

Working in Interracial Vertical Dyads in Social Welfare Nonprofit Organizations:  
The Experience of Subordinates

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Mr. Walter H. Jackson, and my mother, Mrs. Gerald M. Jackson. Through your life examples and teachings, you have given me the strength, desire, and the will to step outside of my comfort zone in search of new experiences and knowledge. Thank you for instilling in me the incessant desire to be the best man, parent, sibling, spouse, and person that I can be. You are, and forever will be my heroes, role models, and sources of inspiration.

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“The hunger and thirst for knowledge, the keen delight in the chase, the good humored willingness to admit that the scent was false, the eager desire to get on with the work, the cheerful resolution to go back and begin again, the broad good sense, the unaffected modesty, the imperturbable temper, the gratitude for any little help that was given -- all these will remain in my memory though I cannot paint them for others.”

~Frederic William Maitland

## Abstract

### Working in Interracial Vertical Dyads in Social Welfare Nonprofit Organizations: The Experience of Subordinates

This study explored the lived experience of subordinates in interracial supervisor-subordinate dyadic working relationships in nonprofit social welfare organizations.

Although contemporary leadership theories explore leaders' traits, characteristics, skills, competencies of, and the relationship between leaders and followers, there is a dearth of empirical research that explores how followers experience racial differences with their leaders in hierarchical vertical dyadic working relationships in nonprofit social welfare organizations. This study provides insights toward improving the social capital generated from these dyadic working relationships, in the context of the organization and the community it serves.

The essence of subordinates' lived working relationship experience that emerged from the findings of this study indicates that subordinates will experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor based on the perceived influence that the supervisor's race has on the relationship. In other words, racial dissimilarity between subordinates and their supervisor influences the subordinate's perception of his or her working relationship with the supervisor, when the racial difference is perceived by the subordinate as an influence on the supervisor's behavior toward the subordinate.

The following four aspects of the lived interracial working relationship experience characterize the essence of the subordinates' experience: (1) subordinates make meaning of race differently, (2) the organization, or job, and/or peers influence the interracial working relationship between the supervisors and subordinates, (3) the

salience of racial dissimilarity is determined by subordinates' perception of its impact on the supervisor's relational behaviors, and (4) subordinates assess the quality of the working relationship based on perceptions of his or her supervisor's relational behaviors in light of the subordinate's expectations.

The understanding of the essence of the lived interracial working relationship has significant implications for practice that include implementing new, or enhancing existing approaches and strategies aimed to ensure effective and efficient interracial supervisor-subordinate dyadic working relationships that will allow for positive relational and organizational outcomes. The implications for research extend the existing body of knowledge with regard to influencers on interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships by conducting an in-depth exploration of interracial hierarchical dyadic relationships that has not been sufficiently examined before.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

When we interact with others, what do we notice about them, and how do our resulting perceptions shape our understanding, expectations, and experience of them? What inferences do we make when we perceive others to be similar or dissimilar to ourselves, and how do those inferences shape our experience of them, of others like them, of ourselves? Diversity-related research involving racism or other forms of institutional, interpersonal, or cultural discrimination is all-too-well known in our society and echoed throughout corresponding research literature.

Since the beginning of time, human kind has sought to understand and increase its knowledge of interpersonal diversity through a variety of means, and for a variety of purposes. Historical steps toward this understanding began with the study of cultures, culture-driven behavior, and culture-related phenomena. It is no surprise that many scholars consider the cultural anthropology field to be a byproduct of the “Age of Enlightenment;” a period in history where Europeans attempted to systematically study human behavior (Schultz & Lavenda, 2009). During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the study of indigenous populations became increasingly important, especially to explorers, international travelers, and conquistadores. Recording the lives and traditions of other cultures helped imperialists more effectively assimilate or subjugate indigenous populations in newly explored lands. As such, early writings and inquiries into human culture continue to evolve and expand in a number of contemporary disciplines (Schultz & Lavenda, 2009). In an ever-expanding world of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity, it has become increasingly important to explore and understand the

ways in which human beings experience those who are “perceived” as different from themselves.

In many, if not most organizations, supervisors and subordinates are assigned to each other based on staffing needs, skill set, technical abilities, or other organizational considerations. There is typically no consideration given to whether supervisors and subordinates prefer to work with racially similar others or not. This concept is particularly important, and somewhat common throughout workplace settings, given that many organizations base their productivity and continued existence on the collaborative working relationships of supervisors and subordinates (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997; Zane, 2002).

This is no less important in organizations that rely on the interaction of human resources to maintain or improve operational effectiveness, pursue strategic opportunities, or take advantage of competitor inefficiencies. In this regard, non-profit organizations in the United States are no exception. And while these collaborative working relationships are important for all organizations, they are particularly significant to nonprofits, due to their perpetual dependence on effectively and efficiently leveraging available resources to further and sustain their mission; monetary, human, and others.

In addition to their philanthropic contributions to society, nonprofit organizations have a significant impact on the overall U.S. economy with 1 out of every 10 American workers being a fulltime employee of a nonprofit business (Nonprofit Organizations, 2012). One type of these organizations that has a special impact on the wellbeing of our society is the “social welfare” or humanitarian nonprofit. These types of nonprofit

organizations are called upon to serve a wide diversity of constituents to address many challenges that require innovative approaches.

Since the constant flow of ideas and input from a diverse workforce helps ensure circumspect consideration of situations and infusion of new ideas, harmonious interracial working relationships in these organizations are crucial for achieving their mission (Larson, n.d.; Putnam, 2000; Weisinger & Salipante, 2005).

### **Problem Statement**

Perceived interpersonal dissimilarities, including, but not limited to gender, age, race, and other demographic characteristics, can lead to dysfunctional and at times counter-productive behavior (Valenti & Rockett, 2008). In many cases, group members attribute influence (or lack thereof) based on affiliation or ascription to either “in-group” or “out-group membership;” in-group members are those individuals perceived to be alike or similar to one’s self, whereas out-group members are those individuals who are perceived as dissimilar to one’s self. In-group and out-group designations have implications for group members’ sense of self-identity, access to power, and level of engagement with other group members, power distance, and a myriad of other group behaviors. Resulting dysfunction often arises from individuals perceiving themselves to be an out-group member to empowered or influential group members.

This assertion is supported by over a decade of group behavior research conducted in the U.S. suggesting that diversity among organization workgroup members can cause individuals to interact in ways that do not always result in positive group performance (Valenti & Rockett, 2008). As such, these individuals can experience

anxieties, trepidation, and/or anger regarding their perceived out-group status as a consequence of being different. In the aforementioned examples, diversity challenges reflect potential impediments to building positive social capital within organizations. Effectively managing, or attempting to overcome these impediments becomes integral to utilizing internal interracial dyadic working relationships to carry out the organization's mission.

Research suggests that workgroups that have positive relationships with their leader perform more effectively than those who have less than positive or dysfunctional relationships with their leaders (Pulakos & Wexley, 1983; Kraiger & Ford, 1985). Research also suggests that the leader's influence on group members' behavior has been positively correlated to the group's perceptions of the leader's contribution to the group goal or task, followers' loyalty to the leader, their respect for the leader, and followers' regard for the leader (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Truckenbrodt, 2000; Greguras & Ford, 2006; Northouse, 2007). However, the ways in which racial dissimilarity influences followers' interactions with their leaders has not been investigated within the context of nonprofit organizations,

### **Purpose Statement & Research Question**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived relationship experience of subordinates who are in working hierarchical dyads with racially-dissimilar supervisors in social welfare nonprofit organizations. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research question was investigated, "How do subordinates experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor?"

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study was informed by *Similarity Attraction Theory*, and *Leader Member Exchange Theory*. These theories incorporate aspects of human behavior based on influences of self-identity, consequent perceptions of others, and consequent relational behaviors. They provide a frame for understanding how individuals make sense of racially-dissimilar others, and how relational behaviors may result from perceived racial dissimilarity.

Originating in Austria and Germany during the late 1800s, Gestalt Theory asserts that the way in which we “experience” the characteristics of objects causes us to interpret or react to them in a given way (Wertheimer & King, 2005). This principle of Gestalt theory applies to all aspects of human learning, but is probably most applicable to the areas of perception and problem-solving (Wertheimer & King, 2005). Wertheimer and King (2005) noted five factors that determine perceptual grouping and called them the “Principles of Perpetual Organization.” These factors consist of Proximity, Alignment, Closure, Continuance, and Similarity.

Through the “similarity” factor, Gestalt theory provided basics concepts toward understanding how visually-cued characteristics of others can influence the perception-driven designation of another person’s race, and potentially evoke subsequent behaviors as an outcome of those perceptions. Just as early application of Gestalt theory attempted to explain cognition in its relationship to visual perception, subsequent theories have extended the application of Gestalt concepts from perception of the external [by the

actor] to internal. Among those theories is the phenomenon of “similarity attraction,” which is further described in Similarity Attraction Theory (SAT).

Through SAT, researchers were able to redirect attention from perceptions of the “other” to perceptions of the “self” in relation to the other (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Consequently, SAT explores individuals’ attitudes and behaviors resulting from interpersonal perceptions (of self in relation to others) and how those perceptions may or may not result in interpersonal affinity on the part of the actor (Byrne, Clore, & Worchel, 1966; Byrne, 1971). In fact, a simplified conceptualization of SAT is that it attempts to explain the phenomenon of interpersonal attraction based on perceived interpersonal similarities. SAT extends the “self” to consider in-group or out-group designation of others (Turner et al., 1987). SAT also examines *why* individuals are “attracted” to others who are perceived as similar. According to Burt and Reagans (1997), SAT suggests that demographic similarity among such characteristics as race and ethnicity increases personal attraction among individuals that are perceived as sharing those characteristics. SAT-related research has shown that in instances where individuals can freely choose with whom they engage and interact, there is a tendency for people to choose others whom they perceive to be similar to themselves (Stark & Poppler, 2009).

Tenets of the theory posit that an individual’s demographic similarity to those around him/her has influence on *that* individual’s attitudes and behaviors in a given context (Riordan, 2000; Chatman & Flynn; 2001; Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Chattopadhyay, 1999; George & Chattopadhyay, 2002; O’Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Hope Pelled, 1996; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui, Egan, & O’Reilly,

1992). Similarity Attraction Theory proposes that the more demographic similarity that exists between the individual and those around him/her, the more positive the individual's attitudes and behavior will be. This postulation is further contextualized in Keller's (2005) study as follows:

...individuals compare their demographic characteristics to those characteristics of the other members in their team or group to assess their similarity or dissimilarity to those individuals. When individuals perceive themselves as being similar to their teammates, they tend to show positive individual level outcomes, such as greater organizational citizenship behavior and psychological attachment and lower levels of turnover and perceptions of conflict. In contrast, when individuals perceive themselves as being dissimilar to their teammates, they tend to show more negative consequences on these same outcomes. (p. 2)

While Gestalt theory provides an approach to understanding how the experience of an external object can be influenced by its perceived physical characteristics, both Similarity Attraction Theory and Gestalt theories build upon the similarity aspect to include categorization of others based on perceived interpersonal similarities or differences. Although these theories provide a framework for examining how group members identify with or distinguish themselves from dissimilar others, they also provide a framework for understanding relationships as explored in this research study.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory focuses on the nature of leader-follower dyadic relationships (Truckenbrodt, 2000). LMX is described as the relationship that forms between a leader and follower as a result of their working arrangements and interactions (Graen & Scandura, 1984; Truckenbrodt, 2000). Theoretical roots of LMX theory have been traced to "Social Exchange Theory" (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Greguras & Ford, 2006) in that social exchange in leader-member

interactions results in feelings of increased obligation, gratitude, and trust (Greguras & Ford, 2006).

Subsequent research shifted its focus to the exploration of in-group and out-group designations in the context of leader-follower dyads (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). While analyzing in-groups and out-groups, researchers found that in-groups were considered to be leader-member relationships with high quality (Northouse, 2007). In high-quality relationships, subordinates excel in their roles and tend to be given additional benefits, compensation, and/or even preferential treatment (Northouse, 2007).

Conversely, leader-member relationships with low-level quality are known as out-groups. Low-quality relationships are primarily transactional and are sometimes characterized by member alienation, apathy, and potential hostility (Northouse, 2007). Out-group members tend to be seen as poor or lesser performing, and viewed by the leader as having less potential than in-group members (Schriesheim, Scandura, Eisenbach, & Neider, 1992). As such, they receive standard or commensurate reward for performing at the minimum accepted level (Northouse, 2007). LMX theory informs this study primarily because of its focus on emotional and behavioral outcomes within the construct of leader-follower relationship dyads.

### **Significance of the Study**

Given the dearth of research on this topic in the context of U.S. based humanitarian or social welfare non-profit organizations (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005), and because the majority of research has only explored this phenomenon at the group level, findings from this study have implications for the existing body of knowledge on

leader-follower relationships. Findings from this research study provide a framework for future research on the impact of racial dissimilarity in interracial supervisor-subordinate dyads.

Research results provide insights into why subordinates who are in working relationships with racially-dissimilar supervisors, exhibit certain behaviors as a result of perceived racial differences. Finally, research findings from this study can be used to develop strategies for improving organization practices, policies, climate, and culture as they relate to supervisor-subordinate relationships; e.g., managing and cultivating social capital in ways that improve working relationships and subsequently impact organization efficiency, effectiveness, and ability to meet the needs of organization workers and the organization's served community.

### **Methodology**

Based on a social constructivist epistemology, this study used a phenomenological research design as a means to explore the lived experience of subordinates who work for supervisors of a different race. A phenomenological design was appropriate because it facilitated in-depth exploration and understanding of individual and shared participant experiences (Creswell, 2007). It is also appropriate because it “is well suited for studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26), such as the potentially divisive subject of racial dissimilarity.

Sixty to ninety-minute in-depth interviews with five participants were conducted via Skype. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the participants, based on the following criteria:

1. They were an employee of a social welfare nonprofit that serves a racially-diverse community, and has a racially-diverse employee population,
2. They had a supervisor/manager whom they report to directly,
3. They perceived their supervisor/manager to be of a different race than themselves, and
4. They had a minimum of three months experience working directly with their supervisor/manager.

The recruitment of participants took place on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, social welfare internet communities, and relevant blog sites (see Appendix A Participant Recruitment Message). The number of participants selected was based on recommendations for sample size in qualitative studies, and based on data saturation (Creswell, 2007). The development of the interview guide was informed by the theoretical framework (see Appendix B Interview Protocol).

Data analysis used a constant comparative approach (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2007). As data were collected, they were transcribed, segmented, and coded using descriptive terms (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007). Seidman's (2006) narrative "profiling" strategy was employed as a means to best contextualize the participants' experience in a way that minimized researcher interpretation while allowing the participants' words to remain unaltered. The coding of statements of interest was used to

create thematic representations of the participants' experiences and develop overarching themes that represented the meaning therein.

Consistent with the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), this research study ensured trustworthiness by establishing the *credibility*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Credibility was ensured through "rich" descriptions and member checks (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Dependability was assured by using intercoder reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) and by maintaining a detailed audit trail (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Confirmability was ensured through reflective memoing and bracketing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, ensuring that the research did not pose a threat, put at risk, or otherwise injure or endanger participants (Creswell, 2007).

### **Delimitations & Limitations of the Study**

Delimitations are the restrictions that researchers consciously apply to a study to make it feasible and significant, based on the purpose of the study. These restrictions can be inclusionary or exclusionary, and can apply to a variety of aspects including the research study's context, constructs, methodology, participants, and a number of other study-related variables that the researcher has control or deliberate influence over (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2007). Given this study's purpose of exploring the lived relationship experience of subordinates who are in working hierarchical dyads with racially-dissimilar supervisors in social welfare nonprofit organizations, the findings of

this study were bounded to social welfare/humanitarian nonprofit organizations, and to participants that perceived their supervisor to be of a different race.

Unlike delimitations, which are deliberately imposed conditions upon a research study's design, limitations are aspects of the study that the researcher has no direct control over – and yet they may impact or influence the results of the study's findings.

Limiting conditions of this study were related to:

- Participants' "openness" to share sincere and authentic reflections on their experiences.
- Participants' recollection of certain phenomenon-related situations.
- Participants' experiences being skewed by selective memory or skewed by other influences such as "Halo Effect" or "Groupthink." Halo effect being the positive assessment of an attribute or characteristic that is arbitrarily ascribed to other characteristics, and groupthink being the influence of a group's opinion on a single group member's thinking as a product of being in the group.

### **Key Terms**

**Prototypicality** – an actor's assessment of "fit" or consistency with a situational or conceptual norm or ideal (Copeland, Reynolds, & Burton, 2008)

**Psychological Contracting** - Unofficial or informal assumptions and perceptions typically held within the context of workplace relationships. These oftentimes unspoken assumptions and perceptions can have strong influences and consequences on individuals' behaviors and attitudes towards each other

(Rousseau, 2001).

**Relationship Orientation** - Relationship-orientation is demonstrated through attitudes and behaviors focused on supporting, motivating, and interpersonal relationship building between individuals within working relationships. This type of relational behavior helps facilitate collaboration and teamwork by fostering positive relationships and good communication (Bass, 1990; Burke et al., 2006).

**Similarity Attraction** – the concept that people are more attracted to others that are perceived to be similar to themselves behaviorally, attitudinally, or demographically (Byrne, 1971; Jackson et al., 1991; Riordan, 2000).

**Task Orientation** - The Task-orientation of an individual is their focus on achieving or accomplishing the presenting goal(s) or objective(s). Behaviors are typically aimed at deliberately employing logical, methodical, and structured processes in pursuit of the objective. There is less concern for relationship building and interpersonal rapport (Bass, 1990; Burke et al., 2006).

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter presents the literature review methodology followed by three sections related to the influence of demographics on group member behavior, racial dissimilarity, and follower behavior, and the follower dimension of leader-member exchange. Each of these three sections highlights empirical studies that have analyzed, explored, or otherwise incorporated Similarity Attraction theory, and LMX theory. Organization of these sections reflects an overarching description of the studies, their strengths and weaknesses, and their relevance to this study.

Selected reference data for this chapter were obtained from a combination of online journals, databases, and book chapters including, but not limited to; PsychInfo, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, ProQuest, Emerald, and Google Scholar. Search terms consisted of: assigned leadership, formal leadership, race, culture, ethnicity, social identity, self-categorization, group behavior, group development, group membership, leader acceptance, group prototypicality, relational demography, non-profits and ethnic diversity, and workgroup diversity. Combined search terms consisted of: leadership and team effectiveness, leadership and race, groups and similarity attraction, leadership and social identity, leadership and relational demography, groups and relational demography, and leadership and diversity. Selected disciplines included: Psychology, Sociology, Business/Management, and Education. Selected sources were English only and had no date restriction.

## **Demographics & Group Behavior**

Among other group member traits, visually-distinguishable characteristics of others can influence individual and collective group member behavior (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Lea, Spears, & Wyatt, 2007). It is through the pursuit of group member "idealness" that groups attempt to self-regulate their internal culture and maintain nominal behavior (Beck, 2002).

Group behavior research suggests that diversity among group members can cause individuals to interact in ways that may enhance or weaken group performance (Valenti & Rockett, 2008). Consequently, dissimilarities among group members may cause the development of negative attitudes and behaviors, leading to dysfunctional group and/or group member performance.

This concept is purported in Neuliep, Hintz, and McCrosky's (2005) meta-analytic study of ethnocentrism (a personal sense that one's own race or ethnicity is superior to that of others) in formal organizations. This quantitative study examined the influence of ethnocentrism on people's perceptions of attractiveness, credibility, and managerial effectiveness. The research design consisted of reviewing the results of two independent studies of 117 participants. Study #1 consisted of 53 participants watching a video-taped interview of a Korean national student being interviewed for a job in the financial aid office of her United States (U.S.) college. Study #2 consisted of 64 participants watching a nearly identical video of a white student manager reprimanding a white student worker. Participants completed an assessment instrument designed to measure ethnocentrism, interpersonal attraction, credibility, generalized attitudes about

the manager, and managerial effectiveness. In the group who watched the Asian student manager (Study #1), results revealed that ethnocentrism was negatively and significantly correlated with perceptions of physical, social, and task attraction, competence, and general attitudes about the manager, but not managerial effectiveness.

