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## Diversity in the 21st Century: Perceptions of Minority Professionals in Organizations

Nancy Greer-Williams

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DIVERSITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PERCEPTIONS OF MINORITY  
PROFESSIONALS IN ORGANIZATIONS

by

Nancy Greer-Williams

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Masters of Arts  
Department of Communication

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, MI  
June 2001

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

And Nancy called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, increase my influence in the organizational communication world. That Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, keep me from the trappings of the enemy, that I may not cause pain to anyone!”

Nancy Greer-Williams

# DIVERSITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PERCEPTIONS OF MINORITY PROFESSIONALS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Nancy Greer-Williams, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2001

We end this century at a unique moment for the United States, when our power and prosperity are greater than at any time in our history. However, there is one area where U.S. leadership is blighted: effective racial diversity in the workplace. In other words, the law mandates that organizations have a diverse workforce, but if the racial history is any indication, there will be resistance to this order, especially by the group in power: white males. This thesis takes a phenomenological approach and explores the traditional styles that organizations use to approach diversity, as well as the barriers minorities experience in seeking jobs in organizations, especially upper-level positions. Organizations can take this information as a means to increase understanding of the four groups represented in this study. In addition, this research study advances current communication theory on assimilation, diversity, and employee relations by exposing individual ethnic identity markers that interfere in effective communication between minority and majority professionals.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

We enter this century at a unique moment for the United States, when our power and prosperity are greater than at any time in our history. However, there is one area where U.S. leadership is blighted: effective racial diversity in the workplace. In other words, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates that organizations have a diverse workforce, but the racial history of this country indicates that there will be resistance to this order, especially by the group in power: white males.

In a governmental report on race initiatives, Advisory Board's Report to the President (1999) explains, "it is in the workplace where people most often come into contact with people from other races" (p. 24). Consequently, organizations must develop strategies for ethnic groups to co-exist in the workforce or their ultimate success will be challenged. Allen (1995) found that introducing dramatic changes into the makeup of an organization will bring to the surface feelings of uneasiness between ethnic groups that have always existed. She asserts that strained relations among ethnic groups in the workplace develop because of the "differences in cultural norms and values," which eventually develop into "various work related behaviors" (Allen, 1995, p. 143).

Johnston and Packer (1987) predict the face of the worker is changing from the majority – being the traditional white male – to that of females and males of a different race and ethnicity, such as African-Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos/Latinas. A U.S. Census Bureau's demographics report reveals that the

population of white Americans will drop as much as 25 percentage points in the year 2050 from their majority status in the 1990s (Morganthau, 1997). In addition, a more recent projection by the U.S. Census Bureau in Newsweek forecasts that African-Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans have increased to the majority group in some states ("America 2000," 2000). Accordingly, "organizations will be challenged to accommodate the diverse cultures and values of their employees in order to develop effective communication between those cultures" (Allen, 1995, p. 143).

The increase of the aforementioned workers in organizations will produce "practical as well as theoretical implications for persons who study organizational communication" (Allen, 1995, p. 143). Organizations will have to develop strategies not only to forge a conflict-free environment but also to recruit and maintain workers that traditionally have been forced to fuse into organizations without consideration for their cultural differences (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995).

The rationale for this research is simple. Prior studies on diversity in organizations traditionally have used the experiences of one member of an ethnic group (white males) and applied those findings to make predictions and generalizations about all groups (Allen, 1995; 1998; Bhagat, 1979; Cox, 1994; Orbe, 1998; Warren, Orbe & Greer-Williams, in press). According to several scholars (Allen, 1995; Cox, 1994; Orbe, 1998), studying only the experiences of one group diverts attention and clarity away from the experiences of all groups and results in information that is not universally factual. If an organization seeking strategies for diversity relies on information that is based only on the experiences of one group (the

majority), then the policies that are initiated will only fit the needs of that one group, and consequently will fail to meet the needs of the other participants in the organization.

This study explores the traditional styles that companies use to approach diversity by looking at existing programs, experiences, communication barriers and successes that minority professionals (African American and Latino females and males) experience in seeking jobs in organizations, especially upper-level positions. This research highlights the anxious climate that diversity causes for the majority and the minority, as well as the lack of credible research related to diversity in organizations as it relates to minority professionals (Allen, 1995; 1998; Cox, 1994; Orbe, 1998). This research is significant because as we progress in the twenty-first century, those in charge of organizations must learn to recognize and value the differences among ethnic groups in organizations and actively seek effective strategies to create environments that enable each employee “to maximize his or her highest potential” (Dobbs, 1996, p. 351).

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to broaden existing research on diversity in organizations by focusing on the difficulties minorities encounter when they advance into middle and upper management. Many organizations have taken steps to develop an environment in which the minority and the majority can co-exist. However, minorities still encounter problems such as discomfort, alienation, frustration, and an overall lack of success in fully integrating into traditionally white male positions (Alderfer, et al., 1980; Allen, 1995, 1998; Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995;

Lattimer, 1998; Muir, 1996; Orbe, 1998). For minorities to experience the unencumbered benefits of diversity, organizations will have to study the problems associated with diversity, which means they will need the input of all workers to have an effective organizational climate.

### The Anxious Climate of Diversity

In recent times, diversity issues have dominated the national agenda. For example, a study in the Advisory Board's Report to the President (1999) found that whites and minorities hold contrasting views on the status of race relations in this country and that the two cultures see the world through different lenses. This is relevant because if two forces are working together for the same goal but see the goal differently, then they will not arrive at the same destination (Warren et al., in press). In other words, minorities feel and perceive discrimination in most domains of life and "see it as more institutional in character," while whites downplay its "contemporary importance" (Bobo, as cited in Advisory Board's Report to the President, 1999, p. 47).

In addition to the aforementioned problems, the following segments (which are cited from the popular press) reveal that there is much anxiety about the changes diversity will cause in organizations. Rowan (1995), a national columnist, made a generalized statement about the majority of mail he received from white readers on an article about the reverse discrimination myth. "Through 'reverse discrimination,' our government, colleges and business have given so many goodies to blacks and Hispanics, that a white man, or family doesn't have a chance anymore" (p. D4).

Rowan's comment is an example of the media fueling the negative atmosphere associated with diversity.

According to the results of a Business Week poll on white managers from three top corporations, Galen and Palmer (1994) found that white males perceived that they must compete against minorities, which is something they did not have to do in the past. The majority of the white males included in the study felt that the diversity programs made them feel that they were under attack. John Mason (as cited in Galen & Palmer, 1994) cites the problem with the diversity program that he participated in as a vice president as related to reprisals against the white males for past injustices. The reprisals "discounted all the good things white males have done" (p. 51).

In another newspaper article about diversity, Paul Delaney, an African-American reporter, warns that diversity will negatively affect the workforce in the following manner:

I warned them that diversity would become one of those four-letter words, like quotas and bussing. I've seen opposition to diversity, build to the point that it will soon be relegated to the burial grounds of past failed efforts . . . The reasons are rather simple: Those charged with managing diversity have little or no experience in such an extremely sensitive area and are botching the job . . . I spoke to a colleague who had an interview but was told by the editor "I'm sorry, I can't hire you right now, if you were black, I would hire you." Such reckless insensitivity promotes dissension between blacks and whites, undermining the whole effort. (As cited in Williams, 1993, p. 21)

The aforementioned articles represent media's negative coverage of diversity, which has a direct effect on public perceptions. However, more recent articles give credence to the importance of this research. According to a recent article in USA

TODAY, “The number of [minority] employees filing federal claims regarding discrimination in promotions based on race has nearly doubled since 1990” (Armour, 2000, p. 1). These lawsuits are based on claims that “advancement is stymied -- experts say [because] too many people of color are finding management positions out of reach” (Armour, 2000, p.1). In fact, a poll conducted by the Texas Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed that “75% of employers say that minorities face barriers to advancement – even with recent diversity training initiatives” (as cited in Armour, 2000, p.1). In other words, these articles state that minorities are not finding the same success as the majority advancing in organizations.

The next section describes my experience with racism and stereotypical behaviors in an organization. It reflects some of the reasons minorities experience difficulties advancing into middle and upper-level management in organizations.

### My Personal Experience

To illustrate that minorities experience barriers in seeking high paying jobs and that companies try to avoid diversity faction, I will recount a negative experience I had recently in seeking a upper-level position. Needing money and a break from law school, I sought employment as a legal assistant with a temporary screening agency. The agency recruited employees for law firms in the area and was listed as “the” premiere agency to find upper-level employment. It is important to note that I had been warned that it was virtually impossible for an African-American to get an upper level position with a law firm in the area. Key people said that temporary agencies



and law firms in this area took great lengths to control the “flavor” (color) of their organizations. However, I was not dissuaded because I knew my credentials were excellent and I am a diligent, efficient worker.

The agency was located forty-five minutes away, so my initial contact with the agency was via the telephone. The agency was immediately impressed with my education and credentials and assured me that I would have no problems securing employment as a legal assistant, making a good salary. They were so impressed that they immediately sent me out on an assignment with a local law firm. The lawyers seemed shocked when I arrived for work, however, they quickly had me attend to the job at hand because they were short staffed. Before I completed my first day, every lawyer in the firm came by the office I was working and inquired about my training and how I learned to do the job. I received constant assurances during the two-week assignment on how well I was doing and if a position opened they would hire me immediately. To this date, I have not received a call/inquiry from the law firm.

In the two-week period of my first assignment, the agency received my picture identification and realized that I was a person of color. Immediately, the agency stopped calling me for upper-level positions. I questioned the agency and was told that no law organizations in a fifty mile radius needed help, even though it was summer, peak vacation time. The only jobs the agency said they received requests for were entry-level jobs such as a receptionist or as a mail clerk. I tried other agencies, but experienced similar treatment over and over.

It has been over a year since I left law school and, to this date, I have not

found employment that would justify the work experience and education I have acquired. I have found that my treatment was not unique. In talking to other minorities with advanced degrees, I learned that minority women, as well as men, have experienced similar treatment and many have had to compromise in the job market to feed their families.

Thus far, I have stated issues that minority professionals face in seeking upper-level positions in the corporate community as evidenced by research, the popular press, as well as my personal experience. The next chapter is a review of the existing literature on the challenges minority professionals face in organizations.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The age, sex, and ethnicity of the U. S. workforce is changing to reflect the demographics of the various ethnic groups (America 2000, 2000; Johnston & Packer, 1987; Morgenthau, 1997). This change is forcing organizations to implement a variety of strategies to “recruit, integrate and manage” the new workforce (Dobbs, 1996, p. 351). Even though organizations are incorporating changes, minority professionals (African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Latinos/Latinas) are experiencing difficulties advancing into middle and upper management (Allen, 1995; Cox, 1994; Dobbs, 1996; Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Zerbinos & Clanton, 1993). The following literature uncovers barriers, which have hindered the successful advancement of minority professionals in organizations.

#### Tensions and Barriers

This literature review is a compilation of prior research on barriers in the organizational culture that have blocked numbers of minorities from advancing into upper-level positions in the corporate world. This research reveals how navigating these barriers has a direct influence on the perceptions of minority professionals as well as uncovers the challenges of being a minority professional in an organization. This is relevant because research indicates that most majority members are not aware of the challenges minority members face in working in traditional majority positions (Alderfer et al, 1980; Wells, 1998). In fact, Wells (1998) says that majority members often deny or disbelieve minority members when they (minorities) cite allegations of

racial bias in the workplace.

Furthermore, Allen (1995) predicts that introducing dramatic changes into the makeup of the culture of an organization will bring to the surface underlying tensions that have existed in the workforce. She continues by explaining that tensions between ethnic groups in the United States develop because of the differences in cultural norms and values. Eventually these develop into various work-related behaviors. Descriptions of some of the tensions and barriers that minorities experience in advancing in organizations are as follows: forced assimilation, lack of mentoring, lack of social networks, stereotyping, the glass ceiling, differing perceptions of diversity based on race/ethnicity, and communication hurdles.

#### Forced Assimilation

One of the traditional ways in which organizations approach diversity is to have employees assimilate into the companies' way of doing things (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1999; Lattimer, 1998; Muir, 1996). Assimilation refers to when co-cultural group members mimic the communication style of the dominant group members to such a degree that they lose their own cultural identity style (Orbe, 1998). In other words, assuming new roles means people must acquire new skills in addition to "adopting the social norms and rules that govern how they should conduct themselves" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Organizations accomplish this process by creating an organizational climate that pushes newcomers to imitate the behaviors and styles of previous workers (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1999).

Lattimer (1998) suggests that while assimilation reinforces traditional ways of

doing things, it is problematic for the manager who has difficulty conforming to the traditions of an organization. In addition, failure to convey the appropriate mannerisms that are consistent with a manager's role not only diminishes the effectiveness of the new manager in that role but can also cause the individual to lose the right to perform that position (Ibarra, 1999). Cox (1994) interjects another key point about assimilation:

Research on organizational socialization has tended to focus more on specific job settings than on the organizational culture as a whole, and since the term often refers only to cultural transmission to newcomers, more attention is paid to the members' initial introduction to the organization than to their ongoing participation and education within the organization. (p. 165)

Increasingly more organizations are discovering that if diverse employees are forced to conform solely to traditional ways, companies lose valuable resources that could help them creatively solve problems, make better decisions, and adapt to differences among consumers (Lattimer, 1998). Those in charge of organizations must learn to recognize and value the differences between ethnic groups in the organization and actively seek strategies to create environments that enable each employee to maximize his or her highest potential (Dobbs, 1996).

### Lack of Mentoring

Mentoring can be defined as a relationship between a junior and senior member of an organization, formed to insure the satisfaction and organizational success of the junior member (Ibarra, 1995, 1999; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Mentor relationships bring encouragement, feedback, training, political guidance, interpersonal support,

and visibility to the junior member of the relationship (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Research indicates that successful employees are those who have been able to establish close personal relationship with one or more senior employees early in their careers (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Cox, 1994; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991).

Kalbfleisch and Davies (1991) conclude that race has a significant impact on the success of a mentoring relationship involving minorities. Findings from their research reveal that the strongest “mentor-protégée partnerships appear to be same-race partnerships rather than cross-race partnerships” (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991, p. 270). Researchers explain that mentors who tend to be white males choose protégées with racial and social backgrounds similar to their own, which typically leaves out minority members (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995; Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley, 1990).

Racial and social background differences create obstacles for white mentors in identifying positively with minority members (Allen, 1995, 1998; Ibarra, 1995; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). In addition, Ibarra (1995) found that ethnic differences were often an obstacle for white mentors in identifying positively with their minority protégées. Greenhaus et al. (1990) also found that minority managers often felt isolated from the majority social network in their corporation. Wells (1998) attributes the isolation feelings of minority group members to the subtle and indirect effect of racial bias from the majority group members. Despite this dilemma, Ibarra (1995) points out that minorities are forced to develop relationships with the dominant ethnic group (white males) to get the mentoring and social support they need to advance in

the organization. This fact is important to note, given that minorities have difficulties advancing in the corporate domain because they do not have the support or mentoring by members of their culture (Cox, 1994; Orbe, 1998).

### Lack of Social Networks

A social network refers to a “set of job-related contacts that a manager relies on for access to task-related, career, and social support” (Ibarra, 1995, p. 674). She concludes that employees whose social networks extend beyond their immediate work groups tend to be more powerful. Research indicates that important information relating to career advancement, business contacts and resources takes place after the required workday and often excludes minorities (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Ibarra, 1995, 1999).

In order for minorities to succeed in the corporate domain, they (minorities) are expected to adopt the styles of their successful white peers by developing interpersonal networks; however, lack of minority professionals in the organization force minorities to have “duo-groups” for social support (Alderfer, et al., 1980; Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Ibarra, 1995, 1999). In other words, minority managers often balance two different social circles to attain the same results of success as the majority group (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995; Lattimer, 1998). The two social networks include contact with the minority community for information, identity and social support, and ties to the majority group for function in and access to important resources (Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995)

Foeman and Pressley (1987) cite other reasons for the social barrier between

the two groups: (a) When minority professionals interact on a social level with the majority, any identification of difference in style of the minority professional works to their disadvantage; (b) results from a previous study revealed that many majority members believe that minorities' behavior is erratic and unusual rather than based on a set of cultural rules; and (c) social convention as much as racism prevents people from talking about racial differences in comfortable and meaningful ways (p. 295).

### Stereotyping

Stereotyping is making judgments or generalizations about a person or a group based on characteristics or behaviors that are universally associated with that group (Allport, 1958). Consequently, Allport (1958) concludes that stereotyping is easily accomplished when a person has little exposure to an ethnic group. It is quite possible for the majority group to have negative stereotypical expectations of minority professionals, because of their limited contact with them and historical patterns of discrimination (Fant, 1982). Foeman and Pressley (1987) polled a group of upper level white managers and found that one third expressed that "the different cultural backgrounds of minority members are not conducive to success in management" (p. 294).

Wells (1998) concludes, "racism in the workplace today has become more subtle, indirect, and covert and less overtly negative than traditional forms of racism observed in the past" (p. 394). Several studies addressing race relations in organizations (Alderfer et al., 1982; Wells, 1998) found that the following behaviors are reflective of majority groups and the way they use stereotypes to address minority



group behavior and performance:

- (a) Middle-level majority managers often react with a form of status anxiety; viewing the advancement as an encroachment on the majorities' rightful entitlement and privilege; (b) The minority manager's competence is initially viewed by the majority as being different from the rest of his or her ethnic group; and (c) the minority manager is frequently second-guessed by his or her subordinates as well as by supervisors. (pp. 394-395)

### Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier that prevents minorities from progressing beyond certain levels in an organization (Greenhaus et al., 1990). "There appears to be no industry type without glass ceilings, no other similar form of structural plateauing, and no comparable barrier for white males" (Buzzanell, 1995, p. 327).

The glass ceiling effect is blamed for the lack of advancement of minorities in middle/upper-level management positions in organizations (Cox, 1994). In fact, the Advisory Board went on to report recent evidence that minorities are on average likely to be "denied promotions at least 20 to 25 percent of the time" because of the glass-ceiling effect (p. 73). In addition, some research indicates that employers would pay higher salaries to white-male job entrants in the upper-level technology positions rather than provide those positions for minority job entrants (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

In prior study, Fant (1982) exposes traditional organizational operating norms that systematically discriminate against minorities. Specifically he found that: (a) candidates are drawn from a limited pool of individuals belonging to the dominant group; (b) minorities usually look different (e.g., skin color, facial features), which

leads to “untested” assumptions and stereotypes about their competency and ability to fit into the organization; (c) when a minority applicant is interviewed by white interviewer, he or she is more likely to receive a lower, less positive rating than his or her white counter part; and (d) the ideal image of the promotable manager is a white male under 45 years of age, college educated with an MBA, and technically oriented.

Buzzanell (1995) asserts that current definitions of the glass ceiling oversimplify the experiences of minorities and generate “gender-biased research” and “quick-fix solutions” (p. 327). She explains that research that asserts that the glass ceiling is a problem -- which can be resolved by providing more jobs for women -- overlooks underlying social phenomenon such as “career rules, discourse, and organizational structures created for and by men” that perpetuates discrimination against women and other minorities (Buzzanell, 1995, p. 193). Minorities who are well qualified for a promotion often find that the door is blocked by the glass ceiling and informal practices or procedures that often bridle a minority’s advancement once he or she is hired (Advisory Board, 1999).

#### Differing Perceptions of Diversity Based on Race

The story of race in the United States is one of conflicting viewpoints to such a degree that an outsider would say that the two cultures, white males and minorities see the world through different lenses (Advisory Board, 1999; Ibarra, 1995; Lattimer, 1998; Orbe, 1998; Warren et al., in press). Minorities have recognized the reality of racism for a very long time, however, white America has enjoyed the dual luxuries of ignorance and denial in lieu of attempts of being color-blinded (Ayvazian & Tatum,

1996). In addition, Foeman and Pressley (1987) point out that the divergent viewpoint between the majority and minority in this country (in addition to racism) prevent people from talking about racial differences in comfortable and meaningful ways. Additionally, unless the two conflicting cultures interact and discuss their views, perceptions are unlikely to change (Ayvazian & Tatum, 1996; Foeman & Pressley, 1987).

These findings support the standpoint theory, which asserts that life is not experienced the same for all persons and their view or perceptions are determined by their societal positioning (Buzzanell, 1994; Orbe, 1998). Various group members may have commonalities but not all group members hold the same standpoint (Buzzanell, 1994; Orbe, 1998). Warren et al. (in press) points out that our standpoint affects how we communicate with other groups and how we perceive the communication of others. In other words, a person's standpoint will determine the role the person will play in a conflict, which is a key element in an organizational encounter between a minority and majority member (Warren et al., in press).

In an interview with minority managers in organizations, Fant (1982) polled them to see what they would say to the majority group if they had a chance to express their underlying feelings. The following responses are a sampling of the group:

Black corporate vice-president: "If one more person engages me in a conversation about jazz, I think I'll scream! Not all blacks like jazz and I happen to be one who doesn't."

