, and leaders must understand the overall environment and people within their organizations. From the survey results, there is a desire for a strong relationship with the company's diversity and inclusion policies and an employee's perception of how connected the organization is with growth and development of the employee. The participants within this survey agreed that diversity is important. However, the survey also indicated that the leadership perception of diversity can be improved. It is imperative that the relationship between an organization's values, culture, and discourse coupled with the perception of its employees are aligned.

Although the term diversity is not new, the definition of diversity has evolved overtime. Diversity can be defined as human characteristics that distinguish individuals. Cultural diversity is contained in this concept dealing with the social system of how individuals are grouped (de Souza & Gama, 2020). Diversity can be further understood

through identity of a heterogeneous group composed of a group of diverse individuals with distinct characteristics. Concrete strategies for women, people of color, and marginalized individuals are sometimes employed to maintain social norms within organizations while pressing for genuine social change. The strategies may include involvement in corporate social responsibility programs, employee resource groups (ERGs), and strategic alliances with other employees that create a sense of belonging. Employees desire autonomy or the right to self-govern within organizations, but they also desire the leadership of managers and executives to act as moral agents while supporting diversity and inclusiveness (de Souza & Gama, 2020).

For marginalized individuals, the state of sensitivity or hyperconsciousness can be debilitating and presents a set of unique challenges. These challenges could be debunking racial stereotypes, gender stereotypes, or the balancing of traditional organizational corporate culture with modernized business practices. Therefore, platitudes about leadership and its effect on diversity, culture, and inclusiveness can be understood through the career experiences of individuals as their career trajectory unfolds. Leaders must be willing to examine deep-level diversity in depth to understand how racism, sexism, inequitable distribution of resources, and other formative issues have a profound effect in shaping the identity of people (de Souza & Gama, 2020). This research has attempted to move leaders beyond the myopic or short-sighted view by highlighting or exposing some of the issues faced by ethnic minorities in Fortune 500 companies.

The researcher suggests a future phenomenological, qualitative study where semistructured interviews are conducted to garner a deeper understanding to build upon

this quantitative study. A research design is a plan the researcher follows during sampling, data collection, and analysis of data. Beck (2020) also argued that the outline of research explains the relationship between all the study variables. A qualitative variable can also be known as a categorical variable, and it is not numerical. Qualitative data will emerge from the research that can be grouped into categories that serve as primary descriptors that will lead the researcher to familiar themes. These themes can be analyzed to understand the correlation between the variables. Qualitative research is subjective and structured by design, where the inquiry centers around the participants' life experiences. In future qualitative studies, the researcher can aim to explore the complexity, depth, and richness of the phenomenon in question (Beck, 2020).

Phenomenological research gives an account of lived experiences of the study participants. According to Dibley et al. (2020), apart from the spoken word, the researcher has the freedom to consider feelings, emotions, and perceptions presented through reactions showing anger, happiness, sorrow, pain, and sorrow, among others. Unlike narrative research designs, which focus on identifying the chronology of events, phenomenological research focuses on the connection between the participants' shared experiences (Beck, 2020). For instance, in this research, the researcher sought to know the similarities in experiences of ethnic minorities and the barriers faced when they attempted to excel as executives within Fortune 500 companies.

During data analysis and presentation, both empirical and hermeneutical perspectives to phenomenological research design apply. According to Beck (2020), in empirical phenomenology (also known as transcendental or psychological phenomenology), the researcher focuses on interpreting the participants' lived

experiences, but in the hermeneutical approach, the researcher emphasizes describing the participants' experiences.

The application of an inductive reasoning approach comes into play during the research process. The researcher's goal is to describe (not explain) the phenomenon as described by the study participants (Dibley et al., 2020). For this reason, the researcher should not form any hypotheses, preconceptions, or pre-given frameworks before collecting data.

Applying the qualitative phenomenological research design to this research was guided by the tenets of the grounded theoretical framework. According to this theory, a researcher must meet the following criteria. First, the researcher only makes an analysis or theory development after data collection (Mihas, 2019). Second, the researcher uses codes and memos to sort and group responses during data analysis. Third, note-taking must be part of the process to ensure the final write-up is as accurate as possible (Mihas, 2019). Fourth, the researcher should observe theoretical sensitivity to eliminate the use of words or messages likely to victimize or offend the participants. Finally, abstracts and conclusions must be constructed inductively.