Follower behavior with regard to interpersonal diversity was also explored in a 2007 study of race relations in an urban high school. In this qualitative anthropological study, Brooks and Gaetane (2007) investigated how race and race relations influence school leadership practice in a high-poverty, high-minority, urban high school in the Southeastern United States. The research design used a conceptual framework called a “moiety” through which the school’s leadership culture was distinguished into two distinct racial leadership sub-cultures: black and white. Findings from this study suggested that in the context of this school, race and race relations had a tremendous influence on the ways school leaders interacted with non-moiety members (members of the other sub-culture) in terms of reciprocity, rivalry, and contrasts.

In another case of diversity-driven organizational change, the CEO of a large financial institution in the Northeast United States publicly vowed to have his bank become more diverse (Zane, 2002). His goal was to communicate and actualize a collaborative vision of organizational commitment to diversity as part of a larger culture change process. The accompanying qualitative research study used the critical science approach to explore the layers of meaning inherent in the organization’s concept of race, gender, and systemic change. Data collection consisted of unobtrusive observation, focus groups, interviews, and review of various organizational artifacts such as policy

documentation, speeches, and training documentation (including videos). While the quest for diversity-related change was initially formulated and introduced at the executive level, many group and inter-group dynamics were stirred at the middle and lower levels of the organization.

Findings from this study indicated that women and racial minorities felt Senior Management had an unrealistic and biased view of diversity with regard to corporate citizenship and equal access to resources and upward mobility. It was further suggested that differences in race and gender (between “power holders” and subordinates) perpetuated perceived organizational inequities (e.g., exclusion, denigration, glass ceilings, and glass walls). These findings support the premise that differences in perceived race of organizational leaders impact the realities that they and subordinates/followers must live in.

Each of these studies investigated the impact of leader and follower racial differences on perceptions of equity and power distance. Furthermore, these studies were consistent in their proposition that perceptions of physical characteristics within groups can affect group behavior, especially when differences between leaders and followers may be perceived as barriers or avenues to achieving group and/or individual goals. The studies differ primarily in their respective contexts, foci, and approaches to exploring the leader-follower relationship; however, the results of each study infer a corresponding relationship between follower behavior or attitudes and the leader’s perceived race.

These research studies were relevant to the exploration of leader-follower racial dissimilarity because they provided other perspectives on how followers’ visually-cued

perceptions of leaders can potentially impact follower's behavior with regard to their acceptance of the leader. They were also relevant because they suggested implications at multiple levels of leader-follower engagement including, but not limited to global communities, organizational settings, group behavior, and interpersonal/individual interactions. With regard to followers' response to leaders' visually-perceived characteristics, research suggests that prototypicality [the degree to which the leader is representative of the "ideal"] of the leader provides access to influence and thereby effects group member attitudes, behavior, and group destiny (Slay, 2003). According to Slay (2003), perception-driven beliefs about leaders had significant consequences with regard to leaders' social attractiveness to their team, and consequently to followers' acceptance of the leader. By further exploring the link between leader acceptance [by followers] and followers' racial dissimilarity with the leader, researchers and theorists uncovered potential means for improving work group productivity, cohesiveness, and improving the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships within organizations.

### **Dissimilarity & Follower Behavior**

What leads followers to want to be part of groups is a phenomenon that is still under considerable research and investigation. Furthermore, what types of behaviors followers exhibit as a response to those drivers becomes a research topic unto itself. By exploring how racial diversity within groups influences group member behavior, past research found implications for potential organization behavior and organization development applications. Attempts to explain followers' relational behavior can be seen through the lens of similarity attraction-based theory, and examined in Wesolowski and

Mossholder's 1997 research study into interpersonal diversity and its impact on subordinate attitudes and behaviors in formal organizations.

Wesolowski and Mossholder's study (1997) explored similarity attraction in the context of leader-follower dyads and its effects on job-related perceptions and individual reactions. The research design included a survey submitted to 340 voluntary participants (170 supervisor-subordinate pairs) from two service-oriented companies (Public Utilities Company & Computer Services Company) located in the southeastern U.S. The study's findings indicated significant positive correlation between perception of (visually-distinguishable) racial diversity of leaders and subordinate attitudes and behaviors, but no significant correlation with gender or age.

These conclusions were consistent with other recent research that race is a salient demographic variable in the social context of organizations and can therefore be considered among moderating factors when considering the success and viability of supervisor-subordinate relationships and job-related attitudes and outcomes.

In another study of follower behavior and relational demographics, Lea et al. (2007) investigated similarity attraction and group cohesiveness under different visibility and anonymity conditions for social categories that differed in their ability to be visually distinguished. The underlying assumption of this approach was based on the premise that group-based social attraction arises from categorizing one's self and others in the context of the group. The design of this quantitative research study involved a population of 36 groups of two British participants located in the UK, one male and one female, and two Dutch participants located in the Netherlands. The experiment was a mixed nested

design in which the visibility and anonymity of geographically-isolated group members was manipulated by the transmission [or not] of live video images. The findings from the study suggested that visible fit or sameness reinforces acceptance and consequently enhances in-group attraction and cohesiveness.

In a related study, Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007) conducted a qualitative research study to explore racial diversity in work groups and the effects of individuals' similarity to their work group or their leader as predictors of individual outcomes. The research design consisted of a literature review of databases, journals, and papers in press (1997-2005). The study's findings suggested that being dissimilar to *their* work group more negatively impacts people who are typically in majority positions in Western organizations (i.e., men, Caucasians) than it does people who are more often in the minority (i.e., women, members of ethnic minorities).

Although related theory, such as SAT, has provided a framework for understanding how group members identify themselves and others, demographic categorization, and consequent perceptions of others, also extends to individuals' perceptions of their leader as well. Findings from this research study indicate that a supervisor's visually-perceived race can become a salient characteristic that a subordinate uses to assess the leader's fit with regard to the ideal or prototypical supervisor. This postulation is further suggested and supported by exploring how leader-follower relationships are experienced in the context of interpersonal interactions.

## **Follower Dimension of Leader-Member Exchange**

As noted earlier, LMX theory purports to explain and predict outcomes as a byproduct of dyadic leader-followers interactions. Its underpinnings are a culmination of social sciences research focused on deconstructing dyadic leader-follower relationships in ways that reveal contributors and influences on the leader-followers relationship. Although recent expansion of LMX theory has resulted in argument for assessing relationship quality from *both* leader and followers' perspectives (Greguras & Ford, 2006), early applications of LMX theory and instrumentation were primarily used to examine the relationship solely from each follower's perspective within a group context. Because this research study explored "a" subordinate's lived experience, versus a disaggregation of group member responses, the applicability of LMX theory within this study was informed by the follower aspects of LMX.

Since its emergence, LMX theory has been routinely used or explored by a number of social sciences research studies. The recurring theme among these studies was the investigation of leader qualities, effectiveness, and other leader-follower dynamics within hierarchical dyadic relationships, and the impact or influence on work products, satisfaction, efficiency, and other environmental variables. As such, the use of LMX theory has been seen in research spanning a wide variety of contexts and disciplines including, but not limited to education, health care, government, business, sports, psychology, sociology, politics, etc.

A longitudinal examination of LMX was seen in Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) research study on the evolution of LMX since 1975. In this meta-analytic study of the

theoretical development of LMX theory, Graen and Uhl-Bien traced the development of LMX through four stages of evolution from the 1970s through 1995 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Through this study, a new class of approaches to leadership emerged, with LMX being clearly suggested as an approach to relationship-based leadership. Graen and Uhl-Bien's study focuses on three leadership studies conducted in 1991, 1992, and 1993 respectively.

The results of these studies indicated that varying combinations of three leadership domains; the leader, the follower, and the relationship [LMX] had a significantly predictable influence on the outcomes of the leader-follower behavior. Furthermore, Graen and Uhl-Bien's conclusions suggested that without considering these three leadership domains collectively (versus solely on their individual contributions), the true impact of each contributing domain could be underestimated or even missed (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

In a more recent study regarding LMX, Greguras and Ford (2006) explored the multi-dimensionality of LMX by considering leader perceptions of the leader-follower relationship (as opposed to the traditional focus on followers' perceptions of the relationship). The research design was quantitative in nature and included standard and modified survey instruments to measure the four dimensions of LMX; affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect.

The instruments were administered to 422 matched supervisor-subordinate dyads from an unspecified population. The results of the study developed and validated a supervisor [leader] version of the LMX instrument originally developed by Liden and

Maslyn in 1998. Study results also suggested that LMX measured from both the leader and follower perspectives could be used to more effectively predict important individual job attitudes and behaviors beyond those results indicated by measuring only one side of the relationship.

In a 2008 study of leader-follower relationships from a political perspective, Albritton, Oswald, and Anderson examined voting behaviors of U.S. citizens and how those behaviors were influenced by perceived qualities of presidential candidates. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the extent to which the perception of prospective leaders impact follower voting behaviors positively or negatively (Albritton et al., 2008). The research design employed a longitudinal approach and drew upon a combination of survey data and questions about demographics and voter perceptions of presidential candidates based on a set of “perceived” traits. The findings from the study showed significant positive correlation between voter [follower] perception of leader traits and follower [behavior].

The common thread among these research studies was their focus on the impact of leader-follower relationships and its influence on achieving personal and organizational goals. Each study used LMX theory as a means for decomposing the leader-follower dyad into common aspects. By isolating and combining these relationship variables, attention was given to the contributing variables that underlie organization behavior at the individual level.

Differences among the studies were obvious in terms of their methodological approaches and corresponding research goals. Methodology included qualitative,

quantitative, and mixed method approaches corresponding to exploration of LMX theory development, consideration of leader feedback in LMX, and socio-political implications of LMX.

### **Summary**

This chapter highlighted relevant antecedent research involving Similarity Attraction Theory and LMX theory in an attempt to identify gaps in related research that will be addressed by exploring the lived working relationship experience of subordinates working for racially-dissimilar supervisors. With regard to SAT, relevant literature focuses on investigating the effects of group member diversity on group members' attitudes and behavior towards each other. Related research studies' have implications for this study's focus based on their assumptions that differences in visually-distinguishable physical characteristics among group members can have a significant impact on group members' interpersonal behaviors within a group context. However, related research studies have not explicitly or definitively explored the effect of interpersonal differences within the context of supervisor-subordinate dyadic working relationships (separate from the group context). As such, this research study will help address that gap in the literature by focusing on subordinate's perceptions of the one-on-one supervisor-subordinate working relationship.

Findings from relevant LMX-related research consistently indicated that the interpersonal relational dimensions of the leader-follower dyad have significant implications for assessing the quality of *that* relationship, as well as having proximal and far-reaching outcomes. Findings from these studies also suggest that by understanding the

contributors and influencers of LMX, that researchers and practitioners can potentially isolate issues, or focus on relational dimensions of the LMX, that could lead to more fulfilling and mutually-beneficial leader-follower relationships. Because LMX focuses on the dyadic relationship of a leader and multiple followers within a group context, versus isolating the dyadic relationship outside and separate from the group, literature related to LMX theory research suggests gaps that will be addressed by findings from this research study; exploration of the subordinate's perceptions of the interpersonal, one-on-one supervisor-subordinate working relationship.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived relationship experience of subordinates who work in hierarchical vertical dyads with racially-dissimilar supervisors in social welfare nonprofit organizations. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research question was investigated, "How do subordinates experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor?" This chapter presents the research paradigm, the methodology, the subjectivity statement, and the ethical considerations of this study.

#### **Research Paradigm & Methodology**

The research paradigm for this study was informed by my ontology and epistemology, as well as the subjective nature of the phenomenon under study;

subordinates' lived working relationship experience with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. More specifically, this study explored the subordinate's experience of interpersonal racial differentiation within a hierarchically-defined dyadic working relationship. Social Constructivist thinking suggests that an individual's reality is derived from socially-constructed values, associations, and propagation through socio-cultural behaviors (e.g., categorization, generalization, and typification; Garcia, 2005). My personal belief that reality is a socially constructed by-product of the world in which we live is consistent with my subjectivist ontology and my constructivist epistemology. In other words, I believe that reality is shaped or constructed by experiences and the context(s) of *the* individual, (i.e., it is created or constructed differently depending on the individual constructing it; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Furthermore, I believe that the knowledge we gain from the process of reality construction, (e.g., new experiences or reflection on past experiences), serves as a mechanism for clarifying, re-shaping, or even creating new realities.

Given that I perceive knowledge in this way, and the pursuit or acquisition of knowledge as a subjective individual experience, I chose a research design and corresponding methodology that align with both my epistemological proclivities and the subjective nature of the phenomenon. A phenomenological research design was selected for this research to facilitate the study of a particular subjective social reality.

According to Van Manen (1990), phenomenology provides a systematic means for exploring lived experience in a context provided by those experiencing a given phenomenon. Phenomenology is unique in that it employs specific “modes of

questioning,” attempts to describe the meaning within lived experience, and allows for the constant evaluation and reconstitution of the lived experience through the sharing of inter-subjective accounts of *that* experience (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). This methodology fit the purpose of the study because it supported the elicitation of intersubjective descriptions of the phenomenon based on the lived experience of study participants. In this case, the “thick rich” descriptions of participants’ experiences were shared during one-on-one interviews; data was incrementally and iteratively analyzed for themes and patterns, which allowed the essence of the phenomenon to emerge (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

Given the influences and implications of my ontology and epistemology, my choice of a phenomenological research design and corresponding methodology [for this research study] was appropriate. In addition, the constructs of one’s own race, and subjective perception of racial-dissimilarity with others, coincided with the methodology that was used in this study – in depth interviews, that used guiding questions to elicit in-depth descriptions of the subjective reality of participants' experiences (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

### **Study Participants**

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the participants for this study. According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling enables the researcher to identify and select research participants on the basis that they can "purposefully inform an understanding" of the phenomenon under study (p. 125). Purposeful sampling was also appropriate for this research study as it facilitated the targeting of specific individuals

who had experienced the phenomenon first-hand (Patton, 1990; Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 2007), and who could give the richest and most authentic depiction of the phenomenon being investigated. Purposeful sampling facilitated the final selection of participants based on the following criteria:

1. Participants were employed by a social welfare nonprofit that serves a racially-diverse community and has a racially-diverse employee population. In this context, a social welfare nonprofit is an organization that provides goods and/or services that promote social welfare and help facilitate the common good and general welfare of the community (Social Welfare Purposes, 2013).
2. Participants worked for a supervisor/manager whom they reported to directly.
3. Participants perceived their supervisor/manager to be of a different race than themselves, and
4. Participants had a minimum of three months experience working directly with their supervisor/manager. While the literature did not prescribe a specific duration or period of time to examine working relationships in general, we can anecdotally surmise that for the purposes of this research study, the length of the supervisor-subordinate relationship would be long enough to allow the subordinate to have developed an “experience” of his or her interactions with the supervisor be able to provide meaningful and in-depth reflections.

As such, three months was used as the minimum amount of time that the subordinate must have worked with his or her supervisor, with no limitation on the maximum amount of time.

Table 1 provides an illustration of the participants that were interviewed during this study. Pseudonyms, as selected by the participants for themselves, are used to represent each of the participants in the study.

Table 1

*Study Participant Information by Selection Criteria*

Participant	Ariana	Beynu	Chanel	JZ	KT
Organization mission	Providing consulting services to client organizations regarding job search and placement strategies	Assisting international organizations with devising strategies primarily focused on youth recidivism programs, career counseling, and job placement assistance	Consults with individuals (on behalf of government agencies) to address issues/challenges/risks in families	Providing testing and proficiency certification services to individual clients and client organizations	Consults with individuals (on behalf of government agencies) to address issues/challenges/risks in families
Participant role in the organization	Program Manager	Program Manager	Case Manager	Certification Specialist	Case Manager
Participant's "self-described" Race and gender	Hispanic Female	Asian-American Female	African-American Female	Immigrant Male	African-American Female
Participant's "perceived" race of their supervisor	Caucasian Female	African-American Male	Caucasian Female	Caucasian Female	Caucasian Female
Duration of working relationship	4.5 years	6 months	8 months	1 year	4 months

The recruitment of participants took place on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, social welfare internet communities, and relevant blog sites. The sample size of five

participants was selected, which is consistent with recommendations for sample size in qualitative studies, and based data saturation (Creswell, 2007). Recruitment of participants began with the submission of a recruitment request via social welfare-focused social networks, listservs, blog sites, and other popular social media (see Appendix A Participant Recruitment Message). The recruitment message incorporated the purpose of the study and the selection criteria for participants, and the request for individuals to convey this request to any other colleagues, friends, acquaintances, or others that might have been interested in participating in the study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of a 60-90 minute in-depth, one-on-one, face-to-face interview conducted via Skype. According to Knox and Burkard (2009), face-to-face interviews are effective because they enable the interviewer to collect both verbal and nonverbal data in abundance. These interviews were also valuable because the visual interaction of the interviewer and participant provided access to a wealth of nonverbal cues that enriched textual descriptions and reflections of participants' lived experience (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Facial expressions, gestures, body posture, and other nonverbal elements were observed and noted by the interviewer, thereby providing additional insights into the meaning within the participant experience.

Face-to-face interviews also aided in the development of trust and rapport between interviewer and participant (Seidman, 2006; Knox & Burkard, 2009). According to authorities on qualitative research methods, by building upon a foundation of trust and sincerity, interviewers can help participants more freely explore their own

feelings, while providing a safe space for sharing deep and authentic reflections on their experiences (Seidman, 2006; Knox & Burkard, 2009). As such, each interview conducted in this study was held via Skype, ensuring that both the interviewer and participant were afforded with physical comfort, safety, and confidentiality.

The interview protocol focused on the participant's lived relationship experience; a relevant accounting of their experience of the phenomenon first-hand (Seidman, 2006). The framing of interview questions and the interview guide (see Appendix B Interview Protocol) was guided by the theories that informed this study; Similarity Attraction theory and Leader-Member Exchange theory.

In studies related to Similarity Attraction theory, researchers primarily focused on participants' perception of similarity (and dissimilarity) among interpersonal differentiators, and the interpersonal attraction that ensued as a result of perceived similarity. Research questions in related studies were designed to elicit responses in two areas: participant perception of similarity and participant regard for those they perceived as being similar to themselves. For this study, interview questions informed by Similarity Attraction Theory were targeted at exploring how racial dissimilarity with the supervisor was experienced by the subordinate, and times in the working relationship where the participant felt more "like" or "unlike" their supervisor. Follow up questions were posed to explore influencers or contributors to those feelings of being similar versus dissimilar. In this study, research questions informed by SAT built upon the concept of perceived interpersonal similarities and differences and focused its inquiry into the resulting behaviors, feelings, and emotions.

Regarding LMX theory, this study's interview protocol included questions designed to elicit responses related to a subordinate's emotional and behavioral responses to their supervisor, (i.e., affection, loyalty, trust, and respect), and how these feelings manifested themselves in resulting subordinate attitudes, feelings, and/or behavior. These interpersonal relational aspects are foundational aspects of LMX theory and also informed this study by way of their implications for subordinates consequent feelings and behavior in response to the supervisor's perceived behaviors and relevant interactions between the subordinate and supervisor.

During interview sessions, participants were asked to think about stories or "episodes" where they felt alienated or distanced from their supervisor, and also to think about episodes where they felt closer or more likeness with their supervisor. Following each interview session, personal reflective notes and observations were recorded in the form of "memos." This concept is consistent with Creswell's (2007) recommendations related to the annotation of interviewer observations and their use as additional data during analysis.