Black female manager: "Because of our cultural history, people assume we should be more sensitive to the human side of the enterprise. I'm often used as a shoulder to cry on. And although I have a technical background, I'm often asked if I would be interested

in joining the Human Resources Department.”

Puerto Rican middle manager: “We’re still hearing the old clichés -- like, ‘We don’t see why you people demand so much; you’re getting all the breaks.’ They don’t see all the pressures that go with the breaks” (p. 61).

These statements reflect the frustration and lack of freedom minority members suppress because they cannot disclose these feelings to the dominant group. This is another reason why meaningful dialogue between the cultures would lead to better perceptions of the other group (Ayvazian & Tatum, 1996; Foeman & Pressley, 1987).

Similarly, Zane (1998) summarizes the feelings of an upper-level Latino female who stated that whites in power treat her as if she were stupid. On the other hand, if these white males perceive that she is intelligent they say it must be because she is different from others of her culture. Such comments put her in the position of having to choose to identify with those in power or with her culture, which is viewed as inferior by the dominant culture. Alderfer et al. (1980) found in a study on the perceptions of black and white managers regarding racial issues in organizations, that 50% of the black managers in an organization felt that their company would do little to protect the legal rights of black managers and two-thirds felt that the organization “would do little to advance the cause of black managers” (p. 155).

Zane (1998) discovered that white managers believed that discrimination claims were attempts to hide poor performance by minorities and that diversity training was simply a distraction from the real work of the organization. In addition, her research uncovered the similar reactions from white managers after they had been exposed to diversity training. One manager shared the following comments:

We often feel powerless or unaware of what to do to make a difference. We want and need feedback because we will make mistakes. We have feelings of fear, guilt, and, anxiety. We feel a lot of the burdens are (appropriately) on us and we want and need to help. (Zane, 1998, p. 34)

The paradox of white males' behavior is that as they believe positive results are occurring, when in reality, they are generating unfavorable results (Alderfer et al., 1980). This indicates that they are expecting minorities to react to changes as they (white males) would act, another indicator that more research is called for (Allen, 1995). For example, Alderfer et al. (1980) learned that whites believe blacks enjoy racial joking, when in reality, they do not. At the same time, the Advisory Board (1999) found that many whites are unaware of how skin color is a disadvantage to minorities. "From the white perspective, there are fewer race problems, less discrimination, and an abundance of opportunities for blacks, and only minimal personal prejudice" (p. 46). Consequently, the literature in this section points out that cultural differences are often a reason for different perceptions of the majority and minority member and often lead to communication hurdles (Cox, 1994; Allen, 1995; Orbe, 1998).

### Communication Hurdles

Communication practices between the majority and minority group members in organizations are not just a dialogue but an interaction of perceptions (Cox, 1994; Foeman & Pressley, 1987). Orbe (1998) points out that certain aspects of co-cultural communication are defined from the perspective of the minority group member when they identify cultural differences as obvious during any given interaction. In addition,

different background experiences of group members in an organization can affect both formal and informal communication (Allen, 1995; Cox, 1994; Orbe, 1998). Those differences can obstruct effective dialogue between group members and lead to conflicts and misunderstandings in the workplace.

Orbe (1998) concludes that different co-cultural group members developed specific communication styles when interacting with dominant group members. In a study on the communication styles of Latino, African, and European American males and females, Warren et al. (in press) discovered the following information about how the different groups communicate about conflict. Participants viewed an episode of MTV's The Real World, which aired a segment of an argument between a white female and an African American male:

The common thread . . . among African American women and men, and Latino/as was the recognition that 'race was always in effect' – either at, or just below, the surface level. As one African American woman explained, 'So, it's always there. It's something that you can't say is NOT there. Race is always an issue. Whether you want to acknowledge it or not, it is always present' . . . However, for most European [white] Americans, it seems like race was brought into situations unnecessarily.

These findings support standpoint theory, which asserts that life, is not experienced the same for all persons and their view or perceptions are determined by their societal positioning (Buzzanell, 1994; Orbe, 1998). Various group members may have commonalities but not all group members hold the same standpoint (Buzzanell, 1994; Orbe, 1998). Warren et al. (in press) reveals that our standpoint affects how we communicate and how we perceive the communication of others.

The goal of this research is to broaden existing research on diversity and the

difficulties minority professionals encounter in the dominant organizational culture, by specifically answering the question of why minority group members do not have the same success as the majority advancing into middle and upper management. Many organizations are aware of diversity and have taken steps to develop a diverse workforce. However, research indicates that minorities are still encountering problems, because of resistance by the dominant group (Allen, 1995; 1998; Cox, 1994; Ibarra, 1995; Orbe, 1998). In order for scholars in the field of organizational communication theory to better understand the motivation behind this resistance, they must have clarity on the data pertaining to barriers to minority professionals in organizations.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The underlying premise throughout this study is that the majority group perceives the rewards and challenges of being a minority differently than those who are in the minority. From a minority professional viewpoint, this research will help the majority understand this phenomenon. According to Armour (2000), “Companies may be putting an emphasis on creating diverse workforces, but more minorities claim they’re facing barriers to promotions once on the job” (p. 1). Consequently, the methodology chosen to study this phenomenon is not steeped in the traditional paradigm of one lens into human relations, but a multi-dimensional, inductive approach that has proven to give voice to minority professionals “through their own lived experiences” (Orbe, 2000, p. 605; van Manen, 1990). This chapter explains how a phenomenological inquiry was used to examine the organizational experiences of minority professionals.

#### Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a methodological science that studies the “conscious experience” of a person and the world that they inhabit and function in (Lanigan, 1988; Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 1990). Husserl (1970) concludes that the phenomenologist is concerned with discussions of a general sort that cover the wider sphere of an objective theory of knowledge. In addition, “phenomenology must bring to pure expression, must describe in terms of their essential concepts, the essences which directly make themselves known in intuition” (Husserl, 1970, p. 249). van Manen



(1990) adds that this method explores the “experiences of people” in their world and extracts meanings from their experiences (p. 11). Phenomenology was birthed in Germany in the early twentieth century by researchers Husserl, Jaspers, and Heidegger, used in France by Merleau-Ponty, Satre, and de Beauvoir, was later adopted by a number of American scholars for the study of intercultural relations (Orbe, 2000).

One of the key aspects of phenomenology inquiry, as van Manen (1990) describes it, is that phenomenology starts with the lived experience and the researcher, and eventually returns back to it (p. 34). This process allows the researcher to reflect on and understand their “preconceived biases, ideas, and subjectivity” while seeking to understand others (Orbe, 2000, p. 611). I will be looking at the co-researchers in this study through the lens of my experiences in organizations as outlined in Chapter Two. In other words, I come to this research from the standpoint of an educated, African-American female that has experienced barriers in advancing in organizations. Dilthey (1985) concludes that a lived experience involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of an experience of life. According to van Manen (1990), the aim of phenomenology is to transform a lived experience into a textual expression of its essence, in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful (p. 36).

### Three-Step Process

According to prior researchers (Lanigan, 1979; Nelson, 1989; Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 1990), phenomenological inquiry involves a three-step process of discovery that entails description, reduction and interpretation. Each step is interdependent, and spirals and intertwines continuously with the other steps (Nelson, 1989). She further explains this synergistic process as each step being part of a whole; in the process of undertaking this procedure the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts (p. 6). Ultimately the goal of this 3-step process is to gain a more direct contact with the lived experiences of a people so that the researcher can reflect on those experiences and gain insight into the essence of their experiences (van Manen, 1990). Or in the case of this thesis, I want to explicate the essence of what it means to be a minority professional in an organization.

As previously stated, phenomenology is grounded in and begins with the lived experiences of the researcher (Merleau-Pointy, 1962). Earlier, I explained my standpoint of an African American female including my experiences with organizational resistance and how that experience made me aware of my own preconceived biases and subjectivity. In phenomenology, emphasis is placed on the researcher not clouding the research by putting their knowledge about the phenomenon before the research (Husserl, 1970). van Manen (1990) advises that the researcher must come to terms with his or her assumptions and not to forget them but place them in context to the findings. This is an important first step to phenomenological inquiry, even before one begins the formal 3-step process.

### Gathering Phenomenological Descriptions

van Manen (1990) states that the emphasis in phenomenological research is always on the meaning of the lived experience. Therefore, to capture the essence of the meaning the researcher must borrow other people's experiences and combine them with their own reflections on their experiences (p. 62). In describing the process of description, Nelson (1989) suggests that the researcher approach the interviews by imaginatively place him or herself in the actual situation. She further continues that such a position activates a complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities that gives a definite form to the phenomenon (p. 231). van Manen (1990) describes a good phenomenological description as collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience – as being validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience (p. 27).

For this thesis, the lived experiences of minority professionals were collected in taped focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. This forum of interviewing was chosen as a means to develop a conversational relationship with the participants in order to study they way they see themselves, others, and related issues in certain situations (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Another reasoning for using the focus group and in-depth interview techniques is to give the researcher and participants an opportunity to collaborate to interpret, modify and enhance the data (Orbe, 2000).

The focus group discussions and in-depth interviews that I will explicate later in this chapter were facilitated using open-ended questions (see Appendix A and B). The listed questions served as a guide to gather experiential narrative data. The data

served as a resource for understanding what it is like to be a minority professional in a majority-controlled organization. It is important to note that these questions served only as a guide to interviewing. van Manen (1990) notes that a researcher cannot just write a question, the interviewee must be “pulled” into the question in such a way that they understand the nature of the phenomenon in the same way as the researcher (p. 44). He continues by saying that it sometimes involves posing the question in such a way that the interviewee would not misinterpret the question.

Upon completion of the focus groups and in-depth interviews, tapes were transcribed. Nelson (1989) concludes that this process reduces the entire interview situation to speech (auditory data), so the transcription reduces speech to words (visual data) (p. 228). Lanigan (1979) calls the data “capta” or the conscious experience that allows our thinking to slip into hypothetical constructs of the phenomenon (p. 7). According to Husserl (1964), both processes allow the researcher to isolate the lived experience into “brackets” so as to keep external ideals, which are outside the experience, from influencing our description (p. XIX). This phase as described by Nelson (1989):

Involves another spiraling of description, reduction and interpretation. The transcripts constitute the description the researcher performs a reduction by choosing certain elements from the description and submitting them to variation. (p. 234)

### Thematic Reduction

The second step of the phenomenological process is called the reduction. Lanigan (1979) describes this step as the process that determines the essential parts of the capta. van Manen (1990) call this “a process of insightful invention, discovery and

disclosure” that is not a conventional process but more an act of “seeing meaning” in the phenomenon (p. 79). Orbe (2000) posits this is the step where the researcher begins the process of refining, expanding, developing, and discarding relevant themes, concepts and ideas (p. 614).

The reduction process entails two cycles to further reduce the capta to meaningful, essential descriptions of the lived reality of the co-researcher (Nelson, 1989). Imaginative free variation, which is described below, is the first cycle reduction and places a focus on the abstract and general properties of the phenomenon under investigation (Lanigan, 1979). Orbe (2000) concludes that this cycle will yield an “overwhelming number of possible themes” and will need to undergo another cycle of reduction (p. 615). The second cycle described by Nelson (1989) is where the original descriptions of lived experiences will be transformed into more general, concise expressions (p. 235).

Imaginative free variation. Imaginative free variation is a process, which helps to differentiate between essential and incidental themes (van Manen, 1990; Orbe, 2000). van Manen (1990) says to determine the essential quality of a theme is to uncover the qualities of that phenomenon that uncover what it is and without these qualities, the phenomenon could not be what it is. This step is accomplished by the researcher asking “is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 106). Lanigan (1979) reports that imaginative free variation consists of the researcher imagining the participants’ lived experiences consisting of perception, memory and judgment and

systematically imagining each aspect present or absent within the lived experience.

This process requires several reviews of capta and ultimately helps to reduce the amount of themes by eliminating incidental or happenstance ones (van Manen, 1990).

### Second Cycle of Reduction

At the end of the first cycle of reduction, you will have an abundance of themes. Orbe (2000) asserts that some of the original themes will be interconnected, redundant or incidental and can be combined under a more general heading (p. 616). Nelson (1989) describes this process as an opportunity for the researcher to gleam properties from the capta that are truly the essential element of the phenomenon. Orbe (2000) explains both cycles of the reduction phase include the synergistic process of: (a) Reading through the each transcript without making any notations; (b) reading through the transcript a second time, and highlighting words, phrases, and recollections that seem insightful about the lived experiences of the co-researchers; and (c) and bracketing these paradigmatic themes till further reduction is completed (p. 615).

A process occurs in between the first and second cycle. After the original themes have been identified, the researcher then uses these themes as objects of reflection for the follow-up in-depth hermeneutic interviews between the researcher and participant (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) recognizes this as an opportunity for the participant to become a co-researcher. Both parties self-reflectively orient themselves to the collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view (p. 99). In other words, the co-researcher aids the researcher to weigh the appropriateness of each theme and further aide to

reduce the number of themes to represent the essential meaning of the lived experience. This causes the reduction phase to evolve to a definition of the phenomenon, and not a flat lived experience, but one that brings essence to the phenomenon. Nelson (1989) explains this process as a procedure where the researcher aided with the *capta* from co-researchers, reflects upon these experiences in the form of an analysis. This analysis takes the flat words from the page and transforms these words into a 3-dimensional picture that tells the story of their lived experiences.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) says the most important lesson of the reduction phase is the impossibility of a complete reduction (p. 178). He continues that this is not an obstacle to the reduction, but the reduction itself and the rediscovery of a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 178). Lanigan (1979) describes this synergistic process of the reduction as the description evolving into a definition of the phenomenon that will under go interpretation in the third phase.

#### Hermeneutic Interpretation of Themes

The goal of this last step is to understand meaning, which links the phenomenon under investigation with consciousness (Nelson, 1989, p. 236). Lanigan (1988) describes this step as an attempt to specify the meanings that are essential in the reduction and descriptions of the conscious experience being investigated (p. 9). He further explains by saying the value or meaning that is the essence of our conscious experience accounts for the way in which we interpret and experience it (Lanigan, 1988). Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes this as a hyper-reflection.

Hyper-reflection. Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes hyper-reflection as the process that the researcher takes their self and the changes the researcher introduces into the phenomenon into account (p. 68). In order to conduct hyper-reflection, the researcher must not only go back to the speech of the respondents, but must also go beyond those already speaking significations (Nelson, 1989, p. 237). van Manen (1990) describes this as the process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure:

As I arrive at essential thematic insights it may seem that insight is a product of all of these; invention (my interpretive product), discovery (the interpretive product of my dialogue with the text of life), disclosure of meaning (the interpretive product given to me by the text of life itself. (p. 88)

Nelson (1989) clarifies the above quote by explaining that the interpretation is an attempt to explicate the preconscious reasoning and the intentional meaning of the described and defined phenomenon (p. 238). This reflective process further strips away the capta until one or two specific revelatory phrase serves as indicators of certain meanings which were not immediately apparent in the earlier process (Nelson, 1989, p. 237).

The reduction process begins by reviewing the essential themes and conceptualizing on how essential themes relate to one another (Orbe, 2000, p. 616). Through a continual process of thematizing, bracketing, and interpreting, one significant phrase or theme emerges and serves as a means of interconnecting all of the essential themes that evolved from the co-researchers' experiences (Orbe, 2000). van Manen (1990) concludes that the goal of phenomenology is to turn a lived experience into a "textual expression of its essence" and that goal will be the focus of this section



(p. 36). The final process thus emphasizes the meaning of the phenomena as described by minority professionals and the value they ascribe to their experiences in the organizational setting (Nelson, 1989).

Syntagmatic thematization. A part in determining the meaning of a phenomenon is what Lanigan (1979) calls hermeneutic semiology, which he describes as a value relationship that unites the phenomenological description and reduction. He further explains, that to determine the value of a phenomenological description involves taking a conscious experience that functions as the relationship in the description and reduction – the speech (acta) given to you (data) which is taken (capta) as meaningful (p. 8). Applying the formula to this research means to take the words the minority professionals spoke in the focus groups (acta) that was collected as audio recording (data) and transcribed (capta). This information will under go a hermeneutic interpretation and a value will be assigned to the meaning of being a minority professional. Nelson (1989) adds that the interpretation is an attempt to specify the preconscious and intentional meaning of the described and defined phenomenon (p. 238).

In summary, the objective of the three steps of description, reduction and interpretation is to articulate the essential meaning of being a minority professional in organizations. This will be accomplished by researching experiential data from minority professionals in order to: (a) examine the communication strategies used to negotiate the organizational culture; (b) explore the communication upon hire

regarding advancement; (c) learn of any barriers to advancement; and (d) explore participants' perception of current diversity training.

### Methods

Following the strategies of early studies (Orbe, 1998; Warren et al., in press) that allowed the gathering of the richest phenomenological descriptions as possible, I have chosen two methods. The first method is focus group discussion. These will be used to gather data and also to construct questions for the follow up, in-depth interviews. Morgan (1988) argues that the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group (p. 12). In addition, once the focus groups have been transcribed and original themes defined, this process will then be used by the researcher to dialogue with the co-researchers to determine the deeper meaning of their experiences in the workplace.

### Co-researchers

In this inquiry, I interacted with 22 minority professionals from a variety of organizations. These men and women have attained the status of mid to upper level managers in their organizations. Initially, co-researchers were chosen from friends and acquaintances of the researcher because of her many contacts through community service and church. As knowledge of the subject matter circulated among contacts, more people were referred and agreed to be part of this study. In addition, some of the co-researchers that participated in a pilot study agreed to be part of this larger study (Greer-Williams, 2000).

My goal was to have four to five members of each of the following groups: African-American males, African-American females, Latino males, and Latina females, participate in the focus groups. To help with recruiting besides friend and contacts, I went through a local minority organization and a multicultural church. Leaders and/or members of the organizations were contacted, given an explanation of the project, and subsequently asked to give a memo describing the research project to members or others that they considered an ideal candidate. This “snowballing effect,” as described by Lindlof (1995), meant that additional participants were contacted, given an explanation of the project, and subsequently asked to participate in the study.

The co-researchers -- who are managers, supervisors and leaders in their organizations -- readily shared their often-muted experiences with the majority in organizational settings. As a group, they share the classification of minority professional; however, they differ in terms of organizational setting, gender, age, socioeconomic, educational level, religious, and family backgrounds. The participants gathered represent a diverse set of circumstances, histories and lived experiences for these men and women.

Specifically, these women and men hold a variety of positions; administrator, educational leader, attorney, program director, department head, physician, counselor, company owner and executive director. They have attained the status of a mid to upper level manager in the following types of organizations: university, telecommunication, public administration, public safety, philanthropic foundation, state run institutions, public school system, banking, service and construction. Some co-

researchers started at an entry-level position and worked their way up the corporate ladder. Others hired into the organization because of their degree status. Most of the minority professionals have at least a Bachelors or a Masters degree, and some had a professional degree (e.g., law and medical), and a few had a PhD.

### Collecting Lived Experiences

The purpose of the initial focus group discussion was to provide an atmosphere where respondents could recall, collaborate and elaborate (Fontana & Frey, 1998). van Manen (1990) points out that focus groups are useful in generating revelations and deeper insights as well as presenting an atmosphere for collaborative discussing and testing of a research situation (p. 100). In addition focus groups discussions were chosen as the best method to collect lived experiences from twenty-five men and women who had busy schedules and worked at different locations.

The minority professionals were asked to supply information regarding their perceptions and experiences with the majority in an organizational setting. Specifically, there were six audio taped, focus groups discussions that took approximately one hour each. Five of the focus groups contained 3-4 respondents, and two focus group discussions contained 2 respondents. The following is the composition of each group: (a) African American females; (b) African American females; (c) Latino males; (d) African American females, African American male and Latino male; (e) Latinas; (f) African American and Latino males; and (g) African American male and female, Latino male and female.

### Focus Group Procedures

The focus groups were held in a conference room in a university building and lasted approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. Focus group discussions were audio taped. Herndon and Kreps (1993) point out that guaranteeing confidentiality of participants in the setting of a focus group is difficult to control because participants are in a group. To address this concern, a letter certified from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (Appendix D), was given to each asking each respondent to keep the contents discussed in the focus groups in the confines of the discussion. In addition, before each session I reminded respondents that the information discussed in the focus groups regarding other participants and organizations is confidential and should not be discussed outside the confines of the focus groups. Furthermore, participants were asked not to reveal their real names or their organizations' identity.

In order to facilitate discussion on the topic, an interview guide (see Appendix A) was used. This was only a guide, because as van Manen (1990) describes, obtaining data from others using phenomenology is to stay close to the nature of the phenomenon. In addition Fontana and Frey (1998) distinguish this type of interview from other methods in that it gathers data with minimal influence from the researcher; respondents' experiences are reported and their differences and issues encountered and discussed. Upon completion of focus group discussions, each audiotape was transcribed, the result was one hundred eighty-seven pages of transcripts. At this point the synergistic process of imaginative free variation was

conducted on the capta and resulted in the first set of themes to be used as an introduction in the follow up in-depth interviews.

