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# White Bodies, Black Gaze: Constructions of White Masculinity in White-Male Elite Discourses on Leadership and Diversity

Christopher Brown

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Christopher B. Brown

*Candidate*

Communication & Journalism

*Department*

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*

*Karen A. Fox*

, Chairperson

*KAG*

, Chairperson

*May Jane Collins*

*Kicky Lee Allen*

**WHITE BODIES, BLACK GAZE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF  
WHITE MASCULINITY IN WHITE-MALE ELITE  
DISCOURSES ON LEADERSHIP AND DIVERSITY**

**BY**

**CHRISTOPHER BROWN**

B.A., Communication and Psychology, Aurora University, 1999  
M.A., Multicultural Communication, DePaul University, 2002

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Communication**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2009**

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my loving mom, Louise Brown, and my brilliant girlfriend, Sachi Sekimoto; thank you both for your love and encouragement!

I also dedicate this project to my father, Mr. Brown and three brothers, Eric, Michael, and Andre; I know you all have *my back!*

Finally, much love to my guardian angels and deceased brother, Raymond and sister, Valerie; continue to watch over your little brother from heaven!

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines white-male elite understandings of diversity and leadership to consider possibilities for exploring articulations of white masculinity. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with white-male leaders in their organizations who by virtue of their race, gender, class, and education, exercise much power and control in their organization. I used grounded theory methodology to highlight the communication strategies that white-male elites employed when talking about leadership and diversity. Techniques in grounded theory methodology yielded concepts, descriptors, and semantic moves that were articulated to intersecting discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. Through the intersectional matrix, I posited that multiple functions of social identities of white-male elites are essential in (re)producing positions of power.

Nuanced talk on leadership and diversity (re)produced discourses of white masculinity as intersecting discourses operating within particular functions of white hegemonic masculinity—white, heterosexual, and patriarchal power. White-male elites in this study used four communication strategies when discussing leadership and diversity: some white-male elites highlighted the significance of race in society, while others denounced race for more appropriate observations outside of racial identity categories; many white-male elites approved binary categories between men and women; some white-male elites buttressed race transcendent ideas; and some white-male elites verified their own privileged positioning. These communication strategies revealed the contradictory meanings of race and gender in white-male elite discourses on leadership and diversity. Thus, theorizing white masculinity constitutes the negotiation of identity politics within social anxieties of the multicultural context. The notion of *studying up* is important in revealing the context in which I, a black heterosexual male researcher, construct meanings about white heterosexual male bodies. This context provides a unique location within the intersectional matrix to observe the process of communication operating in the creative engagement, management, and negotiation of meanings in co-creating, reproducing, and reaffirming whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity ideologies.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, I delivered a talk at the American Bar Association in Chicago, Illinois, to various business leaders, mostly white males, who served as Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Vice-Presidents. My talk essentially reviewed past and present ideas on diversity and called for new grounds in the implementation of diversity-training programs. I also implored the audience to consider the systematic impact of the history of racism and sexism in the United States. In taking my audience systematically through ideas on diversity, I argued that new diversity initiatives are not “new” at all but are, rather, exemplary of traditional practices long associated with quotas. I then argued that the notion of a quota undercuts any value in the circulated meanings of diversity because it undermines the intellectual and practical value that women and people of color<sup>1</sup> bring to organizations.

Upon completing my presentation, I will never forget the dead silence that filled the room. As I stood in the front at the podium, waiting for the moderator to set up the microphone for questioning, I received a few surreptitious glances from the audience. I felt like I had violated the norms of the event in speaking about diversity because I ventured into uncharted territories of race, gender, and the systematic oppression of all people of color and white women. Upon reflection, that is exactly what I did! I altered the conversation from the topic of diversity management to specifying deficiencies in understandings of diversity. I thought to myself, “I probably will not get invited back to

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<sup>1</sup> Like Allen (2003), I use the term *person/people of color* to account for race-ethnicity classifications among groups. Here, I concentrate on predominantly subordinated groups within the United States: blacks, Latinas/os, Asians, and Native Americans. Therefore, to refer collectively to these groups I use the term *people of color*.

“speak at this event!” In any case, the talk elicited many reactions and comments from the audience. Some in the audience asked, “How do you separate diversity from quotas?” Another person asked, “How does culture influence the bottom line?” Others began inquiring, “What responsibility do I have in creating opportunities for people who do not have the personal fortitude to search for them?” Some people discussed the progress that women and persons of color made in integrating the workplace. Some people asserted that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Others made appeals to progress by comparing the social conditions of the past to the conditions of the present. One person justified progress through examples of famous black people in Hollywood and in sports. As I answered each question, I could see that some people were bewildered and perturbed; some enjoyed my candor, while others asked me to come to their organizations and talk about diversity. While I conceded to a few of the statements, I was frustrated by comments that appeared to minimize the significance of sexism and racism in hiring practices.

Irrespective of questions from these business leaders, I recognized a common theme in their responses: “Anyone can overcome the atrocities of their conditions!” I started pondering: “How many of them grew up in a single-parent home? How many of them get overwhelmed and feel helpless when they know the state, city, and community is exploiting them? Do they recognize that historical and unrelenting social barriers prevent some from obtaining, or even recognizing possibilities for success? Do excessive expectations about possibilities of human agency actually obscure these barriers?” In retrospect, it was difficult negotiating the symbolic terrain in which I perceived not only that my words, but also my body, my skin, and my personality to some degree were so

disagreeable to the audience. Nevertheless, this talk confirmed for me that as much as the white leaders in attendance embraced the language of equality and social progress in engaging diversity, they still shared ideological affinities that ignore the contradictory practices of individuals using such notions. This experience of silence, scrutiny, and varying degrees of attentiveness from these business leaders made me want to pursue further conversations on diversity with leaders in organizations. This experience led me to pursue a dissertation project that explores how white-male leaders talk and negotiate diversity and leadership with a black-male interviewer.

### The Present Study

This study originated from my experience of hearing and responding to multiple interpretations of diversity and leadership at the aforementioned Diversity Summit where I was one of about ten speakers representing various identity categories based on race, gender, disability, age, and sexuality. In this study, I interviewed white-male elites to obtain their perspective on issues of diversity and leadership. I interviewed sixteen white males who maintain elite positions in their organizations. I use the term *elite* to identify individuals who, by virtue of their race, gender, class, and education, exercise much power and control in their organization. White-male leaders in their organizations fit this description of people with substantial education, historical racial and gender privilege, social status, and economic resources. Thus, white men in high-profile positions, such as CEOs or politicians, occupy unique spaces in that they can reside in various privileged locations: white, male, nominally heterosexual, affluent relative to economic status, successful relative to job title, and privileged relative United States citizenship status in a world dominated by capitalist and imperialist U.S. practices. Participants range from age

25 to 60, hold important positions in their organizations, and have significant influence on organizational decisions. Thirteen participants were actively involved in decision-making, participation, and implementation of diversity-training workshops. Three of the participants have not been involved in diversity-training workshops, but they provided their ideas on diversity in society. All participants provided ample detail on their ideas of leadership.

This study is motivated by my position at the intersections of being a black heterosexual male who grew up in a poor and working-class neighborhood in inner-city Chicago, Illinois, and who became a part of the academic elite. Research constitutes, as Collins (2000) asserts, a “personal endeavor” where theoretically, I work out the tensions that challenge my own knowledge, but practically, I infiltrate uncomfortable spaces that challenge my own subjectivity so that I can learn more about how I creatively negotiate my own identity. In devoting attention to the intersections of my positionality, the notion of “studying up” (Schrijvers, 1991, p. 177), whereby researchers from traditionally subordinated groups conduct research on members of the dominant group, sets the context for this study.

In studying up, I set the context for the politics of race, gender, class, and sexuality involved in interracial conversations to constitute the negotiation of different perspectives or ways of seeing and acting in the world. Individuals understand the world from different vantage points, which are a result of a person’s experience characterized by social-group membership (Collins, 2000). This study is premised on the idea that persons from a lower standpoint may use their body to produce power and engage the thought processes of persons who historically maintain a higher standpoint (in race,

gender, sexuality, material wealth, job status, and political power). In this respect, in studying up, my positionality, in this interracial context, offers me an opportunity to participate in a space where white-male elites have a higher economic, racial, gender, sexual, academic, material wealth, and job status than me. Although we both occupy privileged spaces of gender, sexuality, and educational achievement, I see myself as studying up relative to white male elites in every single way—race, gender, class, sexuality, education, and job status. For instance, white-male elites maintain high-profile positions in their organization, which affords them higher economic and job status than me. In terms of race, past and present systematic white supremacy oppresses black people and makes it difficult for us to gain access in social institutions. In terms of sexuality and gender, white bodies scrutinize, debase, and objectify black male bodies through negative stereotypical depictions that control representations of blackness. In terms of education, black success in academia is contingent upon the ability to perform and enact whiteness. The historical interpellation (Hall, 1998) of persons of color and white women in society limits opportunities to particular social institutions and spaces that are easily accessible and normally occupied by white males.

#### *Purpose of Study*

In focusing on white elites' engagements with race and gender in topics of diversity and leadership, I was interested in how white-male elites talk about leadership and diversity in order to understand their constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In addition, I was interested in how they talk about leadership and diversity in a face-to-face interview with a black-male interviewer. Feagin and O'Brien (2003) provide evidence of white-male constructions of race in interviews, yet little has been done

toward understanding in greater depth and offering concrete suggestions on how they talk about and perform other identity categories in an interview with an educated black heterosexual male. In addition, little has been done to uncover communication strategies that white-male elites specifically use in constructing discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. In using the idea of studying up to contextualize these interviews, this study helps communication scholars understand how white heterosexual male elites talk about and negotiate meanings of diversity and leadership against their positions as white-male elites.

Two research questions guide this study. First, I examine how white-male elites make sense of leadership in an organizational context. Therefore, the first question, “How do white-male elites talk about leadership?” addresses the communication strategies that arise when white-male elites talk about leadership. Second, I further assessed how these men understand and talk about diversity. Therefore, the second research question, “How do white-male elites talk about diversity?” examines the communication strategies that surface when white-male elites provide their definitions of diversity and talk about diversity-training programs. The larger concern of this study is to show how white-male elites understand diversity and leadership and how these understandings contribute to the construction of white masculinity.

### *Justification for the Study*

Organizational communication scholars explore relationships between communication and a variety of organizational forms including feminist organizing, multinational collaborations, and democratic and cooperative organizing (Krone, 2005). By and large, organizational communication scholars have sought to explain

interconnections between society, culture, and communication (see Morgan & Krone, 2001; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Mumby & Stohl, 1996). Although Ashcraft and Allen (2003) provide systematic attention to the racial dynamics of organizational communication, organizational communication scholars for the most part focus on the impact of gender in organizations (Ashcraft, 2001; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003; Buzzanell, 2001; Forbes, 2002; Mumby, 2000). Only recently have organizational scholars become interested in intersectionality to understand aspects of difference in the world of professionals (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). The omission of intersectionality, nonetheless, in organizational communication studies, remains evident as scholars deal with aspects of gender and race separately in understanding dynamic organizational forms. More pertinently, although we may think of class, race, gender, and sexuality as different social structures, it is important to consider ways in which individuals simultaneously experience them. The intersectional approach may result in research that no longer makes it possible to use generalizations about experiences shared among groups.

As a scholar primarily interested in political and social constructions of race, I usually seek to provide attention to racial dynamics in preserving whiteness ideologies. For example, in studying race in the workplace, I would tend to agree that globalization, interracial interactions, racial and gendered divisions of labor, and diversity issues, which mostly revolve around racial groups (Allen, 1995; Kossek & Zonia, 1994), make it important to include analyses of race in organizational scholarship. However, while my personal experiences might lead one to expect race to be my central concern, I also seek to provide attention to the dynamics of gender, class, and sexuality as manifested in

everyday life experiences of organizational leaders in preserving white heterosexual masculine norms.

As I have come to recognize the complexity of these interactions, I turn to research on intersectionality to avert pitfalls of making generalizations in considering identities separately. Black feminists posit that the intersectional matrix is a specific location where multiple systems of oppression simultaneously converge in concealing ideological maneuvers that define Otherness (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1994). While black women show that they exist in an intersectional matrix that contributes to their shared and diverse experiences, I consider the multiple functions of social identities of white males and the purposes served by them in their positions of power. Thus, I recognize the importance of understanding the ways in which social identities interact and embody the experiences of white-male elites.

In studying white-male elites, I think it is important to politicize a voice that is often seen as common sense. I argue that scholarship must constitute white-male elite bodies and communicative practices as intersecting discourses of difference in untangling social constructions of identity that allow for a rich understanding of structural, material, and bodily conditions at work. As Houston (2002) asserts, aspects of social identities must be seen as power relationships within the social order, not as individual or political social categories. In highlighting white-male elite discourses of leadership and diversity, I conceive the aspects of their social identities as intersecting, which offers an especially powerful means for empirically traversing the boundaries.

According to Brandzel and Desai (2008), white hetero-masculinity is a pervasive discourse whereby white males feel that they are losing social opportunities and

privileges at the hands of feminists, race-consciousness individuals, and other progressives. In this study, I extend this definition of white hetero-masculinity to include the semantic moves and communicative choices of white-male elites in talking about how they experience, organize, and negotiate their membership in the full range of social categories to which they belong. Race, gender, and sexuality are inherently intersectional and these identities shape our relationships within the larger society where we reside. White heterosexual males dominate leadership positions in the workplace historically and even today, resulting in constructions of leadership and diversity within the white masculine heterosexual frame of reference. Thus, I examine the discourses of white-male elites in the workplace and their constructions of white hetero-masculinity as organizational leaders.

My study identifies the meaningful communication strategies that white-male elites engage in constituting multiple foundational discourses of individualism, patriotism, equality, competitiveness, victimhood, aggression, and difference in their constructions of leadership and diversity. Race, gender, and sexuality intersect to shape multiple articulations of white masculinity. I focus on white-male elite constructions of race, gender, and sexuality to highlight the need to account for multiple articulations of identity that shape discursive practices of white hetero-masculinity. White masculinity constitutes an active process, in which power and knowledge construct meanings through *talk*—influence perceptions of gender, race, and sexuality—and guide social interaction. I seek to discover manifestations of white masculinity when white-male elites talk about leadership and diversity with a black-male interviewer.

### *Methodological Considerations*

My research questions are grounded in understanding how white-male elites make sense of leadership and diversity in a face-to-face interview with a black-male interviewer. Given the lack of research examining professional white-male elites and their articulations of leadership and diversity as well as the need for more descriptive data on their constructions of white masculinity, this study uses a grounded-theory approach. I used grounded-theory methodology because I wanted to generate concepts, strategies, possible models, and theories from empirical data. As a methodology, grounded theory accounts for variation of specific cases and ensures that abstract concepts are grounded in empirical data of the everyday experiences of the participants in the study (e.g., Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through grounded-theory methodology, I develop a theory, rather than verify existing theories, that explains how white-male elites' constructions of race and gender contribute to constructions of white masculinity. In particular, I used an inductive approach to explore the concrete practices and ultimately the talk of white-male elites to develop a fresh perspective on existing research that investigates white masculinity as conceptualized and performed. The primary data for this study came from sixteen semi-structured interviews with white-male elites. I used the semi-structured interview format to provide white-male elites with freedom and latitude to expound on each question. I also used semi-structured interviews to yield spontaneous comments from me and the participants.

### *My Position as Researcher*

A researcher's standpoint is not simply interested in biased positions, but, rather, a sense of being engaged that structures epistemology by positing "duality of

levels of reality,” of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the “surface” or appearance. (Hartsock, 1993, p. 285)

Since I am investigating the relationship between gender, race, sexuality, and power through face-to-face interviews with white males as a man of color, it is important to document, in my methodological notes, who I am and how I will interact with my research participants. For instance, my potential standpoint in this study underscores my disciplinary knowledge, gendered experience (subordinate masculinity), heterosexuality, class, and racial/cultural background. These aspects of my identity may influence my assumptions and evaluations of white male elite responses. I also understand that for many white males, the racial, gendered, and sexual composition of these spaces are congruent, but for others they are not. Therefore, these conditions may constitute a threat or even confusion for them. Interracial interactions may influence white respondents’ attitudes and answers, by which they react according to a perceived threat to their reputation (Branton & Jones, 2005). Research provides evidence of a racial-threat hypothesis that asserts that whites respond negatively in the presence of African Americans in contexts of limited spatial proximity (Baybeck, 2006). As a black male, I understand that obvious racial, class, and status differences and shared sexual and gendered experiences may influence respondents’ answers.

In this study, as an interviewer, I am an active participant in these interactions with respondents, and thus, I view these encounters as a conversation between two speakers in which the respondent and I contextually ground meanings in questions and responses. That being said, it is important for me to consider the ideas that fuel my assumptions of social reality and inherent philosophies. In my case, race has been the

most salient identification as to how I see theory, society, and self. In this sense, my racial identity significantly contributes to how I understand my socialization process and communicate with others. Therefore, I understand that my body is a physical manifestation for performing race. Race is nebulous, yet persistent, and requires a willingness to engage in conflict, clash, and compromise in diverse settings. This does not preclude my sexual, class, and gendered standpoints, but I acknowledge that I am first and foremost a race-conscious scholar. As a race-conscious scholar, I engage the explicit recognition of racial differences and acknowledge the importance of race in constituting my worldview (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995; Haney Lopez, 2006a). From this positionality, I engage discussions on race and racism in attempting to understand its influence in various social contexts. Yet, I understand my race-conscious positionality may support viewing the world through one singular aspect of identity, which is reductionist, leaving out the influence of other aspects of identity. Engaging in intersectional scholarship requires locating ourselves as privileged and oppressed subjects, in acknowledging that identity categories are fluid and contextual.

### Preview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I explore and review relevant bodies of scholarly literature pertaining to leadership, diversity, and masculinity. In Chapter Three, I provide a methodological framework for the current study, involving the use of grounded-theory methodology to explore white-male elites' talk on diversity and leadership in rearticulating theories on white masculinity. In Chapters Four through Six, I provide an analysis of the research results yielded during the examination of data for this project. I divide the analysis into three sections, which include white-male elite views on

leadership, diversity, and on race and gender. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I provide conclusions for considering white masculinity, studying up, and thinking about ways to engage difficult topics in interracial conversations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers five primary areas: (1) constructions of leadership that are essential in understanding how leaders' communicative practices impact organizational life; (2) the evolution of the idea of diversity and diversity training in organizations and the critical turns that influenced thinking on diversity; (3) descriptions of whiteness studies and their impact on scholarly literature on race, gender, and sexuality; (4) masculinity studies that serve as a cultural disturbance of the social position of men and of perceived gender roles; and (5) constructions of white masculinity that exert hegemonic control within U.S. culture. In reviewing these five areas, I provide a discussion on scholarship that details conventional understandings of leadership, diversity, and white masculinity. The review of each of these areas facilitates understanding of the importance of this study in contextualizing and situating white-male elites' talk.