Each interview session was audio recorded and thereafter converted into a detailed transcription (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998; Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007). Nonverbal events such as pauses, gestures, laughs, coughs, sighs, etc. were captured as well as they had implications for further contextualizing participant responses (Seidman, 2006). In this way the resulting interview transcript could "breathe and speak for itself" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). At the beginning of each interview, each participant was asked for permission to record the session. Thereafter and prior to data analysis, participants

were provided with a copy of their transcribed interview session to ensure that the information captured was as accurate and complete as possible. This approach also provided an opportunity for participants to share any additional information that was not shared during the initial interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). All five participants read the interview transcripts and two of them suggested slight changes to their corresponding transcripts. Changes were applied to interview transcripts prior to commencing data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

During data analysis, interview data and field notes were collated then analyzed for “significant” statements that reflect participants’ experience of the phenomenon (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007). In this context, significant statements are words, terms, phrases, or collections thereof that are distinctive in ways that clarify, punctuate, emphasize, or expound on the participant statement. These statements were used as a data-reduction technique to encapsulate the “*what*” and “*how*” of participants’ lived experience (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2007). By reducing interview data in this way, each participant’s experience was captured in concrete terms that provided a conceptual and descriptive representation of the phenomenon in action. Significant statements identified among the data were highlighted and set aside to distinguish them from other interview data (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

Once significant statements were identified, they were “segmented” [by the interviewer] or coded using descriptive terms (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

Segmentation is a data reduction technique by which categorization and meaning can be

abstracted from transcribed interview data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2007). Segmentation of significant statements also enabled subsequent analysis by means of grouping, comparison, and assignment of overarching meaning across participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Segmented data was used to give context to participants' literal descriptions of their experience. Through segmentation, context and environment are added to significant statements to reflect the "meaning" participants experienced within the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

As such, this research study used the following sequential steps, as outlined by Seidman (2006) to reduce and succinctly represent narrative interview data:

1. After reviewing each interview transcript, passages of interest were marked and coded.
2. Separate folders were created for each generated code.
3. Coded passages from interview transcripts were copied (using a word processing application) and saved in the corresponding labeled folders.
4. The marked up version of the transcript was revisited a second time, with a critical focus on the passages of interest (from #1 above) that were "the most compelling" (Seidman, 2006, p. 121).
5. Thereafter only the most compelling passages were used to construct a narrative of the participant's experience.
6. Finally, after constructing a narrative of each participant's experience, the aforementioned codes were used to identify themes among and across

interview excerpts to construct a composite narrative profile--an encapsulated thematic representation of the phenomenon.

### **Data Segmentation**

The initial step in the analysis involved segmenting the data by identifying passages of interest from each participant's interview transcript. The focus was to isolate statements that were relevant to the experience of racial dissimilarity within the dyadic working relationship with the supervisor. Having equal value, each relevant passage added contextual detail toward exposing and understanding the influences on the participant's experience of the interracial working relationship with their supervisor. These passages also provided the framework for revealing the essence of the phenomenon.

Data segmentation started with the reduction of the full transcript from interviews with each participant to discrete relevant statements about the interracial working relationship. The data reduction process resulted in: 62 relevant statements from Ariana's interview transcript, 77 relevant statements from Beynu's transcript, 31 relevant statements from Chanel's transcript, 81 relevant statements from JZ' transcript, and 50 relevant statements from KT's transcript. Examples of relevant statements taken from all five participants' interview transcripts can be seen in Appendix C. The relevant statement examples in Appendix C were randomly selected from each participant transcript to provide a broad representation of participant responses to the interview questions that were posed (see Appendix C - Examples of Participants' Relevant Statements).

## **Coding**

The "coding" step in the analysis involved collating relevant statements from each participant transcript into groups, and assigning corresponding codes based on “key” thoughts that emerged. This process resulted in 94 discrete (non-overlapping) codes to represent elements of the interracial work relationship experience across all participants (see Appendix D - Examples of Relevant Statements & Corresponding Codes). These codes were developed iteratively; including new codes with each subsequent participant interview and revisiting previous codes for consistency or revision. This methodological data analysis technique is called, "constant comparison."

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a constant comparative data analysis method can be useful because it enables the early formulation of ideas and meaning from research data in a logical and inductive way. The constant comparative approach may also be useful in refining, correcting, or expounding on findings derived from earlier iterations of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As its name implies, constant comparative analysis is performed on relevant data as it is collected and continues iteratively throughout the study until the essence of participants’ experience emerges. The constant comparative analytic approach facilitates the preliminary development of meanings [related to the phenomenon] that can be extended and enriched through iterative and elaborative investigative discovery (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

An iterative analytic approach like this was especially appropriate for this study because it complemented the inductive nature of the study’s research design. As such, it

also provided opportunities to incrementally construct and refine the emerging view of the phenomenon. Lastly, constant comparative analysis was useful in surfacing new concepts and ways of thinking about the phenomenon under study that were materially different from preliminary postulations. By discovering these new concepts earlier in the study, research design implications were more quickly assessed, and thereby provided support for subsequent adjustment to the research design and methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The 94 codes from participant interviews were collated into groupings that generated three overarching themes associated with the experience of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. These themes emerged as a result of identifying relationships among codes that allowed them to be associated with other similar, but distinctly different codes, and grouping them together based on their relevance to a particular aspect of the subordinate's working relationship experience. These themes consisted of *the meaning of race from the subordinate's perspective*, *the subordinate's perception of the organization and the job*, and *the subordinate's perceptions of the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship*. These themes were then used to construct individual narrative profiles that described each participant's lived dyadic working relationship experience through his or her own eyes.

### **Participant Profiles**

The next step in the analysis involved creating "narrative" profiles of each participant using only "the most compelling" relevant statements to illustrate their individual lived experience of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. Analysis

of the 94 codes aided in identifying the most compelling statements related to the subordinate's lived working relationship experience. These statements were deemed most compelling because of the language, emotion, and depth of detail provided by the participant. They included, but were not limited to, statements that expressed or implied conflict, frustrations, sensitivity, reactions to power, hopes and expectations, as well as feelings of "collegiality and community" (Seidman, 2006, p. 118). By applying this strategy, underlying meanings within the phenomenon began to emerge through participants' experiences of similarity/connectedness and dissimilarity/disconnectedness with their supervisor. According to Seidman (2006, p. 120),

...I have found crafting profiles, however, to be a way to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates.

The resulting narrative profiles provide a representation of the subordinate's lived working relationship experience through a thematic depiction. Each profile uses the participant's own words to describe how they experienced the phenomenon of working with a supervisor of a different race. Meaning was associated with each participant's reflections on their own working relationship in order to provide a subordinate-centric perspective of the experience of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. Thereafter, themes from all five participants' profiles were thoughtfully and critically analyzed to form a single composite narrative that illustrates the essence of the subordinate's experience in the context of an interracial hierarchical dyadic working relationship.

## **Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a research study is a critical element - if the study's findings are to be considered relevant and credible.

In accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) postulations, this research study included a set of practices to ensure that *credibility*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* were established – the underpinnings of a trustworthy research design.

To satisfy the credibility aspect of trustworthiness, thick rich descriptions to illuminate and elucidate the lived experience of participants were used (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2007). This approach allowed the verity of the findings to emerge. Member checking was also used to allow study participants to review interview data and to ensure that the researcher had captured their experience accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2007). All five participants were provided with copies of their interview transcripts. Three participants believed that the transcripts accurately reflected their experiences. The two remaining participants provided feedback that required slight modifications to the transcript, but had no impact on overall content or integrity of the data. With regard to dependability, trustworthiness of this study was reinforced through the consistency of its findings and through strict maintenance of data integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). For this research study, consistency of findings was reinforced through intercoder reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) and careful record keeping (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

By definition, intercoder reliability is a means by which two or more independent coders analyze relevant data and arrive at the same conclusion (Miles & Huberman,

1994). Assessing intercoder reliability in qualitative research is a practice whereby independent reviewers compare coding schemas (derived from the data) to determine the extent to which those schema reflect similar results or patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The degree of similarity among the independent coders' findings is a measure of the reliability of the analysis and thereby strengthens the assertions made in the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2005). Through intercoder reliability, analysis and coding of interview data can be applied in an objective and methodical manner that will support the ensuing findings in a way that clearly reflects congruence of coders' data interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, two professionals, with advanced degrees in human and organizational learning and qualitative methodology, analyzed portions of the data and collaboratively discussed discrepancies that were found in preliminary analysis. The minor discrepancies that *were* found added to the understanding of a small number of participant's relevant statements. The remediation of these discrepancies did not change the overarching themes resulting from the preceding analysis.

Dependability of this study's findings was further supported through the establishment of an audit trail of data and the processes applied to it (i.e., coding, analysis, synthesis, etc.). According to authorities on qualitative research design, creating a well-defined audit trail will clearly convey to readers the "what" and "how" research findings were arrived at (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007). By keeping careful and meticulous records, this study provided a

roadmap of the entire research study in the event that future researchers or other interested parties want to revisit or replicate the study (Creswell, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). Through thorough and complete records keeping, this study also provided an audit trail for anyone who may have questions or has a specific interest in some aspect(s) of the study. According to authorities on qualitative methods, this strategy also provides a means by which findings can be substantiated by other competent authorities if needed (Creswell, 1985; Maxwell, 2005).

Lastly, the trustworthiness of this study was reinforced through confirmability. According to writers on qualitative research, confirmability is the aspect of trustworthiness whereby the researcher takes deliberate steps to ensure to the extent possible, that research findings are more so the product of participants' experiences rather than the result of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

For the purposes of this study, I explicitly described and annotated my feelings, perceptions, and observations through the use of memos.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

As an African-American male growing up in a small, predominantly-white farming community, I never felt inordinately dissimilar to those whom I perceived to be racially different from me. In fact, it was not until I graduated from high school and enlisted in the United States Air Force that I was exposed to various cultural peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, and stereotypes that surfaced during interactions with people of other races. For instance, I was often told by non-white friends, family, and acquaintances that

“they” (primarily Caucasians) “look out for *their* own,” or “*they* don’t do things like *we* do,” or even “you know how *they* are.” Given my somewhat rural and somewhat sheltered upbringing, and the conflicting cross-cultural messages I experienced as an adult, I developed a personal curiosity about how other people felt and developed their own understanding of interracial differences, especially within interpersonal relationships.

During my teen and early adult years my curiosity about cross-racial interactions grew to the point of preoccupation. Because I was constantly faced with social and working situations where I was among the racial minority, or was the only individual “of color” represented, I wanted to know if others had experienced the same or similar concerns, issues, fears, and anxieties that I had.

My curiosity was not just confined to African-Americans; I wanted to understand the lived relational experience of anyone who perceived himself or herself as the racial minority in a given social or working situation. More specifically, I wanted to know how others felt when *they* felt racially underrepresented, and even more so – now that I was a working adult, how did others experience working for a supervisor of a different race. For me, questions that came to mind were: (a) “Will my supervisor be prejudiced because of my race?”; (b) “Will he or she attempt to disguise his or her prejudice through condescending or exaggerated “friendly” behavior?”; (c) “Will my boss stereotype me and feel compelled to use slang, idiomatic terms, or colloquialisms thinking that it will help us connect on a social level?”; and probably more concerning (d) “How would I react if I perceived my boss treating me differently because of our racial difference?”

Throughout my career I have pondered how to best engage with racially-dissimilar subordinates, irrespective of our cultures, experiences, beliefs, values, and other factors. Now, as an older, more experienced, and hopefully more self-aware individual, I want to understand how others, especially subordinates, experience being racially-different from their leaders or supervisors. As a researcher, I want to understand what part, if any, perceived racial differences play in subordinates' relationship with their supervisor, and whether there are implications for social capital.

From a more pragmatic perspective, and in response to ever increasing global organizations and international communities, it has become critically important to understand how interpersonal differences such as race are experienced in working relationships, and how those relationships influence an organization's behavior and abilities (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997; Zane, 2002). As such, and to provide relevant insights to other researchers and practitioners, it was incumbent upon me to be deliberate and thoughtful in the way I approached and experienced the researcher role and the subject matter under study

Because this was potentially a divisive subject matter, I had to remain mindful and thoughtful about how I approached this topic. Having experienced racial dissimilarity in past supervisor-subordinate relationships personally, I had to be careful not to project my assumptions and beliefs onto the experiences of research participants. To mitigate this risk, and consistent with the tenets of qualitative research, I attempted to set aside my own biases and preconceived ideas related to the subject under study. By doing this, the interpretation of participants' experiences could be more objectively

represented without interjecting my own partiality or prejudice (Lavery, 2003; Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

And while I have strong opinions about racial inequity, discrimination, marginalization, and other race-related social issues, I remained mindful that my role in this effort was to be a researcher; a lens, a conduit, a portal into the lives and experiences of others that may otherwise go unseen, unheard, or unappreciated. Through thoughtful “hearing” of participants’ stories, I gained insights that helped illuminate the experience of subordinates in interracial working vertical dyads. However, by being transparent about my own feelings, as I collected, analyzed, and translated participants’ experiences, I hoped to lend credence and authenticity to their stories. By doing this, the results of this study may provide a means to explore racial dissimilarity in ways that could have implications for increasing social capital within organizations, and thereby improve the quality of interactions with constituent and served communities.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the research did not pose a threat, put at risk, or otherwise endanger participants (Creswell, 2007).

Study participants were informed about all the measures taken in the study to ensure their confidentiality (examples include storage of the data, use of pseudonyms, presentation of findings in publications in aggregate form, etc.). The study was conducted in accordance with the George Washington University IRB requirements.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of subordinates who work with a racially-dissimilar supervisor, in nonprofit social welfare organizations. Examination and analysis of collected data were performed in an effort to address the primary research question: How do subordinates experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor? This chapter provides the findings of the study, organized in the following sections: participant narrative profiles, the composite narrative profile, and the essence of the lived interracial working.

### **Participant Narrative Profiles**

Seidman (2006) suggested “profiling” as a means to best elucidate participants’ lived experience, while minimizing researcher interpretation and biases. As such, the Seidman profiling strategy was used as to decompose participants’ experiences into constituent elements that provided a lens into the social and organizational contexts that shape and surround the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships from the subordinate's perspective. Steps in the development of participant profiles include: data segmentation, coding relevant statements, revisiting codification with a focus on the most compelling passages, constructing profile narratives of each participant, and creating a composite representation of the phenomenon from collective participant experiences.

In the presentation of each participant’s profile, the participant’s own words in the first person were used. However, there were instances where participants spoke in third person. For example, when one participant was asked how they determined the

race of others, they responded, “It is quite often that you can just judge physically...” Another participant was asked for her opinion on how organizations like hers could become more effective and efficient with regard to diversity management, she responded, “You need to have that diverse thought to be able to successfully serve...” When asked for recommendations on how individuals within interracial dyadic working relationships could improve the quality of their relationships, one participant replied, “You just get to know the person as a person, and what their histories are that has made them who they are now.”

Given their inter-subjective understanding and experience of “race,” participants used the terms race, culture, ethnicity, and immigrant status interchangeably. Because the focus of this study was not to explore participants’ conceptualization of race, but rather to explore how racial-dissimilarity (with their supervisor) was experienced in the context of the dyadic working relationship, participants’ race-related terminology was maintained throughout individual narratives. To further ensure the authenticity of participant insights, brackets “[ ]” are used to identify text that was inserted by the researcher (versus spoken by the participant). In accordance with the Seidman’s (2006) profiling technique, insertion of research commentary was used minimally, and only to provide transitions between passages of participant data, identify non-verbal expressions or behaviors of participants, or to contextualize complex or convoluted participant statements. Each of the following narrative profiles is divided into sub-sections based on the three themes that emerged from participants’ interview data: the meaning of race from the subordinate’s perspective, the subordinate’s perception of the organization and

the job, and the subordinate's perceptions of the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship.

Ariana's Profile Through her Words  
*(Ariana is a Hispanic subordinate Program Manager working with a  
Caucasian Supervisor)*

*The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's Perspective*

I feel that race is more than physical appearance, skin color, or physical attributes. It also includes dress... I know some African church-members that wear some really beautiful clothes. It's fascinating, but if I was to see that same person wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and they don't open their mouth to speak, I would probably just think they were African-American.

When you start really speaking to them, and you hear that accent, [that's] when you know.

Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization & Job

My organization is a national nonprofit organization. We are very unique in that we have different departments inside of our organization. We have business departments, and we have what we call "the mission." I work directly with the team in the mission departments. The mission of our organization is to help people find jobs, or put people to work. We do that by working with populations that perhaps have barriers to employment, and we help them remove those barriers. So usually we may be talking about people that have been incarcerated and they are looking for [employment] after they get out of jail, or perhaps older workers, or youth or single mothers. Our team really works with our local affiliates to build strategies so they can effectively serve this

population. I specifically work with Hispanic and immigrant populations. I am also helping the local affiliates diversify their served clientele as well as their work force.

[From an organization perspective] I really think that the overall organization does need to be more diverse in our thoughts, and more diverse in our workforce (internal staff), in order for us to better serve people. I think we need to have that diverse thought to be able to successfully serve; serve the community in the way that they deserve, not we deserve...We can't have thought leaders thinking about [racial] diversity the way we have always done when very clearly the population is changing by the minute out there.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

My supervisor is white. I am Hispanic. She is much older than I -- probably twice my age. We have worked together for the past four and half years, and we've been physically co-located with her for the last year and a half. It's a very amicable relationship for sure. I think that it's transcended beyond the traditional supervisor and subordinate relationship. Well that wasn't the case when we began. When I started working in this position four and a half years ago, I needed that structure and that guidance, and I wanted that structure and guidance, in order for me to be the best that I could be...It's become a great professional friendship. I think it has changed to that because she cares about me as a person, as well as an employee.

We have regular conversations about Hispanic foods, fashion, sports, and current events. She [my supervisor] stays on top of the latest Hispanic cultural trends and even wants to learn to speak Spanish. I find it exciting that she is genuinely interested my culture, and that she wants to learn more about me as a person. I do share some personal

stories with her, or I will ask her about her weekend. There's always this relationship building piece that's very important to her and to me. I think that's probably why we get along so well because I value that. I think I am very blessed because I have somebody that values me. I feel valued and I feel welcomed because maybe I have more of a personality that's open to *that* conversation [verbally sharing personal stories]. She is very, very, very sweet, very professional and fun... She cares about me as a person as well as an employee...She has been really very patient with me.

There have been instances [regarding my supervisor's availability] where I am not sure exactly how to best approach a difficult situation and she always had the right sort of idea, or the right answer. She always has time for me, unless she is late for a meeting or something that's very urgent. Sometimes I go into her office to share something that I know about an affiliate, maybe a project, or maybe something that's happening in the department. I can easily tap on her door, open it, walk in, and ask her if she has a few minutes; she always has time. Other times [during incidental interactions] we will talk about whatever I needed to talk about. If it's a Monday morning, we spend at least five minutes talking about weekends, or we are talking about the weather, or she will ask me something about my husband. Other people don't want to share somebody's personal stories, or maybe they think that's too much silly chatter.

Overall, I have gotten to the point where it has been four and half years...I know what I am going to get [from my supervisor] and what I am not. If she says she is going to call, she will call. And if she doesn't call, she will send an email. She is a person who doesn't speak up often, but when she does, it's very insightful. She is very punctual, very

professional, and very knowledgeable. I think that's probably why we get along so well, because I value that. I think that if I were to leave the organization tomorrow, I would still sustain the relationship with her, even if it was just wishing her Merry Christmas, or checking in with her just to see how she's doing.

Beynu's Profile Through her Words  
*(Beynu is an Asian-American Program Manager Working with  
an African-American Supervisor)*

The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's Perspective

I think that the concept of *race* is complicated. And it's complicated because all over the world it's complicated. There's race and there's ethnicity, and then there's cultural origin and cultural identification. For example, there's the African immigrants, that are also African Americans, but don't necessarily identify with black Americans. We [society] have those racial categories, black African-American, Asian Pacific Islander-American, which are very diverse in terms of ethnicity and culture. There are [racial] categories that we as Americans have had with us since the beginning of our development as America. Those identifications, and [the concept of] race, really vary when you start traveling. I think ethnic origin and ethnic identification becomes a lot more important at that point.

So on a broader spectrum, I would identify as Asian-American. More specifically, I'd identify as South Asian-American. I'm from Nepal and I grew up in the U.S. most of my life. However, if I was in a group of South Asians, I would say, "I'm Nepali-American." In Nepal, I'm more American than I am Nepali. In America, I'm more Nepali than I am American; so context matters. For example, in a small country

like Nepal we have over 80 ethnicities. And so people's identification to their ethnic group, or their caste, is really important. And there is as much conversation around ethnic turmoil in Nepal, and ethnic differences, and caste differences, and how they've impacted social impressions.

In America, we've had racist policies like whether it was not giving people the right to vote -- from slavery, to access education, access to healthcare, all of that. And so I think America's very much been divided by what we have not given people access to, which is how people define their race and their ethnicity, even more beyond that where they originally came from. Here [in America], because oppression has been very much dictated by race, I think that what helps us to find out what we call race. I think it is important to try to understand that there are power dynamics at play and those power dynamics of institutions in the United States very much play into our personal dynamics.

[As individuals], I think that we have race categorized for us by others. I would say, "He looks like" or "She looks like they could be African American," or "They could be Asian American," but I don't know because most people think I'm Latino, and I'm not... I know a lot of people that are mixed-race, and so I've come to the place where I don't try to identify people [racially], but allow them to identify themselves. I identify [racially] very much in different communities.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization & Job

I work for an organization that helps devise strategies for an international community of member organizations primarily focused on youth recidivism programs, career counseling, and job placement assistance -- with a focus on marginalized and

minority communities. My organization primarily serves low income, black, some Latino depending on the place, white communities. I would also say that the international work units of my organization are run on the majority by white males-- I don't know their class. I would say middle to upper class. Maybe some of them come from poverty and some of them who don't. So our leadership is very rounded.