### In-depth Interview Procedures

van Manen (1990) says the goal of the interviewing process is to obtain an understanding of the deeper meaning of the lived experience. To do this, he explains that researcher and co-researcher need to collectively reflect on the lived experience and dialogue its significance (van Manen, 1990). After transcribing audiotapes, the transcripts were read and re-read, bracketed and further reviewed; the result was an abundance of themes (see Chapter 4). Needing to reduce the volume of capta, I arranged meetings with the co-researchers to gain more understanding of their phenomenon in the organization.

So armed with the transcripts and nineteen original themes (explicated in Chapter 4), I revisited 20 of the original 23 co-researchers at various locations and together we reflected on the meaning of the capta. Two more Latinas participated in the in-depth interviews than in the focus group discussions. Their scheduling and preference for privacy did not allow them to participate in the focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews lasted from 30 minutes to forty-five minutes. I used the question in Appendix B as a guide. In addition, I asked co-researchers if the capta and themes were a true reflection of what they experienced. As such, the in-depth interviews gave me an opportunity to gather information that some of the co-researchers were not able to give because of the nature of a group discussion or had forgotten to bring up. Through this process, I gained a deeper insight and

understanding of the co-researchers' lived experiences. This process greatly helped to refine the original themes and define the experiences of minority professionals in a majority-dominated organization.

### Phenomenological Reduction

Lanigan (1979) explains that the goal of the reduction stage is to determine which parts of the description are essential and those that are not. Nelson (1989) says that parts of the description undergo variation and vague ideas are refined, expanded, developed or discarded (p. 234). First, I read through each transcript without making any notations or marks in order to re-familiarize myself with that discussion. Then I read through the transcripts a second time, highlighting words and phrases. The final step entailed bracketing themes from each transcript. Then I read through each transcript several times before I began to get a sense of the emerging themes.

Next, I arranged a tentative list outlined in Chapter 4. Another review (using imaginative free variation) of the transcripts and general themes revealed that several themes were interconnected, redundant or incidental. This gave me the opportunity to combine some of the themes under a more general title or discard themes that were more incidental. Ultimately, this continual process reduced the overwhelming number of themes to describe the lived experiences of minority professionals, so that I could reflect on their meaning.

### Phenomenological Interpretation

The phenomenological interpretation stage is the process of determining how the essential themes relate to one another. This involves discovering meanings that were

not immediately apparent in the description or reduction stage (Lanigan, 1979). This process, described as hyper-reflection, seeks to find the overall meaning of the essence of the lived experience through the emergence of one concept or idea that combines all the themes (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This process, outlined in Chapter Five, is geared for one or two revelatory phrases to emerge as the central idea from which interpretations on the major themes are brought to light to identify the true essence of being a minority professional in a majority-controlled organization.



## CHAPTER IV

### THEMATIZING

Chapter Three described the first step in phenomenological methodology as the collection of the capta of minority professionals in various organizations (Lanigan, 1979, p. 3). The capta was collected by using focus groups and in-depth interviews with 25 minority professionals (African American and Latino men and women). This process produced one hundred eighty-seven pages of transcripts depicting the conscious lived experiences of minority professionals in organizations.

The second step in the phenomenological process, and the goal of this chapter, is to reduce the capta into a description of the experiences of co-researchers. Lanigan (1979) says that the purpose of the second step is to isolate which parts of the experience are truly parts of our consciousness and which parts are merely assumed (p. 7). To clarify, my focus is on the lived experiences of the minority professionals in a majority dominated work culture. Another way to look at this is to use an analogy of an orange. If you bite into an orange in its natural form it would taste bitter because you would be chewing the peel, the film, the fruit and seeds. Its not until you remove the outer peel and which comes apart in layers and other undesirable things are you able to taste the sweet essence of the fruit and it is the same process for the second step in the phenomenological process. This second phenomenological step entails stripping away layers and layers of capta until you are able to define what it is to be a minority professional in a majority-controlled organizational setting.

The reduction process entails two cycles to reduce the capta to meaningful, essential descriptions of the lived reality of the co-researcher (Nelson, 1989). Imaginative free variation, described in Chapter 3, is crucial at this point to accomplishing a phenomenological reduction (Lanigan, 1979). The first cycle involves reviewing each transcript without making any markings. Orbe (2000) calls this an opportunity for the researcher to re-familiarize themselves with the description of the lived experiences of the co-researchers. Subsequent steps involve reading through each transcript again and highlighting words, phrases, and recollections that emerge as essential (Orbe, 2000, p. 615). The final step in the first cycle entails bracketing initial themes and continuing the process on other transcripts until the process is complete (Orbe, 2000). Once the initial reduction process was completed, a second and third review produced an overwhelming number of possible themes.

Through this process, several common threads emerged through the initial themes that helped to bring understanding of the co-researchers' experiences. What follows is a presentation of nineteen syntagmatic thematizations and some phrases and themes which were revealed during the first cycle. For purposes of clarity, co-researchers' remarks will be identified by an abbreviation of their ethnicity, a letter followed by a number which will appear after their remarks in parentheses. The letter represents a specific transcript and the number refers to the page of that particular transcript. Ethnic abbreviations will be broken down in the following manner: (a) af = African American female; (b) am = African American male; (c) lm = Latino male; and (d) lf = Latino female. For instance, a description followed by (af-A3) represents

that the co-researcher is an African American female, and the passage is from Transcript “A” on page 3.

### Syntagmatic Thematizations

The ultimate goal of the reduction is to reduce the capta to represent the essence of the lived experience of the minority professional in an organization setting (Nelson, 1989). One method for isolating the lived experience is through the following process described by van Manen (1990): “read a text several times and ask, what statement or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described” (p. 93). Through this process, several themes and clusters emerged that seem to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

The following nineteen themes represent the circumstances, perceptions, experiences and expectations of their roles in organizations. This listing is an extensive list of all the potential themes that emerged as essential to the lived experiences of minority professionals in organizations. Under each heading are representative comments and descriptions of perceptions and behaviors from co-researchers to aide in clarifying their listing under a particular heading. The nineteen potential themes are: (a) communication upon hire about advancement; (b) different standards in the workplace; (c) barriers; (d) stereotypical statements; (e) tactics; (f) work harder and be more qualified; (g) second guessed; (h) working in a restrictive environment; (i) diversity; (j) diversity problems; (k) a mentor would have helped; (l) mentor qualities; (m) formalized mentor relationships; (n) not being invited to the

party; (o) walking a tight rope; (p) coping; (q) minority meta-perceptions; (r) I can make it attitude; and (s) hope for the future.

Under each heading is a brief commentary on the relevancy of the theme as well as respondent comments. This information was included with each theme to aid the reader in understanding the phenomenological process and the researchers logic. The goal of the phenomenological question is two fold, not only involving the interview/ interviewee but also the reader. van Manen (1990) describes this line of inquiry, which is different than other forms of research:

. . . the researcher/writer must pull the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the researcher does . . . so, we adopt a phenomenological perspective in order to help us to bring to light that which presents itself as the behavior and attitude of the researched. (pp. 44-45)

The following headings, explanation and respondent comments will help to bring the reader into the understanding and realm of the researcher.

#### Communication Upon Hire About Opportunities for Advancement

Questions were posed to co-researchers to learn of the type of communication they received upon hire. For instance, did the employer communicate either verbally or non-verbally opportunities for future advancements? This line of inquiry is relevant to learn what the perceptions of minority professional were relating to their new positions. In addition, this will help in understanding their outlook of the environment they will be working in.

-- Well, for me personally, I had this perception at the very beginning that there was a great opportunity for advancement in my career (Im-H1).

-- No one really talked about being able to go from the level I was hired to a higher level, I don't remember that as being part of the discussion (af-A1).

-- I wasn't told anything I believe (af-B-1).

-- When I first went into the position, I basically broke the glass ceiling, and I was told that there are plenty of opportunities to progress (lm-C-1).

-- Zero, there was not very much conversation about advancement opportunities. The conversation was basically familiarizing me with the do's and don't and the benefits-- things you receive with the job . . . There wasn't anything really discussed relevant to advancement opportunities (am-D1).

-- I did talk to the employment officer about other opportunities and he didn't give me a real in-depth run down, but he did make me aware that there were other job opportunities (am-D1).

-- I don't recall being told anything about an opportunity to advance (af-E1).

-- Yeah, I don't remember anything explicit being said about opportunities for advancement (am-E1).

-- It was communicated that I was on the bottom of the totem pole and then, little by little, you are going to be moving up (lm-E1).

-- I asked . . . if a position opened in anyone of these programs would I be able to apply for them . . . you probably would but that is not likely (lf-F1).

-- That I would start at the bottom in which I did in janitorial and work my way up the ladder, that there would be some career opportunities up the ladder (am-G1).

-- . . . Not necessarily that way, but just that there would be opportunities coming up and bid sheets and bid formats would be the way to go for that (am-G1).

-- It was already established, there wasn't any (am-G1).

### Different Standards in the Workplace

This potential theme emerged as co-researchers described their perceptions and interactions with majority members over differences in dress, work ethics, how they are evaluated differently and paid differently. Different standards for the majority and

minority was described over and over in various avenues of discussions by co-researchers. The following descriptions are representative of the discussions from the focus groups.

-- I don't think that many African American women in a management position or even staff position for that matter would be able to do things that other races are able to do, so it is a different standard that we hold (af-B4).

-- Someone can come in a very casual dress where as being an African American woman. If I come in a very casual dress I would be looked at differently than the other person would be and more so just because of my race, I believe (af-B4)

-- For the most part they started here [points high] and I started her [points lower] and they have gone higher and I am still relatively lower (lf-F10).

-- What I have experienced is that you will be selected to serve on certain committees not always for your expertise, but sometimes because you bring diversity to the committee that is needed (am-E6).

-- I believe that my people skills, my communication skills as well as lot of things far surpassed the other female (white). When my boss asked was I jealous of her I almost caught myself from saying, I am so much better than she is as a person you know she is here and I am way up here (af-B23).

### Barriers

Barriers were described as actual experiences with majority members in the organization. In others words, these incidents were not explicitly described as barriers, but happenstance and incidents that prevented advancements. Barriers are hurdles or something that stand in the way of you getting from one point to another and the following examples are things that these minority professionals described as obstacles.

-- Now you have the ability to do the job, have the knowledge to do the job, but if you don't have the degree, too bad (am-G2).

-- There is a cultural misperception and mis-education out there in a lot of the corporations because the demographics are changing . . . and the companies are suffering, trying to get good talent . . . so there is a real need for top management, how to understand, how to deal with the culture that is coming in and how to manage that culture and how to value that culture (lm-C6).

-- We are very, very good workers, but there is a barrier out there when they give those tests. All of a sudden, you will find not only Hispanics but other diverse groups, being kept back because quote unquote, "they did not meet the grade," well what does that mean? (lm-C6).

-- You can take an engineer from Mexico, who is very good at mechanical engineering but he comes here and the terminology is going to be different so therefore he/she is already at a disadvantage. But you give him or her that terminology, and they're work is going to equal or better somebody else here (lm-C19).

-- When I asked (about opportunities), I found all kinds of obstacles put into getting those positions (lm-G2).

-- I can answer that real quick, just your color, your nationality, for me it would be my race (am-G11).

-- Well they were usually presented as some other reason for not being advanced (af-A3).

-- I feel that I am not being promoted because I do speak with an accent I try to do my best but people look at me different because I don't get into the mainstream with the activities (lm- C14).

-- We need to promote some blacks, but we promote black females, the company is a winner, I got my female, I got my black! The main game plan for the majority is to not have black males in the work environment, that is the game plan (am-D15).

-- Our organization knows that there is the good ole boys syndrome there and they readily brag about it and say . . . that there is them and then there is us and neither mixes (af-E8).

### Stereotypical Statements

This theme emerged as co-researchers described inappropriate statements that majority members made in the context of the organizational setting. These discussions were raised as co-researchers described the disrespect they received from majority members.

In addition, many co-researchers described that it did not matter their level in the organization, lower majority members would talk to them any way they wanted to.

The following descriptions are some illustrations of statements that co-researchers described as stereotypical.

-- I had sent in my application, my resume and everything and I had been set up for an interview and he (majority) comes up to me and puts his arms around my shoulders and he says, "you know I want you to withdraw your candidacy from this position." I said "what!" And he says, "yeah, you know you are out of your league." (lf-F5).

-- Well, that is just the way they are. You know, statements like, black people are loud, or it typical for them to be late, they are always late (af-E16).

-- When I would bring it to their attention, I was simply told "this is they way we do it here, we've always done it that way, why are we expected to do it any different?" (am-D8).

-- The Vine kids really need you, the lower achievers or the at risk kids they really need you. The intellectual kids they don't need any counselors over here, so you can split your time anyway you want to (af-E5).

-- I had one individual come to me and ask me blatantly if I got the position because I was "black", opposed to qualifications for that particular position (af-E7).

-- From my experience, people (majority) say this is how a manager is suppose to act and is suppose to be and suppose to do things (af-B3).

-- I was told to make sure that I kept the "colored kids" in line . . . and that is what they expected me to do and they were NOT expecting me to reach out to the white kids (af-A2).

-- I was told by a couple of white counterparts that the only reason you got that job is because you are black (am-D9).

-- There are certain white males, which are on the same level that I am organizationally but have different responsibilities than I do. These men have told me that, "you are not my boss," knowing that what I tell them is right and my boss may have told me to talk to them about it. But they responded to me differently, they wouldn't say that to him (af-B10).



-- When I applied for a manager position in this area, the manager over the entire organization in this area let it be known that I was not to be the party selected (am-D13).

-- I had this guy (majority) who is a friend of mine who would tell me at least once a month, "well you look like you are not really satisfied why don't you just go and do something else?" And I said, "because I've already got two years wrapped up into this I'm just going to go ahead and finish up and get my Journey man's card." And he would go, "well you are kind of using US then." (lm-C22).

-- I went into a meeting and I didn't say anything, I just sat there and I kept having people say, "what's wrong, do you not understand?" (lm-C23).

-- I haven't fortunately received any just blatant stereotypical statements. I think they (majority) use more stereotypical language then they realize though. Like a question or so they might ask every once in a while, like one time the assistant superintendent asked me if I was jealous of a white female. He didn't call her a white female he called her name, because she had her masters degree (af-B9).

### Tactics

Tactics are strategic maneuvers and plans launched against an enemy. Moreover, this theme emerged as co-researchers described experiences where they felt like the outsider or the enemy in the organization. The following descriptions, illustrate the tactics that were used to undermine the effectiveness and or lower the confidence of minority professionals in the workplace.

-- I was the first black hired in my organization and there were some that tried to prevent me from being here . . . there were certain things they were doing to try to make me look like an idiot . . . for example I had to write a report . . . I am writing in red ink and they (majority) sat and watched as I wrote the report and I gave it to my training officer. He looked at it and said OK . . . the next day a guy that wasn't my boss pulled me to the side and he goes you wrote this in red ink and he says you're suppose to write it in black or blue ink and I said no one never told me (am-D2).

-- Where I have run into problems has been from subordinate staff members, reporting non-truths. I even overheard a group of subordinate staff, plotting my demise! (af-E15).

-- Some things that I see appearing now . . . in EEO (equal employment opportunity) are a certain parity that you have to have. Well, we have Caucasian employees now that some of them are claiming that these are higher level managers that they are Hispanic, that they are Indian you know . . . they have been Caucasian all these years now all of a sudden they are Hispanic or they are Indian (am-D14).

-- It is not something that they blatantly do in front of you, its there live and well and I know it by the goal post consistently changing (am-G3).

-- I've seen the manager over the whole organization (white male) deal directly with this man's (African American male) subordinate (white female) rather than deal with him in a respectful manner. It is like giving a person a position but no power to use their authority to accomplish what they need to be accomplished (am-D16).

-- Now the tactics they (majority) use to keep you from advancing are done quietly. Its done like you are not going to advance to this job because you missed one day last year. Or another reason they might use is, you are not going to get this position because there is a better qualified person (majority) than you are (lm-G5).

-- I was one of two minorities in a group of about 200 and at the time I was teaming up with a white person. We were kind of co-business partners at the business and when I got there the people that were trying to recruit for their companies kept acting like my co-partner was my boss. (lm-G11).

-- Because I manage a product and when a product fails that guy has no clue who I am or what I am and a lot of times I will get there, and their teeth will fall right out of their mouths and they have this expression like "Good Lord". Then they try to be your friend you know, and I feel like telling them, "look, I am not here to know that your best friend was black because I really don't care." (Am-G11).

-- As far as being [a] black male in the organization, one that you got to be conscious of is sexual harassment especially from white females. You can just about rest assured if one of them says that you sexually harassed them, you are done. So I am very conscious of when I have the opportunity to place white females in my organization that it is someone that I can really trust and even then I don't get too close to them (am-D23).

### Work Harder and Be More Qualified

Working harder and having to be more qualified represent statements expressed by co-researchers in regards to the demands of being a minority professional. Many described the many things outside of their jobs they have to do to maintain their level

in the organization. Most described the pressures of having to be more prepared and a step ahead of their white counterparts in the organization, but not receiving the same compensation.

--The same guy that started with me at the same time he is two pay grades over me . . . but they (majority) get the brakes that I didn't (am-G17)

-- We are just saying you always have to work twice as hard as the next person who may be Caucasian just because they are. Sometimes our counterpart, a Caucasian female will not be given the level of work or the amount of work that they (majority) will put on us (af-B4).

-- I look at training opportunities that have been given, the reward and recognition that have been given to my white counterparts that don't perform EVEN CLOSE to what I am doing (am-D16).

-- I look at all the ones that have gone past me that don't have the experience and background that I have and I think I have been held back (am-D8).

-- I got a title, I am only the token person in there because really I am the gopher for the guy that doesn't know anything. So he gets the money and I get to give him all the information (am-G7).

-- Black managers, we have to be FAR superior, I mean FAR superior, especially black men . . . and even when you perform you don't get recognized. I don't get paid the same, I am one of the higher paid ones but I got folks on my management staff . . . all the other white boys that have come along in the job they have been here 2 or 3 years they're making more money than me cause I get the printout. I say to myself, how can this be? And it is because the boss is doubling their bonuses at the end of the year (am-D20).

-- I speak three languages, I've gone through a PhD program and then I am continuously in this hyperactive mode around achievement . . . because I have multiple assignments and I feel that I have to do 150% on each one of them . . . sometimes I have to contend with the stress of feeling like I am not either performing to the expectations or having to renegotiate those expectations with supervisors who may not necessarily feel empathy at all towards what I am confronting (lf-F2).

-- I've always been one that tries to do twice as much and considered half as good . . . I do twice as much, and in my mind, I see them thinking that it is only half as good (af-E14).

-- I observed that people get threatened by other people outside of our culture . . . because we tend to be hard workers and you will get statements like, "you're working too hard, slow down your are making us look bad" (lm-C22).

-- You have to walk in the door from 8-5 and be at a certain level and work at a certain standard and there is no letting back or letting your guard down, because just that one little or any mistake will be chalked up and held against you (af-B7).

### Second Guessed

Proving to the majority that you are capable and able to do the position are sentiments that are illustrative of the theme "second guessed." Most talked about experiences with majority members that co-researchers described as "a proving experience." In other words, co-researchers reported having their authority questioned, ideas rejected or majority members going behind their backs to double check their work.

-- The image for African American males is really quite negative and a lot of times what you end up having to do is prove yourself . . . you have to go through a period of time of proving that you are safe (am-E10).

-- It hasn't happened to me but it has to an African American female colleague of mine . . . in performance reviews, if she had any ideas, hers were just not acceptable . . . no matter what she came up with (af-E13).

-- We now have a black lady that's our supervisor. She is pretty young and most of the guys that work with her are not minority groups and I can see that sometimes they act like she got it just because she is black, they do not look at her as a qualified person (lm-G6).

-- You do have to prove yourself and gain respect from employees in the organization . . . there is a backlash too because they see you as a younger African American woman. There is a certain level of resentment because they (majority) may have been in the organization longer. It is like they are saying, "Ok, what is this person who is just coming in what are they going to be able to tell me?" (af-B7)

-- I have never been over that many Caucasian employees before so I think they had a very tough time accepting me (am-D7).

-- I think they (majority) just look at it where they don't want to take your word for it or it is always you know, you are going to have to have all your facts there . . . or you

might have to have the title and say the title you know this is who I am, so that you can get the respect (af-B6).

### Working in a Restrictive Environment

This theme emerged as co-researchers described what it is like to work in a restrictive environment. In other words, what it is like to always be the outsider, or to constantly maintain a certain position knowing that you are a minority? The descriptions that follow explain how minority professionals handle and view the restrictive organizational setting they work in. The last description sums up the thoughts of a co-researcher about how different environments affect production.