#### Constructions of Leadership

Leadership studies examine the leaders themselves, including the qualities deemed necessary to be an effective leader. Popular books written in the 19th century (see Carlyle, 1841), mid-late 20th century (Fiedler, 1967; Holladay & Coombs, 1993; Stogdill, 1974), and the early 21st century (Schein, 2004), provide insightful examples and scholarly evidence on qualities of effective and ineffective leadership in different contexts or historical moments. Organizational scholars (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Vroom & Stenberg, 2002) delve into theories of leadership to explain the relationship between leaders and their followers. These scholars also tend to examine leaders' desires to make right decisions in enhancing productivity for the organization. Similarly,

organizational scholarship maintains a long history of theorizing leadership effectiveness. Scholars who study leadership have compiled numerous theories on the effects of leadership on followers or subordinates' work performance (e.g., Bryman, 1992; Clifton, 2006; Madlock, 2008; Ricks & Freadrich, 1999; Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). In these studies, scholars posit that the employer engages in social actions that are crucial to leading his/her employees (e.g., directing and rewarding employees, managing conflict, achieving team building, and making important decisions).

Some organizational communication scholars examine the impact of communication on the leader in guiding and managing interactions within organizations. Understanding the impact of communicative meanings in guiding social action within organizations has been an important and ongoing project in organizational communication studies (see Ashcraft, 2001; Buzzanell, Ellingson, Silvio, Pasch, Dale, & Mauro, 2001; Fine & Buzzanell, 2000; Mumby, 1993; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Nielsen, 2009; Thayer, 1988). Leaders are responsible for creating meaning through evaluating individuals and organizational processes in pursuing what is right and desirable for the organization. More recently, organizational communication scholars focus on the construction of social identity categories as they impact organizational life and practice. The following section highlights the significance of these themes toward understanding how white-male elites in this study understand and create discourses on leadership.

#### *Leadership and the Construction of Identity*

In the context of organizational communication studies, as in the broader social sciences, identity has become a popular frame through which to investigate a wide array of phenomena. Organizational scholars investigate managerial, professional, and

occupational identities as well as how organizational employees negotiate their identity in the workplace (Ashcraft, 2001). In the workplace, for example, Calhoon (1969) posits that in enacting the Machiavellian approach to leadership, supervisors are fully aware that a degree of manipulation is necessary to survive in the business world. Calhoon found that supervisors, who were not inherently manipulative, relied on exploitative social behaviors to manage employees' behaviors and influence organizational outcomes. In a sense, Machiavellian managers engaged in aggressive and devious behaviors to achieve personal goals.

Recent studies show that Machiavellian supervisors use communication strategies to control their environments and achieve positive organizational outcomes. These individuals tend to maximize personal gains in social interactions, but their employees perceive them as interpersonally detached (Ricks & Freadrich, 1999; Teven, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006). Ricks and Freadrich (1999) discovered that supervisors who possessed high Machiavellian traits were more productive, but less credible than those who displayed less pronounced Machiavellian tendencies. Walter, Anderson, and Martin (2005) noted that effective supervisor behaviors positively related to assertiveness, but negatively related to responsiveness. Teven (2003) found that when employees perceived supervisors as using communication strategies that resembled Machiavellian tendencies, even when supervisors exhibited "low Machiavellian behaviors" (p. 139), they were perceived as being highly ineffective in their interpersonal encounters (Teven, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006). These studies are limited in that they solely devote attention to the particular traits that leaders possess and the communication strategies they employ in enacting effective leadership.

Organizational communication scholars also provide explanations on interconnections between society, culture, and communication (see Morgan & Krone, 2001; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Mumby & Stohl, 1996). In a sense, I am concerned with how white-male elites experience, organize, and negotiate their membership in the full range of social categories to which they belong. The intersectional approach may result in research that no longer makes it possible to use generalizations about any experience shared among groups. Discussions of leadership tend to focus on gendered traits and the communication strategies of leadership yet scholarship lacks focus on white-male elites' constructions of intersecting discourses when talking about leadership.

#### *Leadership is Communication*

The literatures of organizational communication, socialization, learning, and meaning production are all important in establishing the nature of leadership (Buzzanell et al., 2001; Cheney, 1991; Nielsen, 2009). Organizational studies constitute leadership as understood in terms of interaction, language, and persuasion (Cheney, 1991). As Nielsen (2009) asserts, "Leadership is communication" (p. 52); the utterances of the leader create the context for action in such a way that followers rely on these utterances as a point of reference for their own understanding of organizational processes (Nielsen, 2009). The use of language, rituals, stories, myths, and symbolic constructions are important in creating a reference point for employees' actions (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Researchers and practitioners require a better understanding of everyday practices of talk that constitute leadership and a deeper understanding of how leaders use language to craft reality in the furor of events that surround them (Clifton, 2006). From this perspective, it

is therefore important to think of leadership as a social process in which locally produced understandings of reality are enacted through talk.

Organizational scholars often overlook the impact of language use on leaders' effectiveness. There is limited research from leadership theorists on the role of language in leaders' behavior creating organizational meaning and objectives (Madlock, 2008; Sharbrough et al., 2006). Organizational communication studies, however, are beginning to take a linguistic turn whereby researchers concentrate on organizing as action and thus as talk, rather than an organization as a fixed and exogenous reality (Clifton, 2006; Nielsen, 2009; Sharbrough et al., 2006). Leadership appears to be enacted through communication in that it contains a relational and content component (Madlock, 2008). Holladay and Coombs (1993) suggest that leadership is enacted through talk as communication shapes the perceptions of the leader's charisma. When leaders effectively communicate their vision, their followers experience greater satisfaction (Pavitt, 1999).

#### *Leadership is an Interactional Process*

Leadership is socially constructed through interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), as it is constantly negotiated between employers and employees within an organizational context. In everyday interactions, people in the workplace observe and attribute meaning to the behaviors of others. Ultimately, as McShane and Von Glinow (2003) note, the interdependent relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate are important in organizational power. In this relationship, influence derives from the capacity of one person to influence another so long as there is a perception of something of value. Nielsen (2009) views leadership as an interactional practice whereby managers are conscious of the interpretive processes of discourses on leadership and articulate these

discourses to employees. As such, a way of “doing leadership” (Nielsen, 2009, p. 50) is to contextualize employee actions by bringing their perceptions in accord with executive-level perceptions of organizational practices and procedures.

According to Sharbrough et al. (2006), motivational-language theory proposes that effective leaders use three types of communication strategies in influencing employee job performance: (1) meaning-making communication, which explains the rules and values of the culture of an organization; (2) uncertainty-reducing communication, which clears up confusion; and (3) empathic communication, which expresses emotions of a leader through shared feelings, criticism, and praise.

Motivational-language theory posits that the strategic use of language by leaders has a positive impact on employees’ performance and job satisfaction. In extending research that assesses the relationship between supervisors’ communication competence and employee outcomes (Castaneda & Nahavandi, 1991; Pavitt, 1999; Sharbrough et al., 2006), Madlock (2008) asserts that leaders in organizations pay close attention to their own communication competence and leadership style to maximize their employees’ satisfaction and performance.

In sum, leaders are primarily communicative beings who exist within interactions with their followers and subordinates. Although the latter studies on the interactional process of leadership shows us that leaders are cognizant of the communication strategies they enact to impact their employees’ performances, this study calls attention to communication strategies and patterns of meanings that leaders enact in constructing discourses on leadership. It is important to understand how leaders themselves make sense of leadership in an organizational context. By understanding constructions of

leadership by white-male elites, we see how they speak about their role in managing interactions with their employees. Nevertheless, it is essential not only to understand how they speak about their role in managing interaction, but it is also important to highlight the impact of communication strategies and patterns across participants in constructing the discourse on leadership.

### *Styles of Leadership*

In organizational literature, scholars define leadership in a number of ways: the ability to guide followers toward shared goals (Bryman, 1992), a task-centered dimension to which the leader establishes patterns and channels of communication to provide direction (Deluga, 1988), and the process of motivating oneself through self-talk and mental imagery (Neck & Manz, 1992). Leadership also underscores the discursive strategies that leaders employ to create direction, frameworks, and meaning for his/her followers (Nielsen, 2009). Leadership and followership are intersubjective (Frye, Kisselburgh, & Butts, 2007). Leaders make sense of and orient followers to particular interpretations and identities, and followers identify, support, and collaborate on leadership initiatives. In earlier studies on leadership, there was a consistent bifurcation of the leader-follower process (e.g., Burns, 1978).

Recent organizational studies, however, have identified several leadership styles that influence interactions between the leader and follower in the workplace, with particular interest given to the leader's influence on his/her followers: the ability to formulate and articulate an inspirational vision, also known as charismatic leadership (Crant & Bateman, 2000); the identification with needs, desires, and individual capabilities in order to offer motivationally relevant rewards, also known as constructive

leadership (Yukl, 1998); and the lowest level of concern for members' welfare, or disowning supervisor responsibilities despite rank, also known as laissez-faire leadership (Zohar, 2002). These studies have shown that employee satisfaction is highest when employees perceive their supervisor's leadership style to be both exhibiting relational and task-oriented behaviors (see Madlock, 2008). These findings indicate that an employer who exhibits relational and task-oriented behaviors has the greatest influence on employees' satisfaction and job performance outcomes.

Fairhurst (2001) confirms that research in leadership studies eschewed the nature of communication, particularly the ways in which communication shapes organizational processes, and constructs members' identities. Organizational communication scholarship examines the significance of language, myths, and visual imagery in framing leadership styles. For example, Buzzanell et al. (1997) describe a dramaturgical leadership style as a dance in which leaders stand in the background while the interests of the organization's employees emerge in discussions. As such, followers not only support leadership visions, but they also call into question less desirable leadership practices. Thayer (1988) found that a leader becomes enchanted with a story that maintains a complex bromide, idea, or political doctrine. Leaders appreciate pictorials or paintings that reveal the organization's philosophy. As these stories and paintings became truthful for leaders, they became truthful for their followers. Researchers also have focused on the discursive and emergent process of spiritual leadership (Fine & Buzzanell, 2000) and examined the effects of leadership styles on interpersonal communication (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004). Many organizational studies, however, including some in contemporary organizational

communication scholarship, unknowingly reify hegemony by focusing solely on the leader's interests (Frye, Kisselburgh, & Butts, 2007).

While leadership and organizational communication studies demonstrate that certain leadership styles influence employees' performances in the workplace and shape the direction of followers in preserving shared organizational goals, it is important to provide attention to the communicative practices—for example, the use of metaphors and other descriptors—in which leaders engage in describing and employing their preferred leadership styles. In understanding how leaders talk about leadership, it is essential to consider the archetypal terms in constituting not only the goal and objective of leadership, but also the underlying assumptions about the reality of leadership. What is important here is not to understand particular leadership styles that white-male elites enact as leaders, as there is much research on this particular topic. Rather, I intend to examine what particular communication strategies arise in their descriptions of leadership styles and how these particular communicative choices organize and operate in these discourses to constitute white heterosexual masculine norms.

### *Gender and Leadership*

Organizations constitute sites for gendered communication that make it necessary to consider gender, not solely as characteristics of individuals in an organization, but also as an outcome (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003; Buzzanell, 1995). Yet, as mentioned previously, few scholars in organizational communication and in leadership studies provide analyses of intersectionality in constituting power differences in the workplace. Haslett, Geis, and Carter (1992) claim that gender stereotypes represent culturally shared beliefs in which men and women maintain different behavioral characteristics. Men are

generally stereotyped as competitive, aggressive, and rational, whereas women are often viewed as emotional, accommodating, and intuitive (Haslett et al., 1992; Wood, 2003). In organizational literature, however, masculine characteristics become associated with standard leadership qualities, while feminine leadership qualities and communication are dismissed, even though these characteristics may enhance workplace productivity (see Wood, 2003). Previous research supports the idea that leadership has both masculine and feminine components (see Schein, 1973). Feminist critiques problematize the reliance on male-female dualisms that place value on the differences between masculine and feminine leadership communication (Calas & Smircich, 1993; Dennis & Kunkel, 2004). These critiques problematize notions of gender and push for a deeper understanding of gender issues in an organizational context.

Although feminists have played a major role in developing alternatives to patriarchy, rarely have organizational communication scholars considered how feminist practices informed organizational theory (for exceptions see Ashcraft, 2001; Buzzanell, 1995; Mumby, 1996; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). In traditional organizational studies, successful management has been associated with masculine behaviors and traits. Feminists object to the kind of power relations that patriarchy engenders and pursue gender justice as an alternative organizational form (Ashcraft, 2001). Yet, female leaders are judged by and evaluated against masculine norms established as the self-evident standard against which difference is understood (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Robinson, 2000). Categorizations of the masculine corporate identity create a standard that situates feminine attributes outside of the typical successful leader stereotype.

Organizational scholars have argued for a long time that white-male biases shape organizations and have become normalized over time (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Leadership has been conventionally constructed in masculine terms, which relegate socially perceived non-masculine characteristics to spaces outside of the organization (e.g., acknowledging feelings and interdependence). These characteristics are attributed to women and have severely limited opportunities for them to be recruited into management positions. In today's society, nonetheless, there are more women in managerial and professional jobs, but it is important to note that it is mostly white, middle-class, women who have increased their numbers, not women of color (see Davies-Netzley, 1998). Increases in white-female managers have clustered at lower levels of management (Buzzanell, 2001). The numerical dominance of men and the construction of leadership within masculine frames of reference have influenced the discourse on women in management positions. But what do we mean when we talk about masculinity and femininity in organizations?

To begin we must recognize that masculinity and femininity are categories defined by culture (Mumby, 1998) and are seen as mutually exclusive and essentially related to the bodies of men and women (Kimmel, 1994). Although typical descriptions of masculinity appear to be consistent with social norms, masculinity and femininity are changing and depend on ascribed cultural and historical meanings (Kimmel, 1994). Despite the progress of women in U.S. corporate culture, communication scholars Dennis and Kunkel (2004) found that female managers are generally perceived as innately different from and rated lower than male managers in similar leadership roles. Male managers were rated higher in work competence, emotional stability, and independence,

whereas female managers were solely perceived as being more concerned for others. In addition, Wood (2003) found that organizational members perceived women as having relatively “thin or permeable ego boundaries,” and men as having “thick or rigid ego boundaries” (p. 159). These stereotypes inform and give credence to a masculine standard of leadership that mitigates feminine characteristics of leadership. Fine (2009) found that women leaders’ discursive representations of leadership centered on a moral discourse of leadership consisting of making positive contributions to the world and behaving ethically.

The feminine aspect of leadership may not be an entirely new development. Reinelt (1994) argues that feminist organizations promote empowerment through interpersonal development and egalitarian group relationships. For instance, as an alternative to bureaucratic and impersonal male-supervised organizations, communication scholars found that female leaders promoted a caring community by inviting expressions of feelings and allowing employees to negotiate rules that limited collaboration in the workplace (Ashcraft, 2000; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). In fact, it appears that stereotypically feminine behaviors have been viewed as part of successful leadership (Fonda, 1997; Johanson, 2008). Fonda (1997) reviewed management texts to examine modern themes in management and leadership. Fonda found that to be a successful modern manager, one has to engage in stereotypical feminine behaviors—surrendering control, sharing responsibility, and building a connected network of relationships. Fonda is not alone as others also note the success of feminization of leadership in the workplace (see Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

I recently talked to a woman who expressed a desire to learn to play golf so that her male co-workers would learn to respect her and not view her as an outsider. On the surface, one may argue that women benefit from adapting to organizational practices, but theoretically, these forms of complicity and communicative practices require a deeper and critical investigation into how they contribute to stabilizing patriarchy. Previous studies of masculinity in organizations reveal that masculinity is not specific to men, but both men and women co-construct masculinity through various discourses and symbols of expressed thoughts (Forbes, 2002; Nicholson, 1996). Feminist organizational communication theory examines masculine subjectivities and provides an awareness of women's subordination in organizational life. A variety of premises and solutions for oppression have been offered to facilitate individual, organizational, and societal change (Buzzanell, 1995, 2000).

Studies show that women in leadership positions often perform masculinity to maintain their status in the workplace. Hennig and Jardim (1977) found that female managers believe that identification with their father figure was significant for their own success in the workplace. Fagenson and Jackson (1993) discovered that when female managers are perceived as possessing masculine characteristics, they are more likely to be perceived as successful managers. Billings and Alvesson (2000) found that women in upper-level management positions rarely identify with feminine orientations in the workplace. Forbes (2002) explores the ways in which female managers negotiate their identities by internalizing masculine values and norms. In studying the taken-for-granted practices of masculinity, Forbes found that many female managers actively engage in masculine practices in the workplace, rather than highlighting their own experiences as

victims of patriarchy. Power and status are connected to the workplace, and leadership is framed by men who create the standard against which other categories are measured (Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

In sum, people may hold mental images that are subjectively representative of groups of people, including women, non-white ethnic groups, and, presumably, leaders. Many women construct their identities in the midst of competing societal expectations on career success and motherhood (Medved & Kirby, 2005). One may argue that perceptions of leaders are merely contextual and that actual behaviors are rarely a reflection of their beliefs alone. Understanding the common core beliefs that people hold about leadership is important in understanding how context interacts with those beliefs. In this study, understanding the beliefs that white-male leaders hold about leadership may reveal some strong assumptions about how they perceive women and gender outcomes of leadership in the workplace. My point here is to study the communicative choices that white heterosexual males make in demarcating gender roles in the workplace and in society, but also to understand how much these choices constitute a shared and constantly co-created masculinity with me (the black male interviewer). In this study, it is not only important to disentangle the various communication strategies that men use to describe women, but it is also crucial to examine the impact of intersecting identities in constituting various communicative choices used by white men in leadership positions as they talk about their social worlds.

#### *Delimiting Race in Leadership Studies*

Communication scholars have shown that racial stereotypes shape interactions in a variety of contexts (see Allen, 1995, 2003; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Orbe &

Harris, 2001). While critical organization communication scholarship has provided attention to gender, it has rarely attended to how organizations are fundamentally raced (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). For example, Ashcraft and Allen (2003) examined various organizational communication textbooks to highlight the various ways in which organizational communication scholars articulate or mute race. In organizational communication texts, including undergraduate textbooks, they found that race is a separate and singular concept that is relevant only under certain circumstances; race is relevant in so far as it involves cultural differences, which can be identified, valued, and managed to improve organizational performance; cultural differences are synonymous with international variations; racial discrimination is a function of personal bias, interpersonal misunderstanding, organizational failure to manage cultural differences and disproportionate demographics; and white-collar workplaces and workers constitute universal settings, identities, and practices. Allen and Ashcraft argue that these implicit messages demonstrate how organizational communication studies obscure tacit whiteness in much of its theory.