The phenomenological research approach facilitates the development of new theories or hypotheses that explain social or psychological phenomena in society. This is an excellent addition to the research field because it ensures a continual change process regarding the study topic (Beck, 2020). Phenomenology uses an inductive research approach. It starts with identifying research questions, gathering data through interviews, interpreting the data, and finally developing a theory or conclusion.

A research problem is a social and psychological phenomenon. A social phenomenon is an internal or external factor that affects a person's behavior or opinions (Beck, 2020). The researcher's goal is to describe, not explain, the phenomenon described by the study participants (Dibley et al., 2020). For this reason, the researcher should not form any hypotheses, preconceptions, or pregiven frameworks before collecting data.

Qualitative phenomenological research identifies the common themes from the lived experiences of the research participants. The researcher can consider grounded theory if the research points to new revelations from thematic analysis from all data analyzed. Applying the qualitative phenomenological research design to this research is guided by the tenets of the grounded theoretical framework. According to this theory, a researcher must meet these criteria. First, the researcher makes analysis and theory development after the collection of data. Second, the researcher uses codes and memos to sort and group responses during data analysis. Third, note-taking must be part of the process to ensure the final write-up is as accurate as possible. Fourth, the researcher must observe participant sensitivity to eliminate the use of words or messages likely to victimize or offend the participants. Last, abstracts and conclusions must be constructed inductively (Dibley et al., 2020).

To fully understand the phenomenological experience of individuals, this researcher conducted surveys with participants from diverse backgrounds to record their lived experiences. As the research led, the researcher contacted participants for a greater detailed explanation regarding responses. The research aimed to unfold any challenges regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace by illuminating any barriers faced with

career accession. These mid-level to senior-level managerial professionals have extensive work experience in Fortune 500 companies and a desire to reach executive-level positions. Questions listed in the appendix were designed to capture the essence of the study.

Significance of Qualitative Phenomenological Research

A phenomenon can be an occurrence, event, situation, circumstance, or fact observed as it exists or happens in real-live experiences (Beck, 2020). A phenomenological approach to study gives a detailed account of how a person has experienced things from the first-person perspective. The phenomenological approach helps policymakers and other change agents to understand a social phenomenon better. This brings forth better solutions and change processes. Phenomenological research seeks to achieve the following. First, identify a shared experience. For example, in this research, “how being labeled as an ethnic minority has prevented qualified individuals from getting executive positions in Fortune 500 companies or is corporate hegemony a significant factor” is the shared experience. Second, the researcher attempts to identify what phenomena have been created by that shared experience through recording the participants as they explain, describe, and interpret their lived experiences (Beck, 2020). These two objectives bring a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon in question.

The use of phenomenological research design helps to expose secrets, evils, and hidden agendas in society. This can help to bring justice to the victims or survivors affected by those injustices. The participants are free to explain, describe, or interpret their experience fully without any conditions or limitations. According to Dibley et al. (2020), apart from the spoken word, the research has the freedom to consider the

participants' feelings. This approach facilitates the development of new theories or hypotheses that explain social or psychological phenomena in society. This is a great addition to the field of research because it ensures there is a continual change process regarding the study topic. Phenomenology uses an inductive research approach. It starts by identifying research questions, gathering data through interviews, interpreting the data, and finally developing a theory or conclusion. For this reason, the researcher is free from using or forming hypotheses, preconceptions, or pre-given frameworks at the beginning.

Discussion on Seminal Qualitative Research

Data Reduction

Data reduction is achieved through several strategies, including the following five methods. First, data deduplication is the process of deleting redundant information. Second, through data selection, relevant information is assembled and emphasized (Lochmiller, 2018). Third, data compression deals with transforming data files into manageable or sharable formats. Fourth, data organization files names correctly and groups them into similar categories for easy access and analysis. Last, data reexamination can also be done to determine whether all the relevant information was collected. In this study, the researcher had to listen to all the interview transcriptions to achieve this process's objectives.

At this stage, the researcher used an open coding method to break down the data into codes then group those codes into categories. Open coding, also known as inductive coding, is done from scratch because the researcher creates unique codes based on the

data (Chandra & Shang, 2019). All the codes derived from the dataset were recorded in a codebook.