Our middle management is a little bit more diverse -- black, white I would say for the most part, and then some Asians in there. And then our people that are more on my level. They are a little bit more diverse -- white, black, Asian. The local [U.S. based business units of the organization] are pretty similar. The leadership is very white, and maybe middle management is black and white, depending on the [geographic location] of the organization. As far as their staff, there may be some Latinos, and then the majority will be similar to the local community. Overall, we have very few CEOs of or vice presidents the organization -- local or national business units -- that are people of color.

There's a lean number of us [organization staff] that are really conscious of diversity and inclusion initiatives. But there's not a lot of work to help us kind of institutionalize that within our organization, or really bring out the skills that we bring in, including people that are identified in different communities, people who can really talk about what it's like to identify with those [diverse] communities and bring those experiences into how we do our work and how our institution and policies are set. There's just not a lot of that happening to really incorporate the diversity, if that makes sense.

My background has been in community organizing and national organizing around issues of immigration, racial profiling, and LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Queer) issues. I'll be very honest. I had taken a year off after my last job, which lasted about five years, doing national policy and national organizing work around immigration. I accepted this job because I really care about young people and their futures and what we call "at risk communities" and I wanted to kind of go that way. To be honest, I really prefer community organizing and community advocacy over social services work because of the social empowerment and advocacy aspects. You don't get involved in advocacy work in social services work because the strategies for serving communities is dictated by political and socio-economic forces in the organization rather than the needs of the community. I don't necessarily know if it's the right fit for me. I think there's a very different way in which social service agencies approach work than how community organizing approaches [serving] communities.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

I think he [the supervisor] would describe himself as African American. We have worked together in the same location for the past six months. When I first started working with him, I was actually having a really hard time understanding what was going on in terms of how he was interacting with me versus [how he was interacting with] my colleague. And so I had to have a conversation [with him] because I was having a hard time understanding his moods and understanding why things that I felt were really simple requests were complicated for him.

We went out for coffee one day and I just said, “Hey, I don’t know what’s going on, but I am having a hard time relating with you. I want to have a more open dialogue with you. I want to be able to be more open. I’m having a hard time understanding exactly what you need from me and if I’m not doing something right... There are times where you seem really upset, and I don’t know if that’s because of something I’m doing. [After the confrontation] he was really able to explain to me the pressures he was under and why he was the way he was in my first 90 day trial period. Later when we came back to the conversation, he said, “It was really important for me to know that my moods impact your days.”

Ever since then we have been able to kind of click a little bit more-- at least for brief periods of time. There are times where we’re working on a certain project, and we’re right there with one another, and we’re able to totally understand where things need to go and how things need to get done. During those times he’s very supportive. But I would say I find less of those times than times where I just feel like I’m stressing him out and I’m not quite sure why [laughter].

I would really like to get to know him [the supervisor] on a deeper interpersonal level to understand his experiences, his background, and what has made him what he is. However, he made it very clear on his first day that he does not relate in that way, and that he keeps a professional line between himself and his subordinates -- *supervision* is that line. He does not have relationships with [subordinates], which is very different for me because my old supervisor, who’s also a different race and ethnicity, and I are really

close friends. In fact, every supervisor I've had in the past and I are close friends or acquaintances. I can easily call them; they have become mentors to me.

As far as my relationship with my current supervisor, I'm trying to understand him, but I can't. I would try to ask him about himself, [for example] "What about your experiences?" but I don't know how to have that conversation with him. I have had to talk with my colleague about him. I said to myself that I'm going to let a lot of things pass in terms of the way he's [the supervisor] acting with me that honestly, if he had been a white supervisor, I'd have been like, "Hell no [Laughter]."

He's one of the two, maybe now three, black men in the organization of 150 people... What pressure is he under that I don't even know. On one occasion he [the supervisor] said to me, "You'll see that there are certain times that certain people are in certain moods and it impacts everybody else." So what I realized was that he was in a bad place that week because of his supervisors, and I had no clue as to why. [Now] when I don't know why he's upset, I leave it alone... I just do my work.

Chanel's Profile Through her Words  
*(Chanel is An African-American Case Manager Working with  
a Caucasian Supervisor)*

The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's perspective

I see race as something you base on how someone looks. Like the color of their skin or their [physical] features. I have been involved in situations in my job where someone being of a certain race gave them more power than someone else--what causes it, I don't know. I honestly don't know. It's something about not only do they [long pause] -- I don't know [shaking her head as if puzzled], I really don't know. I feel like

there is more respect [given to Caucasians] there. Not only do they [Caucasian supervisors] have this title of supervisor, but also because they are another race.

There was this one black foster father that was painful for me to deal with every single day. He was just so disrespectful and did not believe what I was telling him about the case. I ended up asking my supervisor to intervene with him because he was frustrating to me. I felt like with her having a supervisor title, and that role, and also with her being a Caucasian woman, I felt like the father would respond better to that better...and he did. [Chanel looks upward and ponders] I feel it's almost like, "Well if this is coming from Stacy, and Stacy is pseudo name [for a Caucasian supervisor], then obviously she must be right, or obviously Stacy knows what she is talking about. I don't know how to explain it [visibly frustrated]. Yeah. I don't know how to explain it anyway. I think respect just comes with having that title, not only being of another race, but also having that title attached to them.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization and the Job

The organization I work in works with children and the families that are in foster care who have had some type of government agency involvement in their lives, typically domestic violence. And if the children have been removed from their parents, basically that's where my organization comes in. Once the investigation of the case has been done, my job is to work with the family on stabilizing the situation, helping them to get the kids back, working on their case, or providing any service that needs to be done for them to be reunified with their children.

I have a bachelor's degree in sociology, and I have always just been interested in working with children and families. That's what attracted me to this type of work. It's a lot of responsibility. Sometimes it's almost like you are in a caregiver world, not just the person helping to oversee the case or assisting the family, but sometimes also being responsible for the child's everyday needs. Sometimes you yourself have to do the child's dental appointment where it's like looking it up on Google, or finding the address of that dental office. It's the same thing that I feel like the foster parent, or whoever is responsible for the child could do, but they won't do that kind of thing.

The job can be overwhelming at times. Especially when foster parents are bad, or they are just not cooperative. You [Chanel as a Case Manager] end up having to do all of the little stuff – you are responsible for all of the drive and all of the responsibility--that falls on you because if it doesn't get done, it's all on you! [Chanel emphasizes with a raised voice].

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

I am an African-American [female], and my supervisor is white, a Caucasian [female]. We have been working together for the past eight months. In the beginning, I was a little bit frustrated [in the working relationship]. It may not be her [the supervisor's] fault. I think the field itself was like there is not that much direction in it. It feels like you are almost like a firefighter; there is always something coming up. And I think there is so much going on in everybody's cases and the caseload is so heavy, that sometimes all these things don't get addressed immediately until it's a situation where the child can't stay in the home anymore... It's like you are figuring things out as you go. It

was really difficult because I was pretty new to the field. I didn't understand a lot of things, and I needed her [the supervisor] to be able to explain things to me. I didn't feel like I was getting that or getting the type of support that I needed.

[Over the ensuing months, Chanel felt that her requests for supervisor interaction were continuing to go unheeded] I had been coming to her frequently about a particular case and about the family and the domestic violence that had been occurring. I didn't feel like I was going to receive support from her until it was too late. [Chanel perceived that the situation would escalate without the supervisor's intervention]... I ended up having to drive the mother to a shelter at 10 o'clock at night myself because it never got resolved when I asked to her [the supervisor] for assistance.

On a different case, I brought up to my supervisor multiple times about the concerns I had about the recurring violence that was going on in the home. I said, "I don't think the child is safe in the home because they have a pattern of getting in domestic violence situations, reconciling, getting into fights again, and reconciling. I don't think it is a safe environment for the child." And again, nothing happened... nothing got done, and I really got fed up. My supervisor's behavior frustrated me a lot, to the point that we actually had to sit down after the incident occurred... I was like, "You have to be able to work with me here... not only am I new to this field, you are asking me to assess the situation for safety, and I am telling you THIS IS A SAFETY ISSUE! I need you to get involved, and I need you to do something! You can't just ignore and put it off!" We have pretty much been on same page since that incident.

[Chanel provides examples of interactions with her supervisor following the confrontation above]... I am doing the day-to-day stuff... I just go into her office and say, "Hey, this is what I am thinking regarding this child, or regarding these three teenage girls on this." I say, "This is what I am thinking," and she is like, "Yeah, I agree... I like that she doesn't micromanage me, as opposed to other supervisors that I have seen. I like for her to be there when I need the assistance, when I come to her. In the beginning I was a little bit frustrated about that, so I was like "I am very new to this. I need you to tell me how to do this [and] show me how to do that. But now I am like, "Oh I like that you don't micromanage me. It gives me an opportunity to learn certain things on my own and that you are not breathing down my neck."

[Regarding Chanel's current perceptions of her supervisor's behavior] I think she is still hands off, but it might also be because now I am a little bit more acclimated to the field, a little bit more acclimated to how things work...This is one of those jobs that you really don't do by yourself -- you need support. And if that support is coming from another coworker or somebody who's done it who's been in this field for a long time, then great. I have figured some things out [for myself]. I have been able to go to other people; colleagues that also have been doing it [the job] for a while...now I don't go to her as much as I used to in the beginning.

JZ's Profile Through his Words  
*(JZ is an Immigrant HR Certification Professional  
Working with a White Supervisor)*

The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's Perspective

I assign race based on how different people are, and that difference can manifest itself in many ways. Like times I have to fill [out] a form, and I have to characterize myself [racially]. I just don't want to do it, to tell you the truth, because they ask are you if you are Hispanic, or are you whatever. I don't think that I'm Hispanic. I'm just an immigrant. I think immigrant is another race. Immigrants may be less than Hispanics on the value chain (undervalued chain) in the U.S. And value chain for me is how much more effort you have to do for the same result. So I feel that like Hispanics have to do more effort than others for similar results [and] immigrants have to do more effort than Hispanics for similar results. [Being of a different race in the U.S.] you always have to prove why you deserve to be here.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization & Job

The organization I work in is a certification body for Human Resources (HR) professional. Basically what a certification body does is we develop standards and examinations, apply those examinations, and we certify people who pass those examinations. We also provide re-certification services for professionals who need to recertify every three years. A lot of people come to us is because they're just driven towards learning, and development, and growing, and that's what we are looking for. I personally have done a little market research on a day-to-day basis. Mostly sending out surveys, sending out questionnaires, analyzing the data of the company, analyzing Google analytics, and all data that comes with it -- like transactional data. My job includes analyzing the trends in order to show where the business is going. Studying trends better, understanding where we are in the countries where we have a presence, and

kind of understanding where we could grow. I also look for opportunities for our organization to build relationships, like promoting our products on the phone, on Skype, or in-office via live presentations.

I've been with this organization for five years now [as of November 2014]. In fact, I came here to do global market research. As you can probably tell [by my accent], I am an immigrant. So by being an immigrant, they [my current organization] thought that I could help them better understand other cultures and other countries from the [cross-cultural] perspective, especially since I have the experience of being from abroad. That aspect kind of helped me grow in the company, because I'm the only one who has an accent here. When I came to the U.S., I came here as an F1 student, so I didn't have visa, you know to work. My organization sponsored my visa and all the process. They felt that I had some expertise that that they didn't have, and that they could not find easily. My being different [as an immigrant] worked out well for me.

But I'm always in that sense different. Not necessarily how I look, but when I open my mouth everyone can see that I'm different, you know. It makes me feel sometimes embarrassed, sometimes shy, kind of sticking out for me is always difficult, because I know that when people meet me I don't open my mouth. I feel that there is a perception that if you have an accent, you are not as smart in others. Sometimes I feel embarrassed to even open my mouth, because I know that changes the [perception of others]. In my mind, I feel that I [will] always have to work harder than anyone else in my organization.

[As an immigrant] you will never be equal [with native born individuals]. Expectations are higher of immigrants, you know? You also have to come up with stuff that's different and bring different contributions; you just have to work more. If you don't have an accent, you will never understand what it is like having accent. If you are not like of a different color [minority], you will never understand what it's like to be of a different color. You just cannot understand... [As an immigrant] you think different, your mind is wired in a different way. [As an immigrant] it's very difficult to understand other cultures, you know? It is difficult to understand how to relate to those people because you think different, your mind is wired in a different way.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

My current supervisor is a white female. We have been working together for the past year. My previous supervisor was an African-American male, but he's not here anymore. My first supervisor was a Russian male. So in that sense like it was we were the same [race]. I'm an immigrant, and my that guy was an immigrant, we were kind of both immigrants. We both had accents. In that regard, I think we were kind of similar. Then like I worked for a male African-American and he left the company, and now I work with a white women [supervisor].

As far as interacting with my [current] supervisor, I am part of meetings that she runs every week, but [she and I] don't have like an ongoing necessarily individual meeting a whole lot. She has less time for me on her calendar than others and that could be also because there is often a language challenge, you know? So if you don't have as much time on the calendar [for] a person, then you don't know as much of the stories of

that person, because just your backgrounds are so different... it becomes more of a transactional relationship -- it's all about the work. There is nothing beyond that; not anything that's deeper. And those deeper relationships always give a benefit. That's where the intangibles are... It is very subtle. And I can understand that.

Like where I come from, if there was someone at work that was an immigrant [to my country], and they could speak the language [Portuguese] like a native, they will get benefits. That's because natives will always prefer to speak the language of natives, you know? [rhet.] And I imagine that happens everywhere. So here [in my U.S. based organization] it is the same; the natives prefer to speak with natives because they [American English-speaking supervisors] don't have patience with others who struggle with speaking English. So, the bottom line is that she has less time on her agenda for me than others [peers who have English as their first/primary language].

But doesn't just apply to supervisor you know, it's also applies to peers. I've found that peers have a big importance. Peers can take you out, just as [easily] as the supervisor can. And sometimes the peers are even more challenging than the supervisor him or herself, you know? [rhet.] In fact, I've seen more resistance [to me as a result of my perceived race] on the peer side than on the supervisor side to tell you the truth.

It's like the multi-cultural component that sometimes comes into play. We can all appreciate them [influences of cultural diversity in the organization], but the real point is that you guys, who were born here in the U.S., can tell stories that just click for you guys. But for me, [those stories] are a lot of meaningless stuff. Because I don't have the same background, and the same experiences, I can't even understand that stuff-- and small talk

[among co-workers in organizations] is very common in the U.S. It's like relationship-building thing. If you do not have the same background, those small talks don't mean anything for you. [Common understanding through shared language and experiences] just cannot be borrowed.

So I definitely see that there is a less time for me [with my supervisor] -- it's all about the work. There is nothing beyond that. I [just] prefer to do the job at the best of my ability, and keep the relationship on a professional level only. Trying to go beyond that is where the problems can come. I definitely see that there is a less time for me [than others], but I feel that has evolved. That's probably a signal that she's listening more [now than at the beginning of our working relationship], or maybe she understands my accent better. But I definitely think there is more listening going on. I think things are much better now than before. I think things are clicking more because I have kind of developed a trust, so people [peers and supervisor] listen to what I'm saying more.

KT's Profile Through her Words  
*(KT is An African American Case Manager Working with  
a Caucasian Supervisor)*

The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's perspective

In my opinion, race is the culture who you are familiar with, or in simple terms what you are comfortable with, because I have met some Spanish-speaking people, but they think they are white.

Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization and the Job

The organization I work for, a third party is what I would consider it as, receives abuse calls, abandoned calls, and neglect calls from [a masked government agency].

[That government agency] has their investigators go in, and upon going in, they assess whether a child needs to be removed out of the home, or if the child does not need to be removed out of the home, or if services need to be placed at home, or if services do not need to be placed at home.

They also make a decision once they remove that child, if they need to bring in case management -- which is my position in the workforce. Once they call in case management, we typically work with the individuals whether that would be mom, dad, victim, perpetrator, and we got to court. And from there, the court makes the decision and it should be deemed appropriate that the child is sheltered by the court, and placed under supervision of the court. And from that point, it's a matter of just making sure the child is safe, providing services to the family to ensure that they are getting what they need in order to close out a case.

[Organization staff diversity ranges] from the beginning of the spectrum to the end of the spectrum; Caucasian, African-American, Haitian, Spanish individuals, and a variety of individuals across the board. We have two individual case managers that speak fluent Spanish. We have two individuals that speak Creole fluently, and the remainder of the case managers, which I'll say is probably close to 30 of us, all speak English. [With regard to the client community being served] diversity between the organization and the community is absolutely imbalanced. Imbalanced in that we are consistently dealing with cases where we only have two Spanish-speaking staff members, or two Creole-speaking staff members. [Sometimes when we receive calls] there isn't anyone that can effectively deal with those cases except those four individuals. That's because it may be

a case where the family only speaks Spanish, and you need a Spanish staff member to talk with them [the client], but none of the Spanish-speaking staff members are available. So although you may have someone else who's in line to take a case, because it's on a rotation basis, they call in with a Spanish or Creole-speaking case manager and they end up with a heavier case load.

I am a case manager. That means I am responsible for ensuring that the children are safe once every 25 days that they are going to their medical and dental appointments, that they're enrolled in school, and also to ensure that the family has all the services to meet their needs.

[For example] if a psychological evaluation needs to be done, I would be the one sending out that referral, being in contact with the collaterals, be it a daycare that it's taking care of that child, or a school counselor who is involved with the child, if the child is on a certain age and is able to speak for themselves.

As far as the job, Case Management is extremely busy and nonstop. There is never adequate enough time to sit down and to really understand where you come from, who you are, what you have dealt with, what you are offended by, or the way you think about things. There is just not enough time. You are constantly on the run, like a hamster running around a little wheel, trying to pick up little things as you go.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

The supervisor that I work with is Caucasian That supervisor, because I have only been here since September, we really had to, like with anyone, gain understanding of each other as well as each other's background. Because she was Caucasian, her

background of course is different than mine. So some things we were really not able to relate on. For instance, to paint the picture better for you, she had a case that she transferred to me once I got out of training. There were two things that were very important when she transferred the case to me: she was a middle class Caucasian supervisor who was transferring the case to the new African-American case manager. And the case that she had, that she transferred to me, the children were deemed, or their mother considers them white. Based upon what their actual demographics status, the mother is Spanish, the father is black. The foster mom where the children were placed was Caucasian.

The way the foster mom spoke with me and responded to me of course was completely different from the way that she responded to my [Caucasian] supervisor that transferred me the case. What things I saw as red flags that it was a (long pause) race or title concern is I went to my supervisor on multiple occasions about multiple factors that rose as I had the case. And each time, I would say that because of the type of individual I was dealing with, which was someone that felt they needed to know every little detail on the case, I reached out for her [the supervisor's] expertise on how to handle someone of that nature. And I wrote verbatim, texted, or responded to the foster mom based upon what my supervisor advised me [to communicate to the foster mom]. I resorted to having the communication be strictly through e-mail or text, to ensure what was being translated was exactly what my supervisor was advising me. [I did this] because I was having so many problems, and I felt it was an attack on me [personally] because they [the Caucasian foster mother and the Caucasian supervisor] thought I was not knowledgeable.

That situation resulted in us having a big roundtable [discussion] with all the parties involved; the foster mom, my supervisor, and me. My supervisor did not even take the notion to point out that *she* was the one actually advising me to say to say x, y, z [to the foster mother].

So I brought it to the table and said [to the foster mother], "You were concerned about what I was saying to you, but everything I said to you was verbatim from my supervisor." Throughout the entire ordeal, I felt as though if my [Caucasian] supervisor was saying certain things, the same things that I was saying, this Caucasian foster mom would have received it differently than when she was receiving it from me. And although I asked my supervisor repeatedly to intervene with the foster mom, she chose not to. The type of supervisor she is [laughing]. She will definitely take whatever's the easiest way out. So the easy way to this was I will just tell you what to say versus say, "Let me talk to the foster mom," "Let me kind of clear up these things."

In my opinion, what's important is *that* [the supervisor intervening] should have just taken place automatically without a request, or without -- to speak in layman's terms- - [expletive] hitting the fire or hitting the fan, which that is what happened. Based off of my responses, the foster mom was not pleased with my response. Little did she know, I was only being the deliverer. It was not my response, it was my [Caucasian] supervisor's response, which [incidentally] is the individual she had been working with prior to transferring the case to me.