Similarly, there appears to be a gap in leadership studies on the construction of race in effective leadership. Only a few scholars interrogate race in organizational contexts in addressing the consequences of ignoring white privilege (Allen, 2003; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Calvert & Ramsey, 1996; Grimes, 2002). Hence, there is a gap in research on leadership in examining constructions of race. In focusing on race, the current oversight may be a result of numerous developments including the scarcity of people of color in upper management ranks, and the belief that the Civil Rights Act and equal employment opportunity initiatives have ended inequalities in the workplace (Allen,

2003). Leadership scholars appear to be more involved in highlighting particular traits, roles, and stereotypes associated with gendered identity. This certainly is problematic because leadership is very much influenced by other dynamics of identity as well. Rarely, if ever, do we experience a singular sense of self, as an unlimited number of possible sources of identity influences one's capacity to be an effective leader. Privileging a singular aspect of identity in understanding leadership neglects other potentially important features of self that may intersect in complex ways. For example, in considering both sex and race, Kaba (2005) asserts that a number of social factors including widening educational disparities, position black females to take over a substantial proportion of economic, social, and political leadership from older black men in African American communities.

In conclusion, organizations constitute locally organized interactions between staff members rather than organizational charts and conference rooms independent of the human element (Clifton, 2006). The process of doing leadership is not an apolitical act, but it is necessarily asymmetrically determined according to the discourse resources available to leaders. In Wittgenstein's (1979) concept of language games, the participants in a meeting are playing a game in the sense that speaking a language is an activity in which all participants orient to certain rules relating to the actions or words, which are available to them. In the context of an organization, a CEO controls the meeting and uses more powerful discursive strategies that are bound to the identity of a leader to make decisions and control the flow of conversation.

However, in some situations, it is possible for the subordinate to use more powerful discursive choices within the linguistic rules of the meeting to garner control.

Leadership can be *up for grabs* for participants who *play the game* more skillfully than their superiors and thus, achieve informal leadership (Clifton, 2006). In general, the proclaimed leader will have access to more powerful resources to maintain the status quo when defining organizational reality. As such, there appears to be a gap in research relative to examining how leaders understand the follower's role in (re)producing the reality of the organization. Thus, my study attempts to address this issue by obtaining information on how white-male employers understand leadership and how they speak through ideas of leadership in constituting their relationship with their employees.

### Diversity in Organizations

*Diversity* has become a buzzword for many organizations. Politicians emphasize diversity in their campaigns and many corporate CEOs place a clause in their mission statements on valuing difference as they often require employees to attend diversity trainings. Why is cultural diversity necessary in the workplace? What are diversity programs? These questions need to be answered before I begin to consider discussing the significance of diversity within this study. In literature on cultural diversity and managing diversity, scholars provide a plethora of definitions in explaining the idea of diversity in the workplace (e.g., Allen, 1995; Anand & Winters, 2008; Fine, 1995; Roberson, 2008; Thomas & Ely, 1996). These scholars explain diversity through managing and valuing cultural differences in the workplace. In the United States, an increasingly diverse workforce presents both opportunities and challenges for organizations. On the one hand, organizations may benefit from the creative, novel, and multifaceted ideas provided within a diverse workforce. On the other hand, diversity initiatives demand high levels of intercultural competence, as employers require employees to actively engage in their

organization's diversity efforts by serving as mentors, allies and even cultural brokers to diverse groups (Allen, 2003; Colella, 2001; Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

Cultural diversity encompasses a variety of personal and social bases of identity including race-ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and country of origin (Allen, 1995, 2003). Many organizations in the United States strive to create a culturally diverse workforce for various reasons including profitability, image, to remedy past and present discrimination, and to garner varied perspectives. Cultural diversity in organizations is not a new phenomenon. Small and large organizations require employees to interact with colleagues and customers who are different from themselves. Yet, we are in the midst of a pivotal moment in the business world where questions about the relevance of diversity and impact of diversity training are at the fore of debates on diversity issues (Holladay & Quinones, 2008). Allen (1995) addresses various topics relating to diversity within the U.S. workforce and examines a number of theoretical implications as well as methodological issues for scholars interested in diversity in organizations. While Allen focuses on only one form of diversity, she and other scholars agree that diversity encompasses a number of additional identity markers, including gender, sexual orientation, culture, and socioeconomic status (Allen, 2003; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Zak, 1994). Organizational leaders have devoted increasing attention to diversity issues since the Civil Rights Movement and the implementation of affirmative action laws (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). Organizational communication scholars provide much evidence on the impact of diversity with respect to building and valuing cultural heterogeneity within organizations (see Allen, 1995, 2003; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Mumby, 1993).

Increasing diversity in the workplace engenders new tensions because of differences in cultural norms and values among women and ethnic groups in the United States (Hansen, 2003). Thus, traditional Western management techniques may not be effective with managing a culturally diverse workforce (Zak, 1994). Scholars explore tensions and challenges in implementing diversity initiatives in organizations. For instance, some corporate leaders express skepticism about the value of diversity education and training (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). Some scholars feel that many companies still implement diversity-training programs in a superficial manner rather than in substantive ways (see Anand & Winters, 2008; Hansen, 2003; Kossek & Zonia, 1994). Some consternation also remains over whether diversity should be implemented as a business endeavor or as a cause for social action (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008).

Organizational diversity scholars, however, advocate for organizational diversity in drawing heavily on the premise that diverse perspectives enhance group and organizational creativity, decision-making, and problem-solving (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). In assessing diversity in organizations, my study provides accounts from white-male elites on their understandings of the value of diversity and diversity training in their organizations. Thus, this study examines how white-male elites talk about and understand diversity and diversity training. The following provides an overview of the evolution of the idea of diversity in organizations and the critical turns that influenced thinking on diversity. Finally, I conclude by examining the racialization of diversity within literature of diversity.

### *Evolution of Diversity in Organizations*

In the late 1960s, the U.S. Labor Department Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP) enforced rules for Title VII and President Johnson's 1965 executive order 11246, which required federal contractors to *take* affirmative action to overcome the effects of past discrimination (see Anand & Winters, 2008; Lynch, 2002). By the end of the 1970s, affirmative action practices, which originally ensured equal opportunity for white women and people of color through expanding diversity in personnel, became known as a system of racial and gendered proportional preferences (Anand & Winters, 2008). Anand and Winters also assert that during the 1980s, affirmative action programs expanded diversity in colleges and universities and in corporations across the United States. Consequently, in the early 1990s, conservative pundits and politicians alike went on the attack. Lynch (2002) discusses the actions that conservatives took in highlighting unjust consequences of affirmative action. For instance, talk-radio conservatives like Rush Limbaugh railed against affirmative action as preferential treatment. Politicians like ex-Klansman David Duke, desiring a referendum on affirmative action, received more than 40 percent of the vote for a U.S. Senate seat in Louisiana. North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms was reelected with a television commercial portraying an angry white-male factory worker receiving a letter that he lost a job to a minority. Widespread outrage compelled women and persons of color to resist being stigmatized as affirmative action hires or less qualified workers (Allen, 1995).

Many academics and consultants acknowledged that the general public and CEOs regarded affirmative action as strident and legally enforced preferential treatment (Lynch, 2002). Accordingly, the term diversity supplanted divisive affirmative action rhetoric

with business-friendly rationales of valuing difference. Diversity in organizations is, foremost, a cultural question of norms, values, and beliefs. It is also an ethical imperative determined by human coexistence (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Diversity in organizations stresses a culture of inclusion in that an organizational environment allows people from multiple backgrounds and with different ways of thinking to work effectively together and perform appropriately in achieving organizational objectives (Allen, 1995; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Thereafter, in the mid-1990s, the field of diversity management was established as a business branch of multiculturalism in the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008; Arredondo, 1996). Consultants promoted the idea of diversity management as an extension of cultural diversity to allay the disparaging language of affirmative action and threats of human difference. To paraphrase Arredondo (1996), diversity management became a strategic organizational approach that constitutes management practices toward inclusivity in viewing the workplace as a forum for individual growth. Many major corporations such as Xerox, General Motors, Merrill Lynch, and IBM and colleges and universities across the United States also embraced the goal of cultural diversity and diversity management as it became a part of a vision encapsulating that particular institution's commitment to diversifying the workplace (Lynch, 2002). These institutions initiated various diversity and intercultural-competence programs as the global market produced an increasingly diverse and international workforce.

Diversity consultants and academics alike view diversity as important in considering race, ethnicity, and gender as factors in personnel decisions (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Kulik & Roberson, 2008). According to Lynch (2002), diversity prescriptions for organizational change operate on three assumptions rooted in

affirmative action theory and legal enforcement: the absence of representation of women and people of color at all organizational levels is evidence of a taken-for-granted value that excludes culturally different employees; workforce diversity implies a version of identity politics where the presumption is that an individual's views represent those of his or her racial or gender group; and workplace diversity theories posit that organizational values are biased in favor of white men. Thus, the workforce cannot be considered equitable until leaders incorporate cultural values of all groups into the workforce. In discussing the history of diversity, I now turn to labels that highlight major shifts in understandings of diversity and diversity management to make sense of how scholars understand diversity in organizations.

#### *Shifts in Understanding the Concept of Diversity*

Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) identify four turning points that represent shifts in thinking about the concept of diversity: demographic, political, economic, and critical. These turning points do not represent separate strands but interlocking and incessant ones. Each turn represents a shift in thinking about diversity. The demographic turn highlights the cultural heterogeneity in organizations as white males are no longer the majority of the labor force. Interest in diversity turned political when its inclusive policy was seen as an alternative to affirmative action policies. As Gordon (1992) asserts, the Reagan administration and the thinking of the new Right continued throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. Thus, ethnic and gender diversity became an asset and championed as demographically inevitable as efforts to supplant affirmative action were underway (Lynch, 2002). Political interest turned to economic interest when a series of scholarly journals admonished leaders of performance and image risks for the organization in

ignoring diversity management. Consultants and scholars informed employers that assimilation and melting pot ideas were unnecessary and called on them to adjust standard practices to pay attention to the cultural norms of white women and people of color (Allen, 2003).

Finally, the critical turn identifies the problems encountered in implementing diversity when, despite positive intentions of tolerance and sensitivity seminars, many diversity interventions have been unsuccessful. Lorbiecki and Jack's (2002) critique is important here as all but one of the participants in my interviews have lived through the incorporation of diversity in the workplace within each of the aforementioned turning points. Identifying the shifts in thinking of diversity provides a frame to situate how white-male elites talk about diversity within the present context.

White-male leaders in this study are the driving force behind the demand in their corporations to reflect a diverse environment. Since white-male elites are instrumental in ensuring the hiring and managing of diverse personnel, I obtain their responses to see how they talk about diversity in the workplace. Few, if any, studies on diversity highlight how white-male organizational leaders understand the meaning of diversity. The business community forges ahead in acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity, and yet literature on diversity does not take the fundamental leap to understand how leaders understand or talk about achieving goals of diversifying their organizations. In this study, I build on research on diversity in organizations by showing how white-male elites talk about diversity and understand its meaning in diversifying the workplace. To achieve the desired level of reflexivity on diversity, it is important to see if white-male elite definitions of diversity are consistent with those of cultural diversity.

## *History of Diversity Training in the Workplace*

There is a tendency to categorize any training that is associated with race, gender, ethnicity, or other demographic differences under the umbrella of *diversity*. There are, however, specific types of training that are recognized as distinct from diversity training such as race relations and anti-racist workshops (Bonilla-Silva & Foreman, 2000; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997). To understand the evolution of diversity training, I will briefly trace its roots to show why it has been a vital part of U.S. history. The landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal for employers to discriminate in hiring, termination, compensation and promotion based on race, sex, religion, and national origin (Anand & Winters, 2008). Anand and Winters also assert that it was eventually extended to prohibit discrimination based on age, pregnancy, and disability. This legislation spawned an era of trainings<sup>2</sup> in the late 1960s and 1970s, largely in response to discrimination suits filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (Tomaskovic-Devey, Stainback, Taylor, Zimmer, Robinson, & McTague, 2006). To circumvent the threat of lawsuits, many organizations voluntarily implemented trainings that focused on providing information on legal requirements for people in upper-level management positions. The trainings within this era focused on recitations of the law and a litany of dos and don'ts (Holladay & Quinones, 2008).

The greatest increase in racial and gender diversity in the workplace occurred during the 1970s, which represents the period of the most stringent government enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006). Government deregulation and initiatives in the 1980s circumvented any progress made

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<sup>2</sup> These trainings were not referred to specifically as *diversity trainings*. The emergence of the notion of diversity management and training occurred in the 1990s (see Kirby & Harter, 2003)

during the 1970s. President Ronald Reagan's deregulation of business along with his appointment of Clarence Thomas as head of the EEOC led to less scrutiny from the federal government and allowed companies to scale back on training employees (Lynch, 2002). Organizations began providing content in trainings with the objective of helping white women and people of color to assimilate into existing corporate cultures. These objectives shifted discussions from how to comply with legal mandates to how to assimilate white women and people of color into homogeneous corporate cultures (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006).

The 1990s precipitated another shift from compliance to incorporating everyone, including white males, under the umbrella of diversity. Diversity trainings, in particular, focused on being sensitive to and valuing differences of all employees within an organization. In 1995, a bipartisan Federal Commission, chaired by Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, issued a report titled, "A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital." This report concluded that people of color and white women are consistently underrepresented at the highest levels of corporate America (Hermon, 1996). An earlier report issued by the Department of Labor in 1991 identified barriers that white women and people of color face, including low morale from feeling isolated and making limited contributions in the workplace (Allen, 1995). Yet, many organizations still have continued to present content that started with compliance topics while moving haphazardly into topics of racial and gender inclusion.

In the mid-1990s, many companies hired diversity firms to provide trainers to instruct all employees on various topics of diversity in the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008). Diversity-training approaches ranged from an emphasis on social justice to an

appreciation of racial, gender, and cultural differences (Hermon, 1996). Other programs either focused on race, gender, and work-life balance or examined verifying degrees of sexist and racist tendencies in the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008). Diversity trainers introduced content on diversity that resembled a mixture of cognitive and experiential-learning techniques including viewing Jane Elliot's film on the Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes<sup>3</sup> experiment. Anand and Winters (2008) explain that although diversity training raised awareness of corporate leaders who were concerned with the impact of losing top talent to companies who were more sensitive to employees' needs, women and people of color did not necessarily leave with positive feelings. They felt pressured to speak for the entire group, misunderstood, or that their coworkers were more prejudiced than they had believed them to be prior to the training. Although some participants were happy with what they learned from these programs, they still left searching for answers to understanding the value of diversity in the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008; Hermon, 1996).

Currently, over 67% of U.S. organizations include training in their diversity initiatives (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). While many organizations once viewed diversity training as important for inclusion process, nowadays it is seen as being fueled by profitability (Hansen, 2003). Hansen asserts that as recently as 2003, organizations spent an estimated nine billion dollars on diversity-training programs. Global business

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Elliot is a teacher and diversity trainer who created the famous blue-eyed/brown-eyed exercise, first done with grade school students in the 1960s and later in organizations. In her exercise, she offered praise to brown-eyed children for being hard-working, and she disparaged blue-eyed children and made them wear collars signifying their difference and inferiority. As a result, the brown-eyed children perceived themselves as superior and were unpleasant to the blue-eyed children. On the following day, she reversed the exercise, making blue-eyed children superior, noting who modified their behavior when they were superior. The exercise shows how people label others inferior or superior based solely upon eye color and exposes the experiences of minorities.

endeavors and changing employee and customer demographics have required leaders to become competent not only in valuing differences, but also in cross-cultural communication. In the 21st century, diversity-training programs focus on competencies that enable employers and their employees not only to value cultural differences, but also to utilize them to make better business decisions (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006).

In my study, I asked white-male elites to comment on diversity training. It is important to obtain their understandings of diversity training to get their perspective on its effectiveness in creating inclusion and viability in fostering intercultural understanding. Few, if any studies tell us how leaders consider diversity trainings or ask them what they learned from attending diversity workshops. In this study, it is important not only to obtain the perceptions of white-male elites on diversity training, but also to understand how they discuss them in terms of their effectiveness in the workplace.

In conclusion, the literature on diversity scrutinizes a number of difficulties in producing a consistent meaning for the concept of diversity. As Morrison (1992) points out, for many in the business world, diversity represents an alternative to affirmative action. Diversity, then, may be associated with quotas, numbers, and percentages. Early definitions of diversity centered on the need to treat everyone the same by ignoring the effects of prejudice and the systematic oppression of historically underrepresented groups (Witherspoon & Wohlert, 1996). Prior to the emergence of the notion of diversity management in the 1990s, issues on workplace composition addressed one of two approaches: affirmative action or valuing differences (Kirby & Harter, 2003). On the one hand, affirmative action refers to requirements, usually legally mandated, to change organizational demographics and remedy the historical oppression of women and people

of color. On the other hand, valuing differences is intended to be morally and ethically driven, to which organizational members encourage respect of each other's differences (Kirby & Harter, 2003). For example, as a way of leveling hierarchical situations in the workplace, organizational leaders may use the term *gender equality* to refer to respecting differences between men and women. Valuing feminine and masculine ways of doing things would emphasize the special skills that each brings into the workplace. Essentializing gendered performances and behaviors, however, reinforces gender stereotypes that foster unequal treatment rather than equality in organizations.

In highlighting the history of the meaning of diversity and diversity training, I must acknowledge that valuing diversity in organizations requires changes in overtly racist, sexist, and heterosexist behaviors that include negative tendencies toward stereotyping, differential organizational socialization, and declining communication effectiveness. As organizations in the United States become more diverse, it is essential that scholars distinguish vehicles for improving the quality of communication on diversity as well as interrogate the discourses that substantiate perceived equality among all organizational members.

For instance, in focusing on race and diversity for a moment, researchers have begun to examine the consequences and prevalence of racial discourse within workforce diversity. Thomas Cummins, whose work is profiled in Galagan's (1993) article, found that problems persist with ways that white-male organizational leaders manage diversity. Cummins noted that white organizational members desire to fix those whose behaviors are different rather than accepting multiple ways of working within the workplace. Kossek and Zonia (1994) found that white faculty members exhibited less positive

attitudes toward diversity-training programs than faculty of color. Zak (1994) asserts that communication problems plague newly diversified organizations. For instance, as organizations become racially heterogeneous, veteran white-male employees assert their power through language and symbolic actions (such as horseplay and shoptalk). These communicative practices are used to protract racial hierarchies in the workplace. Allen (1995) also notes that blacks more often encounter stereotypes in a diverse workplace and are more consciously aware than whites of how others perceive and evaluate their behavior.

Grimes (2002) interrogated whiteness in diversity-management literature and found hidden power issues related to organizational communication that in subtle ways support and challenge whiteness ideologies and white privilege. Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2009) argue that diversity efforts stigmatize people of color who report frequent discrimination, particularly in subtle forms. Thus, Ashburn-Nardo et al. came up with a confronting prejudice response model (CPR) that provides persons of color ways to communicate their dissatisfaction with discriminatory treatment, thereby removing obstacles faced in an increasingly diverse workforce. These studies represent obstacles faced by persons of color participating in diverse workplaces; there are also barriers based on gender as well (see Ashcraft, 1999, 2001; Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell, 2001; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Trethewey, 2000). Nonetheless, studies that examine the influence of sexuality in diversifying the workforce remain non-existent.