Moustakas, the creator of heuristic inquiry, distinguished heuristic research from descriptive phenomenology as personal (Mihalache, 2019). Some researchers consider heuristic as personal and transpersonal. Therefore, the heuristic inquiry is a person-centered approach whereas the phenomenological method is a phenomenon-centered approach (Mihalache, 2019). Moreover, heuristic inquiry developed by Moustakas is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery, a way of self-inquiry, and dialogue with others to find the underlying meanings of important human experiences. The heuristic inquiry starts with the researcher attempting to understand the complex and personal experiences of the participants. In theory, the phenomenon might not be well understood, but the essence of the research design is the researcher's engagement through the discovery process. This type of phenomenological research method relies on the researcher's internal frame of reference but engages with others who lived through a common experience (Mihalache, 2019). The heuristic design employs a plurality of voices to cover as many facets of the experience as possible. According to the heuristic method, results are presented in individual depictions, a composite depiction, exemplary portraits, and a creative synthesis. The main researcher constitutes each data set comprising journals, interview transcripts, and alternative data into an individual depiction of the participant living the experience investigated.

There is the general assumption in qualitative studies that the researcher must remain neutral and commit personally even when dealing with impersonal topics. In the heuristic investigation, the researcher looks at the issue and himself or herself. However,

the focus is sharper and more intense with the intent not to enclose oneself in the research but to access an overall consciousness of the participants to understand the essence of the phenomenon (Brisola & Cury, 2016). This concept is in conjunction with Moustakas's line of thought about discovering the meanings and essence that are significant in human experiences. The researcher becomes involved in a way to perceive and understand the research findings in a new way. The researcher is invited to be the instrument through self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-investigation as integral parts of the research process (Brisola & Cury, 2016). The contribution to the heuristic method is the intrinsic method of the researcher. The effective incorporation of the researcher is subjectivity during the entire process.

The researchers are present during the entire investigation process by exploring their own experience and the experience of others to reveal the phenomenon. Therefore, the knowledge illuminates a real human problem related to the essence of the participants' lived experiences. There are six steps to heuristic research design. These steps include initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Brisola & Cury, 2016). Initial engagement must be rooted in the researcher's life in a personal way in which the researcher feels connected to the topic from personal experience. Immersion into the theme is when the research process is linked to the chosen theme through literature or the recall of personal experiences that contribute to the overall understanding of the theme. The immersion process allows the researcher to become intimate with the research questions but grow in knowledge and understanding of the overall phenomenon researched. Incubation is a break in the research process. During this phase, the researcher can develop new approaches, refine

proposed data, or develop new tacit dimensions related to the topic. Tacit dimensions are the inherited practices, implied values, or prejudgments that the researcher might integrate into the research process. Illumination is the revelation of the topic when the researcher starts to understand the relevance of the phenomenon through connected themes illuminated from the research. According to Moustakas (1994), illumination occurs when there is receptivity to tacit knowledge and researcher intuition. This means that the researcher becomes naturally aware of qualities and themes through connectedness to the overall theme in question. This new awareness is a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or a discovery that adds to existing literature beyond initial understanding or awareness.

Explication is achieved by focusing, indwelling, and self-reflection as the experiences become clearer in the research process. However, the researcher must be aware of personal feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding derived from the conversations and dialogues from the research participants. The final step of the heuristic method is described as the creation that emerges from the knowledge with the phenomenon and grows from tacit and intuitive dimensions. From this, the essence of the phenomenon being investigated is realized. This is the last step of the research process when creative synthesis can be derived and new theories can be developed from the research (Brisola & Cury 2016).

The researcher's involvement distinguishes the heuristic investigation to the extent that it becomes the focus of the investigation. This qualitative phenomenological study is standard, but the researcher must be warned not to fall into subjectivism. This research method requires rigor, integrity, and wholeness from the researcher's

perspective. For the researcher to be concentrated on his or her own personal experience does not mean the researcher is not profoundly open to the experience of the research participants. The researcher must be constantly challenged to suspend his or her own judgment to develop a deep understanding of the experiences of others (Brisola & Cury, 2016).

Furthermore, the heuristic design employs a plurality of voices covering as many facts of the phenomenon as possible. This plurality includes the researcher's voice, the participants' voice, and the specific accounts related to the phenomenon that was found within the literature (Mihalache, 2019). The heuristic method records and reports the individual experiences in composite depictions, individual depictions, or creative synthesis. The researcher is responsible for recording the research through journals and interview transcripts to record the participants' lived experiences accurately. From these experiences, the researcher groups the data that contain verbatim narratives and then thematically analyzes them to extract common themes and patterns as revealed by the participants' answers. Moustakas emphasized that phenomenology ends with the essence of the experience, and heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience (Mihalache, 2019). The difference stems from the individual portraits that the researcher depicts using the heuristic method or the totality of the essence from the related experiences of the research participants.