-- You been doing it for so long, you know how to do it, they know you know how to do it. But without coming right out and saying to you well you just don't have the right paint job. And that is what I run into quite a bit and it is not a 1970's thing that is a 1999 or 2000 thing (am-G5).

-- In my organization there is a lot of promoted minorities, but it is a forced thing. So even though they are forced to do it, there is always going to be problems (lm-G5).

-- A lot of times you will come across people who have been in the organization and feel that because they have been there for so long they just should automatically get paid more. I think for just having been there versus if you come in with a certain degree and you are getting paid over them there is a lot of resentment (af-B7).

-- For me maybe it was that I was in a culture where I was the majority and that is so unusual in this country that it is hard to even articulate . . . for once in my life it wasn't like fighting the racial situation and therefore we could just concentrate a lot on school and children (af-A14).

### Diversity

This potential theme emerged as co-researchers discussed the ways in which their organizations approached diversity. Co-researchers responded to questions about their organizations having any education or training about the various ethnic groups in the organization, or any sensitivity training on how to work with various groups.

-- The game that is being played is the so-called diversity game . . . first of all diversity and affirmative action really are two completely different things . . . diversity basically is making sure we use the words, all inclusive (am-D15).

-- We do have a formal program, diversity program; we just went through a major situation where we were forced to do more and to look at the whole area and so we have implemented programs to address diversity (af-B10).

-- They do have formalized policies that you have to be diverse in hiring practices (af-B11).

-- We haven't had any diversity training or sensitivity issues in a long time cause I think naturally we are pretty sensitive to the surroundings (af-B12).

-- I do not know if we have any diversity training . . . I think there are people that are naive enough to think if we are all here together that's diversity . . . Proper diversity training has to in some way be tied to a persons job through evaluations. If committing to diversity initiatives is going to get me more money, promotions, then I will do it. Not very much is done out of the goodness of one's heart at this institution (af-A13).

-- We are working really hard to bring a sense of community, a shared understanding of where we are going as an organization around the issues of diversity . . . I feel that we are in a MUCH better place now about pointing out our similarities, as well as our differences in thinking and learning and talking . . . we are in a healthier place now. But 3, 4, 5 years ago we were at a place where we are all alike here and there are not differences here (lf-F8).

-- I don't know, I work for a major company and there is no diversity training there, been there 33 years and you can still count them (minority professionals) all on one hand (am-C9).

-- The only diversity we get is this paper that everybody signs that says they are a company that is an equal opportunity company. And that causes more problems because people think again that they are doing special favors for minorities (lm-C9).

-- The kind of thinking that if you got an African American person on the committee now that's fine because we (majority) needed that diversity, we (majority) needed that representation and we (majority) got that now. So, now we got somebody who can speak on behalf of all African American people (am-E6).

-- In my 27 years of being employed I have never been invited to a diversity workshop, sensitivity workshop or something that they (majority) think is a biggie . . . they

(majority) claim they worked on it but the environment is still the same over those 27 years (af-E16).

-- On the issue of diversity, the majority has taken it as I have to do it, because it is going to look good . . . I don't think there has been a sincere, honest effort. I am sure there have been some more organizations out there that have been more honest (lm-E16).

-- There may be a commitment at the top to diversity but for some reason or another I don't think it ever really trickles all the way through the hierarchy, I don't see that happening (am-E17).

### Diversity Problems

This potential theme emerged as co-researchers discussed the problems within the organizational setting that diversity has caused. Whether it is the misperceptions of majority members, the way it is taught, or the lack of effectiveness. The consensus between co-researchers is that current diversity initiatives are not sufficient to cause change as illustrated in the following descriptions

-- Its amazing that if we have a potluck that, that should be a diversity educational course. I am more than just collard greens and cornbread [laughter and agreement from the group]. You are the African American; well, you can bring the greens and cornbread (af-E16).

-- Many companies here say they want to have diversity, say they want to implement diversity training, but when it comes down to it you see the resistance (lm-C3).

-- There is a big -- I call it a challenge that is going on now in the corporate sector, it's a need for understanding cultural, not only of the Latino but the other diversities, the pool that is coming in (lm-C5).

-- There has been a mandate that they (majority) had to do diversity training but that is all that it has been . . . because I don't see a change in individuals being more sensitive to diversity and more accepting to people's differences. We still hear the same kind of comments (af-E16).

-- I think most diversity programs are there because it looks good, because they are being forced to do it. I don't think there is a sincere effort to change that perception (lm-E16).

-- When I think about introducing diversity its almost like this little kid that yells that you got to give them this medicine and they don't like the taste of it. But by taking the medicine they are going to feel better and they are going to get better. I think that we got to get to a point where we have to explain the benefits of diversity in a language that the people can accept and relate to (af-E19).

-- Everything that we see in terms of diversity comes in peaks/spikes . . . Martin Luther King, Black History month, Hispanics September . . . it has to be an on-going consistency. It is not going to work in 3 months, 6 months or 1 year, it has to be a 2 or 3-year plan. And I think that for whatever reason, that program is not there why, because it implies money, it implies time and they want to see results the next day (lm-E19).

-- You know I think it is looked at as a positive thing in general but then there are going to be certain people who are going to feel resentful to have to go through that kind of training. It almost automatically, makes people feel like there's a problem and that they are a problem and they are part of the problem (Af-B13).

-- Most people think about diversity . . . oh man that the new affirmative action program they're going to promote some more blacks, they got 15 they going to put over here (am-D15).

-- When you say the word diversity to white managers they automatically start thinking about the numbers game and that this is some program to accelerate blacks and women (am-D29).

-- It's the issue of understanding why I don't want to come to your corporate party, it's the issue of dealing with me as an individual, dealing with my individual personality and my values and things of that nature, that's how I think about things in regards to diversity (am-D33).

### A Mentor Would Have Helped

Someone who could help guide them, as well as navigate the organizational structure, was another topic that emerged from the focus groups. Co-researchers agreed that to have success in the organization, a person needs a mentor. For a minority professional, a mentor is extremely important because most co-researchers come from an environment where the skills needed to succeed in an organization were not taught.



In the following descriptions, co-researchers talk about their feelings and experiences related to having a mentor.

-- There are some survival skills that I don't have for this organization. Some of the survival skills are self promotion, self protection, schmoozing with the big guys, being in the right place at the right time, being proactive and constantly scanning what are the opportunities for me to latch and then just jump into it before anybody else does and I don't have any of those skills. I am a hard worker, I am loyal . . . They have figured out the game and they are playing the game and I have not been able to figure it out (lf-F11).

-- That is one of the things a lot of blacks don't have is . . . somebody to teach them how to play the corporate game without giving up your identity (am-D31).

-- If I had a mentor in the beginning . . . there would have been a lot of things about the organization I would have learned. And that mentor probably would have introduced me to other people in the organization by saying, "hey I am mentoring this person we want to groom this person, keep an eye out for him." And I think that when that happens, you get the opportunities . . . it enhances your chances of success with an effective mentor (am-D35).

-- If you take the risk and mentor somebody correctly you are going to be able to open the doors of progression and development for minority professionals (lm-C12).

-- The need for mentorship is extremely great. Any person of color needs more than one mentor. They need a mentor of their own ethnicity/culture if possible and they need a mentor who is of the majority culture (af-A7).

-- Going back to the 70s . . . and I wasn't getting any help from anybody. I would go out and the older technicians would actually cover the work they were doing so I wouldn't see what was going on and stuff. And to get just one person to help me to learn the business was important to me and I couldn't get that help its like everybody is protecting their knowledge and they don't want to spread it out (lm-G24).

-- I saw the same thing, people that could have done the mentoring that had a lot of information in their brain file and they recorded nothing. So, if you were going to research and find out some stuff you'd spend all of that time and they could have just gave you the direct information, and let you go ahead and do what you need to do . . . but we spend more time trying to find out things from people who knew it but just wouldn't share it (am-G24).

-- It would have been more advantageous to have a black male around, who was older you know and who had already gone where I was trying to go to help me through the

process. I think they really could open my eyes to a lot of things that I wouldn't have had to stumble across (am-E20).

-- Mentor relationships, well I've seen those work, I seen those fail. I had a black mentor who was worthless, absolutely worthless, because he did not believe in it. And asking somebody to be your mentor – it is not easy to go up and ask someone to be your mentor (am-D37).

-- A perfect mentor for me, I have to bounce things off several individuals before I come to a conclusion, for me it would have taken more than just one individual because one individual can't deposit into me everything that I need (af-E23).

-- One mentor - no - maybe a very good person for the professional side because we are talking technical stuff. You have a personal side and I would say that one person is not enough. I think it should be more than one mentor, instead of a one to one; it should be a kind of support group (lm-E23).

-- I didn't have a mentor, I had a professor here who I would go to and would talk to and touch basis with on occasions. But its different being a professor than being an administrator and I don't know if it took me longer, I think it just made it a whole lot more difficult. . . it just made the experience a whole lot more difficult because you are going through it and you are young and naive and you don't really understand all the pitfall that are there (am-E21).

-- It takes more effort. In terms of time I don't think, but more effort (lm-E21).

-- I would say a mentor really would have help me . . . I had to figure everything out myself and had to work real hard on top of everything anyway . . . But a mentor would have helped me where I would not had to struggle and put in a lot of, a lot of extra time, because they would have been there to just show me the ropes. It took me more effort than time (af-E22).

-- So that ability to make an impact within the organization, outside the organization, and quite frankly, to the bottom line is what's going to make or break your ability to grow within an organization (lm-C18).

### Mentor Qualities

In discussing mentorship and having a mentor, co-researchers discussed the qualities that a mentor for a minority professional should have. Most of the minority professionals did not have the background of being familiar with the skills needed to

navigate the organizational structure. Because of this, they needed someone familiar with their culture to spot their short-comings and that someone had to be familiar with the organizational structure. The following discussions explain what the minority professionals describe as necessary for a good or effective mentor qualities.

-- Number one is identify another Latino at all levels . . . for success it has to be from the same culture because of some of well you mentioned the old school, which is traditional values and certain identity values (lm-C12).

-- It would have been nice to have a black male mentor . . . because people who are like you will have similar experiences and what they can share with you is more relevant (am-E20).

-- That is not to say that an older majority person wouldn't do, but their experiences will not be the same, so their pitfalls won't be the same as they are for you, at least not all of them anyway (am-E21).

-- If you had to just go with one mentor you probably need someone from the culture who is very familiar with it, who is willing to guide you and that is not so easy to find (af-A7).

-- Its got to be people that are already successful. First of all, the mentor has got to be willing to take the risk . . . (lm-C12).

-- A mentor has to make them think you are not different, you got the potential that everyone else has . . . I definitely say it could be one person and again it doesn't have to be a Latino. But it helps tremendously because of the identification. There is a comfort zone and a comfort feeling. You are better able to get their attention and react to their resistance (lm-C17).

### Formalized Mentor Relationships

This potential theme emerged as co-researchers discussed the organization's role in building a successful mentor/mentee relationship. Discussion started with the following question, should an organization formalize a mentor program? Other aspects of this question that emerged were if the mentor/mentee had to be of the same ethnicity. Or, can an institution make a successful mentor relationship work between

the minority and majority group? The following co-researchers comments explain their perceptions, experiences and thoughts on formalized mentor relationships.

-- I think there are many things the organization can do formally . . . I think that there should be some . . . investment in their development beyond your organization . . . and put some money in there for minority professionals, to develop their own program around seeking a mentor, whether it is within the organization or outside and attach to it a plan that has an educational plan and then some visits to other organizations and or internships (lf-F13).

-- I read some studies that an organization made it mandatory that the mentor be of a different race. Often times we will flock to another black and all you gonna learn is more black behavior from a black perspective . . . so each corporate executive had to have a mentee but it had to be of a different race and it worked (am-D37).

-- I don't think we are looking at it as though it is the organization's responsibility for our success, you know you take that on yourself (af-B14).

-- If you think that person has skills in a particular area and you think they need to be fully developed, you talk with that person about it and provide the training. Or send them somewhere where they can get the training they need, if they are going to be an investment in the organization (af-B14).

-- If you are assigned a mentor that person may not really want to work with you. They (majority) may have just been told you have to mentor this person (minority). And, there you are sitting with someone who is not passing along information, not helping you with your writing. Just saying you have a mentor does not mean you have a mentor, you know what I mean (af-A7).

-- As far as the organization is concerned if there was one good experienced person there that would be great, that would be more than what I had (am-E23).

### Not Being Invited to The Party

Many aspects of being a successful professional in the organization take place after the regular 9-5 workdays. Not being invited to the party is an emergent theme co-researchers described as related to their experiences and perceptions with social networking. The social functions, where business opportunities develop, as places where key assignments and promotions are suggested and discussed. In other words,

if a person is to advance into the ranks of upper management, then social networking is very important. The following expressions describe the minority professionals' outlook on social networking.

-- Oh no, I haven't been invited to the party and there are many special assignments that have occurred over the past . . . which there would have been numerous opportunities for myself and other people of color to be included and have never been, or have been as a token person . . . It ain't happening and it hasn't happened (lf-F14).

-- Half the time this stuff is happening behind the scenes and then you'll hear, "Oh, we are having a task force to review this and this." "Well, who is on it?" Well its 99% of the people who were on the past one, so the avenue is there to see the president but the invitation is not. There are unwritten rules about how you get access to that stuff and I don't know them (lf-F14).

-- If you want to climb the ladder you need to make every staff party and go to the bar and go to some body's house and befriend them. It would help you to move up faster and it would help them to show you favor when it comes to you getting ready to order something . . . Oh it makes a difference (af-E24).

-- I choose not to navigate that, I rather keep my personal life and my social life separate. I do not really socialize a lot with people on my job. Sometimes I think I should and have to if I want to gain more favor and get the things that I even need to be effective on my job . . . but going to houses and going to a bar that is not my style, I don't do that [laughter] (af-E24).

-- When I get off work I want to let my hair down and kick back, I don't want to have to go to company social functions because I feel like I was going to another meeting . . . this white gentlemen told me, even though "you're off" duty, you are still "on duty" at those gatherings (af-E24).

-- You have to socialize with the people that are going to be evaluating you and obviously most of the evaluations are going to be subjective. I believe social networking is needed because if you know the people you are working with you are going to be able to be more productive . . . Do I feel forced sometimes to attend these functions? I would say yes, do I think its positive? I would say yes, but I do not play golf (lm-E26).

-- I can draw the line between my personal life and my professional life. I think you start to muddy the waters you know when you start blending the personal and the professional and its difficult for people who think that they know you on the personal level to still maintain that level of respect for you on the professional level (am-E26).

-- I wasn't invited to this executive outing, but a friend of mine was invited to it, and he offered his invitation to me to go . . . but I found that the whole list there was no minorities invited (lm-G21).

-- Lets say they (majority) want to play golf or now they go fishing, and their wives entertain by going out to a riverboat dinner. But, if you are not at that certain level, you don't get invited (am-G21).

-- In the current organizational culture, a lot of the opportunities for advancement are talked about in social settings, WAY before anything is said in any other way . . . I know that there are social events where I am not invited to where these things would be talked about (af-A4).

-- I do not feel that I am being slighted because I wasn't invited to something . . . fortunately for me it has not been an issue (af-B16).

-- Well you just have to navigate those social functions, its slightly uncomfortable if you are talking about the organization (af-B16).

-- Social networking is generally for strategizing or finding out information you need to make your next advance move or to gather that network you need to move ahead (af-D33).

-- I have to be very selective on what I am going to go to and what I am NOT going to go to. I don't want to send a signal that I don't have social skills because that is very important as you move along in the organization (am-D29).

-- It is a question of being good at what you do and using the "white strategy" and the right ability to compliment your skills (lm-C17).

### Walking a Tight Rope

The following discussions emerged as co-researchers described the difficulty of being a minority professional without assimilating or losing their ethnic identity. Each group passionately expressed the importance of being themselves and maintaining their values in the organizational setting. Yet, co-researchers understood that many of their values and identities are either misunderstood or frowned upon by the majority group. Compromising or adapting totally to the majority group ways was expressed as selling

out. The following expressions describe the delicate balancing act minority

professionals do in order to advance into through the hierarchy of management.

-- As a professional, that's one of the things our Latinos and Hispanics really struggle with is how do I adapt to the mainstream but balance with the fact that I am not trading in my values . . . I am not saying forget your values. I am not saying totally change and adapt, but I am saying you have to change and adapt and you have to compromise your values when you are at work (lm-C13).

-- We need to walk that tight rope . . . in terms of not being too assertive and yet not being too non-assertive . . . in looking at females from other cultures . . . I don't think they worry about, how am I coming across. For example, at the award dinner for an African American female . . . he said that she is very quiet, which is quite unusual (af-A17).

-- I began now to take on the organizational culture so that I could assimilate without compromising my identity. That was very important to me [agreement noises from the other participants] . . . not that I wanted to wear a Dashiki to work or anything in that way, but I did not want to be perceived as having white values and that is still important to me (am-D7).

-- Yes, they wanted me to be a clone, to adapt exactly to the way that they thought to the way that they did things. Well, the way that I was taught, which was really the correct way was not what they were doing (am-D12).

-- Now there was a black manager in there before me but he was all the way, "yes sir, no sir" and he fit in real well. . . I am having some difficulty (am-D25).

-- I am comfortable with who I am . . . now maybe they (majority) have a difficulty with that but . . . I feel that more so maybe they just don't understand or they haven't been around an African American woman and maybe they need to get to know me (af-B15).

-- Its hard for the majority to disentangle the fact that I am a Latina and tied up with that is my experience in the United States as an immigrant (lf-F1).

### Coping

Coping is a potential theme which emerged as co-researchers described ways they

developed to strive with the majority group. Some have taken a stance, others walked

away, and some decided to study the majority group. The following expressions describe the ways these co-researchers “cope” with the majority.

-- Sometimes I just take the stuff the majority group hands out, head on and I become this very aggressive person who is seen as being out of place, and out of context as saying nasty things to people. Sometimes I would just say nothing, so I would disengage, so you know some of my coping mechanisms weren't very productive (lf-F6).

-- I took some courses and I became a participant in a series of workshops around undoing racism. I learned a lot about how one gets manipulated into conversations and one's anger and or sadness or depression gets used by a group to do the work for the group . . . so I tuned in with my own internalized oppression around gender and around ethnicity and race of course (lf-F7).

-- I made a decision 3 years ago that I ain't letting nobody get away with nothing when it comes to my well being, my safety! If I got to confront you on something, I do it! I try to do it in a nice way and I am learning how to be nicer (lf-F8).

-- I overheard a group of subordinate staff, plotting my demise and I took what they did to me as I take most things hostile . . . I interpreted it as a threat and I threatened them I just went to them and demanded that one of the individuals leave my unit and then I told the others, “I am not going to have it I just told them, I am not going to tolerate this type of behavior” . . . I just used my authority to get the job done and a little of my color to threaten (af-E7).

-- I have personally become a committee of one and make sure that my kids have what they need in order to make it out there (am). Basically, that's the way I feel and the way I drive myself as well (lm & am-G20).

-- Sometimes you end up not having friendships necessarily with your job and you focus more on the job, at least that was one of the ways I handled it (af-A3).

-- I think you just have to be open. It depends a lot on the individual person I think I deal with it fine because . . . I am not always looking at a race factor (af-B15).

-- I learned about the organization . . . I had to learn how they think . . . but when I learned how they thought I pretty much could do what I wanted to do . . . and then the color thing went away (am-D3).

-- You had to learn how to adjust to the system . . . so in other words you had to adopt a sort of institutionalized type of thinking so that you could get yourself in the place to be promoted (am-D5).



-- I did not rely so much on the organization. I started taking things on my own initiative once I came into the job. I had two years of schooling and I took it upon myself to go back to school . . . I started talking to educators and learning more about organizational behaviors . . . I began to see why things didn't work in the organization like I thought they should work (am-D6).

-- My parents told me and my grandparents told me . . . I'll never forget this, "you don't have to like them but you got to show up" and I did that. I learned that in the first grade the first time I was called nigger . . . (am-D18).

-- A lot of people will start their own business because what it is they just do not want to change (lm-C3).

-- Overall, I get along well with all of them (majority). Some of that was a decision I decided. Hey its not going to be radical to get along only with people that agree with me, I need to get along with everybody (lm-C12).

-- One of the most prejudiced guys, I would think that's probably in the organization, he is a great golf player who likes me . . . I am going to get with him so we can play golf, NOT to talk to him about what can I do to improve my management skills, I do not need that. I am trying to learn how to play golf. But when you do that you know they look at you from a whole different perspective (am-D36).

-- You don't want to come off as all black, all white, all female, all male or handicapped or whatever, you got to be diverse in your thinking (am-D35).

### Minority Meta-Perceptions

How do minority professionals perceive how the majority group feels about them?

Minority meta-perceptions emerged as a potential theme as co-researchers described their experiences with majority group members. In the following statements, co-researchers paint the wall of perception, misperceptions, instincts and experiences, which birthed their understanding and knowledge of majority group members.