[KT's lesson learned from the incident] I know that if issues like that were to arise again [in the future], to go and maybe speak with a different supervisor who I felt may be

able to relate to what I was saying, to able to explain different things that I have experienced in my background, or just African-American culture...being able to go and talk to another black supervisor, a black person, and say, "Hey, this is where I am coming from," or "This is what I am thinking," or "You know how this will happen and that will happen." [It would be nice] to be able to speak [to someone else] in that lingo and not have to have a 45 minute discussion that gets nowhere.

[Regarding the current state of the relationship] Overall I feel like we have a pretty good relationship. I just think that we handle matters differently. And what I mean by that, I can sometimes be aggressive when I want things to get done and I push for things to get done.

So I just don't settle with answer "A." I look for other solutions to make sure we are getting to the finish line. [For example] I don't just send e-mail, and then just wait for the reply. I will send an e-mail, but I also follow up if I have I haven't heard from you in a few days. [Also] If an issue occurs, I don't just settle with answer "A," I look for other solutions to make sure we are getting to the finish line. [On one occasion KT confronted her supervisor about her perception of the supervisor's responsiveness], "I don't need to bring it to your attention, because you are not going to address it, and you are going to say it's not a big deal," "You are thinking in the here and the now, but I don't operate just in the here and the now; I operate in the sense we need to prepare for the future."

[When KT and her supervisor are aligned] I think there are times when we are working together on different work-related documents that I need to present to court; those are times that we were on the same alignment. Once I have done the background

work, I report back to my supervisor and ask her to review what I've done to ensure that everything has been caught, nothing's slipped through the cracks, or maybe I didn't see it from the same perspective that she can. You should have someone in your circle that can assist you with anything that you may be struggling with. You should always have someone that you can go to.

[And as a supervisor] It's important whether you are African-American, Caucasian, or Puerto Rican, it's very important for you to have an open door policy. Not in the sense that I know you won't kick me out of your office, but in the sense that I want to hear *from you*, and I want to report in *to you*... [Supervisors should] Just be open-minded, definitely open-minded, and learn how to effectively and professionally address matters... [As the ideal supervisor] I don't want to look at you as you are just my employee. I want to look at you as you honestly are valuable; otherwise, you would not be working here... [As the ideal supervisor] As much as I want employees to work for me, I want to work for them. It's just a team effort.

The only difference is on my side-- I want something for you. I might have a different experience, or I might have read something in a book which gives me just a little bit more insight that I can give to you.

Culminating from the preceding steps of the analysis, and corresponding analysis of participants' individual profiles, the final product of the phenomenological reduction resulted in a thematic representation that captures the "essence" of the experience.

Seidman describes the narrative profile as "a way of knowing" (2006, p. 123), and the thematic representation as a means of contextualizing the experience in ways that "link

the individual's experience with the social and organizational contexts" they operate in (2006, p. 20). As such, the composite narrative profile enables us to "know" the meaning within the phenomenon of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor.

This research study captured the meaning within the phenomenon in the following composite narrative; the "essence" of subordinate experience extrapolated from the collation and thoughtful examination of participants' lived experience individually and collectively.

### **Composite Narrative Profile**

Looking across participant narrative profiles, a composite profile emerged. The composite profile is a culmination of the collective lived experiences with a focus on the meaning that surfaced within the three supporting elements of the experience. As such, the composite profile provides a cross-sectional representation of all participants' lived working relationship experience with their racially-dissimilar supervisors.

#### **The Meaning of Race from the Subordinate's Perspective**

Participant's made meaning of race in a number of diverse ways. They assigned the race of others based on visually-perceived physical characteristics, as well as traditional attire, spoken language, and cultural familiarity.

According to Beynu:

Race is more than physical characteristics and features, although that can sometimes be the first thing that comes to mind. Even though sometimes we (people in society) often determine the race of others by their skin color or other physical features, determining someone else's race can be often times complex and confusing, especially when you're dealing with people of mixed races, or when you're traveling internationally.

Other participants' reflections on race, such as the assignment of race, and even

the concept of race, changed dramatically depending on the context. According to

Beynu:

There are people who share similar physical features, such as skin color, but identify with a whole other race entirely. There are also people who visually appear to be one race, but when they speak you hear a discernible accent that makes immediately makes you realize they weren't the race that you thought they were.

There are just so many classifications and categorizations of race; language, culture, ethnicity, caste, tribe, cultural origin, nationality. It's really complex. And it's complex because the concept of race is universally complex.

Analysis of all participants' experiences suggests that subordinates of racially-dissimilar supervisors really had no single or common means of ascribing or assigning the races of others. Determination of another person's race was based on physical features, spoken language, and context as perceived by the subordinate.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Organization & Job

Organizations' served clientele varied widely from working directly with individuals to working on behalf of, or in concert with government and other non-profit organizations. The missions of these organizations varied as well, from providing educational certification and training, to providing job training, employment assistance, advising other international organizations on policy and process strategies for developing, or improving social services delivery. Served clientele, whether individuals or other organizations, reflected a diverse racial population; however, where organizations were the served client, or in reflection on their own organization, participants noted a disparity in representation of minorities in upper management and senior leadership positions. This fact has implications for subordinates' feelings of belonging and overall affinity

with the organization based on perceptions of the supervisor as an extension of any perceived institutional discrimination or difference-making as a product of subordinates' racial-dissimilarity.

Organization and job-related influences on subordinate's working relationship with their racially-dissimilar supervisor included the nature of the subordinate's field of work, the organization they worked in, and even society outside the organization. Like any field, participants indicated that sometimes the day-to-day demands of their jobs were extremely taxing. According to KT, the constantly shifting priorities and unforeseen issues made her feel like "a hamster on a wheel." When participants were relatively new to the job, their desire and expectation for direct involvement from their supervisor was heightened due to lack of experience. KT explains further:

When I was new to the organization, there didn't seem like there was enough time to sit down and learn the job, or at least learn it in a way that made me comfortable and confident enough to work independently.

Other participants talked about the influence of organization leadership. In JZ's reflections, peers were perceived as having influence on the lived working relationship by way of their group member behaviors toward differentiated subordinates. In light of these perceptions, racially-differentiated subordinates must be aware of the power of peer influence on the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Their influences can either serve to hinder or aid in the subordinate's development and career growth opportunities -- opportunities that can be given or withheld based on peers' influence on your supervisor's perceptions of the racially-differentiated subordinate. JZ's reflections suggest that supervisors relationship behaviors with a given racially-dissimilar

subordinate can be influenced by the way other peers treat that subordinate.

JZ explains:

Peers especially can have an impact on my working relationship with my supervisor. Peers are often involved in small chats that I can't engage in because of deficiencies in my language skills, but that isn't the only thing that peers do. In meetings they will intentionally use "intelligent sounding" words and phrases to make themselves look more intelligent than others. Because of my poor language skills, I am at a disadvantage.

From an organizational perspective, participants felt that there were formal policies and protocols that dictated how the interracial working dyad performed their work; however, subordinates also noted other pressures exerted on the interracial working relationship by means of expectations levied on my supervisor. Beynu's reflections expound on this perception:

On occasion my supervisor exhibits frustration, anger, or feelings of anxiety in response to these pressures. As a result, sometimes those emotions manifest themselves in my supervisor's behavior towards me. During those times, I try to consider these organizational influences and how they might be influencing my supervisor's thoughts, actions, and feelings. I think to myself, there's a lot of pressure that this person goes through, being middle management, because my supervisor is racially-differentiated from other management personnel, as such, I know my supervisor experiences many of the same racial diversity-related challenges that I do.

From a societal perspective, and more specifically here in America, participants noted the history of race-related discrimination and racial difference-making. Participants felt that is important to try to understand that there are power dynamics at play and those power dynamics of institutions and the United States very much play into interpersonal dynamics on the job.

Beynu's reflections provide further context:

Essentially, people who live and or work here in the United States are subtly and

overtly exposed to historical and ongoing discriminatory behavior every day. Unfortunately, these same people perpetuate those same behaviors in the institutional policies, practices, and individual proclivities that shape our personal and professional lives.

#### Subordinate Perceptions of the Interracial Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship

Study participants ranged from front-line staff (with no subordinates themselves) to middle-management subordinates (with a single direct-reporting supervisor, and one to multiple direct-reporting subordinates). At the time of the study, all participants were physically co-located in the same location as their supervisors, and had the ability to interact with their supervisors via email, telephone, or in person. Looking across participant profiles, two sub-themes emerged; subordinates' task- and relationship-oriented expectations compared to perceptions of the supervisor's behavior, and subordinate's, and subordinates' perception of the quality of the interracial working relationship with their supervisor.

While racial dissimilarity was an obvious dynamic in each interracial working relationship, its influence was not always the strongest or sole influencer when it came to the subordinate's assessment of the quality of the relationship. Ariana's reflections further contextualize this finding as an example of congruence between her relationship-oriented expectations and the perception of her supervisor's relationship-oriented behavior:

There's always this relationship building piece that's very important to her and to me. I think that's probably why we get along so well because I value that. I think I am very blessed because I have somebody that values me. I feel valued and I feel welcomed because maybe I have more of a personality that's open to *that* conversation [verbally sharing personal stories]. She is very, very, very sweet, very professional and fun... She cares about me as a person as well as an employee...She has been really very patient with me.

Other participants' task/relationship-oriented expectations of their supervisor were perceived as being unmet or unsatisfied by their supervisor based on subordinates' perception of their supervisor's relational behavior. An example of unmet relationship-oriented expectations can be seen in Beynu's reflections on her relationship-oriented expectations of her supervisor, and her supervisor's "verbalized" aversion to interpersonal social interactions with subordinates.

Beynu explains:

I would really like to get to know him [the supervisor] on a deeper interpersonal level to understand his experiences, his background, and what has made him what he is. However, he made it very clear on his first day that he does not relate in that way, and that he keeps a professional line between himself and his subordinates -- *supervision* is that line. He does not have relationships with [subordinates], which is very different for me because my old supervisor, who's also a different race and ethnicity, and I are really close friends. In fact, every supervisor I've had in the past and I are close friends of acquaintances. I can easily call them; they have become mentors to me.

Incongruence between subordinates' task-oriented expectations and the perceived behaviors of the supervisor can be seen in other participants' reflections on their interracial working relationship. In these instances, subordinates' had expectations for active and timely supervisor engagement and involvement, but perceived their supervisor as being either unwilling or remiss in addressing the subordinates' task-oriented needs. Chanel's reflections on her working relationship experience epitomize incongruence between subordinates' task-oriented expectations of their supervisor and the perceived behavior of the supervisor in light of *that* expectation:

My supervisor's behavior frustrated me a lot, to the point that we actually had to sit down after the incident occurred... I was like, "You have to be able to work with me here... not only am I new to this field, you are asking me to assess the

situation for safety, and I am telling you THIS IS A SAFETY ISSUE! I need you to get involved, and I need you to do something! You can't just ignore and put it off!"

Overall, subordinates' experience suggest that during the early stages of the interracial working relationship, there will be times when subordinates feel they either need or expect the supervisor's direct involvement in work-related situations, especially if the subordinate is new to the job or the field. Inexperienced and new subordinates of racially-dissimilar supervisors expect that his or her supervisor will support them in a timely and appropriate manner, and intervene directly in work-related situations as needed.

Subordinates who either have longer periods of working with his or her supervisor, or subordinate's who are experienced in the job/field, but are newly assigned to a racially-dissimilar supervisor, tend to have more relationship-oriented expectations of their supervisor. Regardless of the subordinate's relational orientation (task or relationship), subordinates' perceptions of the supervisor's behaviors, in light of those expectations, influenced subordinates' consequent assessment of the quality of the interracial working relationship.

Subordinate's characterization of the quality of the relationship had two distinct dimensions; when perceived supervisor behavior was consistently congruent with subordinates' expectations, and when perceived supervisor behaviors were consistently incongruent with subordinates' expectations. When subordinates perceive that the supervisor's behaviors are consistently congruent with the subordinate's relational orientation-related expectations, subordinates will perceive the relationship to be of high

quality, effective, and fulfilling. Conversely, when subordinates perceive that the supervisor's behavior is consistently incongruent with the subordinate's relational orientation-related expectations, subordinates will perceive the relationship as functional, "ok," or transactional in nature.

Participant insights supporting the subordinate expectation-supervisor behavior congruence supposition are evidenced through Ariana's reflections on her interracial working relationship. Ariana explains:

Overall, I have gotten to the point where it has been four and half years...I know what I am going to get [from my supervisor] and what I am not. If she says she is going to call, she will call. And if she doesn't call, she will send an email. She is a person who doesn't speak up often, but when she does, it's very insightful. She is very punctual, very professional, and very knowledgeable. I think that's probably why we get along so well, because I value that. I think that if I were to leave the organization tomorrow, I would still sustain the relationship with her, even if it was just wishing her Merry Christmas, or checking in with her just to see how she's doing. I feel like our relationship has transcended the conventions of traditional supervisor-subordinate relationships; it feels like a professional friendship.

Examples of incongruence between subordinate expectations and perceived supervisor behavior caused subordinates to feel alienated, distanced, and overall misaligned with their supervisor. Beynu's assessment of the quality of her working relationship suggests that while she empathizes with her supervisor as a fellow minority, her supervisor's preference for "strictly professional" relationships with his subordinates falls short of satisfying Beynu's desire for a deeper level of interpersonal interaction with him. As such, Beynu perceives the relationship with her supervisor as a transactional one. Beynu describes her relationship with her supervisor from beginning to present:

[Over time] my expectations for deeper interaction with him have changed. I just do my work... When I run into a problem, I will call him, and he'll help me work through it... There's not a lot of direct supervising that happens I would say.

Chanel's assessment of the current state of her working relationship suggests that at the beginning of their working relationship, Chanel expected active and timely engagement, interaction, and guidance from her supervisor. Over time, Chanel has become more self-sufficient through experiential learning on the job and self-directedness. She has also found alternative knowledge sources (to her supervisor) who she feels she can better relate to and obtain more timely and relevant insights into unfamiliar or complex work-related scenarios.

As Chanel's characterization of her working relationship with her supervisor as a transactional one; a relationship of minimal interpersonal interaction dictated on an as-needed basis. Chanel explains:

I think she is still hands off, but it might also be because now I am a little bit more acclimated to the field, a little bit more acclimated to how things work. I have figured some things out; I have been able to go to other people, colleagues that also have been doing [the job] for a while. Now I don't go to her [Chanel's supervisor] as much as I used to in the beginning. [On occasion] I will just go into her office and say, "Hey, this is what I am thinking regarding this child or regarding these three teenage girls on this." I say, "This is what I am thinking," and she is like, "Yeah, I agree."

JZ's assessment of the current state of the working relationship with his supervisor reflects his perception that the relationship has improved over time. Behaviors such as active listening, fewer prompts for clarification or rephrasing of statements, and note-taking demonstrated by JZ's supervisor, have contributed to JZ's perceptions that the quality of the relationship is improving. However, JZ's other relationship expectations

[of his supervisor] such as being heard, valued, and acknowledged for his individual contributions, remain unsatisfied.

As such, JZ's reflections indicate personal confusion about exactly where he stands with regard to the supervisor's assessment of *him*.

I think things are much better now, you know? I think they are clicking. I kind of developed a trust ... I feel that she's paying more attention now vs. before... [She is] writing down notes, and not saying "What?", or "What did you mean by that?", or "Can you talk in a different way?" So things are definitely much better now.

[However] I still don't know what the boundaries [of the relationship] are; what I can say, what I cannot say. I still don't know how much I am trying to fit in and be equal, and how much I'm keeping my [individuality]... I still don't know.

KT's current assessment of her working relationship suggests a modicum of connectedness based on situational circumstances where she and her supervisor work collaboratively on job-related tasks or endeavors. KT also qualifies her reflections on the current state of the working relationship by commenting on definitive differences in interpersonal approaches to work-related situations (i.e., work ethic, working style, and assertiveness). This qualification suggests that work ethic, working style, and assertiveness are important behaviors to KT. And because KT's supervisor does not share or exhibit the corresponding behaviors that KT values or considers ideal, the working relationship between KT and her supervisor is perceived as a transactional one. KT observes:

Overall I feel like we have a pretty good relationship. I just think that we handle matters differently. I think there were times when we were working together on different documents that I needed to present to court. Those were times that we were on the same alignment with the information that I was providing to the court...In those types of engagements, you are feeling aligned because things are clicking; they are working smoothly, and they are going according to the process.

She is doing what she is supposed to do, you are doing what you are responsible for doing, and it makes the process move effectively...

### The Essence of the Lived Experience of Working with a Racially-Dissimilar Supervisor

Based on analysis across all participants' working relationship experiences with their current supervisor, the essences of the lived relationship experience of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor emerges as this: racial dissimilarity between the supervisor and subordinate becomes a salient influence on the quality of the dyadic working relationship when the subordinate perceives it as an influence on his or her supervisor's relational behaviors.

Aspects of the essence of the phenomenon are:

1. Subordinates make meaning of race differently.
2. The organization, or job, and/or peers influence the interracial working relationship between the supervisors and subordinates.
3. The salience of racial dissimilarity is determined by subordinates' perception of its impact on the supervisor's relational behaviors.
4. Subordinates assess the quality of the working relationship based on perceptions of his or her supervisor's relational behaviors in light of the subordinate's expectations.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented findings from the individual profiles of participants in their own words, organized by three main themes: the meaning of race from the subordinate's perspective, subordinate perceptions of the organization and the job, and subordinate perceptions of the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship. A composite

narrative profile was used to illustrate and convey analytic findings across all participants' experiences which culminated in the essence of the lived experience of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. As such, this chapter concluded with a description of the essence of the phenomenon as a prelude to further discussion and conclusions in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions & Implications**

### **Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of subordinates who work with racially-dissimilar supervisors, in nonprofit social welfare organizations. The study addressed the primary research question, “How do subordinates experience their racially dissimilar supervisor?” The essence of the phenomenon that emerged was, “racial dissimilarity between the supervisor and subordinate becomes a salient influence on the quality of the dyadic working relationship when the subordinate perceives it as an influence on his or her supervisor’s relational behaviors.” This chapter will be organized in three sections: discussion of the study’s findings through lens of Similarity Attraction Theory (SAT), discussion of the study’s findings through the lens of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, and implications for practice and further research.

### **Discussion of Findings through the Lenses of SAT and LMX Theory**

The lenses of SAT and LMX theory were used to discuss and support the four primary conclusions drawn from analysis of the phenomenon. SAT provided a lens for understanding the different ways that subordinates make meaning of the concept of race. SAT was also used as a lens into the influences that the organization, the job, or peers have on the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship. The lens of LMX theory aided in the discussion of subordinates’ relational expectations of their racially-dissimilar supervisor, as well as the subordinate’s overall assessment of the quality of the interracial dyadic working relationship. Analysis of subordinates’ expectations of their racially-dissimilar supervisor and related relationship outcomes also considered the

concepts of psychological contracting, task-oriented expectations, and relationship-oriented expectations. In this context, psychological contracting refers to the informal, and often times unspoken, assumptions and expectations that individuals make about each other in the context of interpersonal workplace relationships. According to Rousseau (2001), these informal contracts typically involve the maintenance and quality of emotional and interpersonal relationships between employer and employee and between peers. As such, psychological contracts, although not binding legally, can have significant influence on interpersonal and relational outcomes as a result of consistency or inconsistency with inherent expectations (Rousseau, 2001).

With regard to task and relationship orientation, these concepts have been historically associated with leadership dynamics, leadership style, and leader/follower proclivities within the context of leader-follower relationship (Bass, 1990). Task orientation is a relational dynamic that suggests individuals are more inclined toward, or have a proclivity for, logical, structured, and/or methodical approaches to work scenarios, interpersonal work interactions, and related tasks (Bass 1990). Relationship orientation is a relational dynamic that suggests individuals are more inclined toward, or have a proclivity for focusing on "emotional" aspects of interpersonal relationships. This includes, but is not limited to, acts of caring, motivation, affinity, and interpersonal regard (Bass, 1990). Both these orientations are referred to routinely in the context of workplace and leader-follower dyadic relationships primarily based on the behaviors of leader in concert or contrast with the needs and expectations of followers (Bass, 1990; Burke et al., 2006).