Phenomenological sociology is one of the most recognizable methodological approaches for explaining social behavior or social reality. Phenomenology was among the first philosophical disciplines in the field of sociology. Phenomenological sociology focuses primarily on the consciousness-related constitution of meaningful action, the

social and knowledge-based communicative construction of social reality, the problem of intersubjectivity, and understanding others (Gugutzer, 2020). This definition is within the same line of thought as that of seminal phenomenological author Husserl, who explained phenomenological sociology as the sociology of everyday life and knowledge. The emergence of new phenomenology, which some researchers believe to be an empirical science, is designed to rediscover those aspects of human life experience that have been missed or repressed by former phenomenological thought or theories (Gugutzer, 2020). Neurophenomenology endorses the idea that phenomena are embodied in the experiences of human life, and sociology has the responsibility to investigate the phenomenon. For this research, the researcher attempted to understand why ethnic minorities are not fully represented at the executive level within Fortune 500 companies and the specific barriers faced by these underrepresented minorities.

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology can be examined as a philosophical approach rather than a methodological approach for justifying truthful situations (Tassone, 2017). The internalist approach in epistemology is the philosophy of the subject. Husserl's conception of phenomenological methodology is the personal experience of self-transcending, justifying individuals' personal or lived experiences (Tassone, 2017). Therefore, many philosophers also view Husserl's writings as relevant to externalism rather than internalism in contemporary epistemology. The belief of mental states can demonstrate Husserl's meaning for transcendental phenomenology as permitting access to evidence by emphasizing that internal states are a necessary condition for helping to determine not only how reasonable beliefs are formed and but also how knowledge about the world is established (Tassone, 2017). Husserl's research

focused on the epistemological problem of how people obtain objective knowledge and how objectivity is connected to subjective sources. Husserl later expanded his analysis of phenomenological research to include temporality, intersubjectivity, and culture from a transcendental perspective. Husserl sought to provide a systemic approach to subjectivity and the essential role in the way objects and meanings are intuitive acts of fulfillment (Tassone, 2017). Husserl included consciousness within his philosophical phenomenological approach as he became interested in the human experience. African American gay males tend to live in an elevated state of consciousness because some males are hyperaware of social stereotypes and heterosexual norms placed upon the marginalized community. Therefore, the analysis from the participants' lived experiences provided the researcher insight into the consciousness experiences through memory recall through everyday shared experiences. In other words, reflections confer upon the underlying experiences of the research participants through the reflective process.

Regardless of the method used, individual depiction contains verbatim material from the participant's narrative. All depictions and portraits were thematically analyzed to extract common themes and patterns. The results could then be translated into a creative synthesis to create a new theory or theories as the essence of the research was revealed. Validity or credibility is established by questioning or reanalyzing the meaning of results (Mihalache, 2019). The researcher aimed to understand the phenomenological experiences of ethnic minorities to add additional insights related to the specific barriers this group faces while attempting to achieve executive-level status within Fortune 500 companies.

Data Display

Data display encourages text, diagrams, charts, matrixes, tables, and any other data organization method to achieve two things. One enables the analyst to identify new patterns and interrelationships from the data (Chandra & Shang, 2019). Two, data are represented in new ways to improve understanding. For example, when text is transformed into a flow chart, understanding becomes easy or simplified to understand the essence of the overall study.

In this qualitative study, Qualtrics analytics software helped the researcher create tables, charts, and all other data visualization diagrams used to display the data. This software was used for data analysis and data display.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

This stage involves drawing and creating meanings from the analysis results. It also involves finding answers to the research questions of the study. The researcher must verify all the conclusions using results attained from the data display and analysis processes (Lochmiller, 2018). The researcher must be able to prove the validity of the results by showing why they are credible, defensible, generalizable, and applicable.

Thematic analysis, like the Miles Saldana framework, finds common themes through the data analysis. The theory also identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). These common themes were revealed through the research shared by the lived experiences of the research participants. Thematic analysis is widely practiced in qualitative research, and this method seeks to develop new theories that emerge from the data. One requirement of thematic analysis in qualitative research from the researcher's perspective is deliberation through thoughtful and reflective

analysis of the data that is crucial to quality of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Rigor and integrity of the research is established through the interconnectedness of themes revealed. A guiding principle of thematic analysis for qualitative research design is coherence or fit when all the research elements come together. However, thematic analysis should be flexible because various themes could emerge throughout the research. Also, thematic analysis can be reflexive analysis that may include inductive and deductive approaches with various methodologies such as epistemology underpinning the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Knowledge with regard to methods, validity, and scope of the research investigation that distinguishes fact from opinion defines epistemology in research across many research fields.