-- [If] you got somebody that is NOT within the perception of their culture it starts to make people (majority) uneasy (lm-C3).

-- I am the highest-ranking black male in that whole gambit. My boss in a subtle, covert way discriminated against me, even though he doesn't think I see it, I do see it (am-D15).

-- You got to know what you are saying when you are in meetings with them, cause they take things and turn them around . . . Don't say the wrong thing. They take it totally out of context. You got to be very careful (am-D23).

-- They (majority) don't understand that I am not as social as they are; they don't understand why I am not as social as they are (am-D28).

-- I think that people (majority group) aren't used to seeing African American females or African Americans in general. I think they are not as pervasive in most organizations and so people aren't used to seeing them (af-B6).

-- I will never forget working with a professor whose religion didn't include African Americans . . . that was before the revelation that African Americans are people who have a soul . . . and yet he was getting a lot of federal monies to work with African American kids (af-A15).

-- The majority has this preconceived notion, that you don't know, nothing. But when you show up and either you going to give them 10 - 15 thousand dollars you can see a marketable change in their attitudes immediately . . . they can be the head of the clan, they will turn around (am-G11).

-- They (majority) always have the assumption that you can't do certain things that only white people can do (lm-G12).

-- Chay whitey at the top--upper management, which is all white (am). They let you get so high up the ladder than there is the roadblock (lm). Here it is you stop right here--we don't want you in this . . . Bottom line is they don't want you to get up there to see what all they really truly do get (am, lm -G16).

-- What I would really like to know before I die is what is it that white folks are scared of?! (am-G19).

-- If you come across as being perhaps the negative African American male that they (majority) have seen on television, then you can be the most intelligent person within the organization. But if you don't look the part which, they (majority) think you should look then you are going to have a hard time trying to convince them that you are a safe and positive contributing member of the organization (am-E11).

-- What a lot of people of color bring to the organization is an intensity to the argument that sometimes gets seen as a personal attack, versus "well, hey man, this guy feels really strongly about an issue" . . . Rather then, "she is attacking me because she is raising her voice and she is being too animated or you know, he is being too strong in his argument" (lf-F15).

-- I think I am seen very much as a person who is bright, whose making contributions, and yet at the same time I am not seen as being central, I am seen as marginal, that's my perception (lf-F3).

### I Can Make It Attitude

In describing their experiences in the organizational setting with the majority group, the co-researchers' survival attitude towards the various challenges rose to the surface.

I observed that the more they talked about the difficulties and hardships they encounter, the more I could observe their perseverance and positive stance. In other words, the co-researchers described their inward feelings that no matter what it seemed like they were not without options, and if they stayed in the organizational setting, eventually things would change for the better.

-- We've had challenges . . . if just having been an immigrant that helps you think, "Well, hey man I came here with nothing, I can get back on that horse and I keep going" . . . I think part of it is a personal philosophy that you just don't give up. If you fall down you kind of shake yourself up and keep going (lf-F4).

--Through time, it is going to change, it cannot continue the way it is (am-G7).

-- I think contending with the issues of the majority group just becomes a way of life and you begin to hold yourself at a certain standard. You have to make up in your mind that this is the level of excellence that I want to work at regardless of those issues . . . I don't have the feeling that it is impossible (af-B8).

-- I am assuming that 10 to 20 years down the road it is even going to be more diverse and easier for people like me to get those positions and move up the ranks. So I am assuming that when I came in it is a little bit better than it was ten years ago (af-B15).

-- I think you have choices and I feel that I am progressing, that I am progressing at the pace that I would like to. I don't feel that I have been hindered or that I have been stopped from moving. I feel like I can if I choose to I can just move and get employment in another city, municipality (af-B13).

-- I know that I am in the minority but its not anything that I focus on because overall I have a good relationship with my bosses which are two white males (af-B13).

-- Racism still exists, but if you are going to be hung up on that than you are going to be left behind (am-D36).

-- I have to contend with what's reality and what's perception and what's fact. I have to try and keep myself balanced so that you don't always see things as being an issue of race. Seeing racism when it is not there is a tough thing to do especially in a predominantly white environment (am-E27).

-- Contending with the issues of the majority, makes you think about well, I got 2 or 3 years I can retire and I think about retiring and I say no, I am not going to let that devil run me out! If somebody's got to go then it is going to be him (white supervisor), it ain't going to be me (am-D25).

### Hope for the Future

In their discussions about the challenges they face on a daily basis, co-researchers described the importance of paving the way for future minority professionals. This starting included: (a) mentoring the younger generation and preparing them for the organizational structure; (b) helping potential minority professionals with their language barriers; and (c) reaching out and helping the loss. The following descriptions of minority professionals entail suggestions and implications for the future.

-- If I can network with that high school student or that middle school student and mentor and tutor that student and they can network with professionals like ourselves. By doing that, then doors will open for them. Hopefully, this will provide the incentive for them not only to graduate, but to go on and get a vocation or a college degree or a university degree (lm-C10).

-- Companies are starting to invest in their employees realizing that they may not have high school or college education. You have to remember it is not can they do the job. Sometimes it boils down to do they understand what they are reading, which is where the cultural language barriers come in. You can take an engineer from Mexico who is very good at mechanical engineering but he come here and the terminology is different, therefore he/she is already at a disadvantage. But if you give him the terminology, he is going to equal or be better than somebody else in the organization (lm-C19).

-- What we have to do is when we see high potential young blacks is to model them and tell them, "You can make it" . . . we got to instill these behaviors when kids are

young. Sometimes when you get to the organizational level and you are 35 or 40 years old, you might not be able to change (am-D36).

-- Now think about it how many black corporate exec, black males you gonna have in the next 10 years? Just look at what you see now, unless we start really doing something . . . and turn these kids around (am-D40).-- I am saying that on the low end of things where we really need to make another impact is not in the job market. These kids are job marketable kids if we get them straightened . . . we have to show the people on the low end that they do have value (am-G31).

-- Among people of color, we don't have the same solidarity that I think we would have in a different kind of setting (lf-F9).

-- There are people coming behind us that are going to say some of the same things that we are facing. OK, will somebody finally break out like we did? We get out of the fences and we succeed and look back through the fences and there are a couple hundred thousand people over there that don't know how to get through. I mean do they stay back there and we give our success stories? Or do we reach back somehow on the other side of the fence and tell them here is the combination to that gate or here is how you get out and this is what you got to do? (am-G31).

These nineteen potential themes represent the first cycle of the description phase. Another round of description, reduction and interpretation was required to further reduce capta to represent a definition of the essence of being a minority professional (van Manen, 1990). This included a further reduction to establish five essential themes.

#### Further Reduction to Reveal Five Essential Themes

van Manen (1990) concludes that determining the essential quality of a theme means to discover aspects or qualities of a phenomenon that make it what it is and without which the phenomenon could not exist (p. 107). Lanigan (1979) further clarifies that the subject of the phenomenon's consciousness is based directly on their experiences and not on an abstraction of their experience. At this step in the on-going synergistic reduction process, the original descriptions/themes will be transformed into more

general, concise expressions (Nelson, 1989, p. 235). Orbe (2000) describes this intermediate level as the process of reducing the initial thematizations into major themes that reflect the essence of the capta (p. 616).

The initial nineteen-syntagmatic themes were taken from one hundred eighty-seven pages of capta that describes the lived experiences of minority professionals. These initial themes are: (a) Communication upon hire about opportunities for advancement; (b) different standards in the workplace; (c) barriers; (d) stereotypical statements; (e) tactics; (f) work harder and be more qualified; (g) second guessed; (h) working in a restrictive environment; (i) diversity; (j) diversity problems; (k) a mentor would have helped; (l) mentor qualities; (m) formalized mentor relationships; (n) not being invited to the party; (o) walking a tight rope; (p) coping; (q) minority meta-perceptions; (r) I can make it attitude; and (s) hope for the future.

Through the process of imaginative free variation, described in Chapter 3, further reduction of the original themes was facilitated. The continual process of comparison and contrast of the original themes, netted the following five essential definitions which reflect what it is to be a minority professional in a majority controlled organization (Nelson, 1989).

#### Five Essential Themes

The phenomenological process at this step calls for organizing the themes into meaningful units of discourse which reflect the essence of the experience of the minority professional. The following thematization of ideas represents the blending of the interaction between the expectations of the researcher and the co-researcher's

capta (Orbe, 1993). van Manen (1990) describes this as the process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure:

As I arrive at essential thematic insights it may seem that insight is a product of all of these; invention (my interpretive product), discovery (the interpretive product of my dialogue with the text of life), disclosure of meaning (the interpretive product given to me by the text of life itself. (p. 88)

Through the process of imaginative free variation, the large number of original themes were interconnected, combined under a more general heading, and/or eliminated for being incidental (Orbe, 2000, p. 616). This synergistic process resulted in the following five essential themes: (a) My ethnic identity; (b) work harder to prove myself; (c) they don't understand why; (d) the path to success; and (e) the goal post keeps moving.

### My Ethnic Identity

Overall, the co-researchers explained that many of the characteristics and values that shape their ethnicity are always salient. In other words, their hair, skin color, language usage, or other unchangeable characteristics stand out and set them apart from the majority in the organization. Co-researchers explained that because these characteristics stand out they draw undue attention from the majority. This undue attention comes in the form of inappropriate comments and stereotypical statements in the work environment.

From the board meeting to a simple business call with a customer, the minority professionals described unpleasant encounters with majority group members who saw

their cultural characteristics before they realized their status in the organization. The following comments illustrate some of these experiences.

I was one of two minorities in a group of about 200. And at this time I was teaming up with a white person, we were kind of co-business partners at the business. When I arrived there, the people that were trying to recruit for their companies kept acting like my co-partner was my boss (lm-G11).

I manage a product and when a product fails that guy (majority) has no clue, who I am or what I am. A lot of times I will get there and their teeth will fall right out of their mouths! It is like they are saying, "Good Lord." Then they try to be your friend. I feel like telling them, "look, I ain't here to know that your best friend was black because I really don't care" (am-G11).

Another element of this theme that co-researchers described involves the dilemma of dressing professionally according to majority standards while attempting to maintain their ethnic identity. For example, the struggle some of the respondents described going through to have a professional look means having chemical alteration to their natural hair because wearing their hair in its natural form would be viewed by the majority as unprofessional. Or, wearing their hair in different styles caused the majority to focus on characteristics instead of their performance, as described by this African American female professional:

I have to contend with my originality when it comes to my hair. I had a white doctor tell me, "I never know what to expect, I always have to take a second look because I never know how you are going to wear your hair" . . . And consistently having individuals ask, "how long did it take to do your hair?" . . . They are more concerned about what I look like opposed to the job that I have been hired to do (af-E14).

Another cultural characteristic that some co-researchers described as protruding in the interactions between the majority and minority members is language



usage. This was described as being an accent, language style, or expression. The following comments describe these experiences:

I feel that I am not being promoted because I speak with an accent. I try to do my best, but people look at me differently. Also, I don't participate in the mainstream (majority) activities at work (lm-C14).

My first employer criticized my speech; she said that my speech was not effective enough for the classroom (af-A15).

Don't say the wrong thing, they (majority) take it totally out of context, you got to be very careful (am-D23)

I think for most minority professionals they are afraid at some point to speak to the majority to just say, "hi." Knowing that it is going to be taken as something different (lm-E9).

In addition to the above, co-researchers across the board were passionate in describing the importance of maintaining their cultural identities and values while taking on the majority controlled organization. The following co-researchers describe the dilemma of balancing two sets of values, that of the majority world and minority world:

I began to take on the organizational culture so that I could assimilate without compromising my identity. That is very important to me . . . not that I wanted to wear a Dashiki to work or anything in that way, but I did not want to be perceived as having white values. That is still important to me (am-D7).

As a minority professional, one of the things Latinos and Hispanics really struggle with is, how do I adapt to the mainstream balance without trading in my cultural values . . . (lm-C13).

I am a quiet person by nature and by culture . . . I was brought up to be a humble person . . . I got socialized and acculturated to be a service to other people. I was also taught to think of myself as a contributor whether than a person at the center, calling all the shots. The majority sees these behaviors as a weakness. In other words, my attributions in

the majority culture would be labeled as lack of eagerness to achieve and lack of political savvy (lf-F2).

Clearly, these minority professionals feel that the skills they come to the organization with are not the skills that the majority culture looks for in providing advancement opportunities in the organization. Some co-researchers relate how their adverse social economic beginnings also affected their interactions with majority group members. Minority professionals explained the way they were taught to interact with people, or values that include respect, family needs before the individual needs, work harder, and work before pleasure. When co-researchers walked into the organization setting, they were confronted with a totally different ball game. The result was a feeling of being out of place:

It is hard for the majority to disentangle the fact that I am a Latina and with that status I bring my adverse experiences in the United States as an immigrant (lf-F1).

I was born in Mexico City, and my Mexican culture has traditional values and certain identity values . . . Like other minorities, I had to learn English, adapt to a new culture (lm-C12).

In addition to describing the challenge of maintaining their cultural values, the co-researchers described what it takes for them to work in a majority-controlled organization. They describe their perceptions, feelings and coping mechanisms for the majority controlled workplace in the following themes, “Work Harder to Prove Myself,” “They Don’t Understand Why”, “Not Invited to the Party,” and “Hey the Goal Post Moved”. These themes are an attempt to reduce the capta to a description of the essence of what it is like to be a minority professional in a majority- controlled organization.

### Work Harder to Prove Myself

Across the board, co-researchers described working harder and doing more work in the organization than their white counterparts. It did not matter the profession, their characterization entailed extra responsibilities, extra hours, meetings and other work for the minority professional. Some of the “extra work” was self-imposed, as described by a Latina manager:

I speak three languages, I’ve gone through a PhD program and I continuously find myself in this hyperactive mode around achievement. I take on multiple assignments and I feel that I have to do 150% on each one of them . . . Sometimes I have to contend with the stress of feeling like I am not either performing to the expectations of the majority or having to renegotiate those expectations with supervisors who may not necessarily feel empathy at all towards what I am confronting (lf-F2).

However, most of the minority professionals described their jobs and the jobs of their white counterparts in the organization as being unbalanced. As such, they might hold the same or similar position in the organization, however, minority professionals described that they did not receive comparable compensation and rewards as their white counterparts. Instead of receiving praise for their accomplishments, many recalled incidents of being second-guessed, undermined and sabotaged in the organizational setting. For instance, consider the following passage from an African American male:

I mean black managers, we have to be FAR superior, I mean FAR superior, especially black men . . . even when you perform you don’t get recognized. I don’t get paid the same. I am one of the higher paid ones but I got folks on my management staff . . . all the other white boys that have come along in the job they have been here 2 or 3 years they’re making more money than me cause I get the print out. I say to

myself, "how can this be?" And it is because the boss is doubling their bonuses at the end of the year (am-D20).

Most of the co-researchers described having to prove their abilities over and over again to their subordinates and peers. It did not matter the level of authority the minority professional possessed, most recalled incidents where the majority employee second-guessed or questioned them in a disrespectful manner. As one African American female described:

You do have to prove yourself and gain respect from employees in the organization . . . However, there is a backlash. They see you as African American, a woman, and young. There is a certain level of resentment because they may have been in the organization longer and say, "what is this person who is just coming in what are they going to be able to tell me?" (af-B7).

Another aspect of proving themselves emerged as respondents described the period of time it takes for the majority to accept minority professionals. Acceptance was described as being safe to work in close proximity with the majority as opposed to someone that is not safe or has a questionable character that has to be watched. There was no agreement as to how long it took for the minority professional to become accepted; some described it in terms of weeks, months and others explained that they have never been fully accepted by the majority. Consider the comments of this African American male:

The image for African American males are really quite negative and a lot of times what you end up having to do is prove yourself . . . You kind of go through that probationary period of proving that you are OK, proving that you are worthy of the job, proving that you are a safe one. Then you are admitted into the majority group (am-E10).

This response evoked a discussion from most of the African American males describing the tense dynamics with European American females in organizations. This description was raised in all three focus groups that contained African American males. Following is a passage from an African American male manager, describing an issue that affects his and other African American males' work environment:

As far as black males in the organization, something that you got to be conscious of is sexual harassment especially from white females. You can just about rest assured if one of them (white female) says that you sexually harassed her, then you are done. I am very conscious when I have the opportunity to place a white female in my organization that she is someone that I can really trust. Even then, I don't get too close to them (am-D23).

To this point, I have described the different standards of job performance between the majority and ways that minority professionals have to prove themselves. To handle the long hours, different standards, and their environments, co-researchers described strategies they used to cope with these demands. The following descriptions illustrate the coping strategies used by this African American female and Latino manager:

I think the environment, just becomes a way of life and you begin to hold yourself at a certain standard. I determined that I want to work at this level of excellence . . . I don't have the feeling that it is impossible (af-B8).

Overall, I get along well with the majority. I made a decision I decided that it is not going to be impossible to get along only with people that agree with me, I need to get along with everybody (lm-C12).

The above minority professionals adopted a positive attitude towards the demands of their job and the environment. However, some minority professionals

described taking a more aggressive approach towards the majority and the issues they faced, like these female African American and Latina managers:

Sometimes, I just take the pressures and the majority head on. Meaning I become this very aggressive person who the majority see as being out of place and out of context and I say nasty things to people. Other times I just say nothing, I just disengage -- some of my coping mechanisms are not very productive (lf-F6).

I overheard a group of subordinate staff plotting my demise . . . I interpreted it as a threat and I threatened them. I just went to them and demanded that one of the individuals leave my unit and then I told the others, "I am not going to have it, I am not going to tolerate it." So, of course I looked like this aggressive, he-woman, but this is what I had to do . . . I used my authority to get the job done and a little of my color to threaten the majority workers (af-E7).

Still other minority professionals used a more subtle approach to cope with their work environments and demands of their positions. Learning about the majority, learning their ways, and learning how to adjust to their environments are coping strategies the following male minority professionals took:

I think the reason things changed is I learned the organization . . . I had to learn how they think . . . Once I learned how they thought and what they were thinking, I could do pretty much what I wanted to do . . . After that, the color thing (the resistance) went away (am-D3).

You have to learn how to adjust to the system . . . In other words you have to adopt a sort of institutionalized type of thinking so that you can get yourself in the place to be promoted (am-D5).

In addition to describing how they have to work harder and do more on the job than their white counterparts, minority professionals described how they coped with these situations they also described in great detail how their majority counterparts do not understand them. The next essential theme entails a combination of topics that defines the misunderstanding of minority professionals by the majority.

### They Don't Understand Why

Lack of understanding on the part of the majority in the organizational setting birthed the most passionate descriptions among co-researchers. This section by far exceeded the other sections in the amount of categories and descriptions. Co-researchers described inappropriate statements, tactics, environments and misconceptions around diversity issues that sparked the misunderstandings of the majority. As one African American male described, “. . . they don't understand that I am not as social as they are, they don't understand WHY I am not as social as they are” (am-D28).

Co-researchers described incidents that the majority group used to discourage, disillusion and to ultimately resign from their positions. These tactics and incidents as described by minority professionals are based on the majority group's lack of understanding of the minority culture. For instance, consider the quote below from a Latino male describing a conversation with a majority co-worker:

I have this majority friend who tells me at least once a month, “you look like you are not really satisfied why don't you just go and do something else?” And I say, “because I've already got two years wrapped up into this and I'm just going to go ahead and finish up and get my Journey mans' card, and if I want to do something else, I will do it after I get my card” . . . Then he always says, “well you are using US then!” (lm-C22).

Another example of an inappropriate statements used to discourage a minority professional is described by a Latina manager. This story of resistance offers another example of the majority failing to understand how to approach a minority professional:

I recently graduated with a Master's degree and put in for a position for director of the organization I had worked in for 10 years. I was not a new comer to this organization. I had sent in my application, my resume and everything and I had been set up for an interview. The

director (majority) of the larger department under which this department was listed called me for lunch. He (majority) comes up to me and puts his arms around my shoulders and he says, "I want you to withdraw your candidacy from this position." I said "what!" And he says, "Yeah you know you are out of your league." I looked at him and I said, "No, I am not going to do that, you can choose not to select me but I am not going to withdraw my application." I wasn't selected and I just realized I will not go anyplace in this white male dominated place, so I left (lf-F5).

Other examples of misunderstandings between the majority and minority emerged as co-researchers described the dilemma of having a majority superior and/or subordinates. Sandwiched between two forces that think alike and have similar interests and values places the minority professional in the position of being "the third person out." In other words, minority professionals described having a title of authority but stripped of the power the position affords because of the alliance of the majority superior and subordinate.

To further clarify, a minority professional might possess the position of vice-president and on paper only have to report to the president. However, the president many times will keep track of the minority vice-president's decisions and behaviors through a subordinate majority secretary. This majority alliance creates tensions between minority professionals and their majority subordinates. In addition, this behavior causes a wall of misunderstanding between the minority professional and their superior as to who has more authority, the minority professional or their subordinate. The following responses from African American females helps to describe this phenomenon:

I've seen the manager over the whole organization deal with this African American professional in a disrespectful manner, because he



has dealt with this mans' subordinate (white female) directly. It is like giving a person a position but no power to use their authority to accomplish what they feel, needs to be accomplished (am-D16).

I had a person working for me a Caucasian female and she made it known that she had romantic ideas and notions towards me. This made for a tight working environment and I tried as much as I could to brush off any suggestions that I was interested in her or that we could have a relationship. Also, she was reluctant to accept my leadership and the things I wanted to do. I did not feel comfortable going to my white supervisor, female to explain to her the reasons behind the difficulty in the office. My supervisor would have believed my subordinate over me (af-E13).

Issues of diversity were other aspects of this phenomenon that minority professionals described as evoking fear and misunderstanding in the workplace. For instance, how is diversity taught, if taught at all, in their organizations? In addition, how do their white counterparts react to diversity? Lastly, do minority professionals consider current diversity teachings sufficient enough to evoke change in their organization?

The following descriptions help to explain co-researchers' perceptions and detailing incidents of misunderstanding and fear from the majority over issues related to diversity. Most co-researchers described the following passages as "normal" in their organizations:

When you say the word diversity to white managers they automatically start thinking about the numbers game and that diversity is some program to accelerate blacks and women in the organization (am-D29).

I think diversity is looked at positively, in general, but there are going to be certain people (majority) who feel resentful for having to go through that kind of training. Because diversity almost automatically makes people (majority) feel like there is a problem and that they (majority) are a problem or part of the problem (Af-B13).

When I think about introducing diversity into the majority-dominated organization, it is almost like this little kid that yells every time you go to give them their medicine. They (majority) don't like the taste of it [diversity] but by taking the medicine they are going to feel better and they are going to get better. I think that we got to get to a point where we have to explain the benefits of diversity in a language that people can accept and relate to (af-E19).

Some co-researchers described their organizations as having made significant strides towards resolving the misunderstandings around diversity through programs. For example, one Latina manager describes how her organization moved to emphasizing acceptance of individual differences instead of everyone having to look and act alike:

We are working really hard to bring a sense of community, a shared understanding of where we are going as an organization around the issues of diversity . . . I feel that we are a MUCH better place now about pointing out our similarities as well as our differences in thinking, learning and talking . . . We are a healthier organization then approximately 5 years ago. At that time we were at a place where we had to be all alike and the company did not value differences (lf-F8).

Most of the minority professionals described their work environments as void of any sort of diversity training. Many described these environments as “never changing,” or that things (misunderstanding) happen but the company is going to handle it the same way they have been handling it. This as explained by an African American female:

In my 27 years of being employed, I have never been invited to a diversity workshop, sensitivity workshop or something that they (majority) think is a big deal . . . They (majority) claim they have worked on misunderstandings and problems but the environment is still the same over those 27 years. They sweep stuff under the carpet if a issue happens with an African American employee and the consequences are different if the employee is Caucasian (af-E16).

The consensus from the minority professionals was that current diversity workshops and trainings are not effective enough to effect change and bring understanding in the organization. Co-researchers described that current trainings only touch surface issues and stir up enough uncertainty in the organization to cause agitation, fear, as well as misunderstanding. Consistent and in-depth training will be required to penetrate the wall of misunderstanding and fear between the majority and minority that still occur in organizations. The following description from a Latino manager sums it up nicely:

There is a cultural misperception and mis-education out there in a lot of the corporations. The demographics are changing . . . and companies are suffering, trying to get good talent . . . There is a real need for top management to understand, how to deal with the culture that is coming in, as well as how to manage and value that culture (lm-C6).

Finally, some co-researchers described their own frustrations and misunderstandings with the majority culture. Again these descriptions define the element of cultural misunderstandings that occur between the majority and minority members. In other words, on both sides of the wall there are things that each group (majority and minority) does not understand about the other. Consider the following descriptions of two African American male and female minority professionals:

Something I would really like to know before I die is, what it is about us that white folks are scared of? It just boggles me to think this concept (am-G19).

It is amazing that if we have a potluck the majority view this as a diversity educational course. I am more than just collard greens and cornbread [laughter and agreement from the group] you know the African American, well you can bring the greens and cornbread (af-E16).

To summarize the elements of this theme, “misunderstandings” illustrate the wall of uncertainty between the majority and minority group in organizations. This aspect is relevant to define the environment that co-researchers work in, as well as highlight incidents of discouragement and disillusionments. Other aspects of this theme that emerged were the discussions about current diversity initiatives and how they have or have not successfully changed the environment.

The next section helps to define the path minority professionals take upon entering the organization to advancement. This theme will help to define barriers, obstacles, as well as successful strategies.

### The Path to Success

The men and women that participated in this study seemed to agree that different standards for the majority and minority professional exist in organizations. This essential theme defines the divergent path in which most of the minority professionals found themselves, something that is different than the path for the majority professional. From the communication about advancement opportunities, to the skills needed to advance in the organization, co-researchers described their experiences in the organizational setting as uniquely different.

Most minority professionals discussed the communication they received upon their hire in the organization as “lacking information about advancement opportunities” (af-E1). Another explanation offered was that the organization and they (minority professional) were so fixed on employment that advancement opportunities were not discussed as illustrated:

I received zero information; there was not very much conversation about advancement opportunities. The conversation I received was basically to familiarize you with the dos and do not's, as well as familiarize you with the benefits and things . . . There wasn't anything really discussed relevant to advancement opportunities (am-D1).

Most of the co-researchers related feeling that the organization did not talk to them about advancement opportunities because the organization did not identify these professionals as upper management material, as summed up by this Latina professional:

I asked management . . . "If a position opens in anyone of these programs would I be able to apply for them?" . . . I was told, you probably would but that is not likely (lf-F1).

However, other minority professionals described having positive communication upon hire about advancement opportunities. Their interpretation of the communication about advancement opportunities within the organization soon faded, as described in the following comments from Latino managers:

When I first went into the position, I basically broke the glass ceiling, and I was told that there are plenty of opportunities to progress. Initially I had this perception that there were plenty of opportunities to grow as the company is growing (lm-C1).

I had this perception at the very beginning that there would be great opportunities for advancement in my career. Through the years, though, I feel that some opportunities have been less than what was originally expected (lm-H3).

These hopeful entrants, as well as the other co-researchers, soon discovered roadblocks and obstacles to their advancement in the organization. These co-researchers identified perceptions, experiences and conversations that made the path bumpy, difficult or insurmountable.

An important element of this theme that co-researchers identified as essential for successful advancement in the organization is a mentor or someone connected to the organization that is willing to guide minority professionals. However, most of these co-researchers did not have a mentor to help alleviate social isolation navigate the organization. Consider the following descriptions from two Latina and African American female professionals:

There are some survival skills that I don't have for this organization. Some of the survival skills are self promotion, self protection, schmoozing with the big guys, being in the right place at the right time, being proactive and constantly scanning opportunities for me to latch onto. Then just jump into the opportunity before anybody else does. I don't have any of these skills. I am a hard worker, I am loyal . . . They [the majority] have figured out the game and they are playing the game. I have not been able to figure it out (lf-F11).

I would say a mentor would have really helped me. I had to figure everything out myself. I had to work real hard on top of everything else I have to juggle . . . A mentor would have helped me not to struggle. I've put in a lot of extra time. If I had a mentor, they would have been there to just show me the ropes (af-E22).

Struggling to find someone to teach survival skills was echoed by every co-researcher. Other discussions arose about mentoring that co-researchers defined as essential to leading to success. One is having a mentor that has the same ethnic identities to which this African American male says, "Having a person from the same ethnic identity means their experiences will be the same and so will their pitfalls" (am-E21). However, one problem identified by co-researchers is there are not enough minorities in organizations to be mentors.

The second part of mentoring that co-researchers defined are qualities that a person needs to mentor someone from the minority culture. In this regard, the second

most important quality identified of a mentor is the willingness to work with co-researchers. However, the following minority professional describes a potential stumbling block:

If you have to go with one mentor, you probably need someone from your culture, who is very familiar with your culture and who is willing to guide you. That is not so easy to find in the majority culture (af-A7).

However, others describe that the demand for a good mentor is so great that some minority professionals will have to find a mentor outside their ethnicity to find success in advancing, as illustrated through the following description:

A mentor has got to make them (minority professionals) think they are not different. A mentor must make the minority professional realize that they got the same potential everyone else has . . . I definitely say it could be one person and again it does not have to be a Latino but it helps tremendously (lm-C17).

Tied into the qualities of a mentor is the following question. Can an organization formalize an effective mentorship program between majority and minority professionals? Co-researchers had mixed reactions to this question. Some felt that the organization has an obligation to minority professionals to succeed at all costs, while others were lukewarm on the subject of being forced into a formalized union, as stated in the following description:

I think there is many things the organization can do and formally . . . I think that there should be some . . . investment in the development of minority professionals beyond their organizations . . . I think that the organization should put some money into a program for minority professionals to develop their own program around seeking a mentor, whether it is within the organization or outside. In addition, the organization should attach to this program a plan that has educational incentives and visits to other organizations as well as internships (lf-F13).

Another concept to this essential theme that co-researchers identified as important to a successful career path in the organization is social networking. Most of the minority professionals described knowledge that many business and social functions that took place outside the regular 9-5 business day. In addition, these settings are events in which business and career advancements were discussed and decided. However, most described the frustrations and dilemma of having to socialize with the majority to advance in the organization, as described by an African American female:

If you want to climb the ladder you need to make every staff party and go to the bar . . . However, I choose not to navigate that aspect of the job . . . I do not really socialize a lot with people in my workplace . . . Sometimes I think I should and have to if I want to gain more favor . . . But that is not my style (af-E24).

Other minority professionals want to attend these functions, but only hear about them after the fact. This creates a roadblock for many minority professionals in their quest for advancement in the organization. Consider the following comments of this Latina manager as she describes her frustration:

I have not been invited to the party and there are many special assignments and opportunities for myself and other people of color to be included and have never been invited . . . Over half of the time business opportunities are being discussed behind the scenes and then you hear about it. For instance, if we are having a task force to review this and that, the same people (majority) who were on the past one are on this new one. The avenue is there to see the president but the invitation isn't. There are unwritten rules about how you get access to that stuff and I don't know them (lf-F14).

In order to navigate through the bumps and hurdles of a successful career path, some minority professionals reported using specific strategies. Whether it was



learning how to play golf or taking classes to learn more about social networking or other skills needed to advance, co-researchers expressed their desire to learn to advance. In other words, certain minority professionals found coping mechanisms to learn how to socially navigate with majority group members as described by this African American and Latina professional:

One of the most prejudice guys in the organization is a great golf player and he likes me . . . I am going to get with him so we can play golf. NOT to talk to him about what I can do to improve my management skills, I do not need him for that. I am trying to learn how to play golf. When you do that, the majority looks at you from a whole different perspective (am-D36).

I took some courses and I became a participant in a series of workshops around undoing racism. I learned a lot about how one gets manipulated into conversations and one's anger, sadness and/or depression gets used by the other group . . . I tuned in on my own internalized oppression (lf-F7).

The successful path is an essential theme that identifies the hurdles and obstacles many minority professionals face in their advancement attempts in the organization. In addition to identifying the hurdles and obstacles, this theme also describes the people and skills needed to help steer the minority professional around the hurdles and obstacles. Along with the previous themes, this theme helps to define the essence of the lived experiences of minority professionals in organizations. The final theme gives insight into the perceptions and beliefs of minority professionals as they interact daily with the majority.

### The Goal Post Keeps Moving

The final essential theme that defines the essence of the experiences of minority professionals is captured in the phrase, "the goal post keeps moving." This theme

emerged as co-researchers reflected on beliefs, perceptions and experiences that different requirements exist the majority and minority. In other words, co-researchers described incidents like the following, where the requirements for advancement kept changing:

It seemed like every opportunity that I tried to move up, there was something else I had to go through that was not required at the time . . . These maneuvers are not something they (majority) blatantly do in front of you. However, it is there live and well, I know it by the goal post consistently changing (am-G3).

Others described the moving goal post as an invisible barrier that hindered a minority professional's ability to receive an advancement opportunity. Consider these comments from an African American and Latino manager:

Now the barriers are done quietly. Meaning the majority will say things like, "You are not going to do this position because you missed one day last year." Or they will say, "You are not going to advance to this job because there is a better qualified person (majority) for the position than you are" (lm-G5).

I have the title of a professional, however, I am only the token person in there. I am the gopher for the guy that doesn't know anything. He gets the money and prestige and I get to give him all the information (am-G7).

In addition to their perceptions of silent barriers, some co-researchers described their perceptions that the higher a person climbs in the organization, the more invisible barriers they are likely to run into. In other words, as described by co-researchers, the reasons become more subtle, the opportunities become fewer and far between, and resistance turns into a wall. In addition, certain co-researchers identified tactics that some majority members are using to gain privileges reserved for minority professionals. This element ties into this emergent theme by defining how the majority

uses certain tactics to sabotage the few opportunities reserved for minority professionals:

Some things that I see appearing now in the organization . . . because of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOC), an organization is required to have certain parity. Now we have Caucasian employees, higher-level managers that are claiming that they are Hispanic, or that they are Indian . . . They have been Caucasian all these years. Now all of a sudden they are Hispanic or they are Indian (am-D14).

Even though they had to contend with the goal post moving -- and all that came with it --most co-researchers adopted a positive stance towards these issues. In other words, they described frustrations, uncertainties and pressures with their current positions, but could look down the road and say that change for the better is coming.

For example, one African American female professional shared the following:

I assume that 10, maybe 20 years down the road the organization is going to be more diverse and easier for people like me to get upper management positions. In addition to more quickly move up the ranks. I am assuming that since I came into the organizational setting, it is better than it was ten years ago (af-B15).

Even though the goal post keeps moving and most minority professionals described positive feelings about change coming in the future, they still have to contend daily with these aforementioned elements of this theme. Facing resistance, contending with subtle barriers, and having to watch every maneuver of the majority can change the perception and positive viewpoint of the minority professional. One African American man shared his take on this:

I have to contend with what is reality and what is perception and what is fact. I have to try and keep myself balanced so that I don't always see things as being an issue of race. Seeing racism when it is not is a tough thing to do especially in a predominantly white environment (am-E27).

This emergent theme, taken together with the other four essential themes encapsulates the lived experiences of minority professionals. These five themes describe the perceptions, reservations and frustrations co-researchers feel towards the majority group. In addition, the essential themes describe the majority controlled work environments that minority professionals face daily. In the next section I will explicate how the definition stage describes the essence of minority professionals in organization.

### Summary

Chapter Four describes the second and third step in the phenomenological process. This synergistic process started with the capta of one hundred and eighty-seven pages of transcripts from minority professionals. Using the process of free imaginative variation, the capta was reduced by reading the transcripts over and over again until undeveloped themes began to emerge. The descriptions of perceptions, experiences and encounters were grouped together under 19 thematic headings outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

Continuing the on-going process of imaginative free variation, potential themes were compared, contrasted and evaluated to determine if the themes were reflective of the true essence of the experience of the minority professional. Continual reduction revealed that some themes were interconnected, overlapping or incidental. Eventually five essential themes emerged: (a) My ethnic identity; (b) work harder to prove myself; (c) they don't understand why; (d) the path to success; and (e) the goal post keeps moving.

The five essential themes depict the essence of the lived experiences of minority professionals as represented through a series of focus group discussions and interviews. In Chapter Five, I will take this characterization of the minority professional, and through a macro-level, hyper-reflection, interpret how these themes relate specifically to the essence of being a minority professional in a majority-dominated organization. Thus the interpretation explicates the phenomenon described in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERPRETATION/DISCUSSION

In Chapter 5, further hermeneutic reduction and interpretation is conducted on the five essential themes identified in the previous chapter; this is done in order to isolate the essential meaning which links the phenomenon under investigation with consciousness (Nelson, 1989, p. 236). In other words, how do; “my ethnic identity,” “work harder to prove myself,” “they don’t understand why,” “the path to success,” and “the goal post keeps moving,” relate to one another and to the phenomena of being a minority professional as a whole?

Wrapped up in the interpretation is what Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls a hyper-reflection, a process where the researcher takes “their-self” and the changes “self” introduces into the spectacle into account (p. 38). van Manen (1990) describes this process as the manner by which the phenomenological description tries to come to terms with self (researcher, African American female) and other (minority professional co-researchers). Further, Nelson (1989) explains that the interpretation is an attempt to specify the preconscious and intentional meaning of the described and defined phenomenon (p. 238). This reflective process further strips away the *capta* until one or two specific revelatory phrases serve as indicators of certain meanings, which were not immediately apparent in the earlier process (Nelson, 1989, p. 237). The final process thus emphasizes the meaning of the phenomena as described by minority professionals and the value they ascribe to their experiences in the organizational setting (Nelson, 1989).

### The Path from the Margin into the Light

Voices from the margin jumped in my head, they were blocked and disillusioned, locked below in the shed. Seeking promotions, recognition and praise, but ran into barriers, attitudes and hate. I shined a Light on their plight one day. Hearing their heartache, their anguish and pains . . .

This poem, as penned by the author of this thesis, leads into the first revelatory phrase that captures the experiences of minority professionals in organizations. The men and women that participated in this study overwhelming described their paths to success in the organization as different than for those in the majority culture.

A re-examination of the transcripts revealed that co-researchers detailed their experiences of gaining entry into the organizational setting. By co-researchers expressing their lived world experiences, it helps the researcher define their experiences and ultimately assign a value to those expressed experiences (Lanigan, 1979). In other words, Lanigan (1979) explains that a person communicates and generates his or her lived-world experiences. Furthermore, the person literally expresses his or her world and the person inhabits the speech uttered (p. 12). To get a full picture of the world of the minority professional, it is important to determine all the elements that work together to create their reality.

#### Preparation Phase

Some co-researchers attained their status in the organization because they have acquired advanced degrees of a Masters or PhD; others advanced to the level of a

professional by climbing from an entry-level position. Still others have a Bachelor's degree. Which ever described their entrance into the organization, these men and women currently hold the classification of mid-level to upper level manager.

However, their individual paths to attain status in the organization were not smooth or without incidents. In fact, most of these minority professionals described their paths as paved with tremendous sacrifices and efforts. Some described beginnings from immigrants or families that were not accustomed to the American way of life as detailed by this Latina:

My family and I left Columbia when I was nine. When we arrived in this country, we realized that as people with no resources, connections or political backing we wouldn't go very far. My mother was very determined and insistent that my brothers and I go for higher education and that we succeed on our own right . . . I went to high school, I worked 3 and 4 jobs at a time and then I attended the local community college. I have always felt that you have to work for what you want. This is my ethic or ethos or whatever you call it. I believe that you have to go for whatever you want that is within your reach. So, I did. I went to community college and that gave me an opportunity to earn a scholarship to the University of Miami, which then put me in a different candidate pool for positions I probably would not have access to if I had gone somewhere else. However, I have had to pay a lot because I did not get married so that I could pursue higher education (PhD). I did not have children, and I still don't . . . I made some tremendous sacrifices to improve not just my economic condition but also my personal development (lf-F4).

Others described their beginning lived experiences as being the first in their families to gain a 4-year or advanced degree. Some minority professionals described having to work two or more jobs and raising a family to pursue higher education. These, and other such examples, paint the picture of the environment that most of these men and women described as evolving from. The co-researchers' experiences



before they reached the organizational structure are relevant to bring understanding of their needs in their interactions with the majority group.

### I Am Here, Now What?

Upon gaining the status of a minority professional, each co-researcher described in one way or the other, the perception that a piece of the puzzle to success in the organization was missing. As such, they discovered that there are skills needed to succeed in upper management, in addition to education and hard work. Many of these skills are gleaned from someone who is skilled and has knowledge in these areas. The following description by a Latina professional sums up what others described as their lived experience:

There are some survival skills that I do not have for this organization. Some of the survival skills are self promotion, self protection, schmoozing with the big guys, being in the right place at the right time, being proactive and constantly scanning what are the opportunities for me to latch and then just jump into it before anybody else does. I don't have any of those skills. I am a hard worker, I am loyal . . . They (the majority) have figured out the game and they (majority) are playing the game. I have not been able to figure it out (lf-F11).

All of these co-researchers described coming from environments that had little to no understanding, or knowledge of the social skills needed for advancement in the organizational setting. This left co-researchers with the dual responsibility of trying various strategies to quickly learn to develop social skills, as well as maintain the rigorous pace of their organizational roles. However, learning these skills would mean the minority professional would have to find someone from the majority group willing to pass this knowledge on, as described by this African American professional:

I think real sociability takes place in your everyday, interpersonal relationships with different folks on your job. That is the skill you really have to have . . . I really want to learn how to play golf. I am going to get with one of the most prejudiced guys I would think that is in this organization, but he likes me. And he says to me all the time, “when are we going to get out and play golf?” So, I am going to get with him so that we can play golf. I do not need to talk to him about what I can do to improve my management skills; I do not need him for that. I am trying to learn how to play golf to improve my sociability skills. When you play golf, they (majority) look at you from a whole different perspective (am-D36).

Co-researchers described the urgency and relevancy of acquiring the “white strategy” (lm-C17). This involves: (a) self protection; (b) schmoozing with the big guys; (c) being in the right place at the right time; (d) being proactive; and (e) scanning for the right opportunities (lf-F11). From their perspective, co-researchers described that the higher you rise in the organization, the more important it is to have these skills.

Overwhelmingly, co-researchers explained the best way to acquire the aforementioned skills is through a mentor. However, if a mentor was not available, then co-researchers suggested that someone familiar with the organizational structure and its forces would suffice, as described by this African American professional: You have to be mentored a lot of times by people who have what you call “organizational savvy” (am-D32).

However, most of these co-researchers advanced to the level they are now without the aide of a mentor. This adds another component into the lived experiences of these minority professionals. They discussed some of the reasons why most of these minority professionals did not have the advantage of a mentor and what they and

other minority professionals need for optimal success in the organization. First of all, a mentor MUST be willing to share their knowledge. In addition, a mentor should be from their ethnicity or have a personal understanding and knowledge of the minority professional's ethnicity. However, there can be problems with finding a mentor from a persons' own ethnicity, as this African American professional pointed out:

Well, it is kind of hard to be mentored by someone of your ethnicity if you don't have a minority in your company to mentor one – so they (majority) have got to hire them (minority professionals) before you can be mentor by them (am-G16).

### Duration on the Path

A clear difference emerged in attitudes of those that had within the last five years entered the path of the organization and those that had been on the path for many years. Even though they faced the same obstacles, barriers, and layers of responsibilities, their outlooks towards their jobs and futures in the organization varied greatly. The co-researchers that had entered the organizational structure within the last five years described the aforementioned issues as manageable. If they did not like what was going on in the organization, they had options. For instance, they described having the opportunity to change organizations or taking the stance that the problems lay within the majority group. Consider the following descriptions of two African American professionals that have been on the organizational path for less than five years:

I think you have choices and I feel that I am progressing at the pace that I would like to. I do not feel that I have been hindered or that I have been stopped from advancing. I feel like I can if I choose to, just move and get employment elsewhere (af-B13).

I think I deal with the pressures and the majority just fine. I am comfortable with who I am. I do not always look at things as if it were a race factor. I can look at people and see that there are other races, I accept that and go on. I don't find it difficult for me — now maybe they (majority) have a difficulty. And, if they don't understand me, then I don't take a defensive stand. I feel that it is because they haven't been around an African American woman. And that maybe they need to get to know me. So, I will extend myself by answering questions about myself so that the majority can get to understand me (af-B16).

However, for those that have been on the path for sometime, their lived experiences were experientially different. There arose more descriptions of experiences where the majority group did not understand them, took their words and statements out of context, did not want to work under or with them, or used tactics to undermine them. These behaviors, as described by co-researchers, evoked feelings of distrust as well as a wariness to interact with the majority group. This is relevant because social interaction is seen as a key skill for organizational success. The following descriptions sum up the described experiences of co-researchers that have worked in the organizational structure for more than 5 years:

I don't get too close socially to them (majority) . . . I'll joke with them a little bit, but nothing off the cuff. You got to stay above board, at all times. They are just waiting for you to make a mistake. Don't say the wrong thing because they will take it totally out of context. You have to be very careful in your interactions with the majority (am-D23).

For me, I mistrust socializing with higher-level majority professionals . . . Now, I realize you got to work with people, however, I am very mistrustful, very mistrustful about that. The reason I feel that way is because, to deal with that type of socializing situation, you have to become more personable with people. You have a tendency to share personal things when you socialize. Now, I feel that we can be out there socializing and you (majority) want to grin in my face. However, when it comes to my opportunity to make some money through career advancement opportunities, there is nothing there (am-D26).

### Maintaining Cultural Markers

These descriptions, as well as others, lead to the final element of this revelatory theme. Maintaining individual ethnic identities and values while ascending the organizational structure emerged unanimously from co-researchers as central issues. Each group identified cultural values and identities that de-emphasize mainstream qualities in the world of the majority. African American females, African American males, Latinos and Latinas, all expressed pride in their heritage and cultural values.

However, pride evolved into expressed concerns over the pressure of compromising these values and their identities to advance in existing organizational structures. Co-researchers explained that if they did not compromise or de-emphasize these values and identities, these characteristics would eventually be the source of incidents or attacks from the majority. The following descriptions from each group illustrate this phenomenon.

African American females. The African American females described that they have to watch being “too strong or assertive because it is considered being aggressive or too unfriendly” (af-A9) by the majority. However, the irony of this is “if you are not assertive then you are not seen as serious” (af-A9) or promotable. However, if an African American woman becomes overwhelmed, “it would not be accepted [by the majority] for an African American female to cry like a Caucasian woman would” (Af-B4). African American females also identified that their nurturing quality and sensitivity to others invites assignments and workloads. The result is that, “a

Caucasian would not be given the amount of work that they [majority] put on us” (af-B4).

Another cultural value that African American females identified relates to their standard of dress and the ways in which they wear their hair. This cultural value of dressing fully accessorized is also identified with dressing the part of, and being perceived as a professional, as described by this African American female:

A majority member can come to work in a very casual dress. Where as being an African American woman, if I come in a very casual dress I would be looked at differently and judged differently than the majority (af-B4).

Included in this issue of dress is a source of irritation for many African American females -- their hair and how they wear it. What emerged from the discussions was that African American females have to contend with the majority making comments and innuendos about their hair. Because most African American females have a different texture of hair than the majority, these women wear their hair differently than the majority. Yet, this draws undue attention and focus by the majority, as described by this African American female: “They (majority) are more concerned about what I look like, opposed to the job that I have been hired to do here!” (af-E14).

African American males. Integrity, honesty, survival skills and their physical presence are qualities that make African American men a threat to the majority culture. The African American male co-researchers described this positioning as a factor in low numbers of African American males in leadership positions in organizations. These co-researchers described over and over again that a company will hire an African

American female instead of an African American male because of these characteristics and, “because the organization gets two minorities [black + female] in the place of one” (am-H5). Additionally, co-researchers explained that the African American female is not perceived as a threat like the African American male.

Other aspects of the African American males’ identity emerged that co-researchers described as a threat to the majority. They described: (a) not backing down from a confrontation; (b) not threatened by loss of a job; (c) no matter how intense the pressure they will not consider suicide; (d) having to surpass and be better at the job than their white counterparts; and finally (e) their physical strength -- all which make them a them a force that the majority group does not want to contend with. An African American male describes this lived world experience in this way:

There is [a] mis-perception by the majority that because African American males excel in ALL sports that they will excel in upper management. So, they (majority) do all they can to keep us out (am-H11).

The cultural values that these co-researchers identified as being essential to being a black male are: (a) having a strong connection with family; and (b) being the responsible head of the household. Because so many were raised by single mothers, they have a connection and responsibility to take care of their mothers and extended families. Another cultural value they identified as drawing attack or undue attention from the majority group is the need to socialize or acknowledge another African American male or female in an informal gathering in the workplace. This was revealed in comments from an African American man:

An issue I have to contend with as an African American male, manager is being accused of discrimination by the majority. I am black and if they (majority) see me talking to any black person, then you will hear, “yeah, he is getting ready to do something for them because they are black.”

In addition, majority members perceived that majority group members were threatened when they saw more than one African American male together. They explained that the majority fears that if they (African American males) are united physically and emotionally together then they are combining forces to take over.

Latino males. Traditional cultural values and work ethics are what emerged from Latino males as being different from the mainstream culture. Traditional cultural values were identified as: (a) family is first, then comes the job; (b) they must have a good job and work hard on that job; and (c) ingrained humility. Latino co-researchers described how these cultural values were out of touch with the majority culture.

First, the family is very important to Latinos, and not simply limited to one's immediate family. Latino males identified the importance of respecting their mothers and fathers, as well as their extended family members. They described being late to work or not socializing with majority members after work; “I go home after my job because my family is important and I have other responsibilities” (Im-C14). However, this behavior caused the Latinos to be looked at as not part of the team which is a reason, they identified, as why they were not promoted.

“We work hard and we show that we can do a good job”; “my quality of work should speak for me” (Im-C14). Overwhelmingly, Latino males passionately expressed



these statements as traditional cultural values. However, mid to upper-level management did not embrace these cultural values as acceptable, promotable qualities.

Ingrained, deep-rooted humility -- to the point where these co-researchers could be manipulated and easily taken advantage of by the majority -- is another traditional cultural value they identified. Latino co-researchers described this cultural trait as causing them to “not strive for or against something” (Im-H12) that ultimately the majority groups labels as lazy.

The last thing that Latino males identified as part of their ethnic identity that they felt has been compromised (“stripped from their ethnicity”) (Im-H13) is the ability to speak Spanish. As one co-researcher explains this phenomenon, when Latino families migrated to the United States, parents made a “conscious effort” to teach their children English so that they would fit into the mainstream culture (Im-H13). However, in their rush to have their children be United States citizens, they emphasized English and de-emphasized Spanish. This resulted in most Latinos being bi-lingual or losing Spanish altogether. However, this causes them to speak both English and Spanish with an accent. The resulting effect is that their accent prevents them from being totally accepted into the majority culture in the United States and their native land. “It leaves you feeling that you are without a country” (Im-H12). A Latino male clarifies this tension:

Because I speak with an accent, sometimes when I am in a meeting and I don't say anything they (majority) will look at me or ask me if I understand what they are talking about. I probably understand more than they do. Or, they will speak VERY LOUD to me. Again they (majority) assume that because I am Latino and I do not speak English or broken English that I am ignorant (Im-C23).

Latinos males described their language accent being as obvious in their interactions with majority members as skin color is for African Americans. This aspect of their ethnicity is so unique that it links them to their traditional culture and at the same time it prevents them from fully being accepted into the mainstream culture:

The majority does not know how to act towards me. They see me as not black, and I am not white. I am always asked, "What are you?" We Latinos feel that we are somewhere in the middle. But the whites do not know how to handle us! (lm-C5).

Latino females. Latinas and Latinos both identified the same traditional cultural values, work ethics and ingrained humility, as well as the same language concerns. However, Latinas explicated that their acculturation to humility included submission to males that results in them being more vulnerable and prone to being taken advantage of. This behavior identified as "machismo" in their native language is explained by this Latina professional:

We have men who grew up in an era where they were taught that they were more powerful than women. Machismo is not quite as subtle as racism. It happens because men frequently are not aware that they are acting out of their gender privileges. They say things very blatantly and it undermines my abilities to supervise as well as interacting as their peer. (lf-F7).

They not only have to contend with this behavior from Latino males, but equally and more in their interactions with the majority group. This Latina professional sums up her lived experiences with machismo in the organization:

The organization culture is still very male. They (majority) expect you to: (a) speak in bullets; (b) just give them the bottom line; and (c) how fast can you jump to the table with a solution. If you don't have all those three going for you then you are not part of the mainstream. I am a department head, however, I was socialized and acculturated to

be in service of other people and to think of myself as being a contributor whether than the one at the center calling all the shots. That combined with ingrained humility is seen by the majority-controlled organization as either a weakness or a lack of eagerness to achieve (lf-F3).

### Summary

The aforementioned cultural values and ethnic identities illuminate traits that distinguished minority professions from the majority group. Some of these traits can be altered to resemble a more centralized look, like hair and dress. However, other traits remain quintessential to the minority professional's being and will never change, like skin color, ingrained humility and other cultural values. The relevance of maintaining these integral characteristics to minority professionals is that they help to define each group. In addition, these aspects of their being equipped them with the necessary skills to master their individual environments and contend with the organizational setting.

The "preparation phase," explained how co-researchers prepared and gained their status in the organization. Once gaining status as minority professional, "I am here now what?" identified the missing components of success co-researchers need to successfully ascend to upper management. "Duration on the path," contrasts the divergent attitudes of minority professions at specific locations on the organizational path. These three sections taken together with the cultural values and ethnic identities illuminate challenges minority professionals described as encountering in their attempts to advance in the organization.

Ultimately, these sections illustrate a different path for co-researchers than for their white counterparts. The path these minority professionals traveled in the organization was paved with negative perceptions, behaviors and experiences. Wrapped up in the perceptions, behaviors and experiences with the majority group was resistance to opportunities. Furthermore, resistance was outlined as subtle stereotypical language, as well as stereotypical behaviors, and layer upon layer of imposed responsibilities.

The revelatory theme, “the path from the margin into the light” paints only one aspect of the essence of minority professionals in organizations. This section, sums up the existence of these co-researchers in their endeavors to climb into the upper hierarchy of their institutions. In other words, it illuminates the preparation, personal involvements, challenges and ultimate resistance to advancement. However, the question remains, do minority professionals have options to force the hand of resistance in their organizations? In the next section, I will explicate the legal choices minority professionals have in traveling this path full of unmet expectations of success. “Falling short of the promise,” as well as “the path from the margin into the light,” help to capture the essence of the phenomenon involving minority professionals in the organizational setting.

### Falling Short of the Promise

The previous theme described the preparation and path these co-researchers traveled to advance in the organizational setting. Additionally, “the path from the margin into the light,” echoed the failed attempts at advancement, depicted the resistance felt from

majority group members and described the disappointments of minority professionals. “Falling short of the promise,” provides an understanding on minority professionals’ legal options for relief. This section begins with an excerpt from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, curtailing the legislative and legal implications of unmet expectations for minority professionals. In addition, this section outlines the long-term effect of working in a restrictive environment.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it unlawful for an employer to consider race in connection with hiring, discharging, promoting, or compensating an individual (Civil Rights Act of 1964). In addition to Title VII, Dawson (1999) clarifies that Congress enacted The Glass Ceiling Act of 1991. Congress felt that further legislation was required because they found that women and minorities continued to remain underrepresented in management and decision-making positions in business, despite their growing presence in the workplace (Dawson, 1999, p. 7). In a televised Town Meeting, then President William Jefferson Clinton remarked about this country’s efforts to end resistance based on ethnicity in higher levels of industry:

Despite our nation’s tireless efforts to end racism, it is tragic to discover that after so many years of efforts to end racism, this epidemic still plagues our society. Racism, at some level, still exists in certain industries of this country . . . (as cited in Dawson, 1999).

### Legislating Relief?

For minority professionals, the relevance of the above findings represents a dual edged sword of reality. In other words, once finding rejections and unmet expectations in the organization, co-researchers are finding that the laws in this country enacted to protect them are cumbersome, difficult to prove or favoring the majority.

Delgado (1993) asserts that racist behaviors dull the moral and social senses of its perpetrators (majority) even as it disables its victims (minority professionals) from fully participating in society and leaves those members of society without prejudice demoralized (p. 109). Consequently, minority professionals are contributing to meet the needs of this country by working, paying employment and other taxes. However, minority professionals are not able to fully partake of the advantages (e.g., non-encumbered work environment, laws) afforded other citizens because of ethnicity.

These co-researchers are United States citizens and have seen the dream of success portrayed in the media. However, the dream of having a good job, successful career, with lots of money to support themselves and their families is not realized. In school these minority professionals learned the laws of this land including the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Amendments to the Constitution and other statutes. These promises legislated from the United States government suggest that if they work hard minority professionals have the same optimistic future that of the majority.

To further clarify, this includes the right to equal access to a career as a mid to upper level professional in any organization. However, once these minority professionals entered the organizational structure they experienced behaviors, resistance and misunderstandings with the majority group that led them to conclude that our country has “fallen short of the promise.” In the following sections, I will explain the long-term effects of working in this type of environment and explore if minority professionals have the same legal redress as majority group members.

## The Long-Term Effect

Chapter Two summarizes research that describes the current obstacles and challenges many minority professionals encounter in the organizational setting. Forced assimilation, lack of mentoring, lack of social networks, stereotyping, glass ceiling, differing perceptions, communication hurdles and changing demographics as well as alarming statistics, tell the story of the struggle in the majority-controlled setting (Alderfer, et al., 1980; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Fant, 1982; Ibarra, 1995, 1999; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). In a study on the effects of working in a victimized setting because of ethnicity, Ehrlich, Larcom and Purvis (1995) found the following alarming facts related to minority professionals:

The leading symptom(s) of working in a prejudice environment and consistently being subjected to discriminatory mistreatment are those commonly associated with post-traumatic stress: anger, mental replay of the incident, nervousness, difficulty in concentrating, withdrawal, and trying to become invisible. The trauma took its toll on interpersonal relations as well: respondents experienced loss of friends, anger with family members, difficulties with significant others, and problems in maintaining their weight. (p. 76)

Existing research summarized in Chapter Two describes the organizational climate for minority professionals as containing tensions and advancement barriers. These hindrances to advancement were identified as: Forced assimilation, lack of mentoring, lack of social networks, stereotyping, the glass ceiling, differing perceptions of diversity based on race/ethnicity and communication hurdles (Allen, 1995; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Cox, 1994; Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Greenhaus et al., 1980; Ibarra, 1995, 1999; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991; Orbe, 1998). The co-researchers of this study described facing the same obstacles on a daily basis. In

addition, there emerged in the discussions suggestions of post-traumatic stress identified above. Specifically, co-researchers described throughout the discussions, bouts of anger, mental replay of the incidents, nervousness, withdrawal and the other aspects of this phenomenon, as described by these co-researchers:

I made a decision 3 years ago because I did not understand why the majority infuriated me, why I developed a truck drivers' language. I decided I am NOT letting anybody get away with anything! When it comes to my well-being and my safety if I have to confront you on something I will do it! (lf-F8).

I don't feel very comfortable going to my white female supervisor to explain to her what is the real reason behind all the difficulty I am experiencing in this office (am-E12).

In the next section I will briefly explain the legal dilemma for minority professionals that have suffered the aforementioned effects in their work environments.

### Legal Redress?

While reviewing the transcripts, I uncovered statement after statement where co-researchers described delays and disappointments in promotions and not being welcomed into the areas of management where the power is and decisions are made. One experience recalled by a Latino manager emerged as especially insightful about the essence of his lived experiences:

I had this perception at the very beginning of my career that there would be a great opportunity for advancement. However, through the years and different experiences in the organization, opportunities have been less than what I originally expected. There have been some stumbling blocks I've ran into . . . Looking back, maybe I was a bit too optimistic, and the opportunity really was not there as much as I originally anticipated (lm- H3).



Starting out optimistically, but finding barriers and stumbling blocks, were often intertwined throughout the descriptions of lived experiences. This perception, as well as the revelation that success in the corporate setting takes more than just determination and hard work, was shared over and over. This information leads into another component of this hyper-reflection that further drives a wedge in the attempts of the minority professional to find organizational success. That is the dilemma of finding legal redress for the barriers, direct stumbling blocks, and long-term effects they have encountered in the organization. The Supreme Court has developed a course of action under Title VII for an employee to challenge an employer if she or he feels that advancement has been denied. However, the language Under Title VII, reads that a plaintiff has the difficult task of proving that the “specific employment practices have violated the statute” (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

This challenge to prove specific wrongdoings in a timely manner can be difficult for minority professionals for a number reasons. First, many experiences with majority group members and the organization were described as subtle. Second, the co-researchers described not looking for the barriers and challenges they encountered as based on race or ethnic factors. Last, they often assume an attitude that they can make it in spite of increased workloads and responsibilities in the organization.

In other words, to prove a case under Title VII, a plaintiff (minority professional) would have to document specific instances of wrongdoing. This means that the minority professional has to know and prove that certain actions and behaviors are based exclusively on their ethnicity. Further, he or she has to constantly scrutinize

occurrences in their organizations as race-based. In addition, incidents perceived as stereotypical could not be included. Moreover, these co-researchers repeatedly described that to cope with their work environments, they chose NOT to look at incidents with the majority group as based solely on ethnicity.

Another factor in filing a Title VII civil rights action against an employer is that the case has to be filed with an authorized agency within a specific number of days of an incident (Civil Rights Act, 1964). For co-researchers, this means taking time away from their increased workloads and responsibilities to meet with agencies (e.g., attorneys, EEOC, etc.) involving their legal action. Ultimately it boils down to the minority professional asking themselves, “Do I put up with what is going on in the workplace? Maybe it will change; . . . or take time and effort to prove that my rights have been violated?” For these co-researchers, they answered this question in “I can make it attitude” and “hope for the future,” as described in Chapter Four.