## Discussion of Findings through the Lens of Similarity Attraction Theory

Because one of the constructs examined was racial dissimilarity, participants were asked to describe themselves and their conceptualization of race in their own terms. Understanding how subordinates make sense of race, and consequently racial assignment was a critical component of this study. Consistent with Similarity Attraction theory concepts, participants described themselves based primarily on visually-cued perceptions (of self in relation to others) (Byrne et al., 1966; Byrne, 1971); however, assigning race to others based on physical features alone can sometimes be challenging. Ariana's comments about how she determines the racial identity of others is similar to Beynu's method for assigning race. Ariana perceives the race of others based on physical features; however, Ariana also includes "dress" (i.e., stereotypical articles of clothing and attire) as another visual clue used to aid in determining others' racial identity. Ariana explains her point as she compares native Africans to African-Americans with regard to attire and discernible "verbal" accent (linguistics):

It is quite often that you cannot just judge [race] physically, although that's the first thing that comes to mind you know... They [native Africans] wear some really beautiful clothes... But if I were to see that same person wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and they don't open their mouth to speak, I would probably just think [they were] African American.

As Beynu explains:

I would say, "He looks like" or "She looks like they could be African American" or "They could be Asian American, but I don't know" because most people think I'm Latino, and I'm not.

JZ feels that there are many different ways that the race of others can be discerned. Like Beynu, JZ also uses accent or verbal cues to identify the race of others,

but refers to this differentiator as "being an immigrant." According to JZ, immigrant is another category of race, and the evidence of that race is the presence of a discernible foreign accent. A perception that JZ laments over when he feels his own accent causes others to develop stereotypical "perceptions" about him. JZ reflects:

I think of race based on how different people are, you know, and that difference can manifest itself in many ways... I'm just an immigrant, you know, like I think immigrant is another race to tell the truth.

I am sometimes shy. Sticking out for me is always difficult because I know that when people meet me I don't open my mouth I know that they have a perception, but I feel that there is a still perception that if you have an accent, you are not as smart as others.

These same criteria were used by participants to describe the perceived race of the supervisor; however, in each case, the participant immediately described the supervisor's race based on physical features. Beynu's racial description of her supervisor suggests a slight deviation from this model, and also as supported by her conceptualization of race designation in general:

I think [my supervisor] would describe himself as African American... I know a lot of people that are mixed race, so I've come to the place where I don't try to identify people [by race], but allow them to identify themselves.

In each participant experience, multiple factors emerged as influencers on the interracial working relationship. The most salient of these influences were either core dimension influences, most notably visually-cued, or outwardly discernible and secondary dimension influences; those that are more mutable, less visible, and often containing an element of control or choice (Loden, 1996). Extrinsic influences on the interracial dyadic working relationship (i.e. the organization, the job, society, or peers),

were consistently less salient than the aforementioned core and secondary dimensional influences.

Analysis of interviews suggests that all participants realized that organizations are complex, and that they (participants) play a role in that complexity. Participants also realized that there is a hierarchy inherent in the organization structure that is facilitated through interpersonal interactions and interdependencies on others for resources and professional development. Given the presence of these organization dynamics, both technical and socio-emotional aspects of work life need continuous cultivating. As such, the awareness of these influences on interpersonal dyadic working relationships is clearly aligned with postulations from a broad spectrum of research, research focused on understanding the implications of external environments on organization behavior, and inclusive organization dynamics (Chatman & Flynn, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2002; Neuliep et al., 2005; Weisinger & Salipante, 2005; Copeland et al., 2008).

The following excerpts from subordinate participant experiences reflect their understanding of these external influences and their personal recommendations for managing them appropriately. Ariana's reflections reflect a perception of the influence of thought leadership in the organization (in the context of racial diversity), and how resulting strategies impact how business is conducted and how communities are served:

I really think that we do need to be more diverse in our thoughts, more diverse in our workforce in order for us to better serve people. We can't have these single thought leaders thinking about this the way we have always done business, and think that this is the way we will always do business; very clearly the population is just changing by the minute out there. I think you need to have that diverse thought to be able to successfully serve the community -- serve the community in the way that *they* deserve, not *we* deserve.

Beynu's insights suggest that in light of known historical socio-political issues around racial diversity and related dialog, organizations should take deliberate steps toward connecting with the communities that they espouse to serve (versus subscribing to political agendas and institutionalized idealism).

Beynu explains:

I think it is important to try to understand that there are power dynamics at play and those power dynamics of institutions and the United States very much play into our personal dynamics. Organizations [and organization leaders] need to get to know the community, let the community lead you. If possible, try to supervise younger folks that are of different ethnicities. It's never tokenizing, but allowing our [the organization's] multiculturalism to take power in the best way that it can.

Analysis suggests that individuals perceiving interpersonal dissimilarity translated their perceptions into cognitions and outward displays of behaviors (Chatman & Flynn, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2002). Empirical studies involving research into the effects of demographic characteristics on relationship outcomes have shown interpersonal attraction as a stronger predictor of the quality of that relationship when race is a salient relational factor (Byrne, 1971). This premise is espoused within the framework of Similarity Attraction theory as applied to formal organizations. Individuals in collaborative work-related scenarios, in the performance of interpersonal or team-driven work tasks, tend to be more attracted to and influence by other workers whom they perceive to be similar to them (George & Chattopadhyay, 2002). Conversely, when less interpersonal similarity or interpersonal dissimilarities are perceived between workgroup members, relationship outcomes show lower levels of individual satisfaction, and at times dysfunctional behavior (Chattopadhyay, 1999; George & Chattopadhyay, 2002).

Discussion of Findings through the Lens of Leader-Member Exchange Theory

George and Chattopadhyay's (2002) study findings suggest that depending on the salience of the demographic being assessed, the degree of perceived dissimilarity had profound implications for interpersonal dynamics, self-esteem, and other perception-driven behaviors that either influenced the individual to assess other interpersonal differentiators for similarity (such as attitudes, values, beliefs, shared experiences, etc.), or to relegate themselves to purely transactional interactions with dissimilar others (Loden, 1996; Chatman & Flynn, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2002). These reactions to interpersonal demographic dissimilarity were primarily the results of investigations of individual behaviors in group, team, or interpersonal contexts; whereas, LMX theory isolates the influence within the context of the dyadic relationship and explores the relational outcomes more definitively.

An example of attempting to overcome the potential challenges of interpersonal dissimilarity within a supervisor-subordinate working dyad can be seen in Ariana's relationship with her supervisor. As a result of the perceived dissimilarity within the working relationship, Ariana's supervisor attempted to minimize the influence of racial dissimilarity on the relationship by demonstrating a desire to learn about and become familiar with Ariana's Hispanic culture. The perceived behavior exhibited by Ariana's supervisor epitomizes the use of dynamic partnership building through the development of a cross-cultural rapport as a means to lessen or alleviate the influence of interpersonal dissimilarity (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Loden, 1996; Bucher, 2000). Ariana explains:

She is [the supervisor] proud to be called an "honorary Hispanic." She stays on top of the latest trends and fashions, but says she still needs to learn Spanish though (laughs). I'm excited by the fact that she's genuinely interested in my culture.

The salience of racial-dissimilarity in Ariana's working relationship with her supervisor became a bridging influence within the working relationship because the supervisor demonstrated a perceived willingness and openness to learn about Ariana's culture.

In turn, this behavior further satisfied Ariana's personal need to be valued and acknowledged by complementing other existing behaviors that Ariana also valued in her supervisor; expert knowledge, punctuality, reliability, openness, and acts of caring. Racial dissimilarity between Ariana and her supervisor became a relationship builder instead of a detractor.

An example of out-group self-designation is reflected in the working relationship experience of JZ. Racial dissimilarity in JZ's supervisor-subordinate relationship manifests itself through JZ's self-identification as an immigrant, working for a Caucasian female supervisor. For JZ, racial dissimilarity in his supervisor-subordinate working relationship is a salient factor; however, the dissimilarity is based upon a secondary demographic interpersonal differentiator of spoken language; JZ's native/first language is not English--he has a pronounced Portuguese accent. JZ's self-professed language challenges, as influenced by his being an "immigrant," not only differentiated him as non-native, but also prevented him from developing a closer interpersonal relationship with his supervisor. Consequently, JZ felt that he did not have the requisite access to his supervisor that would eventually lead to increased growth opportunities, recognition, equal status with peers, or other rewards. JZ's feelings of disconnectedness with his

supervisor are reflective of the concepts of in-group and out-group membership as espoused in the tenets of both Similarity Attraction theory and LMX theory.

JZ's description of his working relationship with his supervisor is consistent with the behaviors associated with being perceived as an out-group member; JZ's supervisor's perceived unavailability, the resulting transactional nature of the working relationship, and JZ's perception that his career growth opportunities are decreased because he is differentiated based on his language skills. JZ explains:

She (JZ's supervisor) has less time for me on her calendar than others [who speak English well]. That could be also because there is often a language challenge. As a result, [the working relationship] is all about the work. There is nothing beyond that... It [has] become more of a transactional relationship. I felt several times that I couldn't grow...and that could be in effect because I'm different. For me it's all about a competition for time; competing [with English-speaking peers] for the time of the supervisor. Those [subordinates] that have more of the [supervisor's] time have more benefits.

An excerpt from KT's interview provides an example of the thinking and behaviors exhibited when the racial dissimilarity of the supervisor is perceived as an obstacle or impediment to fulfilling the subordinate's task-oriented expectations. In KT's working relationship, racially dissimilarity introduces a perceived cross-cultural communications issue that has implications for information timely and concisely shared within the relationship. KT supports her perceptions:

Because she (KT's supervisor) was Caucasian, her background of course is different than mine. So some things we were really not able to relate on... Being able to explain different things that I have experienced in my background, or just in the cultural or the African-American culture, being able to go and talk to another black supervisor or black person and say, "Hey, this is where I am coming from," or "This is what I am thinking..." [I would prefer] to be able to speak in that lingo and not have to have a 45 minute discussion [with a person who's unfamiliar with African-American culture] that gets nowhere.

The preceding excerpts suggest the predictability of the subordinate's behavior when racial dissimilarity is a salient aspect of the dyadic working relationship; however, additional findings also suggest that when interpersonal racial dissimilarity is less salient, or superseded by secondary dimension influences, subordinates' behavioral and emotional reactions can be equally as strong (in either positive or negative ways).

Analysis of this study's data indicate that while racial dissimilarity existed within each working relationship, other or more salient influences often times superseded racial dissimilarity as prominent relationship influencers. This finding is consistent with antecedent research into interpersonal relationship dynamics and associated interpersonal expectations characterized by psychological contracting (Rousseau, 2001). Within the context of the supervisor-subordinate relationship, the subordinate anticipates that the supervisor will address his or her most salient task or maintenance-related need, or become instrumental in its satisfaction (Rousseau, 2001; Greguras & Ford, 2006; Copeland et al., 2008). This study's examination of the interracial working relationship found that several secondary dimensions of interpersonal diversity superseded the influence of racial dissimilarity in prominence.

When these secondary dimensions emerged through the sharing of participants' experiences, racial dissimilarity was either referenced as a lower-level influence, or discounted as an influence all together (Loden, 1996). Among the interpersonal differences that study participants noted were their supervisor's: communication style, organizational role and level, first language, work experience, and work style. In each case, these influences emerged as salient influences on the working relationship more so

than racial dissimilarity alone. These findings confirm the postulations of Loden (1996) with regard to the influence that these dimensional aspects of interpersonal working relationships can have on individual's consequent behavior, feelings, and expectations.

For Beynu, racial dissimilarity was less salient in her working relationship because it was mediated by her empathy for her supervisor as a fellow minority. Beynu's feelings of compassion and empathy for her supervisor's challenges also confirm the affinity principles of SAT projected feelings of shared racial differentiation that were stronger than the effect of interracial differences within the relationship (Byrne et al., 1966; Byrne, 1971; Chatman et al., 1998). The overriding influence [to interpersonal racial dissimilarity] in Beynu's working relationship was the conflict that arose as a result of her relationship-oriented need for deeper interpersonal interaction and dialog with her supervisor, and the supervisor's resistance to engage in any interaction beyond strict professionalism. Beynu explains their relationship first through empathy with her supervisor:

I said I'm going to let a lot of things [pass] in terms of the way he's [Beynu's supervisor] acting with me that honestly, if he had been a white supervisor, I'd have been like, "Hell no." [laughter]. My supervisor's a black male in his fifties, and his supervisor is a white woman in her forties. Her supervisor's a white woman probably in her fifties or sixties or something. "Hey, he's [Beynu's supervisor] one of the two, maybe now three, black men in the organization of 150 people. What pressure is he under that I don't even understand?" The expectations that are put on him and the ways that people communicate to him, and him not necessarily having a number of people to relate to, that is very real.

Beynu discusses her personal desire and proclivity for a closer interpersonal relationship with her supervisor, and how his behavior in light of that need, conflicts with her desire:

He [Beynu's supervisor] made it very clear on his first day that he does not relate in that way, that he keeps a professional line, and that supervision *is* that line. He

made it very clear on his first day that he does not have a relationship with people that he supervises, which is very different for me because my old supervisor, who's also a different race and ethnicity, and I are really close friends.

For Chanel, the interracial difference in the working relationship was less salient than her task-oriented need for direct interpersonal interaction with her supervisor; guidance, support, and active engagement that was continuously unrequited. Her supervisor's perceived apathy and non-responsive behavior, in light of Chanel's relative inexperience, resulted in increasing anxiety and overwhelming frustration. Chanel explains:

In the beginning, I didn't understand a lot of things, and I needed her to be able to explain things to me. I didn't feel like I was getting that, or getting that type of support that I needed for someone who was so new to it. I had to go to her multiple times about multiple domestic violence incidents that occurred on one of my cases where I thought I wasn't getting assistance until it was too late.

[In another case] I brought it up to my supervisor multiple times, and I said, "I don't think the child is safe in the home because they have a pattern of getting in domestic violence situations, reconcile, getting into fights again, reconcile. I don't think there is a safe environment for the child." And again, nothing happened. That whole time, I was telling my supervisor about it, and nothing got done, and I really got fed up.

An additional influence on the dyadic working relationship was the competency and credibility of the supervisor based on race and status. In this instance, racial dissimilarity emerged as a tangential influence on Chanel's task-related interactions with her supervisor and client because Chanel attributed power and status to her supervisor's race and position combined. This behavior is consistent with the concept of power dynamics and the role their influence plays in working relationships, organizations, and society based on "visually-cued" characteristics or physical features associated with status (Byrne et al., 1966; Byrne, 1971; Turner et al., 1987). According to Chanel:

[Caucasian supervisors] not have this title of supervisor, but also because they are another race. I feel it's almost like, if this is coming from Stacy, and Stacy is a pseudonym for a Caucasian [supervisor], then obviously she must be right, or obviously Stacy knows what she is talking about.

It was painful for me to deal with this [African-American male client] every single day, so that's why I asked for my supervisor's assistance. It was frustrating to me. I felt like with her having a supervisor title, and that role, and also with her being a Caucasian woman, I felt like the father would respond better to that...and he did.

Once an individual's status characteristics are salient (as in Chanel's perceptions about the combined influence of her supervisor's race and position), expectations for that individual's performance are generated. These expectations are based upon a combination of diffuse and specific status information (Berger, Cohen, & Zeldich, 1977). Thereafter, the value associated with the status characteristics that the person possesses are aggregated (Berger et al., 1977). This status profile is then projected onto the individual's level of ability, or performance expectancy, relative to other individuals (Berger et al., 1977).

Findings from this study confirmed that each subordinate expressed a relationship-oriented and/or task-oriented need that they expected the supervisor to meet or contribute toward satisfying. In each case, it was clear that the subordinate expected the supervisor to play some part (wholly or contributory) to satisfying these needs. These subordinate expectations were consistent with underlying multi-dimensionality of Leader-Member exchange. In Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) study of the multi-dimensionality of LMX, it was determined that there are traits or characteristics of the leader that the follower may find highly desirable, especially with regard to interpersonal attractiveness and in the pursuit of follower needs satisfaction.

Findings from LMX-related research found that these relational characteristics of the leader (e.g., empowering, inspiring, coaching, and facilitating) helped build strong leader-follower relationships by creating an interpersonal atmosphere of mutual learning and accommodation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Greguras & Ford, 2006). Additionally, congruence between subordinates' relational expectations and the perceived relational behaviors of their racially-dissimilar supervisor confirmed basic concepts of psychological contracting with regard to subordinate's task/relationship-orientation expectations of their racially-dissimilar supervisor.

Findings from this study also confirmed results of antecedent relational studies regarding relationship implications based on subordinates' perceptions of their racially-dissimilar supervisors' working relationship behaviors. Resulting theory posits that by exhibiting behaviors that were consistent with subordinate expectations, leaders could enhance the work-related behaviors of their employees (Bass, 1990; Burke et al., 2006; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Greguras & Ford, 2006). Using Ariana's assessment of her working relationship as an example, consistency with qualities that Ariana valued not only satisfied Ariana's individual relational needs, they also made Ariana's supervisor highly regarded, both as an organizational authority-role and an individual.

Ariana: There's always this relationship building piece that's very important to her and to me... If it's a Monday morning, "How was your weekend?," "Did you anything special?"

Just recently my husband got a promotion and I shared the process with her. From the moment where he found the job, when he applied, got an interview, and got through the second interview. She was always very eager to want to know how things went. I think that's probably why we get along so well, because I value that.

As Loden (1996) noted, in many interpersonal working relationships, the salience of primary or “core” dimensions of interpersonal differentiation such as race, gender, age, and ethnicity, and sexual orientation are accompanied by, and sometimes superseded by secondary differentiators such as communication style, education, family status, first language, work style, and others. These dimensions “represent properties and characteristics that constitute the core” of individuals’ diverse identities (Loden, 1996, p. 15).

Secondary dimensions, although not readily apparent or visually-distinguishable, can be determined as a product of disclosure or interpersonal interaction (Loden, 1996). Secondary dimensions tend to have more variability in the degree of influence they exert on relationships (Loden, 1996). As such, the timing of their revelation, and their salience to the subordinate, may have definitive implications on the subordinate’s perception of the supervisor and the relationship.

According to SAT, the perception of interpersonal dissimilarities with regard to demographic characteristics may lead to dysfunctional and at times counter-productive behavior (Valenti & Rockett, 2008). Perceptions of one’s self, particularly in the context of a leader-subordinate dyadic working relationship, can influence a subordinate's sense of self-identity, access to power, level of engagement with other group members, power distance (Valenti & Rockett, 2008). Resulting dysfunction often arises from individuals perceiving him or herself to be an out-group member; differentiated and alienated from the leader.

With regard to LMX theory, analysis of in-group and out-groups designations found that individuals perceived as having in-group status with the leader were likely to have higher quality dyadic relationships with their leader than individuals perceived as out-group members (Greguras & Ford, 2006; Northouse, 2007). LMX theory posits that high-quality relationships, as a product of in-group membership, yield additional benefits, compensation, and/or even preferential treatment (Northouse, 2007). Whereas lesser, or low-quality relationships, as a result of the subordinate's out-group membership, result in primarily transactional behaviors, often times accentuated by member alienation, apathy, and potential hostility (Northouse, 2007). Out-group members tend to be seen as poor or lesser performing, and viewed by the leader as having less potential than in-group members (Schriesheim et al., 1992). As such, they are often times unrecognized or receive standard or commensurate reward for their performance (Liden & Maslyn, 1998).

The preceding excerpts from participant interviews reflect subordinates' interpersonal task and relationship-oriented expectations of their supervisor and their supervisor's behavior in light of those expectations. In each participant experience, the subordinate provided insights that suggested or explicitly conveyed the subordinate's emotional response to the supervisor's behavior (as compared to subordinate task/relationship-oriented expectations). Consistency between the subordinate's expectations and supervisor's perceived behaviors resulted in positive feelings about the supervisor and the relationship, whereas inconsistency resulted in feelings of frustration, alienation, or indifference.

While the previous section discussed subordinate perceptions (of the supervisor) based on comparisons between subordinate task/relationship-oriented expectations and their perception of the supervisor's demonstrated behavior, this sub-section will build upon those insights by discussing subordinate's subsequent behavioral responses to their perceived supervisor's relational behaviors as a consequence of satisfied or unsatisfied task and relationship-oriented expectations.

In interpersonal working relationships, when the perceived behaviors of the "other" meet or exceed the expectations inherent in the psychological contract, the relationship is characterized as one of congruence (Rousseau, 2001). When these conditions exist, the interpersonal relationship environment is primed for deeper interpersonal interaction, affinity, mutual regard, and more effective and efficient interpersonal exchanges (Greguras & Ford, 2006; Slay, 2003; Albritton et al., 2008). On the other hand, when resulting behaviors of the other are perceived as not meeting, or incongruent with the prototype behavior, dissonance ensues.