Qualitative research is not rigorous because it follows a structured format or the correct data collection and analysis protocol. Qualitative research is rigorous if it is transparent about unexpected and surprising observations, leading the researcher to reorient the focus regarding the initial research interest. Therefore, the researcher is challenged by their initial assumptions and reorients the conclusions and analysis as the research reveals (Harley & Cornelissen, 2020). The researchers are challenged by their implicit biases throughout the research process and must remain transparent while transitioning from data analysis to theory. The researcher needs to establish rigor regarding the study. Rigor is a defining method of the research process and a defining step in the empirical research process. Qualitative research employs a variety of ontological and epistemology approaches with distinct criteria for analyzing and presenting data. Regardless of the research method chosen, the researcher is tasked with established rigor and creditability regarding the research topic, and the outcome of the

research is justified through rigorous analysis of the data. This means that researchers actively reason through theoretical inference and are reflective during the process (Harley & Cornelissen, 2020).

Rigor and trustworthiness within research continue to be challenged during certain aspects of qualitative research. Rigor is simply defined as the quality or state of being very exact, careful, or strictly precise or the quality of being thorough and accurate (Cypress, 2017). However, qualitative research is not stringent or confined to strict guidelines, allowing for some flexibility within the research process because of new findings from the data. Rigor can be further defined as the strength of the research design and the appropriateness of the method selected to answer the research questions properly. Rigor in qualitative methods is expected because of the possible subjectivity of the researcher. Trustworthiness is connected or linked to rigor and refers to the research findings' quality, authenticity, and truthfulness. Trustworthiness relates to the degree of trust or confidence that readers have regarding the results or conclusions drawn from the research (Cypress, 2017). Validity and rigor should be taken into consideration by qualitative inquiries while designing the study, analyzing the results, and developing theories that arise from the research. The concept of rigor must be woven throughout the entire process. If rigor is only considered at the end of the research process; the risk exists, and the research's validity could be called into question (Cypress, 2017). Validity is well-grounded, justifiable, relevant, meaningful, logical, or conformable to the principles of research that is reliable and sound. Validity is rooted in empirical research and is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of research findings. Therefore, validity and confirmation expound upon research that already exists, but the researcher is

allowed to make inferences to develop new theories from the data analysis (Cypress, 2017). For this research, the researcher intended to establish credibility by focusing on the accurate and truthful depictions of the participants' lived experiences through interviews. After the interviews, the data were triangulated to learn the context of the phenomenon. Data analysis was included in the triangulation process to categorize the data for final research findings. After triangulation and analysis, the data were transcribed to illuminate themes as they emerged.

To minimize researcher bias, reflexivity was employed as the researcher actively engaged in critical self-reflection about any potential biases and predispositions concerning the qualitative study. Through the process of reflexivity, the researcher was aware of potential biases through the process of self-monitoring through the awakening of the researcher's inner moral compass (Cypress, 2017). Bracketing is another technique the researcher can use during the qualitative research process to control bias. Bracketing is the attempt to withhold any previous beliefs about the phenomenon under study to perceive the question at hand more clearly during the research process. Standard validity techniques in qualitative research refer to design consideration, data generation, analytic procedures, and data presentation. Data can be analyzed inductively, and the researcher does not have a prior theory during the research process. However, the theory is expected to emerge through the fluidity of the research. Therefore, attending to rigor throughout the research process has significant ramifications for future qualitative research studies.

This research contributes to the existing literature on the topic of diversity and the challenges faced by ethnic minorities within Fortune 500 companies. The researcher attempted to address the following research questions in this quantitative case study.

RQ1: *How does the racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards compare to the U. S. population?* Based upon the quantitative research conducted in this study, the researcher can logically deduce that the racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards does not mirror the population of the United States. Therefore, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis and accept the (A₁) alternative hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis 1 (H₁): The racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards will mirror the population of the United States.

Alternative Hypothesis 1 (A₁): The racial profile of Fortune 500 company boards will not mirror the population of the United States.

RQ2: *Do minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies view their organizational career trajectory positively?* Based upon the phenomenological responses from the study participants, the researcher can logically deduce that the minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies view their career trajectory as positive. Therefore, the researcher can accept the null hypotheses (H₂) and reject the alternative hypothesis (A₂).