Although this section addresses diversity and diversity management and how it evolved into a topic of interest, little is said about how the very word itself invokes a variety of meanings and emotional responses from leaders within organizations. We

know little about how these communication practices may reinforce white hetero-masculine ideologies. As scholars examine leadership and diversity, there is still a need to address more comprehensively the relationship between discourses of diversity and leadership, and whiteness and hegemonic masculinity. As Allen (1995, 2003) observes, the primacy of race, for example, in discourse of diversity requires it to be a central topic in discussions around managing diversity and diversity training. Understanding the impact of race-ethnicity in the workplace is important because, race, as physically observable and socially constructed, maintains its roots in affirmative action/equal employment opportunity programs.

#### Whiteness Studies: An Overview

Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) observations of race relations in the United States guided much of the research on race and racism after the Second World War. As Myrdal saw it, the United States needed to reconcile its belief in equal opportunity for all with the persistence of racism in society. In the 1990s, studies on whiteness and white identity, which developed from research on race relations and white identity, grew exponentially in communication studies and related disciplines (see Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1997; Lipsitz, 1998; Martin, Krizek, & Nakayama, 1996; Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999; McIntosh, 1992; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Shome, 1999; Twine, 1996). Communication scholars in areas such as intercultural, media, gender, organizational, and postcolonial studies turn to interpretations of Western discourses on race, ethnicity, and difference to highlight representations of whiteness (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Banner, 2008; Chidester, 2008; Grimes, 2002; Jackson, 1999; Moon, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Shome, 1999).

Even more, methodological approaches such as discourse analysis (see van Dijk, 1993), rhetorical analysis (see Chidester, 2008; Nakayama & Moon, 2005; Carrillo Rowe, 2007), critical autoethnography (see Cook & Fullon, 2003) and critical performance ethnography (see Warren, 2001, 2003), advance research on whiteness as they uncover the discursive practices of white people in shaping racial categories, hierarchies, and political boundaries. Nakayama and Martin (1999) contend that research in the communication discipline principally highlights the social construction of whiteness as it gains its meaning from encounters with nonwhites.

In reviewing the scholarship of whiteness, I begin by highlighting the various ways scholars define whiteness. I then describe the different waves of whiteness studies to briefly explain the history of its research and finally, in reviewing the literature on whiteness research, I highlight several themes through which scholars view whiteness. Whiteness scholars normally view whiteness as invisible and normative, as culturally contested by anti-racists, as constructed in the mass media, and as a cultural performance. This literature incorporates themes of whiteness to show how white-male elites (re)produce discourses of whiteness.

### *Descriptions of Whiteness*

Studies of whiteness are not a homogenous body of thought as various scholars provide their own understandings of representations and functions of whiteness. For instance, some scholars describe whiteness as a social construction that constitutes historically systematic race-based superiority and provides different means of access to social and economic status in societies marked by European expansion and colonization (Leonardo, 2004; Shome, 1999; Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 1999). Crenshaw (1997)

views whiteness as a marking of difference and part of a struggle to categorize people in marking its social location. Some scholars believe whiteness, as a socially constructed reality, heightens its “slipperiness” (see Ware & Back, 2002, p. 20), by, at times, signifying it as a norm (see Tierney & Jackson, 2003), by traveling through the very language we speak (see Carrillo Rowe, 2000), and by, at other times, constituting it as a property or choice (see Harris, 1993). Weis (2004) sees whiteness as drawing on the ways that individuals rationalize their own classed and racialized senses of self. Whiteness studies takes as its central mission to mark and make visible the unmarked center of cultural, political, and economic power held by white people (Jackson, 1999; McLaren, 1997; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Warren, 2003). Whiteness presents itself as being open to examination, but it refuses interrogation, producing a highly ambivalent marker of identification (Jackson, 1999).

Dyson (2003) sums up these definitions and descriptions of whiteness through his understanding of whiteness as an identity, ideology, and institutional norm to highlight its function in (re)producing discursive and material relations in everyday life. As an identity, whiteness confers both cultural invisibility and universality as it functions as the norm for representing race. As an ideology, whiteness is encoded in state and citizenship discourses on race and racism through its historical roots in white supremacy. As an institutional norm, whiteness underscores access to resources that are driven by colorblind intentions, and yet, it permits large-scale racial inequity (Dyson, 2003). Locating whiteness demands attention to its discursive constructions and its historical significance within social institutions and in sites of power relations (Martin, et. al., 1999).

Steyn (1999), however, argues that there are several discursive practices of whiteness that structurally position it culturally and nationally in relation to others, which makes it difficult to decipher. For instance, while it is true that those in power are white, not all whites benefit equally (Frankenberg, 1997). Many scholars discuss the significance of studying race and its intersections with cultural identity, gender, sexuality, class, nation, power relations, privilege, and ideology (Collier, 2005; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Fusco, 1988; hooks, 1997; Jackson, 1999; Martin, Krizek, & Nakayama, 1996; McIntosh, 1992; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Shome, 1999; Tierney & Jackson, 2003). Thus, whiteness is not only a matter of race, but it also relates to numerous social identifications.

In sum, these definitions demonstrate that whiteness serves a number of social functions that reinforce a system of domination in relation to discursive and social practices, including class, gender, sexuality, and nationalistic and sociopolitical orientation. As we shall see within this section on whiteness, there are an exponential number of scholarly works that define and highlight the discursive practices of whiteness and white identity. Therefore, in this study, I discuss the discursive practices in reproducing whiteness and masculinity as well. I also want to speculate on the discourses that mediate common-sense constructions of white masculinity. In understanding common-sense assumptions (at times, distorted and reified notions) about race and gender, I pay attention to how white-male elites thrive on or are transformed by discourses that draw on perceived progress made by traditionally subordinated groups.

My presence in these interviews further exacerbates discussions of racial and gendered progress. In understanding what is mediating white-male elites' discourse, I

consider the possibility of coming up with a new way of conceptualizing whiteness through their talk on ideas and personal experiences of diversity and leadership. So, the question remains: What can we learn about whiteness from white-male elites who verify the impact of racism in society through progressive discourses? As Leonardo (2005) asserts, “the collective racial unconsciousness includes even the most ‘enlightened’ person who presumes to think outside of race” (p. 407). In other words, the “enlightened person” cannot think outside of racialization of reality because he/she cannot reside outside of racial ideologies. Before I move on in discussing how scholars conceptualize studies of whiteness, I turn an overview of historical and social locations of whiteness in demarcating unique research agendas.

#### *Waves of Whiteness Studies*

Twine and Gallagher (2008) surveyed the interdisciplinary field of critical white studies to demarcate first-, second-, and third-wave research on whiteness studies. Twine and Gallagher borrowed the metaphor *wave* from feminists who explain the history of feminism in the United States. First-wave whiteness studies take cue from three observations made by W.E.B. DuBois (1970 [1899]; 2008 [1903]). DuBois’s observations and writings provide a theoretical foundation for whiteness studies. DuBois (1970) observed that poor white laborers in the United States preferred to embrace the racial identity of dominant white group members to receive material and social privileges, rather than to participate in class solidarity with freed slaves. DuBois also wrote that whiteness operates from a normative center that makes its racial identity invisible. Finally, DuBois (2008) observed that white supremacy is a global phenomenon operating inside as well as outside of the United States. As Shome (1999) asserts, whiteness travels

outside of Western cultures whether through physical colonial practices or through the neocolonial travel of white cultural products.

Second-wave whiteness studies include studies on institutional racism from critical legal and critical race scholars (see Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 1998; Harris, 1993). These scholars challenge white supremacy and make visible institutional racism in the U.S. legal system and in mainstream society. For example, Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) rely on critical race methodology to unpack racial microaggressions (subtle forms of racism) by white students to demonstrate its impact on African American students and on the campus racial climate. Third-wave whiteness studies embark on a process of understanding whiteness as a multiplicity of identities. Third-wave scholars employ various research methodologies, including critical autoethnography (Cooks & Fullon, 2003) and personal narrative analysis (Jensen, 2005), to discuss how white people and people of color produce and negotiate whiteness in their everyday lives. Research within the third wave of whiteness studies also examines the cultural practices and discursive strategies employed through analyses of the rhetoric of white people as they work to reconstitute white identity (Crenshaw, 1997; Moon & Nakayama, 2005; Warren, 2001).

In documenting the waves of whiteness, my study complements the third-wave in that it explains whiteness as a uniform category that locates race through multiple social identifications. As mentioned above, many studies on whiteness account for intersections in understanding systems of domination. These studies usually implicate white people in constructing discourses and engaging in discursive practices of whiteness. My study makes a similar move in examining discursive constructions of white-male elites' talk on

leadership and diversity. I also account for my own social positioning in co-creating and shaping discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. My presence, as the black-male researcher, interviewing white-male elites, contributes to shared and diverse experiences constituted within the intersectional matrix. The following provides evidence of three important themes in studying whiteness. After discussing some of the research and work within all three themes, I explain how each is significant in my research on discourses of white-male elites.

*Whiteness as a Normative/Invisible Imaginary Space*

Yancey (2008) posits, in his critique of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, that the invisible man knows that he is embodied flesh, and yet he is invisible (p. 75). Dyer (1997) captures this character quite frankly when he suggests that many white people create dominant images of the world, but do not see that they "construct the world in their own image" (p. 3). Shome (2001) suggests that "the national subject in the Anglo imagination continues to be the white subject" (p. 325). Early scholarship on whiteness suggests that whiteness became an object of critical study because of the assumption of its invisibility (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 1992). Dyer (1988) describes whiteness as a cultural norm that is both invisible and ubiquitous, so much that it is out of the purview of many white subjects. Here and abroad, scholars point to the need for studying whiteness because it rests on assumptions of normativity and invisibility.

For example, Carrillo Rowe (2000) reveals that whiteness shapes feminist theory and praxis in unreflexive ways, as rhetorical silences constitute moves of both universalizing and deflecting privileges. Research on whiteness typically explores the discursive and ideological practices that render white privilege invisible (Frankenberg,

2001; Gallagher, 2004; Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1992). Despite challenges, contradictions, and resistance, whiteness tactically ensures that what is associated with white is imagined as natural and normal, thus creating the standard for political, economic, cultural, and moral judgments. Those who choose to ignore and naturalize white identity engage in practices that are tantamount to redoubling its hegemony (Tierney & Jackson, 2003).

*White Anti-Racists Contest the Cultural Space of Whiteness*

Wildman (1996) argues that social justice demands examining the roles of social institutions (e.g., the legal system) in creating systems of white privilege that maintain and constrain power. In initiating practices of social justice, many white, anti-racist scholars engage in various anti-racist practices to contest the invisibility of whiteness ideologies. In this case, white scholars acknowledge that racial-identity formation, specifically skin privilege and race-based power, bestows social privileges to them. They also implore white people to act and unlearn white privileges. For instance, Kivel (1996) argues that white people work to become allies with people of color in the struggle to end racism. He implores white people to listen carefully to the voices of people of color and give critical credence to their experiences. Kivel also admonishes white people to consider how their whiteness factors in ways they act from assumptions of power and privilege.

Lipsitz (1998) presupposes that to identify, analyze, and oppose the destructive consequences of whiteness, we need to understand its significance in the present moment. Lipsitz states that a precise awareness of the present requires understanding the consequences of whiteness as a possessive investment that has historically shaped our

public and private lives. The possessive investment underscores how whiteness and its rewards create and recreate economic advantages through policies that benefit Euro-Americans (Lipsitz, 1998). It hides the privileges of whiteness by attributing historical economic advantages enjoyed by many whites to family values and foresight rather than to favoritism or the demonization of persons of color.

Wise (2005) agrees, when he vigorously argues that the virtual invisibility of whiteness affords “psychological money in the bank” for many white people, of which proceeds are cashed in every day while “others are in a state of perpetual overdraft” (p. 120). Carrillo Rowe (2000) posits that the “project of locating the subject” (p. 78) in any intellectual formation is vital to challenging the complacency and unnamed forces of whiteness. In doing so, she argues that white female scholars must not repel the critical gaze necessary for building alliances with women of color and reconfigure the terrain of scholarly pursuit to create spaces for racialized voices to be heard. Yancey (2008) notes that “undoing” whiteness is a performative metaphor; whiteness does not presuppose ontology of self that is capable of rising above white discursive streams embodied in the self. Warren (2003) and Jensen (2005) agree with Yancey when they assert that they, as white-male scholars, can neither escape nor discount the various ways they perform and reinscribe whiteness in their everyday life.

#### *Rhetorical Construction of Whiteness in Mass Media*

Whiteness reinforces its claim of racial centrality and superiority in different contexts, but its absence can also rhetorically function in mass mediated texts (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Scholars must examine whiteness and mass-media representations as pedagogical texts that highlight the struggle for the (re)articulation of race to which white

bodies maintain widespread appeal and popularity (Giroux, 1997; Hall, 1995). Mass media are a notable source for studying rhetorical constructions of whiteness. Several scholars examine mass-media representations as a rhetorical force for (re)producing whiteness (Carrillo Rowe, 2007; Carrillo Rowe & Lindsey, 2003; Moon & Nakayama, 2005; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Squires & Brouwer, 2002).

For instance, communication scholars consider media coverage as a social forum for the white community to show how mass media reconfigure social identities in the face of challenges to white heterosexual norms (Butterworth, 2007; Nakayama & Moon, 2005; Squires & Brouwer, 2002). Other scholars examine representations of whiteness and persons of color to show how television shows and film are replete with claims of white authenticity and Western tropes of cultural imperialism in accenting whiteness as a superior subjectivity (Carrillo Rowe, 2007; Chidester, 2008; Dyer, 1997; Dubrofsky, 2006). Studies of mass-mediated texts draw on characters and protagonists, not as real people but as discursive constructions that reinforce the invisibility of whiteness and shape discourses of race, gender and sexuality (Squires & Brouwer, 2002; Chidester, 2008; Dubrofsky, 2006; Mayer, 2005; Moon & Nakayama, 2005). In studies of whiteness, the mass media are an active source for examining (re)articulations of whiteness in looking critically at sites of enactments of whiteness subjectivities and in locating hegemonic logics of white racial superiority.

#### *Whiteness as Cultural Performance*

The notion of cultural performance ranges from forms of social critique to means of dramatizing collective myth (Alexander, 2006). Theoretically speaking, the signification of whiteness is deeply rooted in cultural understandings of race made

meaningful through performance (Cooks & Simpson, 2007). Several scholars highlight the significance of studying whiteness as a cultural performance (Cooks, 2003; Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Johnson, & Bhatt, 2003; Johnson, Rich, & Cargile, 2008; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Warren, 2001). That is, they examine how whiteness gets reproduced as a discursively performative accomplishment that accounts for ways of seeing both the material and rhetorical construction of the body as a signifier for locating spaces of whiteness. The rhetorical body of whiteness constitutes discourses and communicative systems that influence our understanding of race, and a discursive construction that works to levy power and influence through communicative means (Shome, 1999; Warren, 2003).

For example, some communication scholars rely on classroom interactions to theorize ways to ground theoretical and practical questions that situate race and pedagogy in the classroom (see Simpson, 2006; Simpson & Cook, 2007; Warren, 2001). Johnson and Bhatt (2003) articulate the complexities with navigating the binary logics associated with lesbian/heterosexual, white/Asian, and professor/student identities to undermine assumptions of power and privilege that constrain ways of enacting gender, race, and sexual orientation. Cooks (2003) elaborates on this critique of power by exploring whiteness in an interracial communication class. Cooks draws on critical pedagogy of discomfort and performance and the concept of positionality to highlight shifting articulations of white identities and whiteness in student experiences of their own racial identities. Other communication scholars engage in critical pedagogy to consider the ways that white students use or cite discourses or engage in repetitive acts that maintain white privilege and serve the (re)constitution of whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Warren, 2001). Like students, the classroom can become a site of cultural performance of

race for white teachers who also (re)produce whiteness in discussions of race in the classroom. In viewing the classroom as a site for social change, Fishman and McCarthy (2005) explain that white teachers enter discussions of race with good intentions, but they often (re)produce white privilege by failing to provide a historical context for individual responses. Finally, Alexander (2006) asserts that cultural performances privilege one social marker over the other. In his work, he shows that *passing* is a performance of suppression associated with denial, as light-skinned blacks pass for white to assume social and cultural privileges of being white and to avoid the stigma of being black.

In conclusion, whiteness is socially constructed as a privileged, unmarked, and universal cultural norm, but scholars of whiteness challenge its invisibility by continually marking it as an increasingly flexible, variable, and contested space. Crenshaw (1997) argues that rhetoricians do self-reflexive ideological work to make whiteness visible. She asks scholars to overturn silences of issues of race and to investigate how racialized constructions intersect with gender and class. Like Crenshaw and many others, I enter the discursive space of whiteness to reveal terminology that still reproduces white privilege. In a sense, this study moves toward understanding how white males in leadership positions may enact discourses of privilege or refuse to consent to ideological privilege. These discourses are essentially significant when we consider that white-male elites may impact and influence initiatives for workplace diversity. Leonardo (2004) calls for a different approach to whiteness complemented by white supremacy and white domination. As such, Leonardo believes whiteness revolves less around issues of unearned privileges and direct processes to secure domination, and more on the state of being dominant. In a sense, what is mediating the discourse of white-male elites may revolve less around

communication strategies that they employ in discussing leadership and diversity and more on their social positioning conferred through skin color privilege.

Additionally, like many of the white-male scholars above, Segrest (1994) confronts racism through self-scrutiny of what it means to be a white female lesbian engaging in anti-racist work. Segrest shows how intersections of race, homophobia, and capitalism act simultaneously to maintain white hegemony. In a sense, she weaves the personal and private with understandings of social structures. While I locate my analyses in the common themes of respondents, I also consider the self-scrutiny of white-male elites in explaining their own enactments of privilege. This study is different from other work in whiteness studies where scholars interrogate discourses of whiteness in that white-male elites, themselves, without outright commitment to anti-racist organizing, admit to their own privileged social positioning.

Finally, as mentioned previously, many whiteness scholars skillfully illuminate the discursive practices that whites engage in performing whiteness within a cultural context. These studies locate the reproduction of whiteness in signaling the reproduction of dominance and normativity rather than marginality and privilege (Frankenberg, 1993). Such work, however, dismantles racial hierarchies (decentering whiteness) in settings such as the classroom in analyzing mass-mediated accounts. Therefore, many of the scholars of whiteness examine convenient samples of text or individuals (with few exceptions such as Frankenberg, 1993; van Dijk, 1993). In this study, I talk with white-male elites, who by virtue of their substantial educational achievements, economic influence and job status have greater power in operating and controlling institutions of society. Unlike students in a classroom, these individuals have greater access to resources

than even ordinary white males and have power to make important decisions that impact white women, people of color, and other white men as well (e.g., initiating workplace diversity).