What does that say about the environment they continue to work in? And what can be gleaned about these men and women we see as minority professionals? Before answering these questions, I will sum up the feelings of these co-researchers who have “fallen short of the promise,” through the following description. Then through the process of hyper-reflection, I will bind the two revelatory phrases to reflect the essence of the lived experiences of minority professional in organizations. Consider the following description of an African American professional, who through a series of questions lay the foundation of the discussions on the idea of a failed promise:

There are masses of people (minority professionals) coming behind us. They are going to face some of the same obstacles we are facing. Will somebody finally break out like we did? We got out of the fences and we in some sort of way are succeeding. Do we look back through the fences and see the couple of hundred thousand people over there that don't know how to get through? I mean do they stay back there and we give our success stories? Or, do we reach back somehow on the other side of the fence and tell them? There is a combination to the gate of success and here is how you get out and this is what you got to do (am-G31).

The questions of this African American manager illustrate just a few aspects of the multifaceted, complex reality for minority professionals. They work in the dredge of a changing society, but still having to contend with the reality that some society members want to hold onto the reigns of oppression is difficult. Yet, co-researchers still had concerns for other minorities wanting to enter the path of the organization. Looking at this group of people through the eyes of the researcher, I developed admiration and praise for their insight, their daily plight and their resolve and desire to reach out to other members of their ethnicities.

### Reflections On A Phenomenon

In Chapter Four, one hundred eighty-seven pages of capta were phenomenologically reduced to five essential themes. Through the process of hyper-reflection, two revelatory phrases, "the path from the margin into the light," and "falling short of the promise," emerged as capturing the lived experiences of minority professionals and uniting the five essential themes.

When I analyzed the five essential themes ("my ethnic identity," "work harder to prove myself," "they don't understand why," "the path to success," and "the goal post keeps moving") within this context, I gathered new insight on this phenomenon.

These themes illustrate the multifaceted, complex reality for minority professionals. Working in the dredge of a changing society -- but still having to contend with the reality that some society members want to hold on to the reigns of oppression -- is difficult. The five themes paint the picture of what the co-researchers face in their interactions with the majority. In addition, they uncover their emotions, perceptions and feelings towards the organizational culture, the majority, as well as the future.

However, the story of these minority professionals does not stop at the aforementioned conjuncture. These men and women of African American and Latino descent adopted tactics to transcend the barriers to advancement described in Chapter Two. These five essential themes unite to tell the story of how these co-researchers faced and dealt with these challenges. On the other side of barriers to advancement, coping strategies, resolution to face these challenges, determination and hope for the future emerged.

The process of reflecting on the lived experiences of co-researchers enabled me to develop an ultra-interpretation which lends itself to defining the essence of being a minority professional in a majority-controlled organization. However, Merleau-Ponty (1964) concludes that it is impossible to achieve a complete reduction because the total meaning of the phenomenon is beyond our capacity to express. Furthermore, Nelson (1989) explains that because researchers are consciously engaged in their own lifeworlds, our interpretations are changed the instant we view the finished product and begin to reflect on it (p. 237).

Still, for the purposes of this research, one simple question remains: What does it mean to be a minority professional in a majority-dominated organization? Does this research uncover the meanings that help to clarify the essential components of this phenomenon? The descriptions of my researchers, resulting essential themes and revelatory phrases, lead to the following responses to sum up the answers to these questions.

### The Essence

The co-researchers described a number of challenges that they encounter in the organizational setting: Harsh realities, double standards for minority and majority professionals, perceptual barriers, stereotypical statements, tactics used against them, working harder and getting less compensation, being second guessed, not fully knowing what it takes to advance, and so on. Despite these challenges in attaining professional status, co-researchers unanimously told of the values and ethics they learned from family, or some significant other, that helped them distinguish themselves and rise to the top. This is captured through the following description of an experience from an African American professional:

My parents told me, my grandparents told me . . . I will never forget this. You do not have to like them (majority) but you do have to show up. And I did that. I learned that lesson in the first grade, the first time I was called nigger. Now, I whipped that white boy's butt. I whipped his butt and my mom beat my butt. She said, "You are going to be called that the rest of your natural born life and you do not have to like them but you do have to show up." So, when I first walked into the organization, I knew those that didn't like me and those who did like me (am-D18).

Once arriving at a point where they attained professional status in the organization at mid or upper level management, co-researchers alluded to thoughts of believing that they would not have to struggle anymore. However, the harsh reality of the barriers in the organization setting stirred up the same desire and passions that got them to the point they are now in. This revelation captures why co-researchers described the struggle to maintain their cultural values while learning to assimilate into the majority culture. In essence, the values that are frowned upon in the majority-controlled organization are the elements that boosted them and helped them to survive at this level.

So even though these men and women have undergone trauma, challenges, setback, disappointments and resistance, they have developed coping mechanisms and attitudes of resolve. Thus, although “the path from the margin to the light” led to “falling short of the promise,” for these and other minority professionals, their insight to their daily plight and resolve will pave the way for eventual success.

### The Environment

What do these revelations say to the organizations where minority professionals interact daily with majority peers, superiors and subordinates? Clearly, what emerged is the following description from this Latino professional:

There is a cultural misperception and mis-education in most organizations. The demographics are changing. Companies are suffering, trying to get good talent. There is a real need for top management to understand how to deal with the different cultures that are coming in. They need to know how to manage and value the various cultures entering the workplace (Im-C6).

Co-researchers overwhelmingly explained why current diversity initiatives are not sufficient to quench the fears and anxiety of the minority and majority members in an organization. This important aspect, that emerged from co-researchers, relates to the idea that people are different and different does not mean bad, dangerous or less qualified. The current diversity training, however, does not penetrate deep enough to value the difference in people. Co-researchers proclaimed that current training leans toward emphasizing the theme, “we are one, because we work at the same location.” Looking at the different faces and ethnic cultures they represent, it is obvious that all organizational members are not the same.

#### Application

The purpose of this research project was to study the lived experiences of minority professionals and reveal the essential structures of their lifeworlds. My thesis is an attempt to listen to the muted voices of minority professionals and examine their descriptions of their experiences in the organizations in which they work. I believe that this thesis successfully brought to the surface voices of people that have not traditionally been heard in the hierarchy of organizations, or within communication research (Allen, 1995).

Ideally, organizations should be able to take this information as a means to increase understanding of the four groups represented in this study. In addition, it can serve as a frame for positive remedies for the current downward spiral of many minority professionals. This study can also generate greater understanding for researchers and theorists in organizational communication--especially as it relates to

minority professionals, the area of diversity and the climate in the organization.

Consequently, this study reveals a lack of understanding of how to incorporate various ethnicities successfully in one environment, as well as a lack of understanding on how to promote the acceptance of others. As research indicates (Advisory Board, 1999; Armour, 2000), we are moving to a society where the workforce will be more diverse than ever, which means organizations will not be able to ignore these issues any longer.

### Limitations

In the course of completing this research project, several limitations and questions surfaced concerning the lives of minority professionals in organizations. Before concluding my thesis, I will compare my research to existing research and address future areas of exploration relating to minority professionals.

It is important to remember that certain limitations exist when using a phenomenological methodology. van Manen (1990) explains that to employ this method is to:

Attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

As previously stated, the complex nature of the human spirit undermines the chance to exactly define a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Phenomenology should not be an attempt to prove something (Orbe, 2000). As such, the interpretative



conclusions drawn here about minority professionals should not be used to generalize to other minority professionals. In addition, it would not be wise to use these findings to make generalizations about African American males, African American females, Latino males and Latino females.

van Manen (1990) adds that phenomenology is interested in the human world as we find it in all its variegated aspects (p. 18). Further, he explains that phenomenology unlike other approaches is only interested in the live world experiences that are expressed by the co-researchers through the process of description, definition and interpretation. So, in this case, phenomenology is interested in the expressed perceptions of minority professionals in organizations. Orbe (1993) adds that employing phenomenological research will lead to the production of other questions that need to be addressed to further understand the phenomenon. The final portion of this thesis will address these issues in light of future implications.

### More Voices

This research project involved African American and Latino males and females. Although, I wanted an equal number of participants, I found it very difficult to hear from Latinas. In fact, I only had two participate in my focus groups. The other Latinas did not want to participate in that type of forum, preferring the intimacy of the in-depth interview. I chose the focus group discussions as a means to capture the rich details of co-researchers' experiences with the majority group in the organization (van Manen, 1990). In addition, the discussions birthed questions and inquiries for the in-depth interviews. By having fewer Latinas participate in the focus groups meant their

input on the aspect of being a minority professional was circumscribed. Consequently, to alter this outcome for future research, more concern to Latinas' needs should be addressed in the preparation and recruitment phase described in Chapter Three.

This thesis addressed the lived experiences of only 25 minority professionals representing four ethnic groups in mid and upper level management. I believe more numbers representing these ethnic groups in management should be addressed in future research. Research involving different methodologies is necessary to study the effects of working long term in a majority-controlled system. In addition, discussions with more diverse groups like, women, Asian and Native Americans; the physically and mentally challenged in management is also warranted.

This information is relevant, in light of the changing demographics forecast in existing research (e.g. America 2000, 2000; Johnston & Packer, 1987) that reports greater numbers of minorities entering the workplace. Research should be directed on these additional groups to explore if their experiences with the majority group are the same as described by the minority professionals in this thesis. Specifically, questions can inquire if these new minority professionals encountered the same hindrances, barriers and perceived experiences as the co-researchers of this study. Further, did they adopt similar or new tactics to cope with the majority group? Lastly, what are their attitudes and outlook for their futures in the organization?

In reviewing the transcripts, I noticed a vast difference in attitude between the co-researchers that worked in the organization for less than five years and those that had been in the organizational setting for a longer period of time. Future research is

needed to explore this finding on minority professionals. The question arises if this difference in outlook is because of age, time in the organization, different generations or other possible reasons why their views are so divergent? Potential research questions to address this phenomenon are: (a) How long have you worked in your organization; (b) What are your feelings about your position in the organization; (c) What are your feelings about your advancement opportunities; and (d) How do you view the majority group you work with for instance peers, subordinates and superiors?

Another potential future research project would be hearing from the various majority voices in the organizational setting. This idea emerged as I listened to co-researchers describe the different and more accepting attitudes they perceived in the younger majority group members, as well as some female majority members.

Uniquely, co-researchers described the younger and female majority group members as more willing to work with them, accept their lead as a superior and accept their individual ethnic characteristics than the more traditional majority group member. In a future study combining the aforementioned majority group members and the minority, I would focus on exploring these topics.

Orbe (2000) surmises that as a methodology, phenomenology is useful in gaining insight into the lived experiences of cultural group members traditionally marginalized in research and theory (p. 604). However it can be used to explore how this heterogeneous group negotiates other co-cultural identity markers like age, abilities, and gender. Consequently, I would use a similar methodology to capture the different voices of the majority culture. With these groups, I would explore the

following research questions: (a) What are your perceptions of the minority professionals in your organization?; (b) How do you feel about the diversity initiatives taking place your organization?; (c) Have you had an opportunity to work directly for a minority professional?; and (d) Is there anything you would change in your workplace, if you had the power?

### Future Implications

An implicit limitation to using the phenomenology methodology is that it is not designed to generalize, but to use it as a lens into the lived experiences of the co-researchers (Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 1990). For this thesis, I captured the essence of the lived experiences of mid to upper level minority professionals in various institutions. However, these men and women, like other minority professionals, have faced challenges and barriers outlined in Chapter Two. In this section, I will compare and contrast my findings with existing research on minority professionals as a means to point to future implications of this line of research.

### Compared to Existing Literature

On the issue of forced assimilation, existing researchers (Cox, 1994; Lattimer, 1998; Muir, 1996) found that forcing minority professionals to adopt mannerisms of the majority culture can be challenging. In fact, if the minority professional cannot learn the mainstream mannerisms in a timely fashion it can lead to dismissal. The co-researchers of this study identified encountering the same type of obstacles. As a result, this research furthered the understanding into this dilemma for the minority

professional by identifying the “white strategy.” Naming and identifying the components of the mainstream mannerisms appears to be a rich area for future study.

In addition, this study enlarges the current research on assimilation, diversity, and employee relations. My research does this by bringing insight to the ethnic characteristics and values that are unique to each group represented in this study. In addition, these ethnic characteristics and values were instrumental in helping minority professionals advance to the level they are in the organization despite being de-emphasized and not illustrated in the majority group.

Kalbrleish and Davies (1991) defined mentorship and explained the importance of developing a mentor relationship with a senior organizational member. Other researchers (Allen, 1995; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Ibarra, 1995) outlined the racial and social background barriers that interfere and prevent successful mentor relationships between minority and majority groups. This research advanced these findings on mentorship through a 3-tiered approach on the subject.

First, consistent with existing research, this study reinforces the importance of a minority professional having a mentor. This study further advances this aspect of mentorship by answering why a mentor is so fundamental for a minority professional to successfully advance. In addition, it explains the dilemma minority professionals face in rising from environments that did not understand or teach organizational savvy ways. Moreover, my research provides insight on the effort it takes for a minority professional to undertake the demands of their job as well as attempts to link with

someone from the majority culture to help transcend the other responsibilities of their positions.

Second, the findings in this study were consistent with existing research that points to obstacles racial barriers create for mentor relationships. However, this research advanced this finding in establishing that the obstacle emerges through misunderstandings and mis-perceptions more than racial differences. Further, this research identified specific qualities and skills that co-researchers described as necessary in a mentor for each ethnic group.

I concur with researchers (Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Orbe, 1998) that suggest that communication practices between the majority and minority is an interaction of perceptions. As such, the background differences of co-researchers and the majority group effect every transaction in the organization. However, this study broadened the scope of research on this topic by isolating and exposing the individual ethnic identity markers that interfere in effective communication. These identity markers, like the accents in Latinos, as well as the way African Americans express themselves, play a key component in communication misunderstandings.

Other research identified in Chapter Two explicated the glass ceiling (Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Greenhaus et al., 1990). My research adds insight into this existing research by explaining how the glass ceiling in the higher end management positions often turns into a brick wall. I defined the stereotypical behaviors, the subtle language and behaviors used to narrow the advancement of minority professionals in the hierarchy of institutions.

On the topic of “differing perceptions of diversity based on race,” this study helped to reinforce the overwhelming research that “white males and minorities see the world through different lenses” (Advisory Board, 1999). Existing research (Alderfer et al., 1980; Zane, 1998) studies the majority group’s fears, misperceptions related to minority professionals and diversity training. Injecting the voice of minority professionals into this field of investigations contrasts the focus of these studies. Instead of only focusing on one organizational group and their reactions, my study will attempt to equal the field with voices of the muted minority professional, resulting in strategies for all organizational members (Allen, 1995; Orbe, 1998).

This study concurs with other researchers (Ayvazian & Tatum, 1996; Foemen & Pressley, 1987) that meaningful dialogue between the two cultures will lead to better perceptions of the other group. However, this study proves that current diversity initiatives fail by only skimming the surface of cultural misunderstandings. In other words, effective diversity enculturation has to cover more than everyone is the same because we all work in the same organization. Clearly what emerged from this thesis is that this type of training causes insecurities, reservations and frustrations in both the majority and minority organizational members. As such these misunderstandings take place daily in encounters between the majority and the minority. Consequently, there remains a wall of misunderstanding that has yet to be penetrated.

## Conclusion

Organizations can no longer conduct business as usual and turn a deaf ear to the cries of people that are rejected, not promoted, or fired for culturally related issues. Further research is needed to find ways to incorporate sensitivity and diversity training into the corporate culture. In addition, more strategies are needed to help minority professionals succeed in the organizational structure. With this research as a beginning, future research projects addressing these issues will continue to add insight into this phenomenon.

In conclusion, this chapter and thesis will end with the final portion of the poem, "The Path from the Margin into the Light," penned by Greer-Williams (2000b):

Voices from the margin jumped in my head, they were blocked and disillusioned, locked below in the shed. Seeking promotions, recognition and praise, but ran into barriers, attitudes and hate. I shined a Light on their plight one day. Hearing their heartache, their anguish and pains,

Voices from the margin jumped in my head, block and disillusioned, they were trying different ways to get ahead. Their stories, perceptions, contentions and fears lay dormant and mute behind walls containing tears. They worked diligently and long, hoping today would be the day, when promotions would come with advancements and pay.

"Why are these people afraid of our work?" We want only to taste of the realms of success. We paid the price with sacrifice and faith but the mighty is determined to break our embrace. So I listened to their heartaches, perceptions and pleas. I transformed their miseries locked deep



behind tears. I shined a Light on their plight one day. After hearing their  
heartache, their perceptions and pains, Voices from the margin, now rise  
etched from the flat, one-dimensional page.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

Appendix A  
Focus Group Questions

1. What are your views of minority/majority relations in your organization?
2. How do minority professionals (African-American, Latino, males and females) find out what is going on in your organization in regards to positions available, or other opportunities?
3. Can you identify any barrier minorities face in advancing to upper management? Or barriers when seeking management positions?
4. When you were hired, what were you told about your opportunities for advancement?
5. Did your perceptions change once you became a seasoned employee?
6. Can you identify incidents of discrimination, and/or stereotypical behaviors involving your race/ethnicity?
7. Where and when did this occur in your career?
8. How do you feel about the racial climate in your organization?
9. Does your organization have diversity training?
10. Do you think your co-workers are receptive to diversity training?
11. Is there any more information you would like to share with me that has not had a chance to emerge?
12. Can you recall any experiences where co-workers effectively worked to make cross-cultural connections?
13. Do you have any suggestions for solutions for more effective sensitivity/diversity training?

14. Or suggestions for the make-up of an effective mentor?
  1. Would the mentor need to be a minority?
  2. What areas should the mentor advise in?
  3. Have you seen a successful mentor/mentee relationship? Why?

Appendix B

In-Depth Interview Guide

## Appendix B

### In-Depth Interview Guide

Interview questions for the in-depth interviews will come from the findings of the focus groups. After the transcripts from the focus groups have been transcribed and thematized, I will revisit the focus group participants and ask them to discuss their responses in more depth. The co-researchers will also help bring out the meaning of the focus group discussions and bring more meaning to their lived experiences in organizations. In addition, I will ask participants to expound on topics if I felt they held back responses from the focus group.

A suggestion for starting dialogue include the following question:

- 1) Is there any more information that has emerged since the focus group that you would like to share?

## Appendix C

### Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Clearance

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: January 12, 2001

To: Mark P. Orbe, Principal Investigator  
Nancy Greer-Williams, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Michael S. Pritchard, Interim Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 00-10-18

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Diversity in the 21st Century: Perceptions of Minority Professionals in Organizations" has been **approved** under the **full** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: December 20, 2000



Appendix D  
Consent Form

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 WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
 

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 WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
 H. S. I. R. B.  
 Approved for use for one year from this date:

DEC 20 2000

 x Michael J. Pritchard  
 HSIRB Chair

Principal Investigator: Dr. Mark P. Orbe

Student Investigator: Nancy Greer-Williams

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled, *Diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Perceptions of Minority Professionals in Organizations*. This research is intended to gain insight into the organizational experiences of African-American, Latino/Latina, male and female minority managers (middle and upper levels). This project is Nancy Greer-Williams' thesis project.

I will be asked to attend two one-hour focus group sessions and one 45 minute to one-hour, in-depth interview with the student investigator, Nancy Greer-Williams. I will be asked to meet the student investigator for the focus group sessions on the Second floor conference room in Sprau Tower. The focus group sessions will involve multiple respondents that have similar interests: minority professionals willing to respond to questions regarding race/ethnicity issues in organizations. I may also be asked general information about myself, such as level of education, and employment status. The in-depth interviews will involve private discussions of questions raised from the focus group sessions

I understand that all information discussed in the focus groups is confidential and I will not discuss the contents or information regarding other participants or organizations, outside the confines of the focus group. All of the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name or the organization that I work for, will not appear on any reports or papers. I understand that my identity shall remain confidential throughout the length of this project. I can opt to either use my first name only or an alias. In addition, I understand that my responses will be audiotaped, transcribed, and later reviewed by the principal and student investigator of this project. The audiotapes and written transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigators possession and at no time be handled by anyone other than the investigators of this study. All materials will be retained for three years (as required by the university policy) in a locked file cabinet and then subsequently destroyed. In short, I understand that at no time will any of my responses be linked to me personally, instead my comments will be attributed generally to minority professional managers.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. However for participant's protection, all data collected from focus groups and personal interviews will be written up in such a way that individual subjects cannot be identified by what they say. I understand that the final publication will be written in such a way that removed any

DEC 20 2000

x Michael J. Pritchard  
HSIRB Chair

identifiers to myself or the organization I work for. Still, one potential risk of my participation in this project is the unlikely, but possible, risk of being identified as a result of participating in this study.

I may be upset by the content of the interview, and can terminate the interview at any time. If I need counseling about this topic, I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to pursue it. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is by having the chance to talk about my organizational experiences, which research indicates is beneficial. In addition, other minority professionals who experience difficulties in organizations may benefit from the knowledge that is gained from this research.

I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study or want a final copy of this paper, I may contact Dr. Mark P. Orbe, (616) 387-3132 or Nancy Greer-Williams, (616) 387-7501. I may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the vice president for research at 387-8298 with any concerns that I have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not have a stamped date and signature.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Consent Obtained by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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