Leader-Member Exchange theory suggests that supervisor-subordinate working relationships that are characterized as high-quality, especially those based on congruent interpersonal attitudes and behaviors, habitually demonstrate behaviors that will perpetuate predictably desirable behaviors and consequently perpetuate desirable relationship outcomes (Greguras & Ford, 2006). According to relevant conflict management theory, individuals' reactions to unsatisfied relational expectations or needs can manifest themselves in a variety of ways (Weaver, 2000). The most often

demonstrated responses to these interpersonal conflicts include interpersonal confrontation, avoidance, coping, compromising, or acquiescing (Weaver, 2000).

Participants' reactions to congruence between subordinate relationship-oriented expectations and the supervisor's perceived behavior are reflected in Ariana's description of the working relationship with her supervisor. Ariana shares:

I think that it's transcended beyond [the normal] supervisor and subordinate relationship to one that you know she cares. It's a professional friendship. I think I am just very blessed because I have somebody that values me. I think that if I were to leave the organization tomorrow, I would still sustain the relationship with her even if [it was wishing her] Merry Christmas or "I hope you are well" or "At some time, I would like to see you."

When subordinate task/relationship-oriented expectations were perceived as being unfulfilled by the supervisor, subordinates resorted to coping mechanisms to mitigate the effects of unmet task or relationship-oriented needs. Beynu's experience suggests a relationship-oriented expectation that was not being satisfied by her supervisor; a desire for more interpersonal dialog, mutual openness through dialog, and a desire for authenticity in their interpersonal interactions.

Beynu wanted to feel free to share her thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences with her supervisor, and invited her supervisor to do the same; however, her supervisor did not reciprocate. In fact, Beynu's supervisor stressed his preference against having anything more than a strictly "professional" relationship with his subordinates. This led Beynu to confront her supervisor, and then employ coping mechanisms thereafter because her relationship-oriented expectations continued to be unsatisfied:

I opened up by telling him, "I'm having a hard time understanding exactly what you need and if I'm not doing something right. There are times where you seem really upset, and I don't know if that's because of something I'm doing, or

something else. Are my products not good enough? Could I be creating better products? You can let me know.” I said, “I’m open to feedback.”

He was like, “You’ll see that there are certain times that certain people are in certain moods and it impacts everybody else.” So what I realized was that he was in a bad place that week because of his supervisors, and I had no clue as to why. [Now] when I don’t know why he’s upset, I leave it alone... I just do my work.

Chanel experienced similar unmet task-oriented needs in her working relationship fueled by perceptions of her supervisor’s persistent non-responsiveness to requests for help. Chanel’s relational issues culminated in a direct confrontation with her supervisor, then she tried employment of coping mechanisms including experiential learning and seeking out alternative knowledge sources such as colleagues and peers. Over time, Chanel was able to develop a level of competency and self-efficacy that enabled her to perform day-to-day tasks with little or no intervention from her supervisor.

Chanel shares the pivotal and climactic evolution of her journey from utter exasperation to relief and relative independence:

I said, “If I come in to you, it’s because I really need you on this one kind of thing, or I need to talk to you, and I need you to listen! And if I am wrong, or if I am not – whatever – like back me up! And if I am wrong, get me the direction that I need!”

Since then, I have figured some things out, and I have been able to go to other people, colleagues that also have been doing it for a while. We have pretty much been on same page since that incident. Because we had a talk about my other case that blew up.

JZ’s relationship relationship-oriented expectation is related to access to his supervisor, access that can provide him with growth and career enrichment opportunities. JZ attributes his supervisor's "lack of time" for him to interpersonal communications issues; specifically, language skills challenges -- English is not JZ's first language. JZ

feels that these challenges limit him with regard to receiving the acknowledgement and recognition he deserves for his work-related contributions. More importantly, JZ perceives his poor language as an impediment to meaningful interpersonal interaction with his supervisor; she has difficulty understanding what he is saying so she avoids interpersonal interactions with him. JZ's response to his supervisor's perceived behavior includes feelings of denigration, embarrassment, and alienation. JZ shares:

She has less time for me on her calendar than others, and that could be because there is often a language challenge. I feel that there is a perception that if you have an accent, you are not as smart in others. For sure I think that my accent has influence on the fact that expectations [of me] are different, based on the fact that I probably can't be as direct, or as demanding as others. So it becomes more of a transactional relationship—nothing deeper. When we do interact, we don't talk about anything other than the work. So I just focus on the work.

In reaction to his unsatisfied relationship-oriented need, JZ has found a confidant in whom he has developed a mutually trusting and sharing relationship. In the midst of JZ's interracial working relationship challenges with his supervisor, he finds solace in a trusted companion; an African-American female colleague with whom he can relate and share. This collegial relationship helps JZ to cope with his relational issues:

I am lucky that I have a colleague here today. She's leaving the company though, and I'm pretty sad about this. She's a female African American, and she's kind of like my sister. She could be my sister in terms of how we talk and interact. I trust her, and she trusts me. We can understand each other. We have experienced similar challenges, because we are both different. And we understand each other's challenges and frustrations.

Analysis of research data also suggests that each participant entered into a working relationship with their current supervisor with task and/or relationship-oriented needs that they expected their supervisor to satisfy or address. These subordinate expectations of their supervisor are consistent with empirical research related to

subordinate conceptualizations of the ideal or prototypical supervisor (Slay, 2003). According to related research, subordinate expectations of the ideal supervisor (and corresponding supervisor behaviors) are primarily based on the subordinate's personal preferences, past experiences, expectancy behaviors, a comparison to their own behavior, or a combination of any of the aforementioned (Slay, 2003). KT's response to her supervisor's perceived behavior was based on incongruence among KT's task-oriented expectations with regard to her supervisor's work style, responsiveness, interpersonal communication, and related behaviors. While analysis suggests that the supervisor's racial dissimilarity was a salient influence on the working relationship (i.e., differing cultural background and cultural experiences), it was overshadowed by the drastic difference between interpersonal working styles.

KT expounds on the continuing incongruence between her task-oriented work style and her perceptions of her supervisor's working style:

Overall, I feel like we have a pretty good relationship. I just think that we handle matters differently. And what I mean by that, I can sometimes be aggressive when I want things to get done and I push for things to get done. She is in a sense laid back. She will take whatever's the easiest way out.

I have spoken to various [other] supervisors about the situation to gain a better understanding, because I want to understand and I want to learn. [Now] I know if I have questions, to go and maybe speak with a different supervisor who I feel may be able to relate to what I am saying. I think you should always have someone in your circle that can assist you with anything that you may be struggling with. You should have someone that you can go to...

The preceding excerpts illustrate how subordinates respond to perceived supervisors' behaviors in light of explicit or implicit task/relationship-oriented expectations. Analysis of interview data shows that subordinates will attempt to

perpetuate relational behaviors (with their supervisor) that they believe will result in the continued fulfillment of interpersonal task/relationship-oriented expectations. Conversely, subordinates will employ coping mechanisms such as gaining knowledge through self-directedness, consulting alternative knowledge sources, finding a confidant, or minimizing interactions with the supervisor, if task/maintenance expectations (of the supervisor) continue to be unfulfilled.

In the context of this study, participants described interpersonal congruence or incongruence within their interracial dyadic working relationships by comparing perceptions of their racially-dissimilar supervisors' behaviors to a conceptualized ideal or a prototypical supervisors' behavior. Analysis of this study's findings suggest that subordinates' assessment of their racially-dissimilar supervisors' perceived behavior is based on subordinates' task/maintenance orientation and how supervisors behave (toward the subordinate) in light of those expectations. Racial-dissimilarity in the working relationship will be perceived as a salient influence on the quality of the working relationship when subordinates perceive it to be an influence on their racially-dissimilar supervisor's relational behaviors. As such, four primary conclusions emerged from analysis of participants' lived working relationship experience in light of the problem addressed by the study: How do subordinates experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor?

1. Subordinates make meaning of race differently.
2. The organization, or job, or peers can indirectly influence the interracial working relationship between the supervisor and his or her subordinate.

3. The salience of racial dissimilarity is determined by the subordinate's perception of its impact on the supervisor's relational behaviors.
4. The subordinate's assessment of the quality of the relationship is influenced by (the subordinate) making a comparison between his or her expectations of the supervisor, and the subordinate's perceptions of supervisor's behaviors (in light of those expectations).

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived relationship experience of subordinates who are in working hierarchical dyads with racially-dissimilar supervisors in social welfare nonprofit organizations. This study applied relevant theory to the phenomenon of a subordinate in a hierarchical dyadic working relationship with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. As such, the focus and goal of this study are consistent with the writings of Glaser and Strauss (1967) on how the discovery of theory from social research data is of particular importance when it provides “relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications” (p. 1).

This study presented the subordinate perspective on interracial vertical dyadic working relationships as supporting evidence of the emotional and behavioral reactions of subordinates working under these conditions, within the context of U.S-based Social Welfare nonprofit organizations. The construct contributes to the understanding of subordinates’ attitudes and behaviors in the context of an interracial vertical dyadic working relationship.

This study explicated various manifestations of interpersonal dissimilarity within working relationships, as well as framing their implications and participant

reactions to them using aspects of Similarity Attraction Theory (SAT), Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, and aspects of conflict management strategies. This study confirmed the substantial role of core and secondary dimensional influences on interpersonal perceptions, as well as their salience in predicting relational outcomes.

### **Implications & Recommendations for Practice**

Considering the findings from this research, significant implications emerge with regard to exploration of interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships. These implications are relative to the development and management of effective and efficient hierarchical dyadic working relationships, particularly in the nonprofit market segment. To date, there has been a dearth of research into how effective interracial supervisor-subordinate relationships can improve or enhance the operations of nonprofit organizations. The overwhelming majority of relevant research into organization development, and more specifically leader-follower relationships, has focused primarily on assessing the qualities and abilities of the Leader to improve leadership behaviors and competencies (Dansereau et al., 1975, Dienesch & Liden, 1986,; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Truckenbrodt, 2000; Greguras & Ford, 2008).

For decades, findings from these studies have been adapted and incorporated into development and training programs in private sector and government organizations. Very little consideration has been given to the influence of interracial diversity in nonprofit organizations, and its implications for enhancing social capital within and outside organizations (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005). By enhancing social capital within

racially-diverse non-profit organizations, cross-cultural solidarity and intergroup reciprocity can be leveraged in ways that enhance the outcomes of interracial supervisor-subordinate relationships, and consequently enhance the delivery of organization products and services to its served communities and constituencies.

Because the context of this study was social welfare nonprofit organizations, and also because its findings suggest a connection among subordinates' task/relationship-oriented *expectations* of their racially-dissimilar supervisor, the supervisor's perceived task/relationship-oriented *behavior*, and consequent relational outcomes, insights from this study can be used to inform nonprofit organizations' policy, training, worker recruitment/retention programs, and other relevant processes as they relate to interracial hierarchical working dyads. Resulting artifacts, policies, and procedures can then be used to ensure the organization environment reflects the diversity of the served community, while also ensuring that internal interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships consider the implications of interracial differences; not just recognizing those differences, but taking thoughtful and impactful steps to bridge or alleviate gaps caused by reactions to *those* interpersonal differences (demographic and otherwise).

Findings from this study clearly indicate that subordinates have various task and/or relationship-oriented expectations with regard to his or her racially-dissimilar supervisor's behavior. Findings also suggest that subordinates' emotional and behavioral reaction to the supervisor's "perceived" task/relationship-oriented behavior influence the subordinate's perception of the quality of the interracial working relationship. To the extent possible, understanding the influencers on subordinates' behaviors, with a focus on

awareness of the influences of interpersonal racial dissimilarity, has implications for nonprofit social welfare organization. By improving or enhancing the quality and effectiveness of those internal interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship, these organizations can positively affect the quality of goods and service offerings provided to target communities and constituencies.

Given their inherent implications for improving the quality of interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships, the following recommendations are submitted for consideration. All of these recommendations are aimed at increasing awareness of the implications interracial differences within interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships and implementing or enhancing relational and organizational behaviors to ensure effective and efficient exchanges within and among these interracial dyadic working relationships. These recommendations may also have implications for practitioners and professionals who are interested in organization consulting, leadership coaching, and other aspects of organization development:

- Supervisors should consider holding periodic one-on-one level setting and review/follow-up meetings with racially-dissimilar subordinates. Consider focusing on "hearing" and "discussing" task/relationship-oriented expectations, behaviors, and how they can be effectively managed within the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship. This should include, but not be limited to, using techniques such as appreciative inquiry, reflective listening, and other applicable interpersonal communications methods that can assist with facilitating clear, accurate, and relevant interpersonal

communications exchanges. Also consider what actions/behaviors will demonstrate your willingness to address these needs from the racially-dissimilar subordinate's perspective, and what success will look like.

- Supervisor should consider crafting goals from racially-dissimilar subordinates' feedback and incorporating them into personal development goals. This will aid in holding supervisors accountable for their contribution to quality of the interracial working relationships they maintain with their subordinates, and can also demonstrate to the subordinate that supervisor's take subordinate feedback seriously.
- Supervisors should consider administering Leadership assessment instruments to their racially-dissimilar subordinates as a tool for obtaining feedback and insights on subordinate's perceptions of the supervisor (e.g., LMX instrument and TLQ). Results could help supervisors surface or identify areas of incongruence between their own relational behaviors and the perceptions of racially-dissimilar subordinates.
- Supervisors should be mindful and aware of instances when they intervene (with others) on behalf of their racially-dissimilar subordinate. While in many cases the act may be well-intentioned, it could also be perceived as undermining the authority or credibility of your racially-dissimilar subordinate.
- Subordinates should create opportunities to engage their racially-dissimilar supervisor regarding work-related and/or personal needs. Explicit discussion

of subordinate needs will help the racially-dissimilar supervisor understand where they can help, and aid in setting more achievable interpersonal goals for the interracial working relationship.

- Organizations should consider implementing dyadic team-building activities, programs, and/or events that encourage interpersonal rapport, trust, and relationship building, especially in racially-diverse organizations. Activities like these can reinforce organizational tenets of inclusion and diversity awareness through cross-cultural sharing, as well as recognition and celebration of differences.
- Organizations should consider sharing relevant information in organizational or departmental publication and/or media about strategies to improve interracial supervisor-subordinate relationships, and how those strategies are impacting or will impact organizational effectiveness. To support progress updates, compliment the publications with internal surveys (to staff) and externally to served clientele. Use survey results to assess the value and performance of internal and client-facing strategies focused on improving cross-cultural dynamics (inside the organization and with the served community).

### **Implications & Recommendations for Research**

Because previous research into leader-follower relationships has been performed predominantly as an assessment of the Leader's ability, further research should be conducted into the interracial hierarchical dyadic working relationship, but as a

commutative exchange that has implications and impacts on both the racially-dissimilar leader and the follower. Although LMX-related research over the last decade has begun considering the leader's assessment of the relationship in conjunction with followers' perspectives, further exploration of the leader-follower relationship should be conducted to ensure that a more holistic understanding of leader-follower dyadic relationships can be developed. By examining LMX from both leader and follower perspectives, dimensions of the relationship can emerge that were not previously considered or identified by exploring the follower's perspective alone.

Additionally, prior research using the LMX framework has largely involved examination of the one-too-many supervisor-subordinates relationships; one supervisor with multiple dyadic relationships with individual team or group members. To reduce the influence of peers' perceptions about a common racially-dissimilar supervisor, attempts should be made to recruit participants that have different supervisors than other participants.

Other recommendations for future research include data collection methods. This research study used face-to-face interviews via Skype as a means to visually and verbally engage with participants. The use of contemporary social media-related technology such as this not only helped facilitate the interpersonal researcher-participant interactions, but also helped facilitate an "environment" that enabled participants to feel comfortable and secure while engaging with the researcher. In fact, when participants were given a choice regarding in-person interviews or Skype, all participants preferred Skype—each noting that using Skype would be more convenient and conducive with their day-to-day work

and life routines. As such, depending on the data collection methods to be used, researchers should consider using methodology that is amenable to the participant, but also allows for the most effective and efficient engagement between the researcher and research study participants (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, only one of the five subordinate participants was in a working relationship with her racially-dissimilar supervisor for more than one year. The remaining participants were in his or her current working relationships for one year or less. As such, future research should consider the impact of the duration of the interracial relationship on consequent subordinate feelings and behavioral outcomes from the interracial working relationship. Other research considerations, in addition to the aforementioned recommendations, may enhance or provide insights for future research. The following recommendations should also be considered when undertaking further investigation of the phenomenon of interracial vertical working dyadic relationships:

- Consider investigating the interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationship from the supervisor's perspective.
- Consider using other research design alternatives and methodology to explore the phenomenon of the experience of racial dissimilarity in supervisor-subordinate working relationships.
- Consider antecedent influences on individual's relational behaviors in the context of interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships.
- Consider the influences of other demographic variables such as age and gender (in conjunction with racial dissimilarity) on the behaviors and

attitudes of individuals working in interracial supervisor-subordinate relationships.

- Consider the influence of relationship duration on perceived quality of interracial supervisor-subordinate hierarchical dyadic working relationships.
- Consider critical events that may or have occurred during the relationship, and what influence, if any, they may have had on the relationship going forward.
- Consider augmenting one-on-one interviews with “field observations” to collect additional data that may further contextualize the participant’s experience. Conduct follow-up interviews/discussion with the participant to discuss your observations and obtain clarification or additional details about what was observed.

By considering these recommendations, further insight can be gained into the motivators and influences on interracial vertical dyadic working relationships; relationships where racial dissimilarity may or may not be the sole or predominant influence on relational expectations and outcomes, but may be apparent nonetheless.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of subordinates who work with racially dissimilar supervisors, in nonprofit social welfare organizations. It addressed the primary research question: How do subordinates experience their racially-dissimilar supervisor?

The results of the study revealed various insights regarding the essence of this experience; insights that will enhance the scholarly discussion related to supervisor-subordinate working relationships, organization behavior, and the influence of racial dissimilarity on interpersonal working relationships. This chapter presented analysis-driven conclusions about the phenomenon of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. It also provided conclusions about the phenomenological analysis that was performed, including identification and explication of the four primary conclusions derived from analysis of relevant research findings. This chapter also provided an in-depth description of the phenomenon explored in this study, and its implication, applicability, and predictability with regard to the phenomenon of working with a racially-dissimilar supervisor. Lastly, this chapter provided implications for practice and implications for research and future study, to inform readers, researchers, and other interested individuals of the broad landscape of interracial supervisor-subordinate working relationships that remains to be explored.

While findings from this study suggest that racial dissimilarity in supervisor-subordinate dyadic working relationships has implications for subordinates' perceptions of their supervisor, more in-depth research is required to understand the antecedent and/or presenting influences that contribute to subordinates' consequent relational behaviors. As such, it is incumbent upon leaders and followers alike to be aware of our own beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors as they relate to the perceptions of others whom we perceive as racially-different from ourselves. Not only the recognition of racial difference, but also thoughtful introspection as to how our perceptions and experience of

racial dissimilarity contributes to our understanding and treatment of dissimilar others. By taking personal responsibility and accountability for our own perceptions and behavioral predilections, we can begin to develop a more holistic view of the diverse world in which we live and exist. A world in which individuals of different races can bridge the perceptual gaps that differentiate us, while leveraging the tremendous power inherent in those things that unite us as a society, as a global community, and as human beings.

... “We are all equal in the fact that we are all different. We are all the same in the fact that we will never be the same. We are united by the reality that all colors and all cultures are distinct and individual. We are harmonious in the reality that we are all held to this earth by the same gravity. We don't share blood, but we share the air that keeps us alive...” ~ C. JoyBell C.

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## Appendix A

### Participant Recruitment Message

Dear Ma'am/Sir,

My name is Armon Jackson, and I am a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. I am current seeking out individuals that would be willing to assist me with my research study of subordinate's perspectives on interracial working relationships in nonprofit social welfare organizations.

#### **Research Purpose:**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the "lived relationship" experience of subordinates who are in a working relationship with a supervisor of a different race. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research question will be investigated, "How do subordinates experience their racially dissimilar supervisor?"

#### **Participant Selection:**

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please ensure that you:

- are an employee of a social welfare nonprofit that serves a racially-diverse community and has a racially-diverse employee population
- have a supervisor/manager whom you report to directly
- perceive your supervisor/manager to be of a different race than yourself
- have a minimum of 3 months experience working directly with your supervisor/manager

If you meet these criteria, and are willing to participate in this study, please begin thinking about some meaningful episodes or interactions with your supervisor where you felt closeness or likeness for them, and 2 – 3 episodes where you felt distanced or alienated. We will explore these episodes during our interview session.

#### **Data Collection:**

Data will be collected in a 60-90 minute interview. The interview will be held at a time and location that in no way impacts or impedes your work responsibilities or duties.

#### **Confidentiality:**

Participants' identities, working locations, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential and securely maintained. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' identity.

No one other than the research team will be given or have access to participant interview data.

Once the research study has been completed, individual interview data will be destroyed; only aggregated interview data and research findings will be used in the Doctoral Dissertation.

In summary, I would be honored and appreciative if you could assist me with my doctoral research study. I believe that findings from this study may provide relevant insights for better understanding working relationships, and how those relationships can be maximized to better meet the needs of the served community.

Please let me know if you have additional questions, and we can discuss at your earliest convenience. Also, should you know of colleagues, friends, or acquaintances that may be interested in participating, please relate this request to them as well.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Armon Jackson

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## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

I will begin the interview by reviewing the information sheet details with the participant and ensuring that any questions they might have are answered. I will then provide a brief overview of the purpose of the study and ask for the participant's permission to audio-record the interview. Thereafter I will commence the interview by asking the participant to share "episodes" or stories of their lived working relationship experience with their supervisor; 3 episodes where they felt "alienated" or distanced" from their supervisor, and 2 – 3 episodes where they felt "likeness" or "closeness". This will be a follow up to the interview preparation instructions I gave participants during our pre-interview informal introduction.

To maintain the integrity of the qualitative interview approach, I will keep my interventions and interjections to a minimum. This will help facilitate more authentic responses from the participant, rather than influenced responses from me. I will however ask questions, or make requests to the participant to expound or "say more" in response to notable statements and remarks. I will also ask probing questions in an effort to further contextualize and surface meanings within the participant's experience (Seidman, 2006). This approach reflects and further supports the goal of obtaining "thick" "rich" descriptions as a means to elucidate and contextualize the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2007).

#### **Guidelines for Introduction**

The following is a guideline for the introduction into the interview process.

“I am a doctoral student at The George Washington University, and I am interviewing subordinates in nonprofit social welfare organizations who are in working relationships with a supervisor of a different race.

The goal of my research is to understand how subordinates experience racial difference in the context of a hierarchical working relationship, as well as the implications these relationships might have on the organization’s ability to serve its constituency.”

### **Guidelines for Interview Questions**

The goal of the interview is to obtain as much descriptive and contextual information as possible about the participant and the environment in which the participant experiences the phenomenon. During the interview, I will ask each person to describe themselves, as well as their role, the environment, working conditions, relationships, and other aspects of their experience. I will also pose probative questions about participants’ attitudes and feelings as they relate to their working environment and inclusive relationships. As such, the interview will be used as an opportunity to collect in-depth descriptive details about participants and their working situation, and also to explore the participant’s feelings and emotions relative to the research topic.

### **Subordinate Perceptions of their Organization and Supervisor**

Introductory questions to acclimate the participant will be as follows:

1. Please describe your organization.
2. How do you typically interact with your Supervisor at work?
3. There are a lot different ideas about what race is among different people.

What does “race” mean to you?

## **Exploring the Supervisor-Subordinate Working Relationship**

Following elicitation of participants' reflections on their organization and supervisor, I will ask them to reflect more thoughtfully on the working relationship with their supervisor and to think about *that* relationship in terms of "episodes" or memorable experiences.

As these episodes are shared, I will ask the participant to elaborate on their feelings, emotions, and the meaning that associated with their lived experience (Seidman, 2006). Follow-up questions will be focused on concepts derived from the theories that informed this study; Similarity Attraction Theory and behavioral outcomes based on demographic similarity or dissimilarity, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory and its implications for emotional outcomes based on in-group/out-group designation. Episode context and meaning-focused questions will take the following form:

At this time, I would like for you to think of a few memorable interactions with your supervisor, thinking about both when you felt closeness/likeness and distanced/alienated. Discussion of each episode will start with me asking them to describe the episode, and then posing probing questions to further contextualize the experience; e.g.

Probe: What happened?

Probe: What was the interaction like with your supervisor?

Probe: What did you learn?

Probe: Why do you think influenced or contributed to the situation?

Probe: How did you feel?

Probe: How did it impact your relationship with your supervisor at that point?

Probe: What was the outcome or lesson learned?

### **Closing the Interview**

To close out the relationship segment of the interview, I will apply a concept taken from van Manen's recommendations for capturing participant experiences; lived experiences should have a beginning, middle, and an ending. Since we used initial interview questions to provide orienting background on the organization and supervisor, and we used the middle portion of the interview to obtain interim relationship experiences of the participant. We will now use the end of the interview to encapsulate the participant experience and enjoin them to reflect on the current state of the working relationship. In this the final segment of the interview, I will ask participants to please describe their relationship with their supervisor as of now. Thereafter I will ask them if there is any additional information that they would like to share and conclude the interview session.

While this strategy attempts to obtain all descriptive and contextual data by combining Seidman's first two interviews into one, there may be a need to clarify responses provided during the initial interview or to address any instances of ambiguity. As such, a second interview may be requested should clarification or follow up on participant responses be required.

## Appendix C

### Examples of Participants' Relevant Statements

*Examples of relevant statements from Ariana's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
at least 5 minutes talking about weekends or we are talking about the weather, or we are talking -- or she will ask me something about my husband because
feel valued and I feel welcomed because maybe I have more of that personality that's open to that type of conversation
Sometimes we just travel in bus -- usually when we are both in the office we run into each other, I run into her office and she will come by, and we actually have schedules, one on one conversations once a week for maybe an hour or 2 hours every time
Other people don't want to share somebody's personal stories so maybe they think that's too much silly chatter and they prefer to get down to business
I mean I think I've talked a lot about learning. But I also think that it's important to us to teach and my job has allowed me to do that because of the work that I do, I would still feel responsibility yeah responsibility to talk about my culture, not just to learn, but also teach.
I really think that we do need to be more diverse in our thoughts, more diverse in -- in -- in our workforce -- in order for us to better serve people

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
When you have a supervisor that cares because the minute that you have a supervisor that doesn't care and then you are immediately on a wrong path.
first advice that I would give to somebody is be open to learning and be open -- and I -- I've always been this type of person
I think she may look older – older than what she is but she definitely looks older.
when we start really speaking to them and you hear that accent, it's when you

*Examples of relevant statements from of Beynu's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
I have not done enough work with social service and communities that work in social services and the work that I have done more are with the progressive social service agencies that know that they can't disassociate themselves with the political work that happens or disassociate with themselves by not talking
In America, we've had racist policies like whether it was not giving people the right to vote -- from slavery, to not giving people the right to vote, to access education, access to healthcare, all of that
And so I think that I very much think of race as self-identification, even though race has been categorized for us.
What I'm doing right now is not necessarily my passion and what I'm doing right now is not necessarily my line of work
But those identifications and race really vary when you start traveling

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
I think America's very much been divided by what we have not given people access to, which is how people define their race and their ethnicity even more beyond even where they originally came from, so I think that's a dividing force
[race]it's complicated and it's complicated because all over the world it's complicated
Know the community, let the community lead you. Supervise younger folks that are different ethnicities, it's never tokenizing, but allowing our multiculturalism to take power in the best way that it can.
Even if it had been a native American woman, what are the pressures that they have to go through that are very related to the pressures that I've been through as an Asian queer person.
I have not done enough work with social service and communities that work in social services and the work that I have done more are with the progressive social service agencies that know that they can't disassociate themselves with the political work that happens or disassociate with themselves by not talking

*Examples of relevant statements from Chanel's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
In the beginning, I was a little bit frustrated because, and it may not be her – no fault of her own. I think the field itself was like there is not that much direction in it.
And so it's like you are figuring things out as you go along kind of stuff. So in the beginning, it was really difficult because I was pretty new to the field.
So I am like I didn't understand a lot of things, and I needed her to be able to explain things to me

I didn't feel like I was getting that [job situation-related explanations] or getting that type of support that I needed for someone who was so new to it
But yeah, it was a little bit difficult where I felt like I didn't have the support that I needed.
Early in January, I had to go to her multiple times about multiple domestic violence incidents that occurred on one of my cases where I thought I wasn't getting assistance until it was too late
I brought it up to my supervisor multiple times, and I said, "I don't think the child is safe in the home because they have a pattern of getting in domestic violence situations, reconcile, getting into fights again, reconcile. I don't think there is a safe environment for the child." And again, nothing happened.
Like if I need you to get involved, and I need you to do something, then you need you to do that, and you can't just ignore and put it off, especially considering that I am fairly new." And she has been in the field for a while
I am doing the day-to-day stuff on it, but I would just go into her office and say, "Hey, this is what I am thinking regarding this child or regarding these three teenage girls on this." I said, "This is what I am thinking," and she is like, "Yeah, I agree

*Examples of relevant statements from JZ's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
But I'm always in that sense different. Not necessarily how I look, but when I open my mouth everyone can see that I'm different, you know.
I assign[race] based on how different people are, you know, and that difference can manifest itself in many ways

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
<p>I come from was that class based society, but I feel here [Inaudible 37:31] as well, there are lots of okay you belong to this group, you belong to that group, you belong to that group. The way the groups are marked can be in several ways it's necessarily because of the race it can be just because of what you accomplished</p>
<p>Here in the US, discrimination is big in terms of -- so if you do anything wrong in term of discrimination, you will be sued, you'll have a problem.</p>
<p>I feel the only solution, is okay. I will adapt to—I will make lemonade from the lemons and be thankful to God for the lemon I got.</p>
<p>Be forgiving because the things will not be fair and never give up, because that is the best medicine.</p>
<p>If you're different, you got to always bring something different. Otherwise why do we need a different guy, you know.</p>
<p>I was lucky that I have a colleague here today, she's leaving the company though. And I'm pretty sad with this, because with her, and she's female African American, and she's kind of like my sister on the -- she could be my sister in terms of how we talk -- interact, like I like her as a sister.</p>
<p>Since we're (racial minorities) different, we try to show that we're strong, and that we kind of don't have problems, that we are always happy, and always optimistic. We try just to show that side, you know, because we feel that if we bring something else, people (members of racial majority) may not have patience for those who are different that have problems. So whoever is different cannot have problems, that's my bottom line.</p>
<p>But I'm always in that sense different. Not necessarily how I look, but when I open my mouth everyone can see that I'm different, you know.</p>

*Examples of relevant statements from KT's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>
So I think there were times when we were working together on different documents that I needed to present to court, those were times that we were on the same alignment with the information that I was providing to the court.
I had concerns that the mom was still interacting with the father of the children although she was advising she wasn't, and there was a court order for the children not to have contact with the father. So I definitely gained support on addressing that matter from my supervisor
But if we did check a box and quick and print out a certificate, it does nothing.
What's important that should have just automatically taken place without a request or without being- to speak in layman's terms - hitting the fire or hitting the fan, which that is what happened.
Overall, I feel like we have a pretty good relationship. I just think that we handle matters differently. And what I mean by that, I can sometimes be aggressive when I want things to get done and I push for things to get done.
I feel like she -- her point, which I fully understood was; (a) pick your battle, and (b) give it as much detail as possible. But when you are giving detail, give it in a roundabout way. And what I mean by that is give all the details that you possibly can without disclosing anything that you can't.
Even though I don't have direct employees under me I have coworkers that I work with who are from different nationalities, ethnicities, races and I am always speaking out to them to understand well how you interpret it, how did this come across.
I am a vocal individual that I am going to speak out someone else's opinion because they may be able to explain it to me because I

understand what you are trying to tell me, or where my supervisor is coming from

So I think there were times when we were working together on different documents that I needed to present to court, those were times that we were on the same alignment with the information that I was providing to the court.

## Appendix D

### Examples of Participant Relevant Statements & Codes

*Examples of relevant statements and codes from Ariana's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
at least 5 minutes talking about weekends or we are talking about the weather, or we are talking -- or she will ask me something about my husband because	engaging in work and non-work related discussions
feel valued and I feel welcomed because maybe I have more of that personality that's open to that type of conversation	feeling cared for allows dyadic working relationships to transcend convention
Sometimes we just travel in bus -- usually when we are both in the office we run into each other, I run into her office and she will come by, and we actually have schedules, one on one conversations once a week for maybe an hour or 2 hours every time	frequency of verbal interaction
Other people don't want to share somebody's personal stories so maybe they think that's too much silly chatter and they prefer to get down to business	keeping business focused
I mean I think I've talked a lot about learning. But I also think that it's important to us to teach and my job has allowed me to do that because of the work that I do, I would still feel responsibility yeah responsibility to talk about my culture, not just to learn, but also teach.	overcoming obstacles to interracial relationships through teaching others about one's own culture
I really think that we do need to be more diverse in our thoughts, more diverse in -- in -- in our workforce -- in order for us to better serve people	overcoming obstacles to serving a diverse community

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
When you have a supervisor that cares because the minute that you have a supervisor that doesn't care and then you are immediately on a wrong path.	overcoming obstacles to interracial relationships through having a caring supervisor
first advice that I would give to somebody is be open to learning and be open -- and I -- I've always been this type of person	overcoming obstacles to interracial relationships through learning
I think she may look older – older than what she is but she definitely looks older.	physical characteristics
when we start really speaking to them and you hear that accent, it's when you	race as accent/vocal quality

*Examples of relevant statements and codes from of Beynu's interview.*

<b>Data Segment</b>	<b>Codes</b>
I have not done enough work with social service and communities that work in social services and the work that I have done more are with the progressive social service agencies that know that they can't disassociate themselves with the political work that happens or disassociate with themselves by not talking	concepts of race vary globally
In America, we've had racist policies like whether it was not giving people the right to vote -- from slavery, to not giving people the right to vote, to access education, access to healthcare, all of that	coping by engaging someone outside the relationship that can relate
And so I think that I very much think of race as self-identification, even though race has been categorized for us.	coping by ignoring or avoiding
What I'm doing right now is not necessarily my passion and what I'm doing right now is not necessarily my line of work	coping through awareness
But those identifications and race really vary when you start traveling	coping through empathy

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
I think America's very much been divided by what we have not given people access to, which is how people define their race and their ethnicity even more beyond even where they originally came from, so I think that's a dividing force	current relationship compared to past relationships
[race]it's complicated and it's complicated because all over the world it's complicated	familiarity and comfortability
Know the community, let the community lead you. [Inaudible 1:10:53] supervise younger folks that are different ethnicities, it's never tokenizing, but allowing our multiculturalism to take power in the best way that it can.	identifying with the served community
Even if it had been a native American woman, what are the pressures that they have to go through that are very related to the pressures that I've been through as an Asian queer person.	level of interaction
I have not done enough work with social service and communities that work in social services and the work that I have done more are with the progressive social service agencies that know that they can't disassociate themselves with the political work that happens or disassociate with themselves by not talking	concepts of race vary globally

*Examples of relevant statements and codes from Chanel's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
In the beginning, I was a little bit frustrated because, and it may not be her – no fault of her own. I think the field itself was like there is not that much direction in it.	nature of the field
And so it's like you are figuring things out as you go along kind of stuff. So in the	learning on the job

beginning, it was really difficult because I was pretty new to the field.	
So I am like I didn't understand a lot of things, and I needed her to be able to explain things to me	supervisor as a knowledge source
I didn't feel like I was getting that or getting that type of support that I needed for someone who was so new to it	subordinate expectations of the supervisor
Early in January, I had to go to her multiple times about multiple domestic violence incidents that occurred on one of my cases where I thought I wasn't getting assistance until it was too late	supervisor response to subordinate expectations
I brought it up to my supervisor multiple times, and I said, "I don't think the child is safe in the home because they have a pattern of getting in domestic violence situations, reconcile, getting into fights again, reconcile. I don't think there is a safe environment for the child." And again, nothing happened.	subordinate expectations of the supervisor
Like if I need you to get involved, and I need you to do something, then you need you to do that, and you can't just ignore and put it off, especially considering that I am fairly new." And she has been in the field for a while	conflict from unmet subordinate expectations
I am doing the day-to-day stuff on it, but I would just go into her office and say, "Hey, this is what I am thinking regarding this child or regarding these three teenage girls on this." I said, "This is what I am thinking," and she is like, "Yeah, I agree	relationship outcomes
I like that she doesn't micromanage me because as opposed to other supervisors that I have seen, who are like every little thing they are in your face kind of thing. I like for her to be there when I need the assistance, when I come to her	subordinate assessment of the supervisor
Most of the cases, I have had them since December now, so now I kind of know how to work with the families a little bit better. Now I see them I would say I go to my supervisor less often.	frequency of interactions

*Examples of relevant statements and codes from JZ's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
But I'm always in that sense different. Not necessarily how I look, but when I open my mouth everyone can see that I'm different, you know.	accent or language skills as an obstacle to relationship building
I assign[race] based on how different people are, you know, and that difference can manifest itself in many ways	being an immigrant
I come from was that class based society, but I feel here [Inaudible 37:31] as well, there are lots of okay you belong to this group, you belong to that group, you belong to that group. The way the groups are marked can be in several ways it's necessarily because of the race it can be just because of what you accomplished	concepts of race
Here in the US, discrimination is big in terms of -- so if you do anything wrong in term of discrimination, you will be sued, you'll have a problem.	consequences of differentiation
I feel the only solution, is okay. I will adapt to—I will make lemonade from the lemons and be thankful to God for the lemon I got.	coping by adapting
Be forgiving because the things will not be fair and never give up, because that is the best medicine.	coping by being forgiving
If you're different, you got to always bring something different. Otherwise why do we need a different guy, you know.	coping by distinguishing one's self
I was lucky that I have a colleague here today, she's leaving the company though. And I'm pretty sad with this, because with her, and she's female African American, and she's kind of like my sister on the -- she could be my sister in terms of how we talk -- interact, like I like her as a sister.	coping by engaging someone outside the relationship that can relate
Since we're (racial minorities) different, we try to show that we're strong, and that we kind of don't have problems, that we are always happy, and always optimistic. We try just to show that side, you know,	coping by ignoring or avoiding explicit confrontation of issues

because we feel that if we bring something else, people (members of racial majority) may not have patience for those who are different that have problems. So whoever is different cannot have problems, that's my bottom line.	
But I'm always in that sense different. Not necessarily how I look, but when I open my mouth everyone can see that I'm different, you know.	accent or language skills as an obstacle to relationship building

*Examples of relevant statements and codes from KT's interview.*

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
So I think there were times when we were working together on different documents that I needed to present to court, those were times that we were on the same alignment with the information that I was providing to the court.	supervisor and subordinate expectations complement each other
I had concerns that the mom was still interacting with the father of the children although she was advising she wasn't, and there was a court order for the children not to have contact with the father. So I definitely gained support on addressing that matter from my supervisor	supervisor demonstrates desired behavior
But if we did check a box and quick and print out a certificate, it does nothing.	organizational norms
What's important that should have just automatically taken place without a request or without being- to speak in layman's terms - hitting the fire or hitting the fan, which that is what happened.	supervisor behavior is inconsistent with subordinate expectations
Overall, I feel like we have a pretty good relationship. I just think that we handle matters differently. And what I mean by that, I can sometimes be aggressive when I want things to get done and I push for things to get done.	supervisor and subordinate styles conflict
I feel like she -- her point, which I fully understood was; (a) pick your battle, and (b) give it as much detail as possible. But	supervisor and subordinate situational approaches conflicted

when you are giving detail, give it in a roundabout way. And what I mean by that is give all the details that you possibly can without disclosing anything that you can't.	
Even though I don't have direct employees under me I have coworkers that I work with who are from different nationalities, ethnicities, races and I am always speaking out to them to understand well how you interpret it, how did this come across.	subordinate promotes her interaction with coworkers as the ideal
I am a vocal individual that I am going to speak out someone else's opinion because they may be able to explain it to me because I understand what you are trying to tell me, or where my supervisor is coming from	overcoming obstacles to interracial relationships through dialog

<b>Relevant Statements</b>	<b>Codes</b>
So I think there were times when we were working together on different documents that I needed to present to court, those were times that we were on the same alignment with the information that I was providing to the court.	supervisor and subordinate expectations complement each other