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# Underlying Factors That Perpetuate Race-Based Discrimination in the Workplace in Washington State

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MA, American Intercontinental University, 2011

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Racial discrimination adversely impacts the well-being of individuals in the workplace. However, it is unclear what specific factors persist in terms of discrimination based on race among public employees, especially in Washington state. Using intersectionality theory, critical race theory, and social identity theory as a framework, this qualitative exploratory sociological case study involved exploring underlying factors perpetuating race-based discrimination in Washington's workplace. A singular research question guided this research: Underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State. Data were collected from 10 workplace investigators in Washington state, archival data, and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission statistics. Data were analyzed thematically and triangulated. Two overarching themes emerged from the analysis (1) difficulties in terms of developing founded race-based cases and (2) power dynamics in terms of making race-based allegations. Data showed there was a lack of concrete guidelines to serve as a basis for what constituted racial discrimination, creating ambiguity regarding what was, or was not, discriminatory. Apart from insufficient grounds for building a case, race-based discrimination cases also often entailed lack of witnesses and evidence against perpetrators. Findings highlight the need to advocate for clearer policies of what constitutes race-based discrimination in the workplace that also address more subtle forms of discrimination. Employers must work together with human resources to ensure that their organizational policies are clear and consistently implemented. By addressing these issues, social change may be facilitated, as minority employees become more protected in the workplace.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I give all thanks to My Heavenly Father and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his continued grace and strength to finish this process. By the Holy Spirit, I was assured continuously that all things are possible through God. To Henrietta, my beautiful wife, the love of my life, words cannot express how much your Godly inspiration and support mean to me. This has been a journey for both of us, and I could not have completed this process without you. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and steadfast commitment to helping me achieve this goal. To Christopher, my son, this is to inspire you that you can fulfill your purpose in Christ. To my Pastor, Father, and Mentor, Rev. Dr. Joel Odimba, thank you for your continuously Godly guidance and encouragement to complete this degree. You advised me on the type of doctorate degree to pursue and how to remain faithful to God's work while working on this goal. This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Henrietta B. Afful, my parents Rev. Moses Afful Snr., and Mrs. Vida and my Pastor Rev. Dr. Joel Odimba.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Race-based discrimination is a prevailing occurrence and issue in the United States (U.S.), especially in the state of Washington. Minority groups who experience race-based discrimination in the workplace may have decreased wellbeing, experiencing inequality and disparities in the workplace and economy (Agrawal et al., 2018; Berrey et al., 2017; Elias & Paradies, 2021; Harnois & Bastos, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, race-based discrimination in the workplace is an important problem, especially given high rates of minority groups in the labor market (Lee et al., 2017; Talley & Cotton, 2019). Therefore, understanding factors involved in perpetuating racial discrimination is essential to addressing prevalent discriminatory incidents occurring in the workplace. However, it remains unclear what specific factors persist in terms of discrimination based on race in public employment, especially in the state of Washington.

**Background of the Study**

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which was enacted in 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race in any employment decision, which includes recruitment, training, compensation, and firing. Despite the enactment Civil Rights Movement and landmark laws such as Title VII, racism persists in the workplace (Agrawal et al., 2018; Park, 2018; Sugarman et al., 2018). Park (2018) reported that enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has not eliminated discrimination and oppression based on race and color. Triana et al. (2015) explained amendments to civil rights laws had not eliminated racism at the workplace.

Race-based discrimination charges between 2009 and 2017 indicate victims of racial discrimination received $781.9 million in monetary awards (EEOC, 2019).

**Table 1**

*EEOC Statistics of Workplace Race-Based Discrimination*

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 28.6% | 28.6% | 32.1% | 27.3% | 28.5% | 30.4% | 32.2% | 30.6% | 32.1% |

*Note.* Washington State Statistics Reports from 2009 to 2017 (EEOC, 2019).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has not been able to eliminate discrimination and oppression based on race (EEOC, 2017; Park, 2018). Race-based discrimination comprises 33.9% of total charges filed with the Commission (EEOC, 2017). It is vital to address this problem, given that prevailing racism in the workplace limits equal employment opportunities for minorities (Agrawal et al., 2018; Sugarman et al., 2018). Moreover, public organizations need to be proactive in terms of ensuring and promoting positive diversity in the workplace (Lopez-Littleton et al., 2018; Oberfield, 2016). Oberfield (2016) noted only some public organizations had been committed to ensuring diversity in the workplace. Lopez-Littleton et al. (2018) indicated all levels of government need to have an inclusive working climate with race-conscious dialogues.

Despite the high prevalence of race-based discrimination in the workplace, there is a lack of research regarding factors that persist in terms of discrimination based on race in public employment.

Minority groups make up 38% of the United States labor market, and the percentage is expected to increase in the coming years (Lee et al., 2017; Talley & Cotton,

2019). However, members of these minority groups are still marginalized in terms of education and occupations, reinforcing economic disparity in the workplace (Agrawal et al., 2018; Berrey et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017). It is important to address and explore further, given that race-based discrimination adversely and significantly impacts the wellbeing and human dignity of minority individuals in society in the United States and the workplace (Elias & Paradies, 2021; Harnois & Bastos, 2018).

Underlying factors perpetuate race-based discrimination in public workplaces (Hawkins, 2020; Lopez-Littleton et al., 2018). Based on current literature, it is unclear what specific factors persist in terms of discrimination based on race among public employees, especially in Washington. This qualitative exploratory sociological case study involved bridging this gap in literature by exploring underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington.

## Problem Statement

The problem was the prevalence of race-based discrimination in public employment. The specific problem was that there are underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington. Racial discrimination adversely impacts the wellbeing and human dignity of individuals in society and the workplace (Elias & Paradies, 2021; Harnois & Bastos, 2018; Triana et al., 2015). According to Triana et al. (2015), racial discrimination is associated with increase stress levels, job dissatisfaction, and employee turnover, which adversely impacts organizational success.

Race-based discrimination in the workplace continues to prevail even after the Civil Rights Movement and landmark laws such as Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Furthermore, minority groups continue to report discrimination against them in the workplace because of their race (Imoagene, 2018; Wingfield & Chavez, 2020; Winn, 2018). Color-blind racial attitudes and self-esteem significantly impact perceptions of racial discrimination (Hawkins, 2020).

## Purpose of the Study

This qualitative exploratory sociological case study involved exploring underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington. I studied responses of workplace investigators involving state employment. I conducted interviews using open-ended questions with workplace investigators and reviewed statistical and archival documents from the state and EEOC to gather data. Findings of the study may highlight actions and behaviors that make racial discrimination persist in the workplace.

## Research Questions

RQ1: What are underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state?

## Conceptual Framework

Qualitative researchers conduct generative and reflective analysis of every aspect of a research phenomenon.

According to Rodat (2017), a conceptual framework for studying racism should differentiate the racism phenomenon from ethnocentrism and xenophobia. A

comprehensive analysis of racism as a phenomenon must highlight ideological concepts and emerging attitudes and actions that lead to discrimination.

Levi-Strauss (1988) asserted races are hierarchized, resulting in a perceived superior race dominating, exploiting, and even attempting to eliminate other races. The study was framed using critical race theory, intersectionality of races, and social identity theory to examine this topic.

Critical race theory is rooted in the 1950s civil rights movement for racial justice and commitment to racial equality. The theory posits that social power held by the dominant race in any population marginalizes minority races, and the dominant race does not have any inherent motivation to change the current racist state (Dittmer, 2017). Critical race theory involves challenging unfair treatment and advocating for social reforms that prohibit unfair practices and allow equal employment opportunities (Dittmer, 2017).

According to Babbie (20147) William Edward Burghardt DuBois in 1903 argued African Americans are conflicted when they must deal with dual consciousness at the workplace and in a society experiencing duality reality, which causes a lack of self-confidence as perceived as a second-class person. The intersectionality theory argues that social positions are relational and defined by systems of power. Therefore, the theory is used to illustrate how systems of power and individuals interact in society to marginalize people based on their social identity characteristics, such as race, creating privileged and marginalized classes (Pitcan et al., 2018).

As introduced by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, the social identity theory identifies that individual identity with social categories lead to categories of in-groups and out-groups (Joyce, 2018). These categorized groups within the society are placed into prototypes and stereotypes as defined by the unique attributes of members. Joyce et al. (2015) argued race is one of the measures through which individuals and groups are categorized in terms of social identity. These theories were used to highlight fundamental causes of marginalization, which federal and state laws have been instituted to eliminate. However, this phenomenon persists.

### Nature of the Study

This research was a qualitative study. The qualitative study method involves using an interpretive and naturalistic approach to understanding the world through gathering data (Burkholder et al., 2016). According to Burkholder et al. (2016), qualitative research occurs in uncontrolled environments to describe a phenomenon according to participants. Primary data collection strategies include interviews, focus groups, archival documents, surveys, observation field notes, participant-generated documents, and researcher journals (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews enable researchers and participants to engage in social interaction via asking participants probing questions concerning their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I adopted an exploratory sociological case study research to study a contemporary phenomenon within the current context. Yin (2018) asserted researchers could better study what research questions using exploratory instead of explanatory or descriptive. Sociological case studies enable examination of collective behavior of members of a

group in social relationships as well as determination of factors that influence outcomes of events (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Identifying a case or phenomenon and the bounded unit is essential in adopting a case study design (Yin, 2018). The bounded unit was Washington state general government departments, and the phenomenon was race-based discrimination charges. Case studies involve employing a variety of data sources. I intended to use individual interviews as one of the primary data sources. In addition, I planned to review current and historical statistics. According to Yin (2018), analysis of historical data is relevant for studying the prevalence of a phenomenon. Documents and archival data reviews were used to gather relevant information, providing contextual historical information. Archival records are mainly supplemental to other data sources (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), the constructivism paradigm is that there are multiple realities, and no single theory can describe relevant facts exhaustively. Since realities are in the minds of people, generation of new knowledge occurs during relational interactions between individuals who attribute meaning to facts to construct reality (Burkholder et al., 2016). I studied workplace investigators in Washington state departments to determine their experiences of the underlying factors that persist in race-based discrimination in the workplace.

The population sample for this study was workplace investigators from human resources divisions across Washington state. I used purposive sampling to obtain participants who met specific criteria for inclusion. I used criterion-based case selection sampling to identify participants who met criteria as workplace investigators who had

experience with investigating race-based discrimination. Criterion sampling involves using questionnaires to select likely information-rich respondents for in-depth interviews (Patton, 2015). After getting permission from Washington state, I sent invitation emails to workplace investigators within state HR divisions with some questions to select respondents who met criteria in order to participate in semi-structured in-person interviews. I sought a referral from other workplace investigators in state departments. The sample size was 10 participants. According to Mason (2010), the number of participants for a qualitative study range between 15 and 50. Data saturation was reached when data collection does not yield new themes and there are no unexplained discoveries (Mason, 2010).

## Definitions

The following definitions were used operationally within this study:

*Discrimination*: Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals and groups due to specific characteristics such as race, disability, sex, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation (APA, 2019). According to the APA (2019), discrimination is a public health issue.

*Race-based discrimination:* Race-based discrimination is "a complex amalgamation of factors which coalesce to form racially discriminatory thoughts and feelings, which then inform discriminatory behaviors" (Hawkins, 2020, p. 1).

*Workplace investigators:* In this study, workplace investigators are investigators from HR who have experience in investigating race-based discrimination (AWI, 2021).

**Assumptions**

Assumptions are foundational truths that cannot be tested; however, they are assumed to be true to make the study meaningful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are several assumptions in this study. Firstly, I assumed participants thoroughly worked with race-based discrimination cases.

Secondly, I assumed all participants answered interview questions truthfully and accurately. Another assumption was that the qualitative approach can offer meaningful insights regarding this topic

**Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries of research imposed by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are several delimitations in this study. This study involved workplace investigators who were working in the state of Washington. This delimitation was imposed to keep the scope of the study reasonable and feasible in terms of identifying and contacting potential participants. Further, only a limited number of interviews was feasible. I excluded workplace investigators without experience investigating race-based discrimination in the workplace.

The research problem addressed in the study was race-based discrimination among public employees in Washington state. This specific focus was chosen given the prevalence of race-based discrimination in this context, as well as the fact that I am a HR professional and employee of Washington state. This allowed me to have access to workplace investigators from HR divisions across the state of Washington who have experience investigating race-based discrimination. Therefore, study findings regarding

race-based discrimination were not applicable in other contexts and settings outside of public employment in Washington state.

## Limitations

Limitations are unavoidable weaknesses of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Limitations are often due to the study's methodology. One of the potential limitations of this study involves bias. As a researcher, I have a background in HR as an employee of Washington state. This helped facilitate population access; however, biases may arise due to perceptions and experience when investigating discrimination cases. Another limitation was that I am a racial minority. This may potentially influence data gathering during interviews and interpretation of data. To address these potential limitations, I took steps to minimize effects of my preconceptions and biases. Some steps to decrease the effects of my preconceptions and biases include keeping journals to examine such biases and practicing reflexivity to document notes progressively. I documented my experiences as a HR professional and racial minority through journaling. This process enabled me to identify how my personal experiences potentially influenced data gathering during interviews and data interpretation. Additionally, this study was limited in terms of its generalizability, given the focus on one specific area (Washington state).

Another limitation was participants' biases. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), qualitative research occurs in uncontrolled environments to describe phenomena in the view of participants. As such, participants' biases might arise, as the focus is on their perceptions and experience in investigating race-based discrimination cases. To help

ensure dependability of study findings, I assured participants that their responses were confidential.

## Significance of the Study

### Significance to Practice

This study involved exploring factors that make race-based discrimination persist in the workplace.

Discrimination filings from every protected class have increased, including race, disability, sex, religion, and national origin (EEOC, 2017). I sought to determine why state government departments in Washington that are accountable to citizens still experience race-based discrimination in the workplace. Study findings may enable governments and organizations to determine underlying factors perpetuating racism in the workplace. Also, findings may enable state governments and other organizations to implement and enforce policies that limit discrimination based on racism in the workplace. The workplace is a social system where employees interact with coworkers, supervisors, and management; employees tend to be satisfied when they feel fairly treated.

### Significance to Theory

Society is characterized by conflicts among social groups and the inherent motivation to challenge unfair treatment and advocate for social reforms to ensure equal employment opportunities (Dittmer, 2017). Interactions between systems of power tend to marginalize members of society based on assigned social identities (Pitcan et al., 2018). Federal and state-level civil rights laws are intended to prohibit any form of

marginalization in the workplace based on race and other factors. Even though these laws have reduced overt forms of workplace race-based discrimination, race-based discrimination continues to persist in the workplace. Findings of the study are intended to highlight underlying factors that cause persistence of race-based discrimination in the workplace, focusing on Washington state departments. The study may advance knowledge in the discipline by highlighting underlying factors and how they relate to fundamental theories.

**Significance to Social Change**

Employees who encounter racism experience adverse health conditions (Harnois & Bastos, 2018). Employees who experience adverse effects due to workplace racism tend to extend these impacts to their families. Workplace racism limits equal employment opportunities for minorities. Findings of this study highlight race-based discrimination in the workplace as a social issue and identifying underlying factors that persist. Findings will enable organizational and society leaders to implement measures that will move toward eliminating racism in the workplace.

Organizations are social systems where employees interact with coworkers and management. Employees tend to be satisfied when they feel fairly treated (Al-Zu'bi, 2010). Fairness is an essential factor in terms of determining organizational justice. Employees' perceptions of fairness are related to distributive justice (fairness of employment outcomes), procedural justice ( fairness of rules and procedures), and interactional justice (fairness of interpersonal justice).

There is a positive relationship between organizational justice and job satisfaction. It is essential to note that these interactions define employees' perceptions of fairness. This study will enable organizational leaders to identify factors that persist in terms of discrimination based on race in the workplace. Understanding these factors will allow organizational leaders to implement measures that will prohibit racial discrimination in the workplace, resulting in positive social change in the workplace, which can positively change society's attitudes.

## Summary and Transition

The problem was the prevalence of race-based discrimination in terms of public employment in the state of Washington. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study was to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in this state. The study was conducted using the following theories: critical race theory, intersectionality of races, and social identity theory.