Null Hypothesis 2 (H₂): Minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies will view their career trajectory positively.

Alternative Hypothesis 2 (A₂): Minority management-track employees of Fortune 500 companies will not view their career trajectory positively.

RQ3: *Does the diversity within the Fortune 500 company board mirror that of the organization's upper management?* Based upon the phenomenological responses from the study participants in this quantitative study, the researcher can logically deduce that diversity within Fortune 500 company's board does not mirror that of most organizations' upper management. Research participants in this study indicate a level of upper management status. However, direct verbatim also indicates that corporate boards are still controlled by White men. Therefore, the researcher can reject the null hypothesis (H_3), and accept the alternative hypothesis (A_3).

Null Hypothesis 3 (H_3): The diversity within the Fortune 500 company board will mirror that of the organization's upper management.

Alternative Hypothesis 3 (A_3): The diversity within the Fortune 500 company board will not mirror that of the organization's upper management.

RQ4: *What identifying factors do diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies report as being a significant barrier to the executive board room?* Based upon the responses from the participants in this quantitative study, the researcher can deduce that there are significant barriers that diverse employees experience when attempting to join the executive board room. Some research participants reported racism, the lack of mentors, and the narrowed view of upper management not recognizing the need for diverse talent within the highest levels of the organization. Therefore, the researcher can reject the null hypothesis (H_4) and accept the alternative hypothesis (A_4).

Null Hypothesis 4 (H_4): Diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies will not report any significant barriers to the executive board room.

Alternative Hypothesis 4 (A₄): Diverse employees within Fortune 500 companies
will report significant barriers to the executive board room

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APPENDIX—PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

PART 1 : Demographics Survey

1. What is your gender? (Male, Female, Other)
2. What is your age? (Under 18, 18-14, 25-34, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, 85 or older)
3. Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin? (Yes / No)
4. How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply. (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Other)
5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (Less than a high school diploma, High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED), Some college (no degree), Associate, Bachelor, Master, Doctorate/Professional degree)
6. What is your marital status? (Single, Married (or in a domestic partnership), Widowed, Divorced, Separated)
7. I identify with the LGBTQ+ community. (Yes / No)
8. What is your current employment status? (Employed – full time, employed – part time, Unemployed and currently looking for work, Unemployed and not currently looking for work, Student, Retired, Homemaker, Self-Employed, Unable to work)
9. Do you work for a Fortune 500 company? (Yes / No)
10. What income group does your household fall under? (Less than \$20,000; \$20,001-\$40,000; \$40,001-\$60,000; \$60,001-\$80,000; \$80,001-\$100,000; \$100,001-\$125,000; \$120,001-\$150,000; More than \$150,000)
11. Current level of management. (Top Level, Middle Level, Lower Level).

PART 2: Diversity Survey

How would you rate the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 5 is Strongly Agree?

KEY: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1. The racial profile of my organization's board room mirrors that of the general population of the United States. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?
2. I view my organizational career trajectory positively. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. In what way(s) (optional)?
3. I believe the diversity within my company board (C-Suite executives) mirrors that of the organization's upper management. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?
4. I believe that there are significant barriers that diverse employees experience when attempting to join the executive board room. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?
5. I believe racism has affected my career trajectory? (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?
6. I can express opposing views to leadership without fear of negative consequences.
(1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?
7. I believe racism has affected my career trajectory? (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional)?

8. I am comfortable discussing my ethnicity (or cultural background) with my colleagues at work. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. In what way(s) (optional)?
9. The organization I work for provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
10. The organization I work for has challenges in the area of diversity. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. If so, what are some of the challenges? (optional):
11. The C-Suite within my organization values diversity. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
12. There are unique challenges that women face regarding diversity in Fortune 500 companies. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
13. Ageism (discrimination based on age) exists in my organization. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
14. Ageism (discrimination based on age) has affected my career path. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
15. Employee resource groups, within my organization, are effective. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
16. I believe transformational leadership (leading by example) affects diversity. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
 - a. Describe (optional):
17. Diversity and inclusion are valued within my organization. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

- a. Some values, concerning diversity and inclusion within my organization, are
(optional):

18. Diversity is important to me. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

- a. Describe (optional):

19. My manager (or supervisor) handles diversity matters appropriately and demonstrates a
commitment to diversity and inclusion. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

- a. Describe (optional):

20. I trust the leadership within my organization. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

- a. Describe (optional):