### Constructions of Masculinity: An Overview

Masculinity[,] to the extent that the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture. (Connell, 1995, p. 71)

Numerous academic disciplines take up the study of masculinity in order to problematize patriarchal systems and examine gender dynamics including well-defined distinctions between male and female sex roles and traits in any cultural contexts. In this section, I discuss those works that most directly engage masculinity and its relationship to hegemony, by contextualizing and further defining masculinity. I also situate research on masculinity within a historical context by highlight a few of the approaches to studies of gender. Finally, I examine some of the strategies that researchers employ in studying masculinity and conclude with conceptualizing hegemonic masculinity.

#### *Contextualizing Masculinity*

White men remain principal holders of economic and political power. These men make up a majority of corporate executives and holders of public office, and control most technological and global ventures. Nevertheless, large numbers of these men acknowledge that their position, which was often taken-for-granted, is tenuous (Connell, 2005). The impetus for studies of masculinity is the cultural disturbance of the social position of men and of perceived gender roles. Early on, many scholars of gender used

sex-role theory to explain relationships between males and females. Sex-role theory, however, was ineffective for understanding the power dimensions in gender and the variations in masculinities (Connell, 1987). Accordingly, recent studies on masculinity disregard abstractions of sex-role approaches and examine the social construction of gender, and practices and patterns of masculinity within different contexts (Connell, 2003; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2005; Messner, 2002). That being said, it is equally important to understand that there are likely different meanings of masculinity within familial networks, sports, neighborhood peer groups, and in the workplace, to name a few. Within various contexts, there are likely to be multiple understandings and expressions of masculinity as its meanings are constructed in relation to race, gender, sexuality and class. For instance, the meaning of masculinity in working-class life may be different from meanings among the rich and poor, with similar variations applying within other social identifications as well.

The concept of masculinity maintains different meanings and in many ways remains flawed. For instance, Hearn (2004) sees the concept as blurred and tends to deemphasize issues of power and domination. While Petersen (2003) views the concept as uncertain in its meaning because it essentializes the character of men in imposing a false unity. Masculinity is a relational concept as it does not exist except in contrast to femininity (Connell, 1995). Understanding masculinity and femininity is complicated by their variations across culture (Kimmel, 2004). Shifting definitions and conceptualizations exacerbate our inability to define masculinity and femininity except in relation to men and women (Kimmel, 2004; Paechter, 2006). The dualistic relation between masculinity and femininity, whether claimed by males or females, positions

normative femininity without power (Connell, 1995). Therefore, distancing oneself from the stereotypical femininity may constitute a call for power.

What is problematic is that conceptions of masculinity and femininity ignore exclusion within gender categories. That is, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) assert, scholars criticize studies of masculinity for imposing heteronormative conceptions of gender that essentialize male-female difference. Thus, Kimmel (2004) argues that we must “pluralize” (p. 3) the terms of masculinities and femininities by acknowledging that masculinity and femininity mean different things to different groups of people. This study neither portends to explain cultural variations of masculinities nor highlight the meanings of masculinity within different cultural contexts. Rather, this study examines communication strategies in white-male elites’ talk on diversity and leadership and makes considerations for discourses mediating white masculinity. I do, however, concur with Connell and other researchers on masculinity (e.g., Hearn, 2004; Kimmel, 2004) and argue against the conflation of masculinity research to include all men. Scholars challenge the invisibility of variations in masculinity research, since manhood does not afford similar privileges to all men (Donaldson, 2006).

In racializing masculinities, I acknowledge that all men benefit from existing patriarchal systems, but men, based on race, and other identifications such as class and sexuality, perform, enact, and benefit from masculinity differently. Theories of intersectionality push us to recognize that gendered identity functions through articulations of race, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Orbe, 1998). While this study moves toward looking at intersectional matrices in understanding white hetero-masculinity, the following provides a historical account of masculinity in discussing

approaches to studies of masculinity. I then describe the nuances of hegemonic masculinity. I conclude this section with a discussion on representations of subordinated masculinities to indicate how hegemonic masculinity accents its power differentials through stereotypical depictions of subordinated masculinities.

### *Historicizing Research on Masculinity*

Research on masculinity originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Sigmund Freud examined adult personalities through sexual orientation, self-identity, and constructs of gender (Freud, 1905). Although Freud never wrote a systematic discussion on masculinity, he based his thinking about it on the Oedipus complex. By the 1930s, anthropologists questioned psychoanalysts' perspectives on gender and applied sex-role theory to explain gendered patterns of behavior, socialization, and social expectations (see Hacker, 1957; Parsons & Bales, 1955). In this approach, there are always two sex roles in any cultural context, a male and female one. For instance, Parsons and Bales (1955) explain sex roles as a cultural elaboration of biological differences; in their study, they examine distinctions between the male's instrumental and the female's expressive role in the family. Sex-role theory remained prominent in research on gender until scholars turned to cultural approaches to understand the link between power and gender. Margaret Mead (1963) challenged biological determinism in gender differences and argued for the significance of culture in confirming gender differences. In other words, one culture may conceive, communicate, articulate, and endorse its own version of gender, while others may rely on context to constitute masculinity and femininity.

In addition, recent perspectives, such as post-structuralist and postmodernist, accounted for the malleability of gender and identity (see Butler, 1993). As such, queer

scholarship considers the material and relational conditions that contribute to the fluidity of gender. For instance, Halberstam (1998) contends that associations of masculinity with men reify the link between males and cultural representations of masculinity. This association limits possibilities for considering other varieties of masculinity such as female masculinities. Moreover, she argues that the subversion of female masculinities allows for male masculinities to persist uncontested as “the bearer of gender stability” (p. 41). Western cultures tend to dichotomize gender and thus, scholars challenge the reproduction of the gender binary. Thus, masculinity is not stable; its meanings shift over time and in relation to culture (Spitzack, 1998). For example, the *nadles* of the Navajo and Mojave Indian tribes are neither male nor female, but a combination of the two. When performing tasks typically assumed by women, the *nadle* dresses and acts as a woman; when performing tasks typically assumed by men, the *nadle* dresses and acts as a man. Like Freud, Foucault<sup>4</sup> had no gender theory at all, but Foucault’s (1979) engagements with discourse, power, knowledge, and performance contributed greatly in theorizing gender.

In addition, numerous feminist approaches challenge the sustenance of patriarchy and the ideological worldview of men. As such, much of feminist scholarship starts with acknowledging that patriarchy exists and that men’s domination over women must cease for women to be empowered (Buzzanell, 1994; Calas & Smircich, 1993; Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, & Papa, 2000). Indeed, there is no single feminism that can account for everything because groups are unique and are disadvantaged by a matrix of domination

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<sup>4</sup> Although Foucault had no explicit gender theory, his three-volume series of books on the *History of Sexuality* (1977, 1984, 1992), which were extensions of the genealogical approach in *Discipline and Punishment*, account for modern control of sexuality by making sex an object of discipline. Thus, self-scrutinizing and self-forming subjects internalize the norms prescribed by sciences of sexuality and monitor themselves in conforming to social norms.

(Buzzanell, 1994; Collins, 1998a, 2000; Houston, 2002). Feminist scholars provide bountiful and complex theoretical perspectives that focus on a range of issues including the intersections of multiple oppressions in women's lives. Broadly speaking, feminists reflect on political ideology (see Papa et al., 2000), ethnicity (see hooks, 2000; Houston, 2002; Houston & Davis, 2002), the success and shortcomings of race (hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984), class (Hedge, 1996), communication theories of contemporary feminists (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999), and organizations as sites of gendered communication practices (see Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Parker, 2001).

Feminists emphasize that women are not passive victims of oppression, but active agents constituted in social and cultural contexts (Papa et al., 2000). Feminists use a variety of approaches including rhetorical, performative, and intersectional that openly challenge male privilege and patriarchal definitions of women as dependent and fragile. For example, one approach, namely, the patriarchal-power approach, derives from feminist scholarship and addresses sex-differentiated unequal distribution of power in society. This examines the widespread monopolization of power by men over women (see Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002). This approach recognizes that dualisms (passive/active, mind/body, emotional/rational) validate masculinity as more valuable than femininity.

#### *Other Strategies for Studying Masculinity*

Connell (1995) identifies four strategies that researchers use to characterize the masculine person. Essentialist definitions highlight a core of masculinity and equate it with an activity in contrast to femininity (e.g., Freud, 1905). Positivist definitions provide a logical basis for masculinity by using items that statistically describe patterns of men's

lives in a given culture (e.g., Levant & Richmond, 2007). Normative definitions highlight differences and provide standards for masculine behaviors. For instance, Brannon (1976) identifies four standards of traditional masculinity that inform gender roles: “no sissy stuff” (that men should avoid feminine things); “the big wheel” (that men should strive for success and achievement); “the sturdy oak” (that men should not show weakness); and “give em hell” (that men should seek adventure, even if violence is necessary). Semiotic approaches define masculinity through a system of symbolic differences between men and women. For instance, scholars trace the complex and powerful systems of imagery in mass media that define bodies as either beautiful or ugly (e.g., Chapkis, 1986; Wilson, 1987). Approaches to masculinity also recognize the gender politics within different kinds of masculinity based upon alliance, dominance, and subordination.

### *Hegemonic Masculinity*

Masculine ideologies create a common constellation of standards and expectations associated with traditional male roles in society (Kimmel, 1993). We internalize cultural belief systems and behaviors toward masculinity and men’s roles so that boys and men subscribe to expectations that support masculine ideologies.<sup>5</sup> Connell (1995) refers to masculine ideology as hegemonic masculinity, to reject its singularity and consider white heterosexual male dominance over women and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity combines fundamental ideas of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony with practice-based masculinities theory. Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as: “The configuration of gender practice which embodies

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<sup>5</sup> In this study, I am interested in white male elites’ talk on diversity and leadership to see if their discourses are consistent with masculine ideologies that locate women in traditional gender roles.

the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimating [*sic*] of patriarchy, [and] guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). Through the concept of hegemonic masculinity,<sup>6</sup> Connell argues that masculinity constitutes various means of performance, and highlights intersecting power relations. Hegemonic masculinity diminishes alternative forms of masculinity. Thus, the concept of hegemonic masculinity underscores the social struggles in which subordinated masculinities influence dominant forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Mumby (1998) agrees with Connell and defines hegemonic masculinity as a socially constructed and institutionalized system of power that privileges a certain definition of masculinity. In his discussion of masculinity in organizations, Mumby explains that masculine subjectivities experience empowerment through concentricity; that is, men as concentric subjects<sup>7</sup> have a common center by virtue of patriarchy. Donaldson (1993) concurs and asserts that hegemonic masculinity provides its own form of justice; it delivers its own form of adherence and privileges core principles that set the benchmark for social order. Hegemonic masculinity protects its principles against challenge to ensure the sustenance of its own brand of justice. It is about being able to construct the world for oneself and others so that one’s power goes unchallenged and is taken (more or less) for granted as part of the order of things. Communication scholars turn to hegemonic masculinity as a heuristic for assessing the extent to which social discourses normalize the institution of both masculinity and femininity. Hegemonic

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of hegemonic masculinity is important in this study because I am interested in understanding the dynamics involved when a member of a historically white hegemonic masculine group discusses issues of diversity and leadership with an African American, and thus a member of a historically subordinated masculine group.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of “concentric subjects” is important in this study as the pretext and subtext of performances of masculinity are dictated by the white hegemonic masculine group.

masculine discourses culturally produce a dominant form of masculinity embedded in heterosexual figures (Butterworth, 2004; Trujillo, 1991; Vavrus, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative masculinity (Cloud, 1998) are key components in understanding the process through which men become gendered. In recent years, there has been a growing interest, even concern, about issues surrounding hegemonic masculinity, which as Connell (2005) writes, now extends worldwide. The pervasive force of hegemonic masculinity in Euro-American culture requires researchers to examine the effects of subordinated masculinities within a global-local context.

### *Representations of Subordinated Masculinities*

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinities belie the reality of most men, e.g., WASP, heterosexual, upper class, heroic, competitive, and attractive. In U.S. popular culture, white American men are the standard for masculinity. Hegemonic masculinities are “always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities” (Connell, 1997, p. 22). For example, Dyer (1997) demonstrates in his studies on masculinity that white men constantly represent their forms of masculinity as more superior than subordinate masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity depends on stereotypical depictions that accent the debasement of subordinate masculinities in the United States. There is a complex history of stereotypical traits assigned to Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (GLBTs) by dominant groups. Certainly, Mexican Americans (e.g., Sanchez, 2003), Asian Americans (e.g., Espiritu, 1997), and African Americans (e.g., Ferber, 2007) are marginalized by numerous negative stereotypes ascribed to them. These racial groups along with Native

Americans (e.g., Rogers, 2007) are often stereotyped in negative ways, but these groups also threaten white American masculine social systems and structures.

Although analyses of patriarchy are pervasive in critiques on masculinity, new directions on research, particularly in the last couple of years, focus on the relationship between masculinity and ethnicity (Edwards, 2006; Robinson, 2001). Research on masculinity, nonetheless, often overlooks how social and cultural differences among males influence masculine behaviors and outcomes. For instance, many African American males find themselves in a position where they have to modify and/or distort their own cultural norms in order to conform to white cultural norms (McClure, 2006). Several researchers (Jackson, 1999; McClure, 2006; Wilson, 1991) have written about black masculinities, proposing that contradictions in identity are contingent on a black male's unique experience of living in dual worlds, or what DuBois (1903) refers to as double consciousness. Lived identities are rarely neat as dualistic representations suggest; identities shift and change across space and place (Hall, 1998). The negotiation of identity between cultural spaces of creativity and constraint illustrate how place and space (e.g., context) are pivotal aspects of identity in which men negotiate new opportunities for themselves (Malam, 2004).

#### *Negotiating Hegemonic and Subordinated Masculinity*

Butler (1990) suggests that gender is a “performative accomplishment [in] which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (p. 141). To further extend Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender to DuBois's notion of double consciousness, Johnson (2003) announces the end of the essential black subject as the critical politics of race are

contingent, historically articulated, and particularly placed. Blackness traverses categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. Studies show that men of color tenuously navigate the boundaries between subordinated and hegemonic masculinity for purposes of social regulation and control of their own subjectivity and to garner full participation in the mainstream culture (see Alexander, 2006; Espiritu, 1997; McClure, 2006). For example, some men of color respond to the complexities of race and masculinity through a reactionary masculinity that imitates their white-male counterparts.

McClure (2006) explores the development of masculine identity among members of one historically black fraternity as they attempt to resolve contradictory expectations of their race, class, and gender identities. McClure found that African American men struggle to negotiate between hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) typically ascribed to European American males, which emphasizes competition and individualism, and the Afrocentric model (Akbar, 1990), which emphasizes collectivity and community over competition. African American men articulate a strong connection to the past and future black community to emphasize the importance of communalism. At the same time, they support mainstream ideas associated with (typically white) hegemonic masculinity. “The civilizing discourse of the state calls upon the Other to mimic the colonizing subject, which secures the proliferation of discursively inappropriate act of mimicry that repeats rather than re-presents” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 128).

Similarly, Johnson (2003) provides a compelling account of the critical politics of performing race that articulates the various opinions on seeing the positionality of blackness. Unlike McClure (2006), Johnson (2003) examines the performativity of race, sexuality, and culture in showing how the discourse on blackness is “slippery” (p. 2),

meaning its “mobility is never forestalled once it set to motion though performance” (p. 75). Johnson requires scholars to rethink black culture through performance, as blackness is a signifier that is historically situated and malleable. Being black constitutes a series of corporeal and material performances as black bodies negotiate slippages in biological and ideological codes. Like Johnson, Alexander (2006) emphasizes the performative aspects of being black and knowing blackness within a cultural context. Alexander, however, explores the reflexive process of being a black man in diverse social and cultural contexts and highlights the complex boundaries between competing cultural performances (at home and work) that always require negotiations.

In my study, I consider the boundaries of scholarly production that expose my strengths and vulnerabilities as a researcher. Following cultural studies scholars, I see culture as constituting and constituted in social practices that establish the positionality (process of interpellation) from which we operate in relation to others and view it as contested when we come into contact with competing viewpoints (Grossberg, 1993; Hall, 1998; Williams, 2002). In my study, it is important to consider the discursive constructions of race, gender, sexuality and other identity markers as I, a man with a subordinated masculine subjectivity, engage white males situated in the hegemonic masculine positionality. That being said, I examine the ideological function of communication within social formations of white masculinity where power and desire appear to escape determinations of its discourse and stand in as real. That is, I consider ways in which discourses of white masculinity allude, at times, to existing power relations of race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers through other discourses that mediate ideologically produced representations articulated and experienced as real.

While it is important for me to implicate ideological practices of white masculinity, I also consider ways in which white-male elites, in interacting with me, reaffirm and co-create meaning through discursive constructions of shared patriarchal, sexual, and educational status. In a sense, communication constitutes a moment of sharing and, in some ways, trust, which enables participants to escape potential real threats to self. Thus, while differences exist between the black interviewer and the white interviewee, their communication practices are inserted into an already existing structure of meanings (i.e., hetero-patriarchy). At this juncture, I must note that whiteness is a discourse that can be performed by people of all colors (Carrillo Rowe & Malhotra, 2006) and that people of color can enact and resist whiteness.

It is not my aim to make determinate responses in understanding either white masculinity or my positionality as the researcher. I use the details of my self-reflexive experience to provide insights on white-male subjectivity as I immerse myself in the borders between positionalities of race, sex, and gender, specific spaces of cultural practice and identity location. Thus, as Alexander (2006) and Johnson (2003) assert, being black is slippery, yet I consider discourses of white-male elites that undermine blackness by situating it in essentialized locales.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity influences scholarship about men, gender, and social hierarchy. Despite decades of feminist movements and challenges to sex-role distinctions that benefit men, essentialist views of gender are still popular and constantly reinforced in the media. In my study, I want to see how constructions of gender influence descriptions of leadership and diversity in the workplace. On the one hand, this study examines white-male elites' talk to explore the discursive practices and patterns of

masculinity in their discourses on leadership and diversity. On the other hand, unlike other studies on hegemonic masculinity, this study accounts for the ways in which both members of hegemonic masculine group and a member of a subordinated masculine group can engage in discourses masculinity and heterosexuality altogether. In this study, hegemonic masculinity theorizes the relationship among masculinities in considering on how we shape, co-create, and share in patriarchy.

In addition, while this study considers the range of popular ideologies that constitute characteristics of white masculinity, it also explores the relations of those ideologies as articulated through the experiences of white-male elites, including the tensions, contradictions, and resistances. It is important to explore how white-male elites conform or resist masculine ideologies, without exactly embodying the ideal dominant male. As Wetherell and Edley (1999) suggest, understanding hegemonic norms as a subject position in discourse that is taken up strategically by men is important for seeing how they conform and resist masculine ideologies. I acknowledge that I cannot be absolutely sure that these discussions of leadership and diversity yield genuine, forthright, or insincere responses, but I can consider ways in the discourse that white-male elites dodge meanings of white masculinity according to their interactional needs. In other words, I can speculate on how white-male elites engage in communication strategies that clearly adopt a hegemonic masculinity stance when desirable. I also analyze white-male elites' talk to speculate on ways they distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments in their interaction with me. I also consider the ways in which white-male elites talk through experiences that connect with me as well.