Chapter 1 included an overview of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study. In Chapter 2, the background of the study and its theoretical foundations are addressed according to extant literature. This includes examining relevant and empirical studies regarding the phenomenon of race-based discrimination in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Sugarman et al. (2018) reported race discrimination constitutes 57% of overall discrimination. Many people have been denied jobs and promotions because of their race, but are rarely told that race is the reason because such discrimination is illegal (Williams, 2017). Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on race in any employment decision, which includes recruitment, training, compensation, and firing. This has not been able to eliminate discrimination and oppression based on race (Park, 2018). Minority groups make up 38% of the labor market and are expected to increase (Lee et al., 2017). These groups are still marginalized in terms of education and occupations, which reinforces economic disparity (Lee et al., 2017). The EEOC (2017) indicated that race discrimination accounts for 33.9% of charges filed with the commission.

According to Wheeler et al. (2014), discrimination occurs at all levels in the workplace. The fact that racial discrimination adversely impacts the wellbeing of individuals in society and the workplace is a general problem (Harnois & Bastos, 2018). Racial discrimination has been associated with stress, job dissatisfaction, and employee turnover, adversely impacting organizational success (Triana et al., 2015). The specific problem is that underlying factors perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study is to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state. The study involved exploring factors that make race-based

discrimination persist in the workplace. Therefore, it is necessary to identify sources of complex inherent prejudicial attitudes that make racism persist. Findings of the study highlight actions and behaviors that make racial discrimination persist in the workplace and add knowledge to the literature.

In Chapter 2, the theoretical foundation and relevant studies are discussed. Relevant studies were organized into categories, progressing from broad subject matter to the gap in literature that was addressed by this study. I addressed discrimination in the workplace, perceptions and experiences, reasons for, challenges involving , preventing, and impact of racial discrimination in the workplace, in addition to benefits of diversity in the workplace, difficulties in terms of identifying and addressing discrimination in the workplace, factors that impact ordinary citizens' perceptions of what type of treatment results in discrimination, and determining factors that persist in terms of discrimination.

**Literature Search Strategy**

Articles related to discrimination within the workplace were obtained by entering the following keywords in Google Scholar: *discrimination*, *workplace discrimination*, *reasons for discrimination*, *prevention of discrimination*, *experiences of discrimination in the workplace*, *perceptions of discrimination in the workplace*, *equal employment opportunity*, *factors influencing discrimination*, *impact of discrimination in the workplace*, and *benefits of diversity*. Searches were conducted using the following databases: SAGE Journals, EBSCOHost, ABI/INFORM Collection, Springer, PsycNet, Taylor and Francis, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. The search was mainly limited

to only scholarly peer-reviewed articles that were published between 2019 and 2023. Only 5% of articles were published earlier than 2015.

## Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality was first invented by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw used the theory of intersectionality to describe concurrent experiences involving oppression faced by women of color. Discrimination does not fit neatly into categories of racism or sexism all the time; it is often a combination of both (Boyd, 2018).

Few people embrace only one trait in their identity, and convergence among crucial aspects of social identity creates different experiences (Sugarman et al., 2018). Pitcan et al. (2018) argued Black men's experiences include racism and gender discrimination. Therefore, a woman in a minority group might experience sexual discrimination, racial discrimination, or both (Boyd, 2018).

## Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination among state government workers in Washington state. The literature review was focused on discrimination in the workplace, which is still a problem. Experiences and perceptions of employees and employers are discussed to understand why discrimination in the workplace is still a problem. How to prevent discrimination in the workplace and its impact on the workplace and its employees is also reviewed.

### Discrimination in the Workplace

Throughout the history of the U.S., racial inequality has been a present issue (Shah, 2019). Effects of racial inequality can be seen in terms of employment, criminal

justice, and healthcare (Shah, 2019). Triana et al. (2015) defined discrimination as rejecting equal treatment of individuals because of their group identity. The EEOC (2017) defined discrimination as treating someone unfavorable because he or she is of a certain race because of personal characteristics. Polanco-Roman et al. (2019) stated racial discrimination involves behavioral displays of racism that are personally related to negative life events that is frequently experienced by racial and ethnic minority groups. Racial discrimination persists widely in the U.S., creating discrepancies between Black and White individuals (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). According to Sugarman et al. (2018), race discrimination constitutes 57% of overall discrimination.

African Americans experience fewer employment opportunities, negative career mobility, lower salaries, and higher unemployment rates compared with whites (Whitaker, 2019). Whitaker (2019) referenced that EEOC statistics indicate that the commission received 89,385 charges of racial discrimination at the workplace, referencing that workplace discrimination based on race continues to persist in the millennium. Workplace discrimination continues to restrict workforce participation and satisfaction for several Americans (Whitaker, 2019). These individuals are seldom told that race is why such discrimination is illegal. Another reason for discrimination in the workplace is that executives believe that they are employing and promoting individuals justly when they are not (Williams, 2017). Whitaker (2019) explained that pre-employment discrimination could occur during recruitment, compensation, promotion, and termination due to processes, stereotypes, and biases associated with minority populations. Pre-employment discrimination is difficult to identify and address, limiting

employment opportunities to minorities who might have the necessary skills and abilities to contribute to organizational success (Whitaker, 2019). Research conducted by Kellogg professor Lauren Rivera showed that managers do not quote or even observe race as a factor when making a decision. Managers use vague assessment criteria to filter out individuals who are not like them. According to Williams (2017), marginalized racial and ethnic groups are more often than whites thought to be not the cultural fit or not ready for high-level roles.

African Americans tend to face more employee scrutiny than white coworkers, resulting in adverse workplace actions against them (Wirts, 2017). According to Lee et al. (2019), an interval of 50% and 75% of black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents indicated that they had experienced discriminatory treatment. More non-whites experience discriminatory treatment than whites. McElhattan et al. (2017) confirmed that African Americans perceive anti-black discrimination at higher rates than whites and Latinos. In 2017, 34% of 84,254 charges were due to racial discrimination in the workplace (Daniels & Thornon, 2019). Out of these charges, 25,000 were from African Americans compared to 10% Caucasians, and $76.9 million in monetary benefits were paid to plaintiffs. According to Daniels and Thornton (2019), diversity poses challenges in the workplace when information is not shared due to mistrust and acrimony among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

**Causes of Racial Discrimination in the Workplace**

Discrimination persists in the workplace (Brewster & Rusche, 2017). Opie and Laura (2017) explained Black lives do not matter in the workplace in America. They

pointed out that racial discrimination has laced U.S. history from slavery to the present-day workplace. However, researchers have ignored that slavery and racism influenced management practice and its relations with contemporary racism at the workplace.

According to Brewster and Rusche (2017), studies have found that restaurant servers tend to provide services based on their customers' race. The researchers explained that Americans of color are prone to discriminatory treatment in full-service restaurants. The researchers stated that existing studies noted this phenomenon results from a workplace environment that allows racialized, stereotypical behavior and discrimination against customers of color. In such an environment, servers and managers use coded language to disparage black customers. The authors referenced Denny's restaurant's use of code names that disparage black customers. Management allowed restaurant servers to behave with racial stereotypes.

Brewster and Rusche's (2017) study focused on the effects of a racialized workplace with a racist and stereotypical discourse on employees. The researchers found a positive relationship between restaurant servers' self-professed discriminatory behavior and observed workplace discourse. They found that the relationship was not motivated by restaurant servers' willingness to participate in discriminatory behavior and that the restaurant managers' behaviors might have influenced the behavior of the servers.

Daniels and Thornton (2019) adopted modern discrimination theory, which argues that resentful individuals and biases against minorities engage in discriminatory behaviors that are obscure and hidden; even though ambiguous in content, expressions are concealed and subtle in the display. These behaviors are not unlawful and are

considered insignificant. Daniels and Thornton (2019) also referred to Cortina's 2008 theory of selective incivility, a subtle form of discrimination in modern organizations.

Derivative (imitative) racial discrimination is a process of institutional discrimination (Woodson, 2016). Woodson (2016) highlighted that the process under this concept includes social and cultural systems that limit the workers in minority groups working in predominantly white organizations, even though there are no outright racial biases and stereotypes in which certain social and cultural dynamics impede the careers of minority workers in predominantly white firms even in the absence of racial biases and stereotypes (Woodson, 2016). According to Woodson (2016), derivative racial discrimination is based on cultural homophily, individuals' tendency to gravitate towards others with similar backgrounds and interests. This natural tendency disadvantages people who belong to minority groups in white-dominated workplaces influenced by different cultural and social orientations. These unintended natural tendencies also result in racial disparity in the workplace, limiting equal employment to others while enhancing others' opportunities. Cruz (2016) referenced the racial triangulation theory by Claire Jean Kim to study the racialization of the labor market, identifying the avenues employers adopt to discriminate against minority employees. The theory identifies employers' practices of labor market inequality and racial inequality in organizational dynamics such as the workplace. Cruz (2016) explained that even though blacks are insiders of American society, they are persistently mistreated and considered an inferior racial group. Asian Americans are considered outsiders but hold a superior status to black Americans, creating a conflictive relationship among these groups with whites considered

superior. Race relation triangulation causes whites to remain a superior group in a multiracial American society, with blacks and Asian Americans encountering inequality (Cruz, 2016). Cruz (2016) concluded the study by stating that triangulation theory moves away from binary sociological analysis, identifying how different groups of color experience different forms of discrimination.

**Discriminatory Bias**

African Americans tend to face employee scrutiny compared to white coworkers, resulting in adverse workplace actions against them (Wirts, 2017). Obvious racism had given way to subtle and often ignorant discriminatory biases. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has reduced implicit forms of discrimination, giving way to subtle ignorant biases since complaints of racial discrimination must establish a direct link between their allegations and discrimination. The current forms of discrimination should require plaintiffs to establish causal relations.

Wirts (2017) argued that equal employment opportunity barriers would continue to persist. The Title VII of the act cannot hold employers responsible for implicit biases. Wirts (2017) referenced a theory of responsibility without intending, which argues that employers compensate employees who are tangibly harmed by implicit discrimination. Wirts (2017) referenced a 2014 study that required partners from 22 law firms to evaluate legal memorandum written by African Americans and Caucasians. The findings indicated that Caucasians were ranked higher than African Americans, who were more scrutinized intentionally. This confirms the saying that African Americans must be twice as good to get the same recognition as their Caucasian peers.

Wirts (2017) pointed out that other studies connect racial discrimination to implicit biases. Employers must pay for the damage they cause even if they do so because of indirect biases. These actions by employers generate costs for society at large and individual workers. Wirts (2017) argued that without employer liability for implicit bias and discriminatory effects, the obstacles to equal employment opportunities would continue, and victims of discrimination would carry the costs of the unfair decisions made by employers.

Malos (2015) indicated that the United States appellate courts currently focus on overt biases. The researcher expressed that after years of court litigations, employers know the legal ramifications of discrimination in the workplace. Still, employers may have become somewhat more clever in evading liability based on the direct indication of stereotype discrimination through experience and time. Malos (2015) examined various kinds of stereotype biases related to gender, parenthood, use of family leave, age, disability, and perceived disability, which may improperly influence performance evaluations or employment decisions based on them. Boone

(2017) revealed that the manager's bias toward minority workers adversely impacted those workers' performance. The study was conducted using the Implicit Association Test to examine the manager's unconscious bias toward minority workers with characteristics such as race, gender, and ethnicity. The test measured the manager's bias towards North African sounding names since French civil rights laws forbid asking about workers' ethnicity. Managers with lower scores were more likely to associate the names of employees with incompetence.

Researchers realized that minority workers performed poorly during days with biased work when tracking employee performance. The researchers speculated that biased managers intentionally limit their interaction with minority employees since French laws restrict implicit bias against minority workers (Boone, 2017). Legal commentators have expressed that civil rights laws have reduced explicit biases and should no longer be tolerated in society today (Malos, 2015).

A sense of accountability is one of the avenues to prevent implicit and explicit forms of discrimination (Williams, 2018). Williams (2018) examined the circumstances under which liability to a committee of peers reduced racial bias and discrimination. The researcher argued that racially diverse employment committees might create a sense of liability intended to reduce discrimination, as decision-makers must explain employment decisions. The researcher found that liability to a racially diverse committee leads to more hiring and promotion of underrepresented minorities than does the liability to a homogeneous committee. The evidence presented in this study suggested that whites on diverse committees are more likely to value diversity, acknowledge bias, and make decisions inclusive of racial minorities (Williams, 2018).

**Experiences and Perceptions of Minority Groups in the Workplace**

Racial minorities come to the workplace with different lived experiences, which generate a wealth of diversity for organizational productivity in creativity and innovation (Daniels & Thornton, 2019). African Americans encounter various forms of discrimination at the workplace, limiting employment and career mobility opportunities (Whitaker, 2019).

According to Whitaker (2019), African Americans disproportionately experience structural barriers limiting participation in employment. The lived experiences of 12 professionals who are still early in their careers, working in predominantly white organizations, were studied by Pitcan et al. (2018). They divided racial microaggression into four domains: context, experience, costs, and coping. The findings of the research stated that microaggression could impact the perception of discrimination in the workplace and the resulting adverse feelings of marginalized employees. The findings also indicated that microaggression adversely impacts black men's work experiences and job satisfaction or individuals in minority groups.

Dittmer (2017) examined the experiences of non-Caucasian faculty teaching at small private colleges and universities in the Midwest and identified experiential factors contributing to successful recruitment and retention. The findings indicated that non-Caucasians would accept a faculty appointment in predominantly white colleges when it allows them the opportunity to work directly with students, work in a collegial atmosphere, and the opportunity to be role models. The participants stated that despite the lack of diversity in the Midwest, they found the Midwest people to be accepting and welcoming to non-Caucasians. The most significant finding was that nearly all participants were recruited through personal contact at the institution instead of traditional faculty recruiting techniques.

People of color remain underrepresented in many health professions despite the need for a more racially and ethnically diverse workforce (Snyder & Schwartz, 2019). Snyder and Schwartz (2019) reviewed recent literature on the experiences of racial

discrimination among healthcare professionals by examining studies published between 2006 and 2016. The review restated that healthcare professionals experience racism from patients and the patients' family members. Healthcare professionals also experience racism from their colleagues and supervisors, contributing to employment disparities.

Agrawal et al. (2018) investigated the different forms of experiences of discrimination in the medical workplace. The researchers sent out a total of 526 questionnaires, which included a demographic survey form and the Everyday Discrimination Scale. The results showed that the participants were treated with less courtesy than others. The participants felt that other people were better than them. These experiences and feelings occurred almost daily for 4.1% of participants. According to the results, ancestry was the most commonly reported reason for discrimination (31.3%). Agrawal et al. (2018) concluded their study by stating that discrimination experienced by doctors in the workplace was more common among minority groups.

Racism and sexism are issues in the Canadian labor market that affect Canadian immigrants' outcomes in Toronto (Branker, 2017). The lived experiences of immigrants in Toronto were examined by Banker (2017), emphasizing their perceptions and experiences of labor market discrimination. The study included a series of in-depth interviews. Structural and institutional practices inherent in the Canadian labor market are the primary reasons for several immigrants' poor labor outcomes. According to this study's findings, discrimination in Toronto's labor market negatively influences labor market outcomes for Caribbean immigrants. The participants felt discriminated against and believed that Canadian employers have negative opinions about the skill and work

ethic of the Caribbean workers. The participants also believed that their race limited their

chance to access opportunities for promotion into management positions. According to

the participants who held management positions, they have experienced race-based

conflict with junior staff (Branker, 2017).

Hsieh et al. (2017) studied mistreatment encountered by Latina hotel

housekeepers due to policy and interpersonal relations in 75 hotels in the southeastern

United States. The respondents reported lower pay and benefits, interpersonal

mistreatment by supervisors, supervisor favoritism, unfair work assignments, verbal

abuse, and disrespect. Hsieh et al. (2017) concluded their study by stating that Latina

hotel housekeepers experience workplace mistreatment that adversely impacts their

psychological and physical well-being. Imoagene (2018) discussed the workplace

experiences of second-generation Nigerian adults in the United States. The researcher

drew data from semi-structured interviews with 67 respondents. The researcher showed

that second-generation Nigerians vary in whether they perceive racial discrimination in

the workplace. Almost half of the second-generation Nigerians felt discriminated against

because of their race (Imoagene, 2018).

Workplace discrimination is vaguer, with interracial relations often perceived

differently by different individuals (Offermann et al., 2014). Not only do black workers'

perceptions of racial discrimination arise from being in the minority, but they also arise

from their place in the organizational structure (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). Wingfield

and Chavez (2020) showed that black workers' status within an organization hierarchy

essentially informs perceptions of the nature and type of workplace discrimination. The

findings indicated that the perception of racial discrimination is established differently depending on the status of the organization and that organizations play a role in the different perceptions of discrimination (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020).

Offermann et al. (2014) added to the literature by examining individual color-blind attitudes, a key individual difference variable in the perception of discrimination in the workplace. The researchers examined the relationship between color-blind attitudes, including racial privilege, institutional discrimination, blatant racial issues, and perceptions of racial microaggressions, subtle to overt behavior. The findings of the study showed that institutional discrimination is fully meditated, and blatant racial discrimination is partially mediated by workplace microaggression and racial group membership. The perception of racial privilege is similar among racial groups in relation to microaggression. The researchers linked higher levels of color-blind worldviews to a lesser probability of perceiving microaggression. Non-Hispanic whites perceive color blindness as institutional blindness and blatant racism (Offermann et al., 2014).

The purpose of the study conducted by Chapa et al. (2020) was to examine how the perceptions of employees and the perceptions of individuals close to them influence employee reactions to perceived racial discrimination in the workplace. The results showed that the perceptions of individuals close to them influence employees' reactions to perceived racial discrimination. Job satisfaction is lower for employees who perceive low discrimination when individuals close to them perceive high discrimination against the employee. Chapa et al. (2020) expanded upon prior research and illustrated how close individuals could influence employees' reactions to perceived racial discrimination in the

workplace. The researchers concluded their study by stating that perceived racial discrimination leads to unfavorable outcomes for employees and organizations.

**Impact of Racial Discrimination**

African Americans continue to excessively face structural barriers that limit their participation in the workforce (Whitaker, 2019). The adverse impact of racial discrimination limits the opportunity for African Americans to gain employment and career mobility (Whitaker, 2019). Chapa et al. (2020) argued that racial discrimination adversely impacts employees' job satisfaction and employer outcomes. Job dissatisfaction is a predecessor of turnover, and higher turnover tends to influence organizational effectiveness outcomes. Chapa et al. (2020) indicated that racial discrimination is immoral and illegal, which can incur financial and image losses for organizations when employees file lawsuits. According to Hsieh et al. (2017), the hospitality industry is overwhelmed by extremely high and costly employee turnover and is dependent on immigrant and migrant labor. Discrimination leads to job dissatisfaction, insecurity, lack of control, chronic stress, occupational safety, and health issues. Triana et al. (2015) showed similar results to the previous statement. Their study's findings indicated that perceived racial discrimination impacts job attitudes, organizational citizenship, loyalty, physical health, and psychological health.

Poor mental health outcomes are linked with experiences of racial microaggressions, which are associated with perceptions of workplace discrimination (Pitcan et al., 2018; Skewes & Blume, 2019). Whitaker (2019) also highlighted in his study that racial discrimination causes medical and mental disabilities in African

Americans. Simons et al. (2018) explained that other researchers had found a relationship between race-related stressors and the poor health of black Americans. The researchers investigated elevated systemic inflammation, a strong predictor of chronic illness and mortality in ethnic groups. They used seven wave data and 20 years of medical information from 400 black Americans to examine the extent to which exposure to discrimination, including cumulative stress, stress generation, and predictive adaptive response, impacts the inflammation of adults at the age of 28. The findings indicated that exposure to discrimination and segregation predicts adult inflammation when adolescents are exposed to discrimination and segregation. The findings highlighted that these effects of discrimination and segregation during formative years are more severe than known health risk factors: inadequate diet, lack of exercise, and smoking.

Racial discrimination and oppression also negatively impact American Indians and Alaskan Natives compared with other ethnic groups (Skewes & Blume, 2019). According to Skewes and Blume (2019), racial discrimination affects American Indians, resulting in substance use disorder. The authors conducted qualitative research with semi-structured interviews of 25 American Indians who are critical informants from a reservation in Montana. The participants were asked to share their perception of substance abuse and what issues impact recovery. Even though the interview question did not ask race-related questions, interviewees referenced that stress from historical and current racism contributes to substance abuse and continued use. A participant referenced oppression as the primary source of sickness with drugs and alcohol. Repercussions of colonization also cause race-based stress among American Indians. The authors

referenced that the age-adjusted alcohol-related death rate is higher among American Indians. The authors also referenced the historical oppression by White Europeans to impose the supremacy of white culture on indigenous culture by subjecting their children to boarding houses and limiting cultural expressions. Treaties with American Indians were broken, and their lands were forcefully taken. The findings indicated that racial trauma adversely impacts health outcomes. Gonzales et al. (2016) found that discrimination was significantly associated with psychological stressors such as increased anger and personal distress. Polanco-Roman et al. (2019) determined the relations between racial discrimination and dissociation, a common response to trauma exposure. The researchers found that frequent racial discrimination was positively associated with dissociative symptoms. The researchers concluded their study by stating that individuals who experience racial discrimination as traumatic may be more vulnerable to dissociative symptoms. Wingfield and Chavez (2020) stated that higher stress and anger levels characterize black individuals who perceive racial discrimination. Triana et al. (2015) found that perceived discrimination not only hurts victims physically and mentally but also hurts organizational productivity. Companies need to avoid financially exploiting the vulnerabilities of immigrant workers, as these policies harm the companies themselves (Hsieh et al., 2019).

**Preventing and Combatting Racism**

Institutional policies with practical implementations may reduce discrimination based on race (Triana et al., 2015). Policies must address subtle and implicit verbal expressions of racial prejudice. Workplace policies must prohibit discrimination based on

race and punish perpetrators sternly. Policies should not entertain managers whose

behavior can be interpreted as tacit permission to follow (Brewster & Rusche, 2017).

Organizational leaders who espouse anti-discrimination in the workplace should enhance

policies that limit the natural tendencies of cultural homophily (Woodson, 2016). Policies

that will prevent racial discrimination in the workplace must be instituted (McElhatten et

al., 2017). Hsieh et al. (2019) gave examples of how employers could minimize

perceived mistreatment and promote a healthier work environment for Latina hotel

housekeepers at the policy level. Employers should re-evaluate their reward systems,

minimize pay inequities, avoid paying benefits or overtime by keeping employees

working below 40 hours, offer sick pay, and offer intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Hotel

companies should also make their employees aware of their employment rights. All

employees should be treated respectfully, which should be part of any company's social

responsibility towards employees (Hsieh et al., 2019). Training can help reduce unfair

treatment and discrimination in the workplace and should be given to all employees.

Hsieh et al. (2019) also advised employers to communicate a zero-tolerance policy on

discrimination, mistreatment, and harassment to all employees. Employers should hold

violators accountable and take disciplinary action against violators. Employers should not

penalize employees who file complaints, and they should complement proper procedures

and training to minimize negative behaviors. Hsieh et al. (2019) stated that discrimination

requires attention from policymakers, stakeholders, advocates, and researchers.

     Organizations turn to people analytics to find rational, scalable ways to reduce or

reverse bias and encourage diversity (William, 2017). This is a relatively modern field in

business processes and talent management that replaces gut choices with data-driven practices. People analytics seeks to be evidence-based. Employers can better manage the problems and risks in companies by evaluating business or sector data on minority groups and analyzing patterns in employing promotions and other decisions about talent (Williams, 2017). It is also vital to explore individual cases apart from evaluating business or sector data on minority groups, as systems and figures do not capture what it feels like to be the only black or Hispanic team member or the impact the marginalization has on individual employees and the group as a whole (Williams, 2017). Minority individuals should communicate their experiences with bias and share their own stories. Employers should learn about their employees' experiences and build trust to make the subject safe for discussion (Williams, 2017). It is not always easy for minority individuals to speak out as they feel that telling the truth is too risky, and they would rather tell their managers what they want to hear. According to Williams (2017), gut-based decisions are insufficient if companies hire and manage fairly. She recommended that analysts must push themselves to look outside the inadequate hard data, companies should be more constant and comprehensive in their qualitative analysis, employees should be educated on the real-life impact of bias and negative stereotypes, and human resources and analytics departments must value both qualitative and quantitative expertise and apply mixed method approaches everywhere possible.

Organizations like financial institutions have not been able to attain diversity and inclusion goals to meet the demands of their growing diverse clients. Understanding the critical race theory would enable organizations to understand the effects of power, law,

and race and understand that the American societal fabric is woven with racism (Boyd, 2018). Critical race theory is a theoretical framework researchers use to examine culture related to race, law, and power. Boyd (2018) explained how companies can apply critical race theory to their diversity and inclusion efforts. Firstly, companies need to understand that they do not live in a post-racial society. Secondly, companies must understand that true inclusion addresses racism, sexism, and other combinations of oppression. Thirdly, companies also need to challenge their willingness to promote gender-only focused diversity. Lastly, companies must use their uneasiness when discussing diversity to empathize with marginalized individuals and their discomfort. Critical perspectives are essential to understanding discriminatory behaviors and the identification of a solution to reduce discrimination (Bowleg, 2019). The researcher explained that it enables interrogation, exposure, and the challenge of assumptions, practices, and institutions that interpret power relations that endanger inequality and oppression and hide how a dominant group of people opposes marginalized populations. Bowleg (2019) also explained that critical frameworks offer solutions to the willful ignorance of discrimination under white supremacy, sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. Critical frameworks highlight sociodemographic variables and noncritical embrace of disparity language. Bowleg (2019) identified critical race theory, intersectionality, and ecosocial as they expose power and inequality. Bowleg (2019) used the critical framework in examining the inequality in healthcare and encouraged others to contribute by using a critical perspective to identify solutions to confront discrimination.

It has been noted for over 50 years that social scientists have a significant role in fighting discrimination (Sugarman et al., 2018). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr stated that the civil rights movement needed social scientists' help in a speech in 1967 to the American Psychological Association (Sugarman et al., 2018). He stated that the civil rights movement needed the assistance of social scientists for the white community to understand their accomplices in contributing to segregation, violent behavior, and inhumane legislation that negatively impacted black people. Sugarman et al. (2018) suggested the intentional involvement of social scientists in studying ideas to prevent and intervene in discrimination. Organizations must review systematically to determine the underlying factors that persist in racial discrimination (Enner, 2017). Racial conversations have been determined to be one of the problematic interactions. However, organizations must facilitate these conversations by acknowledging that everyone is biased (Enner, 2017). Lopez-Littleton et al. (2018) argued that public administration leaders could promote racial and social justice when policies encourage race-conscious dialogues. Academic and professional training programs need to include race, racism, and racial equity discussions. According to Lopez- Littleton et al. (2018), discussions of race and racism should have a prominent place in public administration education, training, and all levels of government. The researchers stated that individuals must be willing to confront their own biases, challenge long-standing assumptions, and commit to being lifelong learners if they want to achieve fairness and justice for all.

Racial and gender discrimination are reported less when the organization has established worker voice mechanisms (Bender et al., 2017). The study indicated that

discrimination charges are lower in organizations where employees are of the same race and gender. However, when the race and gender of employees are different, the role of voice is larger. The literature also indicated that employee voice and managerial responsiveness create better labor relations and a stronger shared sense of fairness at the workplace, increasing labor productivity levels (Bender et al., 2017). According to the researchers, social psychologists argue that employee voices improve fairness for a given outcome. The voice effect at the workplace is the best-documented phenomenon in procedural justice research. Bender et al. (2017) found that non-white employees are more likely to claim racial discrimination. Employees with supervisors who seek information from workers are less likely to argue racial discrimination. The researchers also presented evidence of a robust and statistical relationship between several measures of voice and lower claims of racial discrimination.

With the growing number of diverse populations in the global economy and the need to meet social responsibility by ensuring equal employment opportunity, organizations need to identify practical measures to reduce blatant and subtle discrimination in the workplace (Pitcan et al., 2018). Organizational leaders must establish anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination during recruitment and employment participation (Whitaker, 2019). Encouraging multiculturalism, instigating comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, and empowering labor market mobility can reduce racial discrimination (De Freitas et al., 2018). Organizations also need to implement intentional policies to improve diversity and identify ways of exploiting the benefits of diversity (Dittmer, 2017). Organizational leaders must attempt to understand

the orientation and culture of their organizations to determine what policies will be

effective in reducing discrimination (Bowleg, 2019). If possible, organizations must

ensure diversity and equal representation in management and interview panels. Woodson,

2016

**Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace**

The U.S. Census expected that minorities would comprise 57% of the population

by 2060 (Boyd, 2018). Therefore, it is progressively important for companies to hire and

retain professionals who reflect this increasing demographic (Boyd, 2018). It is important

for accreditation and the cultural environment of the institute to enhance the diversity of

faculty in small institutes (Dittmer, 2017). The percentage of non-Caucasian students has

steadily increased in American Colleges after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The same cannot be said of non-Caucasian faculty. Dittmer (2017) reviewed the literature

and found that in 1983, non-Caucasian faculty represented 9% of faculty nationwide,

which increased to 12% in 1993, while the population of non-Caucasian students

increased to nearly 27%. The literature revealed further statistics that showed in 2008,

16% of full-time non-Caucasian faculty with 5.3% in full professor positions. According

to the literature, non-Caucasian faculty increased to 20.7% in 2011, while non-Caucasian

students increased to 38.8%. Increasing non-Caucasian faculty in universities and

colleges provides benefits to their students and their institutions (Dittmer, 2017). These

benefits include serving as role models for a diverse student population. It brings

different perspectives and teaching methods beneficial to students, represents a

commitment to campus-wide diversity initiatives, broadens the concept of scholarship,

and helps students prepare themselves to live and work in an increasingly diverse world. Diversity in the workplace is important as it brings a sense of inclusion (Dittmer, 2017).

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity is altering the labor market landscape (Lee et al., 2017). Positive diversity climates in the workplace provide public organizations with benefits (Oberfield, 2016). 20th-century private firms and governmental organizations have been proactive in ensuring diversity in the workplace. However, only some public organizations have been committed to ensuring diversity in the workplace. Oberfield (2016) argued that there are not enough studies on why some organizations are not committed to ensuring adverse work environments and hypothesized how group and management characteristics, social identities, and procedural justice might shape perceptions of diversity climate to fill the gap. According to Oberfield (2016), the literature indicates that when employees perceive their employer is committed to diversity, it improves their workplace satisfaction, influencing their performance. Therefore, diversity has become an important goal for most organizations. Oberfield (2016) pointed out that employees' perceptions of policies and procedures determine an organization's diversity climate. The literature highlights that globalization expects organizations to have employees from different nationalities, races, ethnicities, and sex. Diversity is, therefore, an expectation for all organizations. Diversity has been studied to increase cohesion and coordination, which improves performance. Oberfield (2016) argued that procedural justice could influence diversity in the workplace, and personal diversity and management have not been studied to impact the diversity climate.

**Laws Against Discrimination and the Legal System**

In the wake of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B Johnson pressured Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII). He spoke of the need to abolish racial discrimination and oppression (Park, 2018). After 50 years of the civil rights movement, the issues and challenges related to civil rights persist, and the United States continues to struggle with race and racism (Sugarman et al., 2018). The intent of civil rights laws has not been able to meet its intended purposes and continue to evolve to meet its goals as they expand to cover the protected classes (Park, 2018). Park (2018) pointed out that the evolution of civil rights laws is impacted by court precedence, political climate, and social movements. The federal law intends to prohibit discrimination that causes disparate treatment, disparate impact, hostile work environment, sexual harassment, failure to accommodate, failure to reinstate after FMLA leave, and retaliation for an employee's protected activity. Park (2018) defined material adverse action as discrimination that caused a material change in terms and conditions of employment, including unjustified negative evaluation, discipline, transfer, and constructive discharge. The researcher highlighted that race discrimination persists in light of all these laws, as federal courts continue to hear cases of race discrimination by all races and within races. Park (2018) pointed out that EEOC identified race as immutable physical and cultural characteristics. National origin, immigration status, sex, and disabilities are some of the bases for discrimination. The author pointed out that bona fide occupational qualifications are legitimate bases for limiting employment to a specific group of people.

Even though the law gives the road map for legal actions against discrimination, only a few tend to enter the legal system due to institutional and ideological determinants (McElhattan et al., 2017). Some of the factors are legal cynicism and distrust of the legal system to provide expected justice of relief. McElhattan et al. (2017) referenced that even though racial discrimination results in about 38% of civil rights litigations, only a few cases enter the legal system. The authors employed a quantitative research method that used a factorial survey studying 2087 participants in the United States from a knowledge-based network. The study's findings revealed that African American respondents suggested legal action when discrimination is determined against African Americans and Caucasians. González (2018) explained that Colombia is one of the countries with the most comprehensive and stringent anti-discrimination laws in Latin America. They criminalize discrimination and harassment in the workplace based on race. The author pointed out that the justice system has not limited racial discrimination at the workplace due to a lack of capacity to respond to complaints. The situation was evident in the John Jak Becerra racial discrimination at the workplace case. Becerra was discharged from employment due to complaints about racism in the workplace and could not receive redress. The Ministry of Labor took three years to respond to his complaint. The author explained that discrimination is a widespread phenomenon requiring structural measures. After persistence in the courts, the Colombian constitutional courts finally ordered the employer and Ministry of Labor to employ measures to curtail racial harassment in the workplace.

Even though civil rights laws have reduced blatant forms of discrimination, more subtle ways have emerged, causing scholars to focus studies on subtle and more complex forms of discrimination (Woodson, 2016); Woodson (2016) intended to determine whether this phenomenon can be addressed under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Upon studying black workers in a predominated white firm, the findings indicated that derivative racial discrimination could be partially addressed under the law. Daniel and Thornton (2019) also referenced that Title of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, and religion based on any employment decision. Referencing Quillan et al. (2017) stated that even though there has been some improvement in civil rights laws after 50 years, there is minimal improvement in race-based discrimination in the workplace. Indicating the prevalence of this issue in the United States, it is still not obvious how these behaviors persist in the workplace.

**Gap in the Literature**

The literature selected for this chapter's review associated with the topic of race-based discrimination in the workplace was examined to determine what was missing regarding expert opinion on racial inequity in employment (Whitaker, 2019; Wirts, 2017). Experts agreed that people of color were underrepresented in many professions and were continually discriminated against in the workplace (Snyder & Schwartz, 2019; Whitaker, 2019). Other studies focused their investigations on the causes of racial discrimination in the workplace (Brewster & Rusche, 2017; Woodson, 2016). Further, the current research focuses on the issues of discrimination in the workplace with studies on how there were few employment opportunities for African Americans in the U.S., with

negative career mobility, lower salaries, and higher unemployment rates for those who were working (Chapa et al., 2020; Whitaker, 2019).

Researchers also claimed that African Americans employees faced significantly more scrutiny than white coworkers, resulting in adverse workplace actions against them (Wirts, 2017; Williams, 2018). Such examinations found workplace racial discrimination caused by the tendency of individuals to gravitate towards others with similar backgrounds and interests (Wirts, 2017; Woodson, 2016). Race relation triangulation causes whites to remain a distinguished group in a multiracial American society, with blacks and Asian Americans encountering inequality (Cruz, 2016). Such discriminatory bias was found to be a liability to racial diversity that led to more hiring and promotion of underrepresented minorities than the liability to a homogeneous committee. The evidence presented in the current literature suggests that research on these discriminatory practices needs more investigation (Williams, 2018). Examinations of experiences and perceptions of minority groups in the workplace were scarce, with those few studies focusing on how diversity was accepting and welcoming non-Caucasians in very few places (Dittmer, 2017; Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). Such data was provided on black workers' perceptions of racial discrimination due to the perceptions of their place in the organizational structure of society (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020).

Experts also concluded that institutional discrimination was fully meditated, while blatant racial discrimination was partially mediated by workplace microaggression and racial group membership (Branker, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2017). Such mediated acts of discriminatory practices were found to impact job satisfaction among Black employees

and employer outcomes (Dittmer, 2017; Pitcan et al., 2018). Even though the law allows for legal actions against discrimination, very few will enter a legal discourse against their employers. This was due to institutional and ideological determinants failing to produce any reasonable explanation regarding the underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace, mainly found in Washington State (McElhattan et al., 2017). Therefore, such a lack of research indicates a need for further exploration and justifies the current study.

## Summary and Conclusions

Racial inequality has been a present issue throughout the history of the U.S. and is still an issue. Effects of racial inequality can be seen in terms of employment, criminal justice, and healthcare. African Americans are still experiencing fewer employment opportunities, negative career mobility, lower salaries, and higher unemployment rates compared with Whites (Whitaker, 2019). African Americans face more employee scrutiny than White coworkers, resulting in adverse workplace actions against them (Wirts, 2017). Blatant racism had given way to subtle and often ignorant discriminatory biases (Wirts, 2017).

Not only do Black workers' perceptions of racial discrimination arise from being in the minority, but they also arise from their place in the organizational structure (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). Perceptions of racial discrimination manifest differently depending on the status of the organization, and organizations play a role in different perceptions of discrimination (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). According to Park (2018), the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has not been able to eliminate discrimination and oppression

based on race or color. Daniel and Thornton (2019) stated even though there has been some improvement in civil rights laws, there is minimal improvement in terms of race-based discrimination in the workplace.

Studies need to identify sources of prejudicial attitudes that make racism persist. It is important to determine why state government departments that are accountable to citizen scrutiny still experience race-based discrimination in the workplace. It is important to enable governments and organizations to determine underlying factors perpetuating racism in the workplace. Findings of this study might enable state governments and other organizations to implement and enforce policies that limit discrimination based on race in the workplace. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study is to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state. Specifically, I examined responses of workplace investigators involving state employment. I addressed the gap in research regarding factors that lead to discrimination based on race in terms of public employment in the state of Washington.

This chapter contains information about the proposed methodology for this case study. The rationale for selecting a qualitative exploratory sociological case study design is described in the next section. I describe my role as the researcher and human instrument. I address specifics of proposed research procedures, including participant selection logic, instrumentation, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I then address techniques to resolve issues of trustworthiness, followed by adherence to ethical procedures. Finally, a summary is provided to conclude the chapter.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The proposed research design for this study is a qualitative exploratory sociological case study design. I made considerations about research approaches and designs before deciding on the proposed design. First, I identified the research paradigm. Ontology refers to what can be known (Vogl et al., 2019). Epistemology refers to how and who can know (Vogl et al., 2019). Race-based discrimination in the workplace is a social construct that is contextual rather than an objective variable that can be measured. Thus, the ontological foundation of this study is a constructivist rather than objectivist worldview. Furthermore, the context-based nature of the phenomenon under investigation

indicates a search for deeper understanding instead of an explanation of causality, indicating an interpretivist rather than a positivist worldview. Therefore, the research paradigm is interpretivist/constructivist.

The qualitative research method is based on the positivism paradigm, which tends to leave out in-depth and underlying meaning of social phenomena. The qualitative research method involves addressing interpretations participants attribute to actions associated with social phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2016). The qualitative research method places the researcher in world of participants via use of interpretive and constructivist approaches to understand the world through gathering data (Burkholder et al., 2016). According to Burkholder et al. (2016), qualitative research occurs in uncontrolled environments to describe a phenomenon according to participants.

The constructivism paradigm asserts a multiplicity of realities; therefore, no single theory can exhaustively describe relevant facts (Burkholder et al., 2016). Since realities are in the minds of people, generation of new knowledge occurs during relational interactions among individuals who attribute meaning to facts to construct reality (Burkholder et al., 2016). The qualitative research approach enables researchers to interpret and document phenomena from an individual viewpoint or frame of reference . A I conducted in-depth interviews and reviewed archival documents on subject matter to gather data for research. I studied workplace investigators in Washington state departments to determine their perspectives of underlying factors that persist in terms of race-based discrimination in the workplace.

I used an exploratory sociological case study design to study a contemporary phenomenon within its current context. Sociological case studies involve examination of collective behavior of members of a group in social relationships and determination of factors that influence outcomes of events (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

The identified bounded unit is Washington state general government departments, and the phenomenon is race-based discrimination charges. Case studies involve employing a variety of data sources. I used individual interviews, one of the primary data sources for a sociological case study. In addition, I reviewed current and historical statistics. According to Yin (2018), analysis of historical data is relevant for studying the prevalence of a phenomenon. Documents and archival data reviews are used to gather relevant contextual historical information. Archival documents and existing data were supplemental to data during interviews.

The qualitative research method involves studying a phenomenon in a controlled environment with information that is measured and interpreted using scientific methods (Burkholder et al., 2016). Qualitative research relies on statistics to interpret and test predictions of a phenomenon. The qualitative research method involves interacting with respondents in their natural settings and probing responses with in-depth questions. The quantitative research method involves using mostly predefined questions with limited room to ask interactive probing questions (Burkholder et al., 2016).

**Role of the Researcher**

Case study qualitative research requires researchers to be the key data collection instrument to conduct a detailed investigation into a bounded unit and phenomenon

(Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). As the researcher, my roles included conducting a literature review using keywords, developing an interview protocol and questions, selecting participants using purposeful sampling, and ensuring legal and ethical requirements were met. I conducted interviews with workplace investigators from HR divisions across the state of Washington who had experience investigating race-based discrimination.

Hancock and Alozzine (2017) asserted that although it is time-consuming, individual interviews enable gathering rich information and individual perspectives regarding research questions. I conducted a review of archival and existing documents on workplace racism.

As a HR professional and employee of the Washington state government, my perceptions and experiences involving investigating discrimination cases impacted probing of questions. Also, my race was a potential source of prejudice and impacted data analysis. I used reflexivity to progressively document notes and keep journals of self-examination of biases. As part of the journal, I documented my experiences as a HR professional and identified how these experiences potentially influenced data gathering during interviews and interpretation of data. In addition, I used peer debriefing to discuss the study's progression, data analysis, and tentative findings to solicit feedback and improve the study's credibility. Reflexibility and peer debriefing are used to avoid being influenced by experiences, past feelings, prejudices, and biases regarding a phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004).

**Methodology**

This section contains detailed descriptions of the proposed methodology. I address participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan.

**Participant Selection Logic**

The target population was Workplace Investigators from Human Resource Divisions across the state of Washington. The Association of Workplace Investigators (AWI), founded in 2009, reports a professional network of about 1,400 attorneys, human resource professionals, private investigators, and other professionals in the field (AWI, 2021). From this population, I selected a small sample of Workplace Investigators from Human Resource Divisions across the state of Washington who have experience investigating race-based discrimination. As all workplace investigators work to address misconduct in the organization, the suitable sampling technique was purposive sampling and applied a criteria-based selection of prospective participants who specifically have experiences in investigating race-based discrimination.

Patton (2015) recommended using purposive sampling to recruit a sample that will be considered experts of the phenomenon under investigation. This sample of experts was information-rich cases that  provided insights and in-depth understanding (Pattom, 2015, p. 273). In a case study, the sample is essential in understanding the case (Stake, 1995). Etikan and colleagues (2016) suggested that purposive sampling is appropriate when collecting data from a sample working in a similar setting to maintain connections among the participants and allow the data collection to be individualized yet grounded on

the research topic. The inclusion criteria for the prospective participants to be eligible for

this study was: (a) being a workplace investigator in the state of Washington, (b) has

experience in investigating race-based discrimination in the workplace, and (c) at least

two years of experience as a workplace investigator.

I intended to purposively select 15 to 20 participants for the interview and

archival document review. According to Mason (2010), qualitative studies can have a

sample size of 15 to 50 to reach data saturation. However, Vasileiou et al. (2018) reported

that a qualitative researcher conducting an exploratory case study could reach data

saturation with at least five participants. In order to account for attrition and other

obstacles in participant recruitment, I aimed to recruit 15 to 20 participants. Alternatively,

suppose I cannot reach the targeted sample size through purposive sampling. In that case,

I employed snowball sampling to ask the eligible participants for referrals to other

potential participants (Ghaljaie et al., 2017).

**Instrumentation**

The data sources were semi-structured interviews, archival documents, and Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) statistics. I selected a sample of 15 to 20

participants. The participants were invited for individual semi-structured interviews and

asked the participants for copies of archival documents relevant to their job as workplace

investigators who have experience in investigating race-based discrimination.

Simultaneously, I obtained EEOC statistics from the EEOC website.

For the semi-structured interviews, I self-developed the interview protocol. The

protocol collected relevant demographic information, a broad opening question, ten

focusing questions organized from general to in-depth, and a closing question (Britten, 2006). The open-ended questions allowed the participants to freely express their perceptions and experiences in investigating race-based discrimination.

I tested the protocol's validity through an expert panel's aid. The expert panel consisted of three to five workplace investigators who were part of the 15 to 20 sample of the study and experts in the field of qualitative research. I revised the protocol as needed.

For the document review, I requested archival documents from the 15 to 20 participants. The documents were records of race-based discrimination. The documents supplemented the interview data as physical evidence of their experiences with race-based discrimination. Documents included were not limited to incident reports, resolutions, memos, and meeting minutes. I used the documents in triangulation to identify codes that converged with the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

EEOC statistics are publicly available reports on the EEOC website. For the purposes of this study, I obtained the statistics for "Color-Based Charges," which are "charges filed and resolved under Title VII alleging color-based discrimination" (EEOC, 2021). The currently available reports were for the fiscal years 1997 to 2020. I treated the EEOC statistics as supplementary to the interview rather than quantitative data like the archival documents. I triangulated the statistics with the interview and document review data to identify common codes (Merriam & Tisell, 2016).

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The first step in conducting this qualitative exploratory sociological case study was to obtain an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure ethical research adherence.

The revised interview protocol and the research proposal was the subject of the review. Upon obtaining approval, the second step was to recruit participants. I asked permission from the AWI to allow me to disseminate a letter of invitation to study their members. Ideally, the letter was sent electronically through the members' email addresses. I introduced myself and the study in the letter.

Interested potential participants were expected to contact me. I provided the prospective participants with additional details about the nature and purpose of the study, discussed the scope of their participation, which was written in the informed consent form, and asked screening questions about the inclusion criteria. The participants who met the eligibility criteria and agreed to participate in the data collection were asked for an interview schedule. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I gave the participants an option to conduct the interviews face-to-face or via the Zoom online video conferencing program. Once an interview schedule was determined, I asked the participants for electronic copies of archival documents related to their experiences as workplace investigators who have worked with race-based discrimination cases. I ended the initial contact by asking the participants if they have further questions about the study and their participation, thanked them for their time, and reminded them to check their email inbox within the day for a copy of the informed consent form. Once I began interviewing the first participant without reaching my goal of at least 15 participants, I started snowball sampling by asking the eligible workplace investigators to refer other potential participants.

A day before the interview schedule, I ensured that the participant submitted a signed copy of the informed consent form. I sent an email reminder to the participant regarding the interview schedule. Whether face-to-face or through Zoom, at the time of the scheduled interview, I greeted the participant, reviewed the content of the informed consent form, and asked if the participant is ready. Once the participant agreed to start, I began recording the interview. The recording was helpful in data analysis, as well as in avoiding the distraction of taking down notes while I collected the data. I asked the questions as indicated in the protocol; however, the semi-structured nature allowed me flexibility in the line of questioning and in asking probing questions. I limited the interviews to a duration of 45 to 60 minutes. At the end of the interview, I asked the closing question on whether the participant has anything to add. I thanked the participants for their time and informed them that I will email a copy of the interview transcription within 24 hours for their review. I reminded the participants about the documents that I requested.

The archival documents included but are not limited to incident reports, resolutions, memos, and meeting minutes relevant to race-based workplace discrimination. All the documents obtained were with the permission of the participants. I requested electronic copies of the documents for easier processing for the analysis. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, I screened each record and remove any identifiers such as company names and names of involved employees.

The final source of data was EEOC statistics. The EEOC statistics are publicly and readily available on the EEOC website. I obtained information relevant to the

phenomenon of race-based discrimination under the "Color-Based Charges" link. Color-based charges are "charges filed and resolved under Title VII alleging color-based discrimination" (EEOC, 2021). The currently available reports were for the fiscal years 1997 to 2020. I treated the statistics as quantitative data but as a supplement to the interview and document review data for the purposes of triangulation.

**Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis plan for the study was a thematic analysis based on the recommendations of Braun et al. (2014). The following six steps guided the analysis: (a) data familiarization, (b) code development and coding, (c) theme development, (d) theme revisions, (e) theme finalization and theme definition development, and (f) report generation. As in qualitative study, these steps allowed flexibility to follow a cyclical rather than linear direction of the analysis. I utilized the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 to complete the analysis.

I began with the analysis of the interview data. I produced verbatim transcriptions for each of the 10 interview recordings. The transcriptions was saved in Microsoft Word formats with the participants' pseudonyms as file names and forwarded to the participants' email for review. Once the participants verified the accuracy of the transcription, I imported the Word files to NVivo 12.

I accomplished data familiarization by reading each transcript separately to grasp the entire picture of the whole interview data set. I then re-read each transcript while I took notes regarding the data's general patterns I observed. At this point, I used the concepts from the critical race theory and social identity theory to identify relevant

general patterns. Next, I began the coding process by closely reading each transcription line-by-line, searching for small units of meaning. In the third step, I organized and categorized the codes such that units with similar meanings are grouped to form initial themes. I reviewed and revised the themes depending on their relevance to answering the research questions. I assigned names and definitions to each final theme to ensure that each theme is distinct from the others. Lastly, I generated a report of the themes.

I triangulated the interview data with the archival documents. As NVivo 12 supports electronic copies of data, including Word, PDF, and photos, I imported all the documents I collected to the program. During this point, the codes and themes that emerged from the interviews were visible in a hierarchy form at the side panel of NVivo. I opened each document on the main panel of the software and coded the contents of the document to the already existing codes from the interviews. In the instance that a code emerged from the documents that will not match any of the existing units of meaning, I created a new code and reported the discrepant findings in the results.

Similar to the archival documents, I triangulated the EEOC statistics with the existing codes and themes from the interview data. I downloaded the EEOC statistics data from the EEOC website and import the file to NVivo 12. I treated the statistics as supplementary data rather than quantitative data and coded the information to relevant existing codes. If the EEOC statistics did not match the existing code, I created a new code and reported the findings in the results section.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

I ensured the study's rigor involved applying trustworthiness techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Trustworthiness entails the following four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Forero et al., 2018). The sub-sections below

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree of truthfulness of the findings in representing the population of interest (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Establishing credibility will include an extended acquaintance with the setting of the study (Forero et al., 2018). I familiarized myself with the context of public workplaces in the state of Washington. I also anticipated and reported any issues that may arise in relation to the setting of the study, particularly the possible influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection.

I ensured I have the necessary skills to be a "human instrument" to complete the research procedures (Forero et al., 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994). My familiarity with the context of the study will help establish my investigator's authority. Additionally, I was equipped with theoretical knowledge regarding race-based discrimination in the workplace, specifically with the constructs of critical race theory and social identity theory. I self-developed the semi-structured interview protocol that I used for data collection based on the concepts in the existing literature. As a human instrument of this study, I was equipped with the skills and experiences to conduct multiple qualitative research techniques such that I can select and apply the most appropriate methodologies.

I collected sufficient data from the proposed 10 participants and apply triangulation of data involving interviews with workplace investigators, EEOC statistics, and state reports provided by workplace investigators (Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation involves a search for a confluence of information among the sources of data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Triangulation resolved credibility issues in that a convergence of evidence solidified the study findings' representation of the population involved in this study (Forero et al., 2018).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the study findings are applicable in another context and setting (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Increasing the transferability of this study involved descriptions of the purposive sampling technique and data saturation (Forero et al., 2018). Descriptions of the purposive sampling technique allowed readers to make inferences about the characteristics of the sample and how the characteristics may be applicable or not applicable to another context. The eligibility criteria that come with purposive sampling set the boundaries of the characteristics of the research sample (Shenton, 2004). Data saturation was achieved through quantified code frequencies that emerged from each data source. NVivo 12 automatically counted the number of references associated with one data source. Data saturation was evidenced by a decreasing frequency of codes as I kept working from one data source to another until the last one. Data saturation was indicated by an iterative process in which I continued coding until no new codes emerged from the data (Forero et al., 2018).

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the extent to which the study findings are reliable and consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Addressing dependability issues involved techniques that allowed future researchers to replicate the study (Shenton, 2004). The first technique described the research procedures (Forero et al., 2018). This chapter included all the details of the methodology and the rationale behind each chosen procedure. I reported any changes from the proposal to the execution of the study procedures in this chapter. The second technique was to keep trackable documentation of all the materials I utilized in the study, including, but not limited to, letters of approval and permission, an informed consent form, an interview protocol, and a codebook.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers can corroborate the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Resolving confirmability issues  involved evidence that the research findings are derived from the data collected from the sample and not my subjective opinion (Shenton, 2004). Techniques to increase confirmability was triangulation and reflexivity (Forero et al., 2018). Triangulation of the data served as evidence that the finding emerged from the common themes among the data sources and not from possible research bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity involved using a researcher's journal in which I will note my reflective commentary about my thoughts regarding the decisions I will make during the implementation of the proposed methodology (Shenton, 2004).

**Ethical Procedures**

I ensured that this study adhered to ethical research procedures. First step I obtained IRB approval. The IRB approval ensured the proposed methodology is ethical and suitable for human subjects. Second, I ensured ethical research practices involving human subjects using the following components: confidentiality of participation, security of data, and confirmation of voluntary participation (Dongre & Sankaran, 2016).

I maintained the confidentiality of participation by removing names and other identifying features linked with the participants. I assigned a random pseudonym known only to them and myself in place of the participants' names. I ensured data security by storing all the digital data in a password-protected computer and encrypted flash drive. I kept all paper copies of the data under lock and key in my residence. I will permanently destroy and delete all copies of the data five years after the conclusion of this study. I upheld confirmation of voluntary participation from the participant selection to any point of the study. The prospective participants were not offered any incentives to join the study, nor were coerced to participate. Additionally, the participants who chose not to join or withdraw from the study were not suffered any consequences. Any data collected from participants who withdraw were not used in this study and were immediately and permanently destroyed/deleted.

The informed consent form indicated the study's scope, terms, and conditions. The contents of the informed consent form were orally explained to the participants. All the participants were required to submit a signed informed consent form before data

collection as written evidence that they agreed and understood the details of their participation.

**Summary**

The quality of research findings is highly dependent on rigor and appropriateness of the methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research methods I selected for this qualitative exploratory sociological case study were evaluated based on their pertinence to the investigation of the phenomenon of race-based discrimination in the workplace. I extended knowledge of underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State. This goal was achieved with the involvement of a purposively sampled 10 workplace investigators who work for the state who participated in individual semi-structured interviews and provided state reports. Interview data and he archival documents were triangulated with EEOC statistics. All information from three data sources was analyzed thematically following the six-step guidelines recommended by Braun et al.. I ensured I adhered to ethical research procedures.

Chapter 4 contains study findings. Findings include a comprehensive description of the context of the study, including descriptions of the sample and setting of the study. Thematic analysis is presented regarding themes and supporting evidence from data.

Chapter 4: Results

In the workplace, individuals affected by racial discrimination tend to experience stress, job dissatisfaction, and employee turnover, which adversely impacts success of organizations (Triana et al., 2015). According to the EEOC (2017), race-based

discrimination in the workplace in Washington state is perpetuated by underlying factors, but factors were not specified. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study was to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State. This study was guided by the following research question: What are underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state?

This chapter contains results of this study. I include descriptions of the setting to provide context for the study. This chapter also includes descriptions of data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness techniques that were used to establish rigor of the study as well as modifications to the methodology plan presented in Chapter 3. I addressed results and themes in order to answer the research question for this study. Themes were supported by narratives and excerpts from data.

## Research Setting

The setting of this study was the workplace in the state of Washington. Specifically, the bounded unit was Washington state's general government departments. From fiscal years (FY) 2009 to 2021, a total of 4,676 race-based charges were reported in Washington State (EEOC, 2021). Sex-based discrimination charges within the same period in Washington state were approximately similar, with a total of 4,763 charges, while color-based discrimination charges were observably lower, totaling 771 (EEOC, 2023). When compared to total across the U.S., the total percentage of Washington state charges for race-based and sex-based cases was close to the trend (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of Total Washington State Charges and U.S. Charges in Percentages*
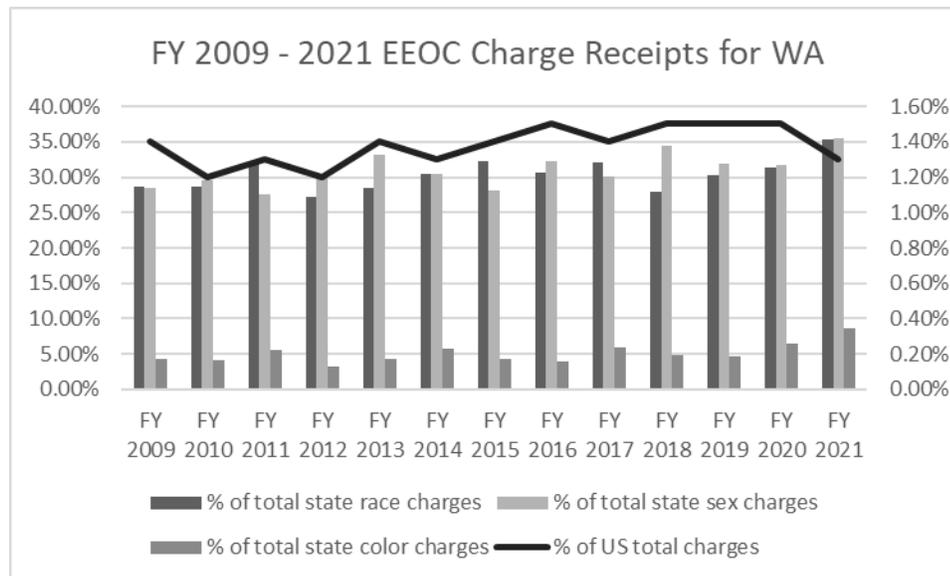


**Data Collection**

The three data sources I gathered for this study were interview data with 10 workplace investigators, archival documents that were relevant to race-based discrimination cases in the workplace in Washington state, and EEOC statistics involving color-based charges. Some modifications were made to data collection methods 3 with approval of the IRB. Data collection began with obtaining IRB approval for ethical research and the AWI permission to disseminate invitation letters for this study to its members. The AWI website provided a master list of its members and their email addresses. I emailed invitation letters to members who were practicing in Washington state. The invitation letter contained an introduction to myself and this study and inclusion criteria for participant selection. All participants were required to be workplace

investigators in the state of Washington who had experience in race-based discrimination in the workplace and at least 2 years of experience as a workplace investigator.

Upon sending out email invitations, I received minimal responses and did not reach the target of 15 to 20 participants. I proceeded to the secondary participant selection strategy, which was snowball sampling. I asked workplace investigators who responded to email invitations for referrals to other potential participants. I was able to obtain a final sample of 10 participants. All 10 participants met eligibility criteria, and saturation was reached by the ninth participant. I ensured participants shared detailed and substantial insights regarding their experiences with race-based workplace discrimination. I built rapport with participants before interviews to acquire rich and thick data. I contacted them using voice calls to share further details about myself and this study. I answered any questions they had regarding their participation. During our initial contact, I also provided details regarding their rights and protections, which were explained in the informed consent form. I informed participants of the voluntary nature of participation, protection of their identity, and confidentiality of data. Their names and other information that could compromise their identity, such as workplace or names of coworkers, were omitted from transcripts and replaced with numerical codes. Thus, participants were referred to as Participants 1 to 10. Data will be permanently deleted 3 years after the conclusion of this study.

All participants signed the informed consent form to indicate they understood and agreed with terms and conditions of their participation in interviews. They chose their preferred interview schedule. Interviews were conducted using Zoom videoconferencing

software. At the beginning of interviews, I informed participants that the session would be recorded for the purposes of data collection. I recapped the nature and purpose of the study as well as terms and conditions of participation. When participants were ready, I asked a general opening question about the number of cases they had handled in the past year. This question was indicated in the interview protocol and strategically asked first to get participants willing to share their insights about work. The interview protocol contained four open-ended questions involving handling race-based discrimination cases. All questions were asked to all participants, but the semi-structured nature of interviews allowed me to ask probing questions. Duration of the interviews were approximately 45 minutes. I concluded each interview by thanking participants and informing them of the possibility that I may reach out for follow-up questions or clarifications. I also summarized participants' responses to research questions and asked them to confirm the accuracy of recorded responses after every interview question. I explained reviews of responses was part of the member checking process that was vital to trustworthiness of the study. Immediately after each interview, I listened to recordings and produced verbatim transcriptions. Transcripts were saved in individual Microsoft Word files and imported to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software in preparation for analysis.

After interviews, I proceeded to collect archival data and EEOC statistics. Both sources of data were publicly available through official websites. No permissions were needed to acquire and use data for research purposes. Archival data that I collected were two documents from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). One WSDOT document contained details about the department's 2020 EEO assurances. The

other document was the WSDOT Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action program for FY 2018 to 2023. I downloaded the files via the Microsoft Word format. For EEOC statistics, I proceeded to the EEOC website, then the data and analytics tab, and selected race-based charges filed with the EEOC, which included total number of charges that were filed and resolved under Title VII alleging race-based discrimination between FY 1997 and 2019. I downloaded the file and saved it in Microsoft Word format. I went back to the data and analytics tab and filtered statistics by state, which yielded data for charge receipts totals and percentages for Washington state between FY 2009 and 2021. I also downloaded information and saved the file in Microsoft Word. All archival documents and statistics were imported to NVivo to supplement interview data.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically based on the six-step guide devised by Braun et al. Despite being named steps, the procedures were performed in a cyclical rather than linear manner in which I went back and forth across the steps as needed. The six steps were: (a) data familiarization, (b) code development and coding, (c) theme development, (d) theme revisions, (e) theme finalization and theme definition development, and (f) report generation. I applied the thematic steps to the interview data, archival documents, and EEOC statistics to triangulate the data. I utilized NVivo to store, manage, and organize the data, the codes, and the themes. This section contains the details of the data analysis procedures.

Data familiarization involves immersion in the data. I became familiar with the data upon personally conducting the interviews, listening to the interview recordings,

producing a verbatim transcription of the recordings, and repeatedly reading the transcripts. During the data familiarization process, I was able to gain an understanding of the dataset as a whole without assigning meanings to the parts of the texts. As I became familiar with the data, I observed general patterns that were relevant to the research question. I proceeded to code development to assign labels that described the meanings of parts of texts.

I read each line of the data to identify parts of the texts that were meaningful. At this point, open coding was applied to the data in which I assigned as many codes as possible without first considering their relevance to the study. This process allowed for the identification of possible outlier data. The coding process resulted in the identification of 11 codes. All the codes with sample quotes are presented in Table 2 in alphabetical order.

**Table 2**

*Sample Codes*

| Codes | Quotes |
| --- | --- |
| basis for gender-based cases deemed severe enough | "I typically will see more gender-based complaints, or I will see cases that are gender raised in terms of falling under the umbrella of sexual harassment." |
| basis for race-based cases deemed not severe enough | "We just didn't have comparators, so it was a very heavy lift for people to be able to substantiate allegations of race discrimination." "Two cases at Organization 1 in the last year where employees have also made culturally insensitive statements specifically about two people's accents, um, you know it was one statement again they um lacking the malicious intent." |

| | |
|---|---|
| direct witnesses and evidence | "I don't think that there was just ever any direct evidence; you know, I think over the course of years, case law has sort of helped with developing the type of evidence that is considered in discrimination claims." |
| | "If you recall, basically, there has to be enough evidence to prove that it was founded." |
| evidence not concrete | "The difficulty of them, especially since the pandemic, is having direct evidence and witnesses that have seen it. It's the pandemic that has made it hard." |
| | "So there's nothing concrete to tie it. So that's why it's typically been unfounded." |
| lack of witnesses | "50% were administratively closed because the subject left, so we just stopped doing the investigations. And then the rest were unsubstantiated." |
| more complaints are peer-to-peer | "You know, I think in general if I were to just kind of say in general, I think in my experience in other agencies it happens more with line level staff because there's not the same sort of responsibility on those staff to report those incidents." |
| | "So, coworkers, that's that most of them." |
| more complaints from younger generation | "Younger generations may have more. I guess an openness to say something if they disagree with something or call out inappropriate behavior." |
| more complaints from supervisors against subordinates | "A lot of the times, it seems like when I've looked into the complaints, or it came aware of them, it was a supervisor or manager acting against a subordinate or someone in a lower level position." |
| organization supporting employees | "The organization is committed to Washington's statewide affirmative action and diversity efforts." |
| | "I would say probably at an increase in founded, and I would correlate that to agencies being a lot more vocal with the expectations throughout an agency and the zero tolerance for those types of behaviors." |

| race-based allegations from minority employees standing up for themselves | "My personal experience would be complaints of against management, so racial discrimination complaints from maybe a subordinate against a manager or a supervisor." |
|---|---|
| relatively low number of race-based cases | |

I repeated the coding process until no new codes emerged. I proceeded to theme development, which involved grouping codes with similar meaning patterns. The codes, *more complaints from younger generation*, *organization supporting employees*, and *race-based allegations from minority employees standing up for themselves* contain meaning patterns that pertain to employees becoming empowered to speak up against the discrimination they reported. I determined that the three codes were related and grouped them using the hierarchy feature of NVivo. I labeled the initial theme as *employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations*. Four initial themes emerged from the theme development process. The themes and supporting codes are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Themes with Codes*

| Themes | Supporting Codes |
|---|---|
| insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases | <ul><li>basis for gender-based cases deemed severe enough.</li><li>basis for race-based cases deemed not severe enough</li></ul> |
| sufficiency of witnesses and evidence for race-based cases | <ul><li>direct witnesses and evidence,</li><li>evidence not concrete</li><li>lack of witnesses</li></ul> |

| employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations | <ul><li>more complaints from younger generation</li><li>organization supporting employees</li><li>race-based allegations from minority employees standing up for themselves.</li></ul> |
|---|---|
| influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination | <ul><li>more complaints are peer-to-peer</li><li>more complaints from supervisors against subordinates</li><li>relatively low number of race-based cases</li></ul> |

The fourth step was theme revisions. During this step, I went back to the interview transcripts and reviewed whether the participants' words sufficiently supported the themes. This step also included reviewing the relationship of the themes with each other so that the themes made sense holistically. I determined larger meaning patterns from the four initial themes I identified in the previous step and merged some themes, yielding two overarching themes. The initial themes and overarching themes are illustrated in the thematic map shown in Figure 2. The participants disclosed that race-based cases were often difficult to be founded due to insufficient grounds, hard evidence, and witnesses. Furthermore, building cases was also challenging when subordinates were worried or afraid of complaining against superiors who they thought discriminated against them. However, some younger employees were beginning to speak up for themselves and others when they experienced discriminatory and offensive behaviors.

**Figure 2**

*Thematic Map*
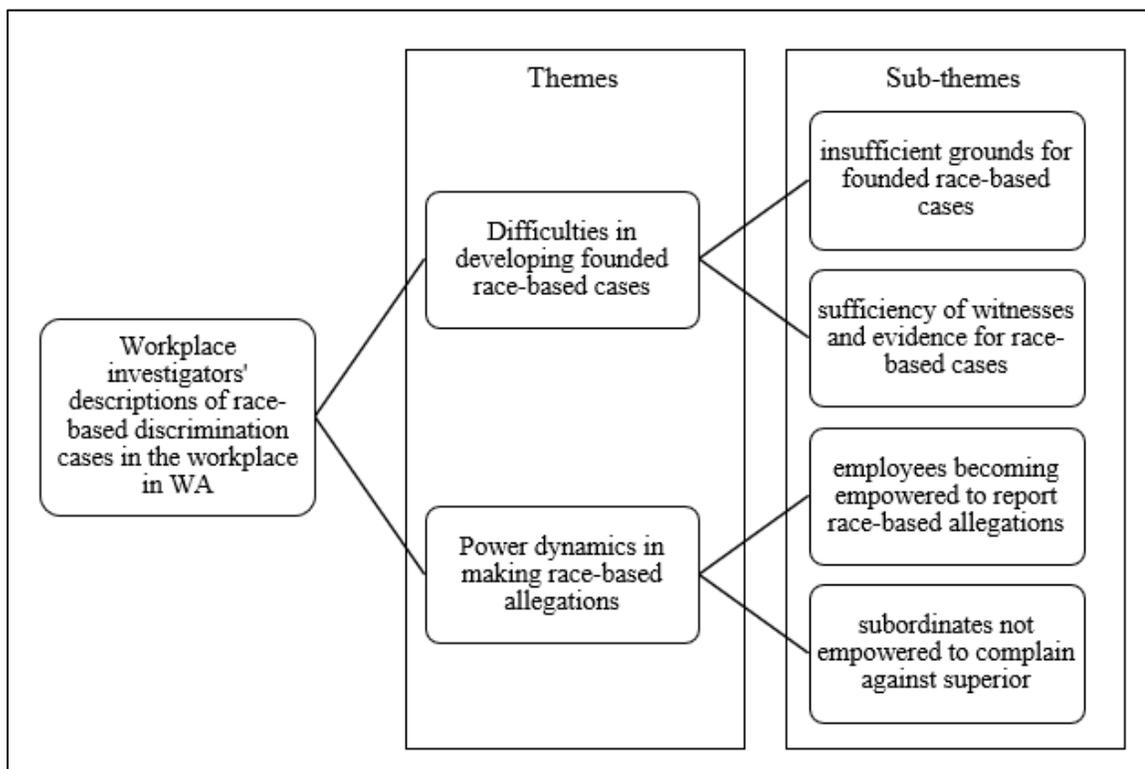


The fifth step was to finalize and define the themes. This step entailed that each

theme was unique and did not overlap with other themes. The theme names and

definitions were derived from the interview transcripts to maintain the words of the

participants. The themes and the definitions are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Themes and Definitions*

| Themes | Definitions |
| --- | --- |
| Theme 1: Difficulties in developing founded race-based cases | Race-based discrimination in the workplace is perpetuated by the low number of founded cases as a result of the complexities involved in building a case |

| Sub-theme 1: Insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases | Problems in developing founded race-based cases due to the inadequacy in the foundational basis to build upon |
|---|---|
| Sub-theme 2: Sufficiency of witnesses and evidences for race-based cases | Problems in developing founded race-based cases due to lacking concrete proof of discrimination |
| Theme 2: Power dynamics in making race-based allegations | Race-based discrimination in the workplace is perpetuated by the low number of reported discrimination instances due to the relationships among employees, supervisors, and managers |
| Sub-theme 1: Employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations | The organization providing support to encourage marginalized individuals to report discriminatory behaviors |
| Sub-theme 2: Influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination | Prevalence of race-based charges in peer-to-peer relationships and low race-based charges in subordinate-to-superior relationships |

The final step of thematic analysis was report generation. This step involved identifying the most logical manner of presenting the themes. The two themes and four sub-themes directly answered the research question that guided this study. As NVivo generated automatic counts of the number of supporting participants and references to the themes, I determined that presenting the results was the logical way to present the theme with the highest number of references first. The themes and the number of supporting participants and references are presented in Table 5. The final list of codes, sub-themes, and themes with definitions is presented in Appendix A.

**Table 5**

*Themes, Number of Supporting Participants, and Number of Supporting References*

| Themes | Number of Supporting Participants | Number of Supporting References |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: Difficulties in developing founded race-based cases | 12 | 52 |
| Sub-theme 1: Insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases | 9 | 28 |
| Sub-theme 2: sufficiency of witnesses and Evidences for race-based cases | 11 | 24 |
| Theme 2: Power dynamics in making race-based allegations | 14 | 36 |
| Sub-theme 1: Employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations | 11 | 19 |
| Sub-theme 2: Influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination | 10 | 17 |

I then read and compared the archival documents and EEOC statistics with the existing codes and themes. The archival documents supported the codes of the organization, supporting the employees to be empowered in reporting experiences of discrimination. The EEOC statistics generally showed a trend in the low number of race-based cases, which also supported the results from the interview data.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

This section contains the evidence of using techniques to address the issues of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was determined by the following four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This section is organized according to the four criteria.

**Credibility**

Credibility issues arise from inaccuracies in the sample representing the population of interest (Shufutinsky, 2020). To increase the accuracy of the data, I utilized purposive sampling and selected participants who had sufficient knowledge and experience about race-based discrimination cases and workplace investigation. I also built rapport with the participants, used an interview protocol, and asked probing questions to elicit bulky and detailed responses from the participants. Additionally, I collected data from three sources to be able to cross-check the information and accomplish the triangulation process.

**Transferability**

Transferability issues originate from the lack of descriptions of the context of the current study to be able to make inferences about the applicability of the findings to another context (Shufutinsky, 2020). I documented descriptions of the setting and the sample and included the report in this chapter so that readers may gain an understanding of the context of this study. I also reached data saturation by reaching a point where no new information emerged from the data. The use of NVivo 12 entailed an automatic count of the number of codes and number of code occurrences across the data. I determined that I reached the point of saturation when I coded the ninth transcript, and no new codes emerged.

**Dependability**

Dependability issues are caused by the insufficiency of details regarding the materials and steps involved in the research so that future researchers may replicate the

study and expect similar results (Shufutinsky, 2020). In chapter three, I provided details of the planned methodology and the rationale for choosing each step to align with the qualitative exploratory sociological case study design. In this chapter, I reported the actual implementation of the data collection and analysis and included descriptions of any modifications to the strategies presented in Chapter 3. I also attached all the materials, such as the permissions, recruitment letter, informed consent form, interview protocol, and code book, in the appendices.

## Confirmability

Confirmability issues arise from the lack of support that the results are grounded in the collected data. I addressed confirmability issues through triangulation and reflexivity. Triangulation entailed cross-referencing the information across the three data sources to find evidence that the finding was based on the data rather than my preconceived ideas about workplace investigation. Reflexivity involved my use of a journal to document my thought processes throughout the duration of the study. In each decision I made regarding the study procedures, I self-inquired whether the step was relevant to the nature and purpose of this study to avoid bias.

## Study Results

This section contains the presentation of the themes that emerged from the triangulation of interview data, archival documents, and EEOC statistics. Two overarching themes with four sub-themes emerged from the data. The first theme was difficulties in developing founded race-based cases with the sub-themes of insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases and sufficiency of witnesses and evidence for race-

based cases. The second theme was power dynamics in making race-based allegations, with the sub-themes of employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations and the influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination.

**Theme 1: Difficulties in Developing Founded Race-Based Cases**

The participants described that race-based discrimination cases in the workplace were difficult to build when based only on allegations. The data showed the lack of concrete guidelines to serve as a basis for what constituted racial discrimination, unlike gender-based discrimination cases, which were often grounded on intentional acts of harassment despite the definition of race-based discrimination in existing literature. In Chapter 1, race-based discrimination was defined as "a complex amalgamation of factors which coalesce to form racially discriminatory thoughts and feelings, which then inform discriminatory behaviors" (Hawkins, 2020, p. 1). The participants stated during the interview that acts of racial discrimination were difficult to prove. Apart from insufficient grounds for building a case, race-based discrimination cases also often lacked witnesses and evidence against the perpetrator. The two sub-themes under this theme are described in the following sub-sections.

*Subtheme 1*

Insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases emerged from the data, particularly as the participants reported relatively fewer successfully developed founded race-based discrimination cases than gender-based discrimination cases. A review of the FY 2009 to 2021 EEOC statistics for the State of Washington revealed information on slightly higher percentages of gender-based charges than race-based charges. The basis

for building a case on racial discrimination remains unclear. For instance, P8 shared a founded case that was based on the complaint of a Native American employee versus a couple of his co-workers who offended him with stereotypical racial slurs. In contrast, Participants 2, 6, and 7 shared similar cases built upon racial slurs but were considered unfounded. P1 perceived that building race-based discrimination cases and holding the accused accountable were difficult tasks, as race-based discrimination allegations often stemmed from misunderstandings and cultural insensitivity rather than the malicious intent of the accused or the hypersensitivity of the recipient as well. P1 said:

> In my experience, the people who have made those one-off statements aren't doing it in a malicious way. It's simply because…it doesn't come across as malicious, but…their impact was that they made a rude, culturally insensitive statement… I have had two cases at [Organization 1] in the last year where employees have also made culturally insensitive statements specifically about two people's accents. It was one statement. Again, they [are] lacking the malicious intent.

Participants 3, 5, and 7 encountered charges made by minority employees against their superiors based on allegations of racial discrimination in their hiring and promotion practices. However, the participants disclosed that the cases were unfounded due to the organizations' ruling that the accusations were not severe enough to build a founded case. P5 stated, "We received some claims based on that alleged [racial] discrimination. From an EEOC perspective, [those cases] were more based on hiring decisions that were made, and none of those were ever founded." For P3, the issue was that a minority employee

filed a complaint against their supervisor, who allegedly did not give them the same opportunity for promotion as their White counterparts. The case was unfounded due to the lack of grounds for building a founded case. P3 shared that the supervisor insisted they judged employees based on "performance value" rather than ethnicity.

Participants 5 and 8 revealed that race-based discrimination cases may also have insufficient grounds as a result of the complainant not pursuing the case due to fear. P5 shared the experience of witnessing an African American female co-worker who did not pursue a racial discrimination case against their supervisor due to fear of retaliation. P8 reported that some minority employees were afraid to pursue discrimination cases due to fear of not being taken seriously and risking their safety. However, P8 also noted that employees were more likely to come forward now than in the past. P8 explained, "They always feel unsafe bringing these kinds of complaints forward. People are more willing to put up with it in a way that maybe they once have not been in the past."

Archival documents and the participants' interview responses revealed that the grounds for founded race-based discrimination cases were often insufficient due to the limited diversity in the workplace and the lack of similar cases that may be used to build a case. P5 stated:

> There were never enough individuals in minority classifications to use as comparators to say well, we already have, you know, these many individuals, and they were treated fine, and they're not filing complaints. We just didn't have comparators, so it was a very heavy lift for people to be able to substantiate allegations of race discrimination.

*Subtheme 2*

The second sub-theme emerged from the triangulated data that pertained to the need to substantiate race-based discrimination cases with sufficient and concrete witnesses and evidence. Otherwise, the case would be considered unfounded. P4 explained that their job as a workplace investigator was to gather and present the facts surrounding cases, but the management ultimately made the decisions of the organizations. Therefore, a lack of witnesses and evidence could result in unfounded cases. P7 shared that half of the cases were unresolved, as the individuals involved left the organization, which meant that facts could no longer be collected. P2 stated:

> So, I would say a small percentage of those are founded, and likely because of a lot of these types of higher-level allegations, sometimes there are no witnesses present, and it becomes they said versus they said situation. So, where there was actual factual information that management could follow up on, I would say, gosh, more often than not, there was none, but I would say maybe in a 12-month period, three to five perhaps, and that includes addressing it at the lowest level.

Five of the participants shared that the most common obstacle they faced at work was the lack of concrete evidences. P9 shared that this problem was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic when their organization shifted to the remote work setting in which direct evidences and witnesses became more difficult to gather. P9 stated, "The difficulty of them, especially since the pandemic, is having direct evidence and witnesses that have seen it. It's the pandemic that has made it hard." P9 also shared that the number of race-based cases filed and resolved increased during President Barack Obama's terms from

2009 to 2017. The EEOC statistics for race-based cases filed and resolved during FY 2007 to 2021 were aligned with P9's statement, as evidenced in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*EEOC Statistics of Race-Based Cases from FY 2007 to 2021*

| | FY 2007 | FY 2008 | FY 2009 | FY 2010 | FY 2011 | FY 2012 | FY 2013 | FY 2014 | FY 2015 | FY 2016 | FY 2017 | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Filed | 30,510 | 33,937 | 33,579 | 35,890 | 35,395 | 33,512 | 33,068 | 31,073 | 31,027 | 32,309 | 28,528 | 24,600 | 23,976 | 22,064 | 20,908 |
| Resolved | 25,882 | 28,321 | 31,129 | 37,559 | 40,534 | 38,426 | 33,978 | 30,429 | 31,782 | 33,936 | 34,229 | 30,564 | 26,317 | 22,719 | 20,714 |

P10 shared that concrete evidence was needed to build and resolve a race-based discrimination case regardless of the number of employees complaining. P10 also disclosed that despite known workplace issues, insufficient concrete evidence would still render a case unfounded. P10 shared:

> So, for example, in the case that I said is an active case right now at my current department, there are clear issues with management. So, the case I'm dealing with right now specifically has to do with the director of a specific department within this larger agency, and it comes down to employees feeling like they're being treated differently, and that could be like they feel like they're being held to different standards, higher expectations, things are being addressed with them that aren't being addressed with other employees. When they look around at the other employees, they see that those other employees are primarily White. Either people of color or we have one employee who has a disability, so there's something different about them, and they're attributing. The differential treatment to that, that aspect of who they are, and that's the only reason that they can think of that.

Maybe they're being treated differently. So, we hired an outside investigator in this one, and they came in and did the primary interviews and put together a report. While there are definite interpersonal things that can be improved upon, there was nothing to tie it back to any specific racial comments or any documented references to that employee's race or disability. So, there's nothing concrete to tie it. So that's why it's typically been unfounded when it comes to racial discrimination concern.

P6 handled a similar case with different results. In the case handled by P6, a group of employees also felt offended by the words of one individual. The case outcomes differed from P10's experience, as P6 shared that the organization had policies regarding making racially offensive comments, which sufficed as proof of the case. P6 shared:

In that particular case, it was an employee's beliefs and objections to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program of the agency. That individual was not on board with where the agency was going with the policies, and the culture changes that we were trying to make within the agency. The employee, in conversations with her leadership team, was making comments that were racially insensitive and that were really offensive to the entire group. They weren't directed at any one individual, but it was more a reflection of her beliefs and the incongruence. The nature of her beliefs with the current policy direction and culture of the region.

P7 stated that sufficient and concrete evidence includes copies of conversations through texts or emails. P5 reported that evidence should be "direct" rather than

insinuating racial discrimination and perceived that direct evidence was difficult to find, as the cases often only involved the words of one person versus another. P5 shared:

> I think previously when cases were coming forward, and I was involved in cases that had to actually do with race-based discrimination allegations, there was sort of a tendency to look for more direct evidence as opposed to circumstantial evidence, or you know, evidence that may provide an insinuation. I think with a lot of claims of discrimination, finding direct evidence is very difficult. I think, at least in the cases that I was aware of that I was involved in, we never had any allegations where someone actually made a racial statement. The claims were always to the extent that someone said it must be because I am of this racial character or this racial classification.

**Theme 2: Power Dynamics in Making Race-Based Allegations**

Despite minimal evidence of race-based discrimination at the workplace, another underlying factor that emerged from the triangulated data that race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State was the relationships among the employees, supervisors, and upper management. Relationships included peer-to-peer and superior-to-subordinate or vice versa. The individuals in higher positions naturally had more power than subordinates. The data revealed that the power held by the involved individuals may have affected the perpetuation of race-based discrimination in the workplace. When the organization or society in general provided means to empower the lower-level employees, they tended to speak out against discrimination in the workplace. However,

individuals were often more willing to file complaints against someone with equal or less power in the organization.

***Subtheme 1: Employees Becoming Empowered to Report Race-Based Allegations***

According to the participants, specific groups of employees were more likely to file race-based discrimination cases than other groups. One of the specific groups was younger employees. Participants 1 and 7 perceived that younger employees who tended to access the internet more than older employees also had access to more information about acceptable and inappropriate behavior towards them. P1 stated that the younger generation's complaints may not necessarily be speaking out for themselves, but they might be advocating for another marginalized co-worker. Apart from having access to information, the younger generation also had more "openness" to speak out against discriminatory behaviors. P1 described:

> I think the Internet and access to information and people and technologies played a role…I think the number of complaints has gone up because folks, particularly younger generations, may have more, I guess, an openness to say something if they disagree with something or call out inappropriate behavior…these are just generalities, but I think older generations maybe had a tendency to look the other way which isn't necessarily condoning it, but they wouldn't play an active role in calling out or addressing an issue they saw compared to the younger generation.

P7 added that younger people who have become comfortable in the workplace also tended to speak out more than the ones who were not comfortable. Comfort may come from outcomes of previous cases that empowered the employees. One empowering

outcome was when the complainant emerged successfully. P2 stated, "I would say the number of complaints increased because I would assume more people are feeling empowered to bring their concerns forward, which results in a higher number of our correlated number of founded as well." Participants 8 and 9 perceived that employees become encouraged to speak up against discrimination when previous similar cases resulted in the perpetrator being fired. Another possible empowering outcome was when cases became unfounded, but the perpetrators were mandated to attend classes or counseling sessions to prevent discriminatory behaviors in the future. P10 shared:

So, in my experience, they've typically been unfounded, but they've typically resulted in some sort of action, needing training in interpersonal communications or emotional intelligence. I mean, there are many factors that would be kind of included in that, so even if we weren't able to. So even though they've been unfounded, they've typically resulted in some sort of action like training and education on how to prevent those types of situations from occurring again in the future.

P2 and P9 perceived that employees become empowered to speak out against discrimination when the organization does not tolerate inappropriate behaviors from anyone. P2 stated, "I would say probably at an increase in founded, and I would correlate that to agencies being a lot more vocal with the expectations throughout an agency and the zero tolerance for those types of behaviors." In the archival document, the Washington State organization had a written policy about zero tolerance for discriminatory behavior under the Affirmative Employment Commitment section. . As

written in the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Program FY 2018
to 2023 (p.3):

> We are committed to achieving a diverse workforce that is reflective of our
> communities through fair and effective implementation of our Affirmative Action
> Plan. The organization's executives are committed to holding all managers and
> employees accountable in carrying out this Affirmative Action Plan. (p. 3)

On rare cases, Participants 1, 4, and 10 experienced subordinates feeling
empowered to speak up against their superiors for racial discrimination. In subordinate-
against-superior complaints, the basis was often on the employees' experiences of
receiving differential treatment than White co-workers. According to P10, complaints
about race-related derogatory remarks were often peer-to-peer cases. P10 stated:

> An employee feeling like they're being discriminated against by a supervisor or
> manager or somebody higher up in their chain of command. And I would say
> that's probably more frequent where an employee was saying they feel like they're
> being treated differently by management and held to a different standard. Those
> are the typical concerns I've seen.

### Subtheme 2

The charges received, and cases handled by the participants were largely peer-to-
peer or superior-to-subordinate. The participants perceived that employees were less
likely to file complaints against employees of the same level or against their superiors
than the other way around. P5 stated, "I see that discrimination allegations are more
common amongst coworkers and potentially also by managers against their employees

their staff that work underneath them that they supervise so that the people that are being supervised we're making the allegations." P6 believed that the number of reports made by supervisors against employees was higher than the reports made by employees against supervisors and another employee because of the dynamics in which supervisors were being held accountable for their subordinates' behaviors. P6 explained:

Supervisors know that they are held personally liable for not addressing those kinds of behaviors. The same is true for managers. There's a different level of responsibility put upon them to stop that behavior. It's the know or should have known standard, and so they are often more proactive because they are. It's self-preservation. That tactic is for them because they know they will be in trouble if they don't report those things and address those things.

According to P2 and P3, the complaints reported by superiors against their subordinates were rarely race-based and were often about performance issues. However, P3 also explained that supervisors may use performance-based complaints as excuses to discriminate against minority employees. P3 stated, "Primarily in round of performance issues, so supervisor taking action on performance issue where minority population or a specific race [is] singled out."

## Summary

This chapter contained results of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study. This study was conducted to explore underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in the state government in Washington state. Data were collected from 10 workplace investigators in Washington state, archival data, and EEOC

statistics. Data were analyzed thematically and triangulated. Two overarching themes and four subthemes emerged from the analysis. The first theme was difficulties in terms of developing founded race-based cases with the subthemes insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases and sufficiency of witnesses and evidence for race-based cases. The second theme was power dynamics in terms of making race-based allegations, with the subthemes empowering employees to report race-based allegations and influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination.

The first theme pertained to workplace investigators' descriptions of difficulties in terms of building and achieving founded race-based discrimination cases at the workplace in Washington.  Tangible evidence and witnesses were also rarely available to support allegations of individual employees. The remote work set-up during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated difficulties of collecting evidence and having witnesses to support a case.

Findings also showed participants reported impacts of relationships among employees, supervisors, and managers in terms of subordinates' willingness to report alleged race-based discrimination. When higher management had zero-tolerance policies for discrimination, lower-level employees tended to feel empowered to report their experiences involving racial discrimination. Supervisors were more likely to report instances of racial discrimination among their subordinates, as participants generally believed that supervisors would be held accountable by management if such issues were not addressed under their supervision. Participants also generally perceived that some supervisors may have used their authority to report their subordinates for performance

issues as an excuse to discriminate against minorities. Overall, participants observed that factors outside the organization may affect employees' decision to report racial discrimination in the workplace. One factor was access to the Internet and information about equity, which younger employees accessed more widely compared to older employees. Participants reported their perceptions that younger employees tended to speak up more than older employees when they thought someone at the workplace was being discriminated against. Another external factor was influence of government leaders, as racial discrimination cases that were reported and resolved increased during the presidency of Barack Obama, as reported by EEOC, with an average annual case of 29,348.13 from 2009 to 2016; declined after his term in 2017, with average annual cases of 24,015.20 from 2017 to 2021.

Findings reported in this chapter are discussed in Chapter 5. I interpret findings guided by the conceptual framework. Chapter 5 includes study implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Minority groups who experience race-based discrimination in the workplace may have decreased wellbeing and experience inequality and disparity in the workplace and economy (Agrawal et al., 2018; Berrey et al., 2017; Elias & Paradies, 2021; Harnois & Bastos, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, race-based discrimination in the workplace is an important problem that must be addressed because of the high rate of minority groups in the labor market (Lee et al., 2017; Talley & Cotton, 2019). According to the EEOC (2017), race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state was related to underlying factors, but these factors were not specified. Research on these discriminatory practices needed more investigation.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study was to explore underlying factors that may perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state. This study was guided by the following research question: What are underlying factors that may perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state? The sample of the study consisted of 10 workplace investigators from HR divisions within state government in Washington state. Data were also gathered from two additional sources of archival documents relevant to race-based discrimination cases in the workplace in Washington state and EEOC statistics involving color-based charges.

Data were analyzed thematically and triangulated. Two overarching themes and four subthemes emerged from analysis. The first theme was difficulties in terms of developing founded race-based cases with the subthemes insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases and sufficiency of witnesses and evidence for race-based cases.

The second theme was power dynamics in terms of making race-based allegations, with the subthemes employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations and influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination.

The first theme pertained to race-based discrimination in the workplace as a result of low number of founded cases associated with complexities involved in building a case. Findings were that problems in terms of developing founded race-based cases emerged from inadequacy in the foundational basis to build cases as well as lack of concrete proof of discrimination. Historically, workplaces included in this study had low racial diversity, which was linked to the few race-based discrimination cases in the past, which current workplace investigators may use as the basis for current and future cases. Some organizations also did not have written policies or guidelines about what behaviors qualified as racially discriminatory. Tangible evidence and witnesses were also rarely available to support allegations of individual employees. Remote employment during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated difficulties in terms of collecting evidence and having witnesses to support cases as well.

Findings further revealed that race-based discrimination in the workplace was possibly related to low number of reported discrimination instances due to relationships among employees, supervisors, and managers. When higher management had policies such as zero-tolerance for discrimination, lower-level employees tended to feel empowered to report their experiences with racial discrimination. However, the typical scenario was that race-based discrimination allegations were often reported by one employee against another.

Supervisors were more likely to report instances of racial discrimination among their subordinates, as participants generally believed supervisors would be held accountable by management if such issues were not addressed under their supervision. Participants generally perceived some supervisors may have used their authority to report their subordinates for performance issues as an excuse to discriminate against minorities. Overall, participants observed factors outside the organization may affect employees' decision to report racial discrimination in the workplace. One factor was access to the Internet and information about equity, which was more widely available for younger employees compared to older employees. Thus, younger employees tended to speak up about discrimination more than older employees.

## Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I discuss in further depth how these important findings answered the research question. Key findings, as previously noted, are discussed within the context that they confirm, disconfirm, or extend related extant literature. These key findings are then analyzed within the context of the conceptual framework.

### Theme 1

One of the underlying factors that emerged from data was that race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington state was related to difficulties in terms of building a case based on allegations. Data showed there was a lack of concrete guidelines to serve as a basis for what constituted racial discrimination, unlike gender-based discrimination cases, which were often grounded on intentional acts of harassment. Apart

from insufficient grounds for building a case, race-based discrimination cases also often

entailed lack of witnesses and evidence against perpetrators.

Race discrimination may not be a significant factor in every industry and

location.

Literature revealed challenges that HR workplace investigators may have with

developing founded race-based cases due to the focus of current law. Malos (2015)

indicated U.S. appellate courts currently focus on overt racial biases. After years of court

litigations, employers know legal ramifications of racial discrimination in the workplace

(Malos, 2015). They may have become more adept in terms of evading liability based on

direct indication of stereotype discrimination through experience and the passage of time.

Malos (2015) also examined stereotype biases related to race, gender, parenthood, use of

family leave, age, disability, and perceived disability, which may improperly influence

performance evaluations or employment decisions based on them. Woodson (2016)

claimed even though civil rights laws have reduced blatant forms of discrimination,

subtler and more complex forms of discrimination have emerged.

Current laws focus on overt forms of racial discrimination in the workplace rather

than more subtle forms (Malos, 2015; Woodson, 2016). Within this context, it may be

more difficult for workplace investigators to develop founded race-based cases, even if

more subtle race-based discrimination is occurring. Therefore, this study does not

disconfirm extant literature but confirms and extends it by further spotlighting practical

implications of how focus of current laws on overt rather than subtle forms of racial

discrimination in the workplace may make it more difficult for workplace investigators to develop founded race-based cases, even when discrimination may have been occurring.

The conceptual framework for this study included the critical race theory, intersectionality of races, and social identity theory. Critical race theory posits that the social power held by the dominant race in the population marginalizes the minority race, and the dominant White race does not have any inherent motivation to change the current racist state (Dittmer, 2017). The motive of critical race theory is to challenge unfair treatment and advocate for social reforms that will prohibit unfair practices to allow equal employment opportunities (Dittmer, 2017).

Intersectionality theory argues that social positions are relational and defined by systems of power and illustrates how systems of power and individuals interact in society to marginalize people based on their social identities (Pitcan et al., 2018). Pitcan et al. (2018) referenced the intersectionality of the lived experiences of Black men, including both racism and gender discrimination. As introduced by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, social identity theory posits that an individual's identity within the social category they are defined to creates a categorization of an in-group and an out-group, and race is one of the measures used to categorize individuals into groups (Joyce, 2018).

These three components of this conceptual framework all support the potential for race-based discrimination to occur in the workplace, such as against Black men, because the intersectionality of being a Black man creates a social identity of being more likely to be marginalized and to be categorized into the out-group due to not being a part of the dominant White race. The first key finding from this study focuses more on the

difficulties of developing founded race-based cases, not on whether race-based discrimination may be actually occurring or not. Therefore, this finding still generally aligns with the conceptual framework that the potential is still there for race-based discrimination to occur in the workplace.

*Subtheme 1*

Insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases emerged from the data, particularly as the participants reported relatively fewer successfully developed founded race-based discrimination cases than gender-based discrimination cases. The FY 2009 to 2021 EEOC statistics for the State of Washington contained information regarding slightly higher percentages of gender-based charges than race-based charges. The basis for building a case on racial discrimination remains unclear.

For instance, P8 shared a founded case that was based on the complaint of a Native American employee versus a couple of his co-workers who offended him with stereotypical racial slurs, while P2, P6, and P7 shared similar cases built upon racial slurs but were considered unfounded. P1 perceived that building race-based discrimination cases and holding the accused accountable were difficult tasks, as race-based discrimination allegations often stemmed from misunderstandings and the cultural insensitivity rather than the malicious intent of the accused. P3, P5, and P7 encountered charges made by minority employees against their superiors based on allegations of racial discrimination in their hiring and promotion practices. However, the participants disclosed that the cases were unfounded due to the organizations' ruling that the accusations were not severe enough to build a founded case.

P5 and P8 revealed that race-based discrimination cases may also have insufficient grounds as a result of the complainant not pursuing the case due to fear. P5 shared the experience of witnessing an African American female co-worker who did not pursue a racial discrimination case against their supervisor due to fear of retaliation. P8 reported that some minority employees were afraid to pursue discrimination cases due to fear of not being taken seriously and risking their safety. However, P8 also noted that employees are more likely to come forward now than in the past. Archival documents and the participants' interview responses lastly revealed that the grounds for founded race-based discrimination cases were often insufficient as a result of the limited diversity in the workplace and the lack of similar cases that may be used as the basis to build a case.

Studies within the literature also recognized the lack of clarity of institutional policies addressing race-based workplace discrimination. Triana et al. (2015) determined that clearer institutional policies with practical implementation in the workplace may reduce discrimination based on race. The literature indicated as well that even though the law allows for legal actions against race-based discrimination in the workplace, very few will enter into a legal discourse against their employers (McElhattan et al., 2017). These researchers further determined that this lack of legal action was due to unclear institutional and ideological determinants that failed to produce any reasonable explanation regarding the underlying factors that may perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace, particularly in Washington State (McElhattan et al., 2017).

These findings with consensus in the literature all pointed to the lack of clarity of what constituted race-based discrimination in the workplace (McElhattan et al., 2017; Triana et al., 2015). Therefore, this second important finding of the study that emphasized the inability of workplace investigators to develop sufficient grounds for founded race-based cases also confirms and extends the literature by further spotlighting the practical implications of how a lack of clarity of institutional and workplace policies for building a case of racial discrimination may make it more difficult for workplace investigators to build these cases, even when discrimination may have been occurring.

Regarding the conceptual framework, the main theme of difficulties in developing founded race-based cases of discrimination was continued with a specific focus on insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases. This second finding from the study also did not focus on whether race-based discrimination may be actually occurring or not, only on difficulties with developing founded race-based cases that were due to other significant factors, such as a lack of clarity for building a case on race-based discrimination in the workplace. Therefore, this finding also generally aligns with the conceptual framework that the potential is still there for race-based discrimination to be occurring in the workplace.

### Subtheme 2

The second sub-theme that emerged from the triangulated data pertained to the need to substantiate race-based discrimination cases with sufficient and concrete witnesses and evidence. Otherwise, the case would be considered unfounded. Cases were often not resolved then, as the individuals involved left the organization, and facts could

no longer be collected. P4 further explained that their job as a workplace investigator was to gather and present the facts surrounding cases, but the decisions were ultimately made by the management of the organizations.

As previously noted, consensus was found in the literature reviewed that significant factors that may contribute to difficulties for human resources workplace investigators in developing founded race-based cases of workplace discrimination may be directly related to a focus in current law on overt forms of racial discrimination rather than on more subtle and complex forms (Malos, 2015; Woodson, 2016) and a lack of clarity in institutional policies of what constituted race-based discrimination in the workplace (McElhattan et al., 2017; Triana et al., 2015). However, no studies were found in the literature reviewed that focused research on the specific topic of difficulties in building founded race-based discrimination cases in the workplace as related to not have sufficient concrete witnesses and evidence. Therefore, this third important finding from the study extends the literature in this area and invites further research to better understand the dynamics of why individuals involved left a particular organization and how often they left an organization directly because of being involved in race-based discrimination cases or how often they left an organization for other unrelated reasons.

Regarding the conceptual framework, the main theme of difficulties in developing founded race-based cases of discrimination was further emphasized again with a specific focus on a lack of sufficiency of witnesses and evidence for race-based cases. This third finding from the study also did not focus on whether race-based discrimination may be occurring or not, only on difficulties with developing founded race-based cases that were

due to other significant factors such as a lack of sufficient witnesses who had been involved in the case due to them leaving the organization. Therefore, this finding also generally aligns with the conceptual framework that the potential is still there for race-based discrimination to be occurring in the workplace.

**Theme 2**

Despite minimal evidence of race-based discrimination at the workplace, another underlying factor that emerged from the triangulated data on race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State was the relationships among the employees, supervisors, and upper management. Relationships included peer-to-peer and superior-to-subordinate or vice versa. The individuals in higher positions naturally had more power than subordinates. The data revealed that the power held by the involved individuals may have affected race-based discrimination in the workplace. When the organization or society in general provided means to empower the lower-level employees, they tended to speak out against discrimination in the workplace. However, individuals were often more willing to file complaints against someone with equal or less power in the organization.

The topic of the broader power dynamics involved in making race-based allegations in the workplace was also recognized in the literature reviewed. Wingfield and Chavez (2020) found that Black workers' status within an organization hierarchy essentially informed perceptions of the nature and type of workplace discrimination. Bender et al. (2017) supported these findings by presenting evidence of a robust and statistical relationship between several measures of having a more powerful voice within an organization and lower claims of racial discrimination. Bender et al. (2017) further

determined that employees with supervisors who gave them a more powerful voice by seeking information from them were less likely to argue racial discrimination. Therefore, this fourth important finding of the study of power dynamics within an organization being a significant factor in making race-based allegations confirms the literature in this area.

Regarding the conceptual framework, the foundational principles of critical race theory, the intersectionality of races, and social identity theory all emphasize power dynamics, whether these power dynamics are based on the dominant social power of the White race within organizational structures, marginalizing people based on the perceived intersectionality of lesser social identities or categorizing people as belonging to the in-group or the out-group based on their social identity. In the workplace, these power dynamics may continue to be a significant factor in whether an employee will choose to speak out about race-based discrimination or not. Therefore, this fourth key finding of power dynamics being significantly involved when making race-based allegations within a workplace organization clearly aligns with this conceptual framework.

*Subtheme 1*

According to the participants, specific groups of employees were more likely to file race-based discrimination cases than other groups. One of the specific groups was younger employees. The younger generation's complaints may not necessarily involve speaking out for themselves, and they may be advocating for another marginalized co-worker. Apart from having access to information, the younger generation also had more openness to speak out against discriminatory behaviors.

No studies were found in the literature reviewed that focused specifically on younger employees being a significant group who may be empowered to report race-based allegations of discrimination in the workplace. Therefore, this fifth important finding from the study extends the literature on this topic. Further research is clearly indicated, though, to better understand how younger employees may influence and impact the difficulties that investigators face when developing founded race-based cases of discrimination in the workplace.

Regarding the conceptual framework, this framework does not appear to focus on age as a significant component within the power dynamics of the dominant social power of the White race within organizational structures, marginalizing people based on the perceived intersectionality of lesser social identities or categorizing people as belonging to the in-group or the out-group based on their social identity. Yet, age could be a significant component of any power dynamic. Therefore, this fifth key finding of younger employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations not necessarily to speak out for themselves but on behalf of advocating for another marginalized co-worker makes a valuable contribution to this conceptual framework by opening the discussion within the context of race-based discrimination in the workplace of how age may be a significant factor in these power dynamics.

### Subtheme 2

The charges received, and cases handled by the participants were largely peer-to-peer or superior-to-subordinate. The participants perceived that employees were less likely to file complaints against employees of the same level or against their superiors

than the other way around. The complaints reported by superiors against their subordinates were rarely race-based and were often about performance issues. However, performance-based complaints were reported that they may be used by supervisors as excuses to discriminate against minority employees. P6 believed that the number of reports made by supervisors against employees was higher than the reports made by employees against supervisors and another employee because of the dynamics in which supervisors were being held accountable for their subordinates' behaviors.

Multiple studies in the literature reviewed explored the power dynamics of the influence of workplace position in more depth, particularly as it related to feeling comfortable speaking out or being scrutinized on performance. Williams (2017) determined that employers should learn about their employees' experiences and build trust to make the subject of racial discrimination safe for discussion because it was not always easy for minority individuals to speak out if they felt that telling the truth was too risky and would therefore rather tell their managers what they want to hear instead. Brewster and Rusche (2017) added further support to these findings by emphasizing that workplace policies should not encourage managers who did not give other employees a voice to speak out and should sternly punish managers who displayed racist or discriminatory behavior that could be interpreted as tacit permission to follow. These findings of Williams (2017) and Brewster and Rusche (2017) added support to the previous findings of Bender et al. (2017) that employees with supervisors who gave them a more powerful voice by seeking information from them were less likely to argue racial discrimination.

Other researchers focused on the more intense scrutiny that African Americans may face in the workplace as a form of the more subtle racial discrimination they may experience. Both Williams (2018) and Wirts (2017) found that African Americans tended to face more employee scrutiny than White coworkers, resulting in adverse workplace actions against them. These findings of Williams (2018) and Wirts (2017) added support to the previous findings of Malos (2015) that there were various kinds of more subtle stereotype biases that may improperly influence performance evaluations or employment decisions based upon them.

Further consensus was found in the literature reviewed that the power dynamics of the influence of workplace position was a significant factor in reporting race-based discrimination (Bender et al., 2017; Brewster & Rusche, 2017; Williams, 2017). Further consensus was also found that African Americans may face more subtle forms of race-based discrimination in the workplace, such as more intense scrutiny or biased performance evaluations (Malos, 2015; Wirts, 2017; Williams, 2018). Therefore, this sixth important finding from the current study of the influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination confirms the extant literature in this area.

The conceptual framework of this study continues to emphasize the power dynamics of the dominant social power of the White race within organizational structures, marginalizing people based on the perceived intersectionality of lesser social identities and categorizing people as belonging to the in-group or the out-group based on their social identity. The workplace is certainly an important setting where these power dynamics can exist within these organizational structures to marginalize and categorize

people as not really deserving to have as powerful of a voice as others and deserving instead of being unfairly scrutinized. Therefore, this sixth important finding from the current study of the influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination clearly aligns with this conceptual framework.

## Limitations of the Study

Limitations to generalizability and/or trustworthiness, validity, and reliability that arose from the execution of this study will now be discussed. The study was limited in terms of its generalizability because of the focus on only Washington State and a relatively small sample size of only ten participants. The remote work set-up during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the difficulty of participants in collecting evidence and having witnesses to support a case, which may have also limited the generalizability of the study findings. There were no recognized limitations to the trustworthiness or to the validity of the study. However, some limitations were recognized pertaining to the reliability of biases, such as the bias of the researcher, who is a racial minority, has a background in human resources, and is an employee of one of the many departments of Washington State.

The researcher took several steps to decrease the effects of any preconceptions and biases by keeping journals of self-examination of such biases and practicing reflexivity to document notes progressively. Another limitation to consider was the participants' own self-report bias inherent in this study's qualitative approach. The researcher minimized this bias by ensuring the participants that their responses were confidential.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research within the context of the strengths and limitations of the current study and the literature reviewed will now be discussed. This current study offered many strengths of a specific focus on both the perspectives and practical experiences of human resources investigators with building founded cases for race-based discrimination in the workplace. The findings from this study also provided a greater understanding of how various underlying factors may influence this process.

However, several limitations to this study were noted that invite further research. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies on this topic include human resources workplace investigators from other states as well to enhance generalizability. It is also recommended that further research on this topic utilize different types of research designs and methodologies to further enhance validity and reliability, such as studies that are quantitative and measure specific variables such as the number of cases that were determined to be unfounded, how many times this could be directly attributed to a lack of clarity of institutional policies to address race-based discrimination in the workplace, and or how many times this could be directly attributed to witnesses involved in the case leaving the organization before the case was resolved. Other studies could utilize a mixed method approach that analyzes these quantitative variables within the context of the perceptions of employees from various levels and age groups within an organization. Moreover, it is also recommended that further research be conducted to reduce the potential for researcher or self-report bias.

Areas for further research were also recognized from the literature reviewed. No studies were found in the literature that focused research on the specific topic of difficulties in building founded race-based discrimination cases in the workplace as related to not having sufficient concrete witnesses and evidence. Therefore, this topic is recommended for further research to better understand the dynamics of why individuals involved in a race-based discrimination case leave a particular organization before the case had been resolved, how often they leave an organization directly because of being involved in race-based discrimination cases, or how often they leave an organization for other unrelated reasons. No studies were also found in the literature reviewed that focused specifically on younger employees being a significant group who may be empowered to report race-based allegations of discrimination in the workplace on behalf of themselves or others. Therefore, this topic is recommended for further research to better understand how younger employees may influence and impact the difficulties that investigators face when developing founded race-based workplace discrimination cases.

## Implications

Implications of this study and its potential impact on positive social change on the individual, family, organizational, and societal/policy levels will now be discussed. Next, methodological, and theoretical implications will be discussed. Then, practice recommendations will also be discussed.

On the individual level, better understanding the underlying factors that perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace may help to prevent individual employees from being racially discriminated against. A better understanding of the

perspectives and practical experiences of human resources investigators with building founded cases for race-based discrimination in the workplace may also help individual investigators improve their ability to build founded cases. In turn, these benefits could positively impact their families by these employees and workplace investigators experiencing more job satisfaction and better overall well-being as they interact with their family members. On the organizational level, a better understanding of the underlying factors that perpetuate racism in the workplace may facilitate the ability of organizational leaders to implement and enforce clearer and more effective measures that will prohibit racial discrimination in the workplace, resulting in positive social change at the policy and society level, workplace by workplace.

Regarding methodological implications, there is a need for future studies, as previously noted, that will explore the research topic of this study with a more varied sample of human resources workplace investigators and different types of research designs and methodologies to further enhance validity and reliability. Regarding the theoretical implications, this study makes a valuable contribution to critical race theory, the intersectionality of races, and social identity theory, which all emphasize power dynamics of the dominant social power of the White race within organizational structures, marginalizing people based on the perceived intersectionality of lesser social identities, or categorizing people as belonging to the in-group or the out-group based on their social identity within the context of race-based discrimination in the workplace. The first major theme from the findings of difficulties in developing founded race-based cases spotlighted how more subtle forms of race-based discrimination in the workplace that are

not being more clearly and adequately addressed at the organizational and governmental policy level may interfere with workplace investigators doing their jobs more effectively. The second major theme focused directly on these power dynamics in the workplace when making race-based allegations and how they may interfere with workplace investigators doing their jobs more effectively. Within this second major theme, this study also made a valuable contribution to this conceptual framework by opening up the discussion within the context of race-based discrimination in the workplace and how age may be a significant factor in these power dynamics.

Recommendations for practice in the human resources industry point to the imperative for workplace investigators to continue to spotlight and advocate for the need for clearer policies of what constitutes race-based discrimination in the workplace that also address more subtle forms of discrimination so they can be empowered to do their jobs more effectively. Employers must work together with human resources to ensure that their organizational policies are clear and consistently implemented. Leaders at the government level must also work with employers and workplace investigators so that laws already in place to prevent race-based discrimination in the workplace are clear and will continue to be improved to address all forms of race-based discrimination.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory sociological case study was to explore the underlying factors that may perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington State. Key findings from this study indicated that important underlying factors that may perpetuate race-based discrimination in the workplace in Washington

State were difficulties in developing founded race-based cases due to a lack of clarity in organizational policies of the basis for building sufficient grounds for a case and or a lack of witnesses involved in a case who may have already left the organization before the case was resolved. Key findings from this study further indicated that there were power dynamics involved in making race-based allegations of discrimination in the workplace that may influence lower-level employees from not wanting to report higher-level employees who may also be engaging in more subtle forms of discrimination. Civil rights laws were passed to protect minorities from being racially discriminated against, including being discriminated against in the workplace. However, these laws cannot be effective if they are not clearly and consistently implemented and address all forms of racial discrimination. Therefore, it is imperative that government and organizational leaders, employers, and human resources workplace investigators all work together to establish a much clearer understanding of the basis for what constitutes race-based discrimination in the workplace so that workplace investigators in Washington State can do the job they were intended to do in a timely manner to protect minorities and uphold these laws.

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Appendix A: List Of Codes and Themes

| Codes | Sub-themes | Definitions of Sub-themes | Themes | Definitions of Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| -basis for gender-based cases deemed severe enough -basis for race-based cases deemed not severe enough | Insufficient grounds for founded race-based cases | Problems in developing founded race-based cases due to the inadequacy in the foundational basis to build upon | Difficulties in developing founded race-based cases | Race-based discrimination in the workplace perpetuated by the low number of founded cases as a result of the complexities involved in building a case |
| - direct witnesses and evidences - evidences not concrete - lack of witnesses | Sufficiency of witnesses and evidences for race-based cases | Problems in developing founded race-based cases due to lacking concrete proof of discrimination | | |
| - more complaints from younger generation - organization supporting employees - race-based allegations from minority employees standing up for themselves | Employees becoming empowered to report race-based allegations | The organization providing support to encourage marginalized individuals to report discriminatory behaviors | Power dynamics in making race-based allegations | Race-based discrimination in the workplace perpetuated by the low number of reported discrimination instances due to the relationships among employees, supervisors, and managers |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| - more complaints are peer-to-peer<br>- more complaints from supervisors against subordinates<br>- relatively low number of race-based cases | Influence of position on reporting race-based discrimination | Prevalence of race-based charges in peer-to-peer relationships and low race-based charges in subordinate-to-superior relationships |