## Constructions of White Masculinity

Boys and men construct, perform, and negotiate masculinity in social spaces made distinct by race, ethnicity, class, and sexual politics. Connell believes as means of understanding gender, we must constantly go beyond gender. To paraphrase Connell (2001), white masculinities are constructed in relation to race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. As follows, we cannot point to a singular white masculinity because ethnicity, class, and sexuality are deeply implicated in white masculinity as well. White masculinity exerts hegemonic control within our culture. That is, a white male “can be a man” without exposing the nature of his performance (Esposito, 2003, p. 232). In this study, whiteness and masculinity are foremost historical concepts, discursively constructed within the hidden traces of the experience and reality of white-male elites.

The previous sections examined constructions of whiteness and masculinity, the context-specific and dynamic aspects of white heterosexual male identity formation. In this study, I want to examine the extent to which white-male elites, by virtue of their possession of white heterosexual masculinity, continue to occupy a position of privilege and power despite desires for diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. To further highlight Collins’s (2000) matrix of domination, I explore discourses of white-male elites to show how particular communication strategies that mark race, gender, and sexuality as interlocking systems of oppression are understandable in discussions of diversity and leadership. Intersectionality contributes to understanding white masculine identity formation, as different identity standpoints emerge within my interviews with white-male elites. The following reviews existing literature that shows constructions of white masculinity in various social and cultural contexts. In reviewing the literature on white

masculinity, I found that white masculinity functions to celebrate the white male's strength and versatility, to validate white-male victimhood, and to uphold heteronormativity. Thereafter, I conclude by revealing how white masculinity is relevant toward understanding discourse of white-male elites in this study.

#### *White Masculinity—Versatility and Strength*

Butler (1990) theorizes that the white American male's body is a precarious racial membrane, a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated. Its health and maintenance is of vital importance. The white-male body is Hollywood's greatest spectacle. The white-male body captivates audience attention, and lures the onlooker to celebrate its versatility and physique. In the early 1990s, popular culture and the mass media capitalized on changing conceptions of whiteness and masculinity. For instance, Dyer (1997) examines Chuck Norris's Braddock and Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo to deconstruct the hard bodied white American male depiction. Dyer aligns the narrative of both characters within a European American imperial context with its characteristically Western investment in obtaining the perfect body. As Dyer explains, the hard bodies of Rambo and Braddock exemplify active white masculinity as white-male bodily superiority occurs through recurring nakedness with non-white savagery, a transcendent stoicism, and the rejection of the effeminate qualities. White masculinity, in this way, white hegemonic masculinity denounces homosexuality and attaches physical weakness, cowardice, and lack of sexual voracity to subordinated masculinities. To be sure, Malin (2003) explains that reiterating the power of white masculinity involves the rehabilitation of dominant notions of identity through the abjection of minority identities.

Carrillo Rowe (2007) examines the critically acclaimed film *Monster's Ball* as a cultural narrative of white masculinity's redemption from the atrocities of racism through an interracial love story. *Monster's Ball* narrates a story about an overtly racist, sexually aggressive, and white prison guard (Hank) who overcomes his racism as he builds an intimate relationship with a dysfunctional black mother and witness (Leticia). The interracial love story functions metonymically to produce a new white masculinity consistent with an emerging multicultural logic of colorblindness that displaces the cultural work of racial healing from history and politics, and places it squarely within the realm of possibilities for white-male recuperation. In addition, white femininity, as an ideological construction, is flexible, and naturalized, and is positioned, just as white masculinity, as superior to other femininities (Carrillo Rowe, 2007; Frankenberg, 1993; Shome, 2001). White males, nonetheless, occupy a more hegemonic strategic position than white females and maintain an essentially "label-free existence" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 305).

#### *White Masculinity and the Rhetoric of Victimization*

A new articulation of white masculinity appeared in the 1990s as white males relied on the rhetoric of victimhood (Savran, 1998) to denounce unearned privileges and call attention to their own social disempowerment. As Kimmel (1996) writes, "angry white males...feel besieged by frenzied 'feminazis' and a culture of entitlements, affirmative action, and special interests" (p. 300). In addressing white masculinity, critics narrate notions of an apocalyptic or perceived crisis of white masculinity in popular culture and mass mediated discourses (Dyer, 1997; Jeffords, 1993). Many interpret this cry for victimhood as a strategy to reclaim social privileges of being white, heterosexual,

and male (Brayton, 2007; Robinson, 2000). The status of victim becomes a discursive strategy for recentering white heteronormative masculinity in American culture, as claims of “symbolic disempowerment” (p. 12) negotiate white heterosexual males’ position within the field of identity politics (Robinson, 2000). Carrillo Rowe (2007) asserts that the logic of white-male victimhood serves a pedagogical function in teaching audiences how to read multiculturalism as white victimization.

Popular culture representations of white males in crisis substantiate multiple and complex hegemonic masculinities infused in class, race, nation, and sexuality with attention to heteronormative assumptions of white victimhood (Kimmel, 1996; Malin, 2003; Robinson, 2000). Many white hegemonic males readily identify a white-male backlash in their efforts to not only recant, but also to embrace the role of victim (Savran, 1998). The story of white victimhood circulates in popular film and television, providing accounts of white men who feel overpowered by cultural and political advances, but empowered in interracial interactions. For example, in examining the popular film and MTV series *Jackass*, Brayton (2007) provides multiple depictions of abject white masculinity through various displays of white-male nudity, comedy, lunacy, and pain and pleasure. For Brayton, the body, as the most reliable metaphor for the meaning of life, inscribes ideologies of abject white masculinity and victimhood on the characters in *Jackass*. Through reflexive sadomasochism, white males in *Jackass* simultaneously affirm and recant a heroic white masculinity. In other words, the white-male victim flirts with disaster by torturing himself and destroying his body not only to prove his own subordination but also his masculinity (Brayton, 2007).

The embodiment of the victim is displaced from the subordinated subjects and mapped onto the hegemonic white-male body (Carrillo Rowe, 2007). Carrillo Rowe and Lindsey (2003) further argue that modes of white masculinity in crisis are circumscribed in white female subjectivity. The wounded hegemonic white-male body enables erasure of institutional support of white male dominance, but re-centers white masculinity, often at the expense of women and subordinated masculinities (Robinson, 2000). White masculinity is a historically unstable category beset with notions of affirmation, assurance, and anxiety. Although a sense of loss, retracted privileges and collapsed incomes of some white men are real (Brayton, 2007), their annual incomes, institutional control and racial privilege remain disproportionately greater than white women and people of color (Winant, 2004). White masculinity informs representations of disempowered white males to support the reactionary discourse of white-male backlash and evoke a transformation of victimization.

*White Masculinity: The Sustenance of Heterosexuality*

Masculinity is understood as organizing maleness and practicing manhood. Queer scholarship points to the significance of culture in the modern Western deployment of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. As Kimmel (2003) asserts, many in dominant culture abhor men deemed less than fully heterosexual, as manhood equates with power over women and other men as well. For example, in gendered and raced discourse, white masculinity presumes heterosexuality, which often leaves gay men out of the configuration of the masculine. In a sense, gay men are not considered men and the homosexual is erased from the emotional relations of gender (see Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Diequez, 2008).

Westerfelhaus and Brookey (2004) assert in their analysis of the film *Fight Club*, the inclusion of homoeroticism, designed to be read as gay or gay friendly, constitutes a violation of heteronormative order and imperative to the film's ritual rebellion. As Ward (2008) proves in her analyses of sexual and racial identities of advertisements for online sex, the ongoing construction of authentic male heterosexuality is reliant upon racial and sexual codes that signify normal, straight male bonding, and lack of interest in gay culture. Thus, white masculine archetypes, for example, jocks and surfers, play a central role in the production of desirable heterosexual culture distinct from gay male culture. Scholars of masculinity also document the centrality of homophobic insults of masculinity (Kimmel, 2003). For instance, the ubiquity of the word *faggot* speaks to the capacity to discredit homosexuality (Corbett, 2001, p. 4). Pascoe (2005) demonstrates that the fag insult has multiple meanings that are primarily gendered, but raced and sexualized as well. In this case, the fag discourse involves more than homophobia, but these deployments suggest ways in which gendered power works through racialization.

In conclusion, in many ways, studies on critical whiteness contest white cultural privilege, uncover the often masked power relations within existing racial hierarchies, and scrutinize social institutional arrangements, state practices, and ideological beliefs that maintain white privilege. Masculinity rests on notions of identity or efforts to map actual patterns of conduct in subscribing to simplified notions of differences between men and women. White masculinity encapsulates both racial identity and ideologies as white males often project forms of masculinity that may shift at any moment depending on the cultural context. This study considers the ways that white-male elites recast discourses onto raced bodies in both embracing and disavowing them. In examining these

depictions of subordinated masculinities, it is important to see how raced bodies become products of discourse and commodification as white-male elites simultaneously represent and control depictions of subordinated masculinities (Collins, 2005).

### Summary

White males remain dominant figures in leadership positions in organizations. Leadership scholars address particular traits, roles, and stereotypes; this study considers the ways that white-male elites talk about leadership and discuss their own leadership style. In addition, many organizational leaders in the United States strive to create a culturally diverse workforce for various reasons including profitability, image, to remedy past and present discrimination, and to garner varied perspectives. Although diversity and diversity management evolved as a topic of interest, little is said about how the very word itself invokes a variety of meanings and emotional responses from leaders within organizations. Thus, it is important to understand how white-male elites are essential in improving the quality of communication on diversity. White masculinity functions to celebrate the white male's strength and versatility, to validate white-male victimhood, and to uphold heteronormativity. My study considers manifestations of white masculinity when white-male elites talk about diversity and leadership with a black male interviewer. Thereafter, I conclude by revealing how white masculinity is relevant toward understanding discourse of white-male elites in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how white-male elites talk about leadership and diversity. My research questions are grounded in understanding how white-male elites make sense of leadership and diversity in a face-to-face interview with a black-male interviewer. This chapter introduces the method used to study the research questions under investigation: I describe the analytical components of grounded-theory methodology as the basis for understanding how white-male elites make sense of both leadership and diversity; I explain the research method employed in this study, namely semi-structured interviews, and I discuss the process of data analysis.

#### Methodological Considerations

Given the lack of research examining professional white-male elites and their articulations of leadership and diversity as well as the need for more descriptive data on their constructions of white masculinity, this study uses a grounded-theory approach. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology (Ponterotto, 2002) developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a way to generate theory from data that are grounded in the lived experiences of individuals. It is increasingly used by communication scholars (Carpac-Claver, 2007; Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007; Gray, 2007; Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, & Salovey, 2006; Sparks, Villigran, Parker-Riley, & Cunningham, 2007; Suter & Daas, 2007) to analyze text drawn from systematically gathered data. Grounded-theory methodology aims to generate concepts, possible models, or a theory from empirical data and, in this project, to explain how white males understand leadership and diversity,

rather than verify any existing theories. As a methodology, grounded theory accounts for variation of specific cases and ensures that abstract concepts are grounded in empirical data of the everyday experiences of the participants in the study (e.g., Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded-theory methodology allows researchers to aptly name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and provide a new slant on existing knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using this methodology, I examine the communicative strategies that appear across the data in white-male elite talk on diversity and leadership, and discuss how these discourses operate in reproducing white masculinity.

I use grounded theory to enhance understandings of the discursive formations of contemporary discourses on leadership, race, gender, and diversity as articulated by white men who by virtue of job title and education, exercise much power and influence in the workplace. In particular, I will use an inductive approach to explore discourses of white-male elites to develop a fresh perspective on existing research that investigates white masculinity as conceptualized and performed. While the dialectic of critical and interpretive perspectives are utilized to uncover complex intersecting cultural identifications of power relations (Thompson & Collier, 2006), this study provides description of white-male elites' talk in moving toward critical ends. In focusing on white elites' engagements with race and gender, I examine the following research questions: how do white-male elites talk about leadership? How do white-male elites talk about diversity?

## Research Method

### *Sample*

I interviewed sixteen white-male elites for this study. I define white-male elites as those who are self-identified as white; who work in elite positions in which they hold job titles such as partner in a law firm, executive director, president and vice-president; and who are U.S. citizens. This form of “purposive sampling,” called systematic nonprobabilistic sampling, is common in qualitative methods and allows the researcher to identify specific groups of individuals who either possess characteristics or live in circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2002). To begin, I sent an e-mail to individuals who attended the 1st Annual Diversity Summit sponsored by the American Bar Association in Chicago, Illinois; I contacted individuals (friends, family, professors, etc.) who might know of someone who leads an organization; and I randomly sent out e-mails to individuals who are leaders in large corporations. All participants voluntarily participated in this study.

### *Interview Process*

The primary data for this study came from semi-structured interviews with white-male elites. This interview format provided white-male elites with freedom and latitude to expound on each question. The semi-structured interview approach allowed me, as an interviewer, to engage in free-flowing conversation to cover a variety of topics (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It also gave me room to improvise questions in response to their comments in order to gain as much understanding as possible about the interviewee and his thoughts and opinions (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The flexibility, interpersonal nature, and interactive style of this interview method are decisive factors in my choice of this

method. Semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for spontaneous comments from both the interviewer and participants in ways that yielded rich data and increased the likelihood of candid and representative responses that may be obscured in more controlled environments (Karim, Bailey, & Tunna, 2000).

### *Data Collection*

After informal networking with participants who considered my request, I initiated another request for an interview with a letter explaining the project on the University of New Mexico Communication & Journalism Department stationery. I followed up with a telephone call to establish a specific time, date, and place for the interview. I preceded each interview with an intensive and detailed investigation of specific information on biographical and organizational backgrounds of my elite interviewees for the purposes of initiating conversation. Important to note is that this information will not appear in this study to ensure confidentiality and to protect the respondents' personal identities.

After recruiting interviewees, I visited the workplace of each participant and employed small talk to establish a comfortable interviewing environment. I asked participants to provide written informed consent and explained that I could not offer incentives for participation in this interview. I also audiotaped each interview. I started a tape recorder to record the interview and placed it out of the sight of both the participant and me because I did not want it to become a distraction during the interview process.

Participants chose the location of their interviews. Although two interviews were held in the homes of participants, all other interviews took place in the office of the participants. One participant asked that his administrative assistant be in the room with us

to listen to the interview. The administrative assistant did not participate or respond at any point during the interview process. The length of the interviews lasted anywhere from one to three hours. I asked the participants to let me know if they needed to take a break at anytime during the interview process. Upon completion of the all interviews, I transcribed approximately 400 pages of audiorecorded data. After transcribing each interview, I sent a copy of the transcription to the participants so that they could check it for accuracy in their statements.<sup>8</sup>

Interview data are more than verbal records. Therefore, I also took note of nonverbal features in these interactions. I took note of facial expressions and/or bodily movements as the participant responded to my question. Each interview started with general questions on participants' work experiences, and gradually moved to specific questions on leadership, success, and diversity. Each participant had the option not to respond to questions deemed threatening. This study maintains approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of New Mexico.

### *Analysis*

After conducting interviews, transcribing them in full detail, and sending back transcriptions via e-mail, I systematically studied and analyzed tapes, notes, and transcriptions looking and coding for patterns in responses. I analyzed the data using a strategy of thematic content analysis, which is an adaptation of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded-theory methodology. The aim here is to produce a detailed and systematic account of themes that arise from interviews and to link them together in an

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<sup>8</sup> As a result of member-checking, no respondent questioned or commented on what was written in the transcriptions. Eleven participants merely responded with a message of thank you or good luck. I did not receive a reply from three participants. I did not have the updated contact information for two participants.

exhaustive categorical system (Karim, Bailey & Tunna, 2000). In grounded-theory methodology, the researcher codes emerging data as it is collected and generates categories of analysis that come strictly from interview data. Coding helps researchers gain a new perspective on the material that may lead in unforeseen directions (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding starts the chain of theory development and theory building (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 1998).

The data were coded to the extent to which each participant discussed his experiences and narratives on leadership and diversity. In coding the data, I came up with themes around their discourses to account for communicative moves they made in discussing the aforementioned topics. It is thus important to pay close attention to the relationship between specific communicative practices or experiences situated in existing structures of power and domination. Communication takes place in the context of power relations, and it is important for me to connect discourses to the structure of those relations (Forbes, 2002).

During the open coding phase, I simultaneously listened to each audio-recorded interview and read each transcribed interview to familiarize myself with the data. First, I focused on the major categories within this study such as race, gender, and diversity. I coded responses and placed similar responses within similar characteristics of one of these broad categories. For example, if someone made a statement about “women,” I placed the statement in a broad category entitled gender, or if someone made a statement about “being white,” I placed this statement in a category entitled race. I also came up with new and unexpected categories as they consistently arose from the responses with particular focus on the communication strategies that white-male elites use to talk about

these subject matters. This orientation helped me as the researcher to become even more familiar with data and to break down their important components.

Second, after coming up with broad categories, I coded specific ways, within each category, to which respondents mobilized their arguments, opinions, or stories using metaphors, shifts in content, constructions of self and other, contradictions, racial and gendered generalizations, and repetitive words. For example, I detected metaphors that were relevant within these categories with respect to their persuasive potential. In this case, I identified metaphors in the text, considered their conceptual implications, persuasive appeal, and potential as a communicative or argumentative strategy in augmenting the participants' perspectives. As another example, in the coding process, I identified the semantic moves or maneuvers white-male elites make in their statements. A semantic move is a strategically managed relationship between propositions (van Dijk, 1987). I referred to these moves as semantic because these statements strategically functioned to link one proposition to a preceding or subsequent proposition. For instance, a semantic strategy might entail making a statement to avoid appearing sexist or racist. Finally, after examining the semantic moves and communication strategies within these broad categories, I came up with themes describing these moves and strategies. A theme in this study constitutes a consistent semantic move or communication strategy made by the respondents that accounts for defining actions or events. After identifying emergent themes, I then examined each theme in the data and gave it a conceptual name to clarify the multitude of issues in addressing the research questions on how white-male elites talk about leadership and diversity.

After presenting the themes that emerged, I collapsed them into a large category signifying white heterosexual masculinity. The selective coding phase allowed me to form a more precise and complete explanation of the phenomenon. In selective coding, I used initial themes that reappear frequently to sort out large amounts of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through selective coding, I identified a central explanatory concept consisting of all the products of analysis that creates an explanatory whole. Through this process I connected the themes in terms of their relationship to white heterosexual masculinity as well as made connections between the consequences and interactions between the participants and me.

#### Summary

This study examines the discourses on race, gender, and diversity of white-male elites through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. I employed grounded-theory methodology to account for the need for more descriptive data on how white-male elites talk about leadership and diversity. The data were coded to the extent to which each participant talked about his understanding of leadership and diversity. In coding the data, themes arise around their discourses to account for communicative moves that white-male elites make in discussing the aforementioned topics.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### WHITE-MALE ELITES' TALK ON LEADERSHIP

This chapter presents the results of the data gathered in the sixteen interviews with white men in leadership positions in their organizations. The results derived from one research question that guided this chapter of the analysis: how do white-male elites talk about leadership? Personal stories underlining the main theme of each section precede in-depth description and interpretation of results.

#### White-Male Elite Discourses on Leadership

Leadership is an exercise of power in organizational life. Leaders maintain the power to determine daily work activities and to demand optimal job performance from their employees. The leader's power in exercising these dynamics comes from multiple sources including employees, organizational networks, and board members. For some people, power also may signify self-serving or manipulative means to create a desirable end; these concepts represent the less than desirable aspects of power (Kanter, 1979). Power is pervasive in the modern-day organization. Most interactions within the workplace operate through an exercise of power. These interactions are usually "marked by hierarchical and egalitarian modes of power" (Ashcraft, 2001, p. 3). In this section, I describe white-male elites' understandings of leadership. This analysis provides attention to the variety of ways that participants talk about leadership.

Recently, I engaged in an exciting and enthusiastic conversation on leadership with a white man who works as a leadership consultant. One of my colleagues from school invited me along with a few mutual friends and members of her family to a

gathering at her home. Beforehand, my colleague admonished our friends and me that her father was conversationally playful and craved to engage in debate on any topic with willing participants. She did not want us to be unexpectedly offended by his willingness to provoke discord. We all heeded her warning and forestalled his attempts to start debates. We observed that he constantly opposed group consensus. As the party reached its conclusion, we all sat in a circle and engaged in cheerful small talk on such topics as traveling abroad, television shows, and film. At this point, my colleague's father turned to each of us and asked about our educational endeavors. We all merely mentioned the number of years that we have been in graduate studies, as we tried to detour the conversation into another direction, but he persistently resuscitated it with more general questions on teaching and research.

At this juncture, one of my colleagues informed him that I was working on my dissertation. He then turned to me and started to inquire about my work. I did not want to oblige because I suspected that it would alter the dynamics of the conversation. I provided very general answers to his questions in hopes that he would change the subject. He obviously did not take the hint and kept asking me about my dissertation. At that point, I observed that he was frustrated by my answers. He then, condescendingly, asserted, "I am a leadership consultant! Your job is to convince me of your findings (pointing and gesturing at me). How are you going to do it?"

I immediately looked in his eyes and went on a harangue on leadership and race that lulled him for a few seconds. He then asked what I thought about Hitler's leadership style. Possibly, unexpectedly to him, I extolled the leadership attributes of Hitler, acknowledging his rhetorical skills while chiding the moral aspects. As dialogue erupted

into a debate, everyone else left the circle as we both disputed ideas on effective leadership. He argued that Hitler was an unsuccessful leader because his followers defied and turned on him. I argued that he was successful because he persuaded his followers to execute his plan and that his eugenics ideologies persist as blond hair and blue-eyed whiteness is globally desirable. For five uncomfortable minutes, at least for my classmates, we debated different leadership styles and strategies. At this point, I presumed that possibly his conversational style might inform the way he consults other leaders. I imagined that he advised his clients that successful business leaders are persistent and work diligently to create indisputable outcomes. In a sense, he sees Hitler as an unsuccessful leader because Germany did not control the world.

I do not necessarily view leadership as determined by either a determinate positive or a negative outcome. Although I agree that Hitler was a deplorable human being, for me, one way of seeing successful leadership is through the leader's ability, in this case a high-ranking world leader, not a business leader, to execute a plan and rhetorically infuse a persisting ideology that influences or obfuscates mass consciousness in spite of the outcome. In reflection, on the one hand, I imagine that two impassionate people can stubbornly espouse their ideas without consenting to the dynamics within the existing context. On the other hand, I surmise that establishing a general definition for effective leadership can be a daunting task, considering that there are several important aspects of leadership, including various descriptions and theories that popularize different styles and ideas. In my interviews with white-male elites, I noticed that each individual, like in my discussion with my colleague's father, provided their own unique perspective on effective leadership. Some viewed effective leadership as obtaining positive results,

while others described effective leadership as clearly communicating organizational objectives and vision. That being said, there are numerous perspectives on leadership, too many to mention here; and yet, this study describes a few prominent descriptions of leadership that will be useful for understanding how white-male elites construct discourses on leadership.

In this study, I wanted to understand how white-male elites in my interviews talk about the idea of leadership within an organizational context. As leaders in their own right, I thought these participants would be the most appropriate sources for obtaining a general understanding of definitions of leadership, including descriptions of a leader's behaviors and styles. By understanding how respondents make sense of leadership in an organizational context, we can better understand if they buttress existing discourses on leadership or construct new discourses for themselves. We can also better understand how they conceptualize leadership through those they manage and historical figures they hold in esteem. In examining white-male elite discourses on leadership, I show the myriad ways in which their constructions of leadership both speak to how they manage their role and actions, and aid others in accomplishing tasks within the workplace.

Although many of the participants indicated that they are personally and professionally driven to improve themselves through mentorship, attending numerous trainings (financial, diversity, or time management), and networking; for some, being an effective leader is most important in contributing to and accomplishing their defined organizational objectives. Leaders maintain formal power or legitimate authority to influence their employees' behaviors and actions. I asked participants for their personal definition of leadership to understand how they view effective leadership. Upon

completion of the interview, I found that white-male elites provide a host of meanings and interpretations for leadership. They were also cognizant of how pre-existing leadership styles are effective in accomplishing the collective goals of the organization.<sup>9</sup> The following analysis shows the ways that the white-male elites in my study describe effective leadership. Participants talk about leaders as those who perform madman behaviors, make things happen, are able to balance various lifestyles, and enable others to accomplish organizational tasks.

### *Madman Leadership*

In my interviews, some leaders express a preference either for providing direction in managing their employees or demanding compliance from their employees. I use the term *madman*<sup>10</sup> leadership to highlight communication strategies that participants use to enact systematic discipline in carrying out orders and to emphasize an aggressive approach in exercising authority over employees. The following statements represent ideal types of participants who talked about leadership in this manner. For instance, Neal, a CEO in an organization in Chicago, has been a coach on his son's baseball team. It appears that his own leadership style as a CEO is very much influenced by his experience as a baseball coach. In describing leadership, Neal continuously made comparisons between managing his organization and coaching a sports team. In the following statement, Neal talks about how he works with employees in his organization:

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<sup>9</sup> Because any one participant may have a variety of descriptions for leadership, they may appear in more than one of the established themes or subthemes.

<sup>10</sup> I must note the gender exclusive language in using the *madman* concept—I use it to refer only to men here, so I am going to use a masculine adjective.

I tell people where we want to go and what we want to accomplish, and tell people how we want them to get there. I am the scorekeeper and I hold them accountable as whether or not we got to where we want them to go. I was a maniac as a coach too and I am proud of it. I was pretty intense. (Neal, personal interview, September 29, 2008)

Neal expresses a great deal of emotion and excitement in discussing how he enacts leadership within his organization. He demands the utmost effort from his employees in completing tasks and holds them accountable for failure. In talking about the demands he places on his employees and describing his intensity, Neal told a story about how he was once kicked out of a grade-school basketball game as a spectator. What makes his ejection even more remarkable is that he did not have a child on either team. Neal's talk on leadership is exemplified in the metaphors he used to emphasize his aggressive approach to leading others. For instance, Neal uses *sports* metaphors, like "scorekeeper," to reveal that he is responsible for keeping a record of his employees' performances. That is, Neal assigns specific work tasks to his employees and holds them accountable. He also keeps track of their job performances in determining if his expectations are met.

Neal typifies the *madman* metaphor in using the term "maniac," to show that he can be an overzealous leader in desiring certain expectations from his employees. Through this madman metaphor, Neal talks about leadership in ways that highlight the depth of the intensity that he exhibits in getting people to meet his expectations. Neal's leadership style resembles the authoritarian leadership style (see Burns, 1978) as he views himself as having strict and legitimate authority over employees. In examining his approach to leadership, the sports and madman metaphors indicate that Neal desires to

enact strict and systematic discipline if his orders are not carried out. Neal desires to take an aggressive approach in preferring to exercise authority in the workplace. Neal talks about leadership in ways that make his relationship with employees more impersonal because he believes that providing strict requests is preferable in leading others.

Ronald also provides his own interpretation of madman leadership in managing his organization:

For me leadership is intimidation. [When I was in college] I felt intimidated by these athletes and the way they communicated... Then I realized that I may never be as strong as them but I can be a lot [fiercer] than them. ...we would wrestle and I didn't mind kicking them in you know where... Then people would start to get scared of me... [and say] he is so crazy! I was a leader because people respected me, people feared me. I take this mentality to the business world. I won't hesitate to fire someone if they aren't doing their job and they know it.

(Ronald, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Ronald sees *fear* as an essential leadership strategy in getting people to fulfill his organizational goals. For example, in my interview with him, Ronald told a story about an incident that occurred while in boarding school that explains his preference for using fear to enact leadership. Ronald attended one of the most elite all-boys boarding schools in the country along with sons of CEOs and family members of a president of the United States. At times, students would wrestle to allay pressures from coursework. Ronald was the smallest of all the young men at his school, yet he was known for using aggressive tactics to win these wrestling matches with the other boys. For instance, Ronald often kicked or kneed his opponents in the groin because he desperately wanted to win. Many

of the boys feared him because of his willingness to use such aggressive physical tactics to win wrestling matches. Ronald has taken his own personal experience in boarding school and applied it to the way he talks about leading employees.

Ronald talks about leadership by using such descriptors *fear* and *intimidation* as a means to garner respect from his employees. In understanding leadership through fear and intimidation, bullying becomes a strategy for making employees commit to high-quality performance. Numerous hostile and intense messages/behaviors comprise bullying, which often becomes increasingly aggressive (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2006). As Ronald states, quite frankly, “I won’t hesitate to fire someone.” In enacting fear, the *madman* metaphor, “crazy,” exemplifies how Ronald manifests abnormal behaviors that frighten his employees to conform to and carry out organizational objectives. Fear functions as both a visceral response to provoke action and as active performance to belittle those who do not perform up to his expectations. That is, fear not only implies mood, but it constitutes a mechanism to get employees to perform. For Ronald, leadership means using his authority to create fear in others in obtaining optimal performance. The madman metaphor, crazy, and descriptors that typify bullying constitute a more aggressive form of authoritative leadership than Neal to which Ronald makes strict requests by actively inducing fear in his employees.

### *Making Things Happen*

Some leaders use metaphors, descriptors, and phrases to highlight their active involvement in getting employees to accomplish organizational goals. For example, Ray described his leadership style as that of a builder,

Somebody always asks me if I had one word to describe [myself]. I said, well, I am probably best known as a builder. Sort of stirring the pot! Leadership, in my mind, is the ability to get things done through other people. (Ray, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

As someone who makes things happen, Ray sees it as his personal obligation to construct a plan for the organization and to impel his employees to execute the plan. Ray sees himself through the *construction* metaphor, “builder,” and uses the cliché “stirring the pot” to talk about how he performs leadership in his organization. Ray talks through the *builder* metaphor, meaning that he is charged with molding others by developing and strengthening his own organizational plan. This metaphor works together with “stirring the pot” to exemplify his willingness to personally intervene to construct arguments that move the organization in a particular direction. Ray brings about the construction metaphor and the cliché of “stirring the pot” in a way that places responsibility on the leader in getting employees to accomplish tasks. Unlike Neal and Ronald, Ray’s use of metaphor did not necessarily depend on intimidating employees. Ray talked about leadership in ways that held the leader accountable for designing clear and concrete organizational plans and goals for employees. In a sense, Ray talked about leadership as the active involvement of the leader in getting employees to perform efficiently while more authoritative leaders like Neal and Ronald placed more responsibility on the employees to meet their expectations.

Another leader, Dean, who is the president of a university, expresses his view on leadership: “I think that leadership is empowering people to understand what you are trying to do and want to be part of” (Dean, personal interview, March 17, 2009). In

making things happen, Dean talks about leadership in ways that foretell his own responsibility in enabling his employees to enact his plans. Dean talks about leadership as *empowering* employees, but not necessarily through encouraging their own personal development. The term *empowering* complements the theme of making things happen as Dean sees leadership as emphasizing ways to get employees to carry out tasks. Empowerment, in a sense, does not constitute abdicating authority or power to others, but it underscores the ways in which leaders enable employees to meet organizational expectations. To be sure, for Dean, the source of empowerment comes through his employees' ability to carry out his orders.

Mark concurs, "Um, (he pauses) the first thing that comes to mind is (short pause) setting a course that people are willing to follow. You can't be an effective leader if you don't know the right way to take people, the right direction to take people" (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008). Mark also views leadership as providing direction and getting employees to perform essential tasks for the organization. The cliché "setting the course" indicates that, as a leader, he is responsible for creating a plan for employees to follow. The term *course* also functions as a sports metaphor, exemplifying a track or race, or a route or path taken that signifies continuous progression or moving forward. The sports metaphor signifies movement or progress toward a desired goal. Through the theme of making things happen, Mark talks about leadership as signified through the cliché "setting the course" and a sports metaphor. Mark describes leadership as the leader's responsibility in defining and creating the plan, and moving his employees toward prescribed goals.

Another leader, Greg stated that he prefers to give his employees the freedom to come up with their own plans. He wants employees to make decisions on organizational tasks. Greg stated that he usually gives his employees a task and requires them to generate ways to complete it. As such, Greg states, “Leadership I think plays a role in expediting things. So I think that leadership is the art of making things happen in cooperation with other people” (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008). The theme of *making things happen* is actually stated in Greg’s discourse, yet Greg talks through this theme differently from others. Greg does make the leader accountable in getting employees to quickly perform tasks, but he also emphasizes the significance of his role in acting collaboratively with employees. Other leaders, within this theme, do not talk about leadership in terms of cooperation from employees. Greg talks about leadership through the cliché “expediting things” and “making things happen” to underscore his active involvement and responsibility in imploring employees to accomplish organizational tasks. Greg places responsibility on himself, as the leader, to hasten progress and promptly get employees to perform the desired tasks.

Leaders who see leadership as making things happen talk about leadership in ways that exemplify transactional leadership, which ultimately considers the ways the leaders get people to contribute to making something happen (see Kouzes & Posner, 1987). In their descriptions of leadership, these participants see it as their responsibility to get employees to quickly act in accomplishing organizational goals. These leaders use clichés such as “setting the course,” “empowering,” “expediting things,” and “stirring the pot,” which shows that each leader sees it as his own more personal obligation to create a plan that facilitates action—employees act to execute their plans. Yet, as these leaders

acknowledge the presence of the employees, they distance themselves from their employees since the major objective for them is to complete the required task.

### *Striking the Balance*

Negotiating the demands of employment and the demands of activities outside of the workplace has proved to be difficult for most leaders. In the late 1990s, organizations sought to become more attractive by creating initiatives that made it easier for individuals to balance the demands of work and other areas in life (see Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). For instance, Tyler talked about the admiration that he has for Vice-President Joe Biden. He admired the way that Vice-President Biden was able to manage his work and family life after the untimely death of his wife. Tyler believes that Biden is an exemplar of leadership because, despite difficult circumstances, he was able to manage both the responsibilities of his political work and his family life. Tyler expresses similar regard for his former employer,

...the most influential person was [someone] who I worked for about 25 years ago. I was in his home. He had a family, large family, six or seven kids, at a time. That was the first time I saw someone balancing their work-life with their family life. He had this kind of office set up in his home and he did a lot of projects out of it. I was impressed with the way or his ability to blend those kinds of things. (Tyler, personal interview, August 29, 2008)

For Tyler, the metaphors *balance* and *blend* are signifiers for effective leadership. The balance metaphor signifies the degree to which one is able to arrange responsibilities symmetrically. The blend metaphor signifies the intermingling of responsibilities in order to obtain harmony. In Tyler's description of leadership, these metaphors maintain similar

functions that represent the effective and effortless mixing of responsibilities. Tyler talks about leadership using these metaphors to show his admiration for those who effectively manage various aspects of one's life. Tyler uses the term "balance" in talking about his admiration for his former employer who was able to manage a large family and complete work-related tasks at home. He uses the term "blend" to talk about his admiration for the way his former employer smoothly intermingles both working on the job and at home, and even conducting job-related activities at home. Tyler's idea of effective leadership, as articulated through his former employer, not only is shown through his employer's ability to blend and balance work and family, but it also connotes a surrendering of what is desirable—high-quality job performance for the sake of the children. What is interesting is that the discourse on balance relies upon connections with children, which essentially denotes what it means, not only to be a good executive, but a good father as well. As Jay explains:

My wife and I consciously made decisions that we would sacrifice for our kids and so putting them through college... In February that year they asked me to do the deputy job, a 23 million dollar project. So, I started that, for that one semester I was juggling [school, work, and family]. I was responsible for the normal day-to-day stuff, expanding programs and hiring the staff. I went back to school, and between work and school, I finished in seven years. People say I am a good father, but I did what I had to do. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

Jay discusses his own sacrifices in balancing family and going to work. Jay talks about his willingness to sacrifice his own well-being and personal success in blending various aspects of school, work, and family for future stability. For Jay, his children

constitute a legitimate source in balancing work and family. Tyler talks through the *juggling* metaphor to signify that keeping several objects in motion in air or, in his case, simultaneously managing several responsibilities: the precarious balance of performing work-related tasks, and being a good father and student.

Five other respondents used the juggling metaphor as well, suggesting that these leaders did not want work responsibilities to infringe on activities outside of the workplace. The intermingling of the discourses of the juggling metaphor on work and family complements the language of “balancing” and “blending,” while holding children as the legitimate source for managing various responsibilities. Leaders make these communicative choices to talk about the precarious positions and responsibilities in maintaining this difficult balance. Mark expresses his feeling on work-life balance:

You are juggling so many balls at the same time. Strange as it may sound, [my wife and I] are consistently trying to balance work happiness with personal happiness. You know, I am not happy when I am struck at work and I can't put my daughter in bed... You know, whenever I can I try to get home by seven o'clock or seven fifteen because I love reading with my daughter. I want to spend a little time and play with her, and put her to bed. You can't successfully complete your job if you draw boundaries like that, but you do have to stake out your territory. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

Like other respondents, Mark uses to the juggling metaphor to assert the difficulty of managing responsibilities at work and home. We also see that the “child,” as with other respondents, is a consistent source for constituting work-life balance. Mark, however, takes a different approach in creating work-life balance by reaffirming his

priorities and setting boundaries for participation at work and home. When Mark asserts, “you do have to stake out your territory,” he is stating that for him, juggling and balance are mandatory and compulsory. Thus, Mark talks about effective leadership as simultaneously being about maintaining professional and personal obligations without excuses.

Although I did not ask participants to discuss their feelings on balancing responsibilities in their life, many felt compelled to talk about the relationship between being a leader and a husband and/or father. In listening to participants’ perceptions of work and family, I found that creating balance was important in maintaining lifestyles in and outside of the organization. In a sense, the metaphor of balance in participants’ discourse including juggling, blending, and implicitly, sacrifice, appears to exemplify effective leadership. Balance also constitutes allaying personal stress that contributes to managing their personal life and increasing productivity on the job. Participants talk about leadership through professional and personal commitments that shape the way they manage the relationship between work and the rest of their life. In a sense, respondents make communicative choices such as juggling and blending to highlight the delicate balance between the self and being selfless as it is difficult to negotiate work and family life. Therefore, these leaders believe that leadership depends on the leader’s ability to manage workplace obligation with familial responsibilities.

### *Enabling Others*

A common theme that stood out in my discussions repeatedly emphasized leadership as the process of “enabling others.” White-male elites understand that they could not achieve organizational objectives alone without the help of their employees.

Respondents talk about leadership in myriad ways to emphasize how they enable employees to perform tasks. Leaders discuss the significance of enabling employees in various ways: by prioritizing employees' goals; through the vision metaphor; and the inclusive "we."

### *Prioritizing Employees' Goals*

In my interviews, respondents repeatedly spoke of their desires to inspire and enable employees to act according to the desired organizational goals. For instance, Tyler who is the Associate Provost in a university, constantly talked about his desire to encourage staff members to develop work-related skills and help faculty obtain tenure. Tyler stated that he holds work-related trainings for his employees, focusing on the latest technological and workplace developments. During my interview with Tyler, he provides his perspective on leadership: "I think leadership is helping people obtain their professional goals, running interference for people. Um, helping people realize their potential and steering them away from a direction that maybe wouldn't be the best for them" (Tyler, personal interview, August 29, 2008).

Through his statement, "helping people achieve their goals," Tyler shows his commitment to prioritizing employees' goals. In stressing his desire to help employees accomplish their goals, Tyler talks about leadership through the *protector* metaphorical phrase "running interference," which can have two meanings in different contexts: first, when someone entertains the obligatory person in the group so that others can go elsewhere; second, when one protects or creates a lane for others to go through—e.g., a passage and line that offensive linemen in professional football might create for a ball carrier. Tyler uses protector metaphorical phrases such as "running interference for

people” and “steering them away from a direction” to indicate that he is willing to help his employees make astute decisions. In this case, Tyler sees leadership as helping his employees in their professional development. George also provides his perspective on leadership:

I think leadership is helping people achieve their goals. In my case, I serve [our] staff. I think leaders should be teachers too. I think that in learning organizations often times the best way to lead people is to help them learn new skills. You know, ultimately, leadership is about helping individuals in organizations choose their objectives. (George, personal interview, September 29, 2008)

In George’s statement, in using the term “serve,” he indicates that his job as leader is to actively assist employees in their professional development. In prioritizing employees, the term “serve” complements the *educational* metaphor, “teachers,” to emphasize the leader’s role in providing instruction that helps employees learn new skills. In talking about workplaces as “learning organizations,” George believes that the workplace may function as a classroom, a positive learning environment wherein leaders provide resources and professional advice to their employees.

Jamie provides another way to talk about prioritizing his employees in his organization:

I wake up every morning and say how I’m going to inspire my team to keep moving forward when things are screwed up. How am I going to inspire them to feel good about each other? I work very hard as a leader to make my team feel like they are moving in one swift motion together. You don’t always have to be the quarterback, sometimes you got to be the coach to lead the team. Before, I

want[ed] the ball! I want to carry it across the line, and I want to be the hero at the end of the game. But, I've learned like being the coach, you have to let someone else carry the ball. It's a big part of leadership. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

Like Tyler and George, Jamie describes leadership through more altruistic means. Jamie uses several sports metaphors to describe how he veers from enacting authoritarian leadership styles. Jamie uses the sports metaphor, "I wanted the ball," to stress his desire to curb impulses to take control of tasks in the workplace. He sees the organization through the sports metaphor, "team," to highlight the importance of interdependent relationships and working cohesively with employees to accomplish organizational goals. For example, sports metaphors like "team" and "quarterback," and *motion* metaphors such "moving in one swift motion," revolve around the sport metaphorical expression, "coach." In this case, Jamie views the role of a leader as similar to that of a *coach*, one who is responsible for organizing the team and for setting tasks in motion.

For Jamie, the coach not only serves as a leader, but also functions in the role of a teacher responsible for training and improving the performance of the members of the team. He talks through the metaphorical expression of the "quarterback" to further explain what his role does not constitute as the leader in the organization. The quarterback, while a leader in his own right, is the member of the team that is most responsible for calling the plays at any given moment in a football game. Thus, Jamie does not view himself as the quarterback; this role might be more suitable for an executive under him—Jamie reaffirms his role as the coach who creates and calls the

plays for the quarterback to execute. In other words, as the coach, he is the prime decision maker within the organization.

Yet, Jamie uses the sports expression, “carry the ball,” to demonstrate that he allows his employees to work through and resolve organizational tasks themselves without much interference from him. Jamie views leadership as empowering employees, but in a slightly different way from Dean’s way of seeing empowerment. Whereas Dean wants to empower employees to carry out his orders, Jamie empowers employees by giving them the authority to make decisions in completing tasks. Through various sports metaphors, Jamie views leadership as prioritizing employees by showing confidence in their abilities to carry out tasks. In essence, Jamie believes that a leader merely acts as the face of the organization. Thus, an effective leader allows employees to work together, generate synergy, and complete tasks on their own rather than through micro-management. These approaches to leadership are similar to what Greenleaf (2003) refers to as servant leadership. Through servant leadership, leaders make sure that their follower’s highest priorities are met and provide resources for their followers to improve their own self-worth.

#### *The Vision Metaphor*

Some respondents articulate their understanding of leadership through the vision metaphor. For many respondents, the notion of *vision* constitutes a visceral orientation that encourages employees to accomplish a particular organizational goal. For instance, Jay articulates his idea of leadership through the *vision* metaphor: “Leaders have [a] vision, leaders have ability to inspire people to do things that they would do willingly. That is, leadership [is] the ability to make us better than what we are, or the ability to help

us see things that we can't see” (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008). Jay talks about vision as a way of encouraging his employees to perform tasks. He also sees the leader’s vision as engaging the employee in a way that advocates his or her own personal improvement. Through the vision metaphor, Jay sees leadership as enabling others through aiding them to pursue those things that are inconspicuous.

Jamie also talks about his idea of leadership through the vision metaphor:

I think a [leader] is somebody who can convince other people to come along with them. Feel their vision, believe in their leadership, and convince people that you may not know where you are going always, but you are going in a good direction.

You really [have] to inspire people. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

For Jamie, a leader’s vision must show they are capable of accomplishing organizational goals. Thus, through the organization’s vision, effective leaders can garner trust from employees. Jamie talks through the visceral term “feel” to signify that a leader’s vision should impress reflexivity upon employees. In this case, Jamie asserts that leaders should organize an enterprise of loyal followers who remain invested in the organizational vision and who are willing to consider it as their mission. Jamie sees effective leadership through leaders, even as they move aimlessly and indecisively, who create expectations through their vision by fostering employees’ confidence in them.

Other respondents, like Chandler, see the vision metaphor through ideas of servant leadership styles: “Good leadership means serving others by creating a vision, establishing standards...providing support...to let them do their best” (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008). Chandler talks through the vision metaphor in a way that encourages and provides them with the means and freedom to perform their job well.

Dean, on the other hand, talks through the vision metaphor in recognizing the United States' "forefathers" as a productive source to talk about leadership: "Our forefathers had a vision for where the country was and what was needed. Their leadership was value-based, so they were able to get people to follow them" (Dean, personal interview, March 17, 2009). The notion of vision underscores a vivid conception of anticipating what will come in the future. For Dean, the vision metaphor is exemplified through the actions of the forefathers who created a vision that directs the proclivities of people within the United States. In a sense, for Dean, the vision of the forefathers did not depend on quid pro quo leadership strategies, but their vision constituted certain ideals that are closely aligned with a totality of motives—"leadership was value-based," a style that motivates the follower to work toward upholding the norms and beliefs of the leader. Therefore, Dean sees the vision metaphor as helping him to provide clear direction and purpose to his employees while inspiring them to support organizational values.

Altogether, these white-male elites see the vision metaphor of leadership as permeating the workplace and manifested in the goals of the organization. In this case, leaders share their vision with employees to compel them to act, whether it is organizing a plan or helping them to see what is inconspicuous. Leaders effectively communicate a vision that generates confidence and aids communication satisfaction between themselves and their followers. These conceptions of leadership are similar to what is known as transformative leadership styles, by which leaders create a common vision to motivate and energize followers (see Burns, 1978). The relationship between transformative leaders and their followers may result in levels of performance that exceeds those achieved individually.

*Inclusive We: We Means You and Me*

Wittgenstein (1979) once pondered what language would look like if all pronouns were left out. Indeed, we do not need Wittgenstein to challenge us here, because, as he concluded, pronouns are important in a variety of languages. Pronouns, by definition, function as substitutes for nouns, so they carry major attributes of a noun. In my study, I found that the presence of the personal pronoun *we* in white-male elite discourses constitute expressions of leadership that emphasize mutual recognition and interdependence between the employer and employee. In contrast, third-person pronouns, like *he*, *she*, or *they* point to more impersonal things to which its usage may be unmarked. There are two main uses of the personal pronoun *we*: *exclusive we*, which excludes the hearer and the *inclusive we*, which includes the hearer (“we” meaning me and you). The exclusive and inclusive *we* represent different forms of distancing between both the hearer and the speaker (see Brown & Levinson, 1987).

As we shall see, the personal pronoun *we* is prominent in leaders’ interpretations of leadership. For instance, Mark asserts:

I never point the finger at anyone else when they screw up, when something goes wrong, it is we! It is not he or she. It is we! When something goes right, it is also we! I think people understand when that is the ethos of team, you work together. Those are kind of the characteristics that are important in leadership. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

Greg agrees with Mark through his emphasis on leadership using the personal pronoun *we*:

I am humble enough to say as a leader that I have made a difference in certain situations by setting a tone, a culture, and the people I hire, the people I nurtured, [and] the ideas that I have prompted have enabled others to create. I think success is when you can look back and say that we wanted to do something. We meaning as a group. We said, we want to change this or achieve that, and we achieved it somehow. (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008)

Mark talks through the inclusive we to call attention to his desire for mutual recognition for what goes right or wrong within the organization. Mark does mention at one point that he deplores leaders who try to gain trust through bullying employees. He sees such practices as antithetical to solidarity within the workplace. Greg uses the personal pronoun we to express his own humility and to defer personal credit for organizational accomplishments. With these expressions—“the ethos of team,” and “setting a tone, a culture,”—both Mark and Greg show that the inclusive we directs not only their own professional motives in working collaboratively with employees, but also the inclusive we is essential in constituting a discourse for their employees’ understanding of the workplace as well. When both Mark and Greg refer to everyone within the organization as the sports metaphor “team” or the “culture,” they both make it known that the discourse of their organization underscores a commitment to collaboration in attaining of common goals. They also imply that employees may have some form of legitimate authority in decision-making. In a sense, “we” constitutes the identity for members involved in their organization. The identity of the organization is constructed and maintained through the inclusive we. That is, leaders employ inclusive we to enjoin

members of an organization in carrying out actions that seek to achieve common organizational goals.

James also uses the inclusive we in his definition of effective leadership:

It is an act of leadership and also followership to get it done... It became a tradition around here that we would always stay in this building until we got everything done. You know there was no task on that day too small for anybody to do. When crunch time comes and you've got to do it, and you [have to] meet the deadline, there is nothing that you shouldn't be willing to do that you would not ask someone else to do. You have to demonstrate that, so to me that is effective leadership. (James, personal interview, July 25, 2008)

James uses the inclusive we, unlike Mark and Greg, to indicate that no task is too great or too small for anyone working within his organization. James use of the personal pronoun we indicates a symmetrical relationship among members in the organization, which is essential in enacting collaborative leadership. Ryan agrees with James:

I think [that] being the leader, [is knowing] how to follow, how to collaborate, um, you know, this is where my humility runs into this too. You know, I am not one to turn my credentials around... That's actually been a value of this organization, it is we collaborate. (Ryan, personal interview, September 16, 2008)

Both Ryan and James use the personal pronoun to express a shared and collective obligation in accomplishing daily tasks. Unlike Mark and Greg, both Ryan and James reshape the discourse on collaborative leadership to include their own personal involvement in daily work operations, as James states, “no task too small for anybody” or as Ryan states, “I turn my credentials around,” to connote that they are willing to share in

these activities. Both Ryan and James believe that effective leaders involve themselves in daily operations of the workplace. In both Ryan's statement, "humility runs into this too," and James' statement "willing to do that you would not ask someone else to do" we see that the process of inclusion shows that they maintain a modest estimate of his own rank in the organization. In this case, the personal pronoun we functions to modify their roles as leaders of the organization and show their commitment to working collaboratively with their employees. Although leadership occurs mostly in hierarchical levels, some respondents recognize the importance of cooperation, interdependence, and collaboration in leadership all emphasized in the inclusive we.

In this section, I considered the presence of the personal pronoun we as a communication choice that encourages cooperation and collaboration in the workplace. These respondents view leadership through collaborative leadership styles, which constitutes the process of working together through sharing power, responsibility, and knowledge to accomplish organizational tasks (see Kanter, 2003). In a sense, this term appears to be contradictory to top-down directional forms of leadership just as authoritarian forms of leadership could potentially damage cooperation. That being said, using the personal pronoun we to emphasize collaboration appears to be an essential strategy for leaders in discussing the significance of sharing responsibility with and enabling employees in daily organizational tasks.

## Barack Obama: The Great Man Metaphor

I will never forget the night when it was announced that Barack Obama would become the first African-American<sup>11</sup> President of the United States. It was a jubilant night as Obama supporters were elated in victory and black people across the world expressed pride. As television reporters announced the election results, I picked up the remote control and switched from one news channel to the next. I wanted to hear the announcement and commentary over and over again to etch the imagery of excitement and relief in my memory. As I listened and watched the news coverage, I suddenly went from a state of feeling euphoric to feeling indifferent. My girlfriend said, “Are you happy?” I half-heartedly replied, “Yeah, it’s cool! My cell phone rang; it was one of my good friends. I could hear the excitement in his voice as he said, “How does it feel brother.” I calmly replied, “It’s cool!” I attentively, but quietly sat on the couch and watched Obama deliver his victory speech. After the speech, the phone rang; it was Mom. She was very excited. I shared in her joy and I reflected on her stories of picking cotton in fields in the Southern heat. When I hung up the phone, I immediately returned to feeling subdued.

The next morning, I got on the bus to school and sat down near a few people who were discussing the election results. As usual, I was the only black person on the bus. As I sat down and went over a few lecture notes, a white man, who was engaged in the conversation, immediately turned to me and congratulated me. I merely nodded, smiled, and replied, “I appreciate it.” At that point, another man said, “See you don’t have much

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<sup>11</sup> I placed a hyphen in between African and American to indicate that his mother is white American and his father is from Africa. I am sure the complexities of his identity will be debated further as his Presidency transpires.

to worry about anymore.” I replied, “Yeah, I guess everything is all good now!” He replied, “Yeah man, there are going to be a few changes!” At the moment, my indifference became a little more pronounced. Leaders are increasingly relevant in inducing hope in followers or supporters who desire social change. People galvanize around those whom they believe can effectively produce desired outcomes. Like the passengers on the bus, almost all white-male elites spoke eloquently and forcefully about President Barack Obama.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as the passengers on the bus, white-male elites, and my friends and family extol the virtues of Obama, I remained unsure of and unresponsive to suggestions that the potential success of his Presidency immediately justifies racial and social progress. In this study, I contribute to our understanding of leadership by paying careful attention to how Obama gets signified through metaphorical representations and descriptions on leadership. Here, I provide attention to my primary concern, ironically, constituting and reproducing such representations through an African-American leader.

Leading is a human activity. We all may face circumstances in our lives that require us to cultivate a plan for others to follow, determine competencies in others to manage them, and elevate levels of trust and commitment from others. Various situations require us to take on leadership roles. Whether you are a parent raising a child, a student leading a group activity, or an individual leading others through your own discrete behaviors, it is conceivable that everyone takes on the role of a leader at some point in their life. Many leaders today seek to understand and articulate what it means to be a leader. Understanding leadership becomes increasingly relevant as organizational leaders

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<sup>12</sup> I must note that I conducted six interviews during the democratic primary where Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama vied for the Presidential nomination. I conducted nine interviews during the Presidential run between Obama and McClain. I conducted one interview after the presidential election of Barack Obama.

face many changes including incessant technological advancements and globalization. These circumstances compel organizational leaders to consider ways to manage such changes while ensuring effectiveness.

When white-male elites in my study reflect on leadership, they often talk about individuals who shaped history both through their personal resolve and ability to secure loyalty from their followers. Participants provide lengthy details on particular character traits of individuals they considered leaders. These men often articulate Great Man theories of leadership that often portray leaders as heroic or destined to act when called upon to lead others. The Great Man theory explains the impact of heroes, specifically men, who were highly influential through their charismatic, intelligent, or Machiavellian personalities (Carlyle, 1841). For instance, some respondents praise the heroic acts of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X for galvanizing movements in circumstances where their viewpoints were considered unpopular in the mainstream and for some within their own constituencies.

Some respondents laud the actions of Robert Kennedy, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan for remaining loyal to their respective constituents. Two respondents admired the bravery of military leaders and even conquerors throughout history like George Patton, John Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, and Napoleon for their willingness to personally engage enemies in combat. All respondents extolled the foresight of the forefathers in creating a vision for what would evidently become the basic virtues of United States democracy. Specifically, all participants boasted about the exploits of Abraham Lincoln, for signing the Emancipation Proclamation, which resulted in the

abolition of slavery, but more for his ability to manage diverse personalities on his cabinet.

Metaphors link the familiar with the unfamiliar and abstract constructs with concrete images, a process that involves highlighting certain features while suppressing others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) extended this definition of metaphor by discussing how it is essential in human ways of knowing. A metaphor is a tool for creating reality. Once metaphors become verbalized, they encourage us to see reality in that way. Numerous scholars already have examined the discourses on Obama in considering his black identity, how he expands and reduces meanings of blackness transnationally, the core American values in the rhetoric of hope, and the influence of celebrity endorsements on candidate support (Asante, 2007; Atwater, 2007; Bobo & Charles, 2009; Clayton, 2007; Parameswaran, 2009; Pease & Brewer, 2008). This study embraces Obama as a conceptual metaphor through which white-male elites understand him. Obama is a central metaphor for reflecting on what respondents perceive as the changing conditions of race in society. In this analysis, discourse constitutes naturally occurring talk and the historically rooted frames that play an important role in the construction of the Obama through *the Great Man metaphor*.

#### *Background on Barack Obama*

Barack Obama is the 44th President of the United States. He is the first African-American to hold the office of President. Obama won the democratic nomination after a close race in the Democratic primary against Senator Hillary Clinton. In 2008, Obama defeated John McCain, the Republican nominee from Arizona, in the general election and, on January 20, 2009, he was inaugurated as President of the United States. Obama

graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University and a Juris Doctorate from Harvard University. His mother was a highly educated Caucasian woman from Wichita, Kansas. His father was a highly educated African man from Kenya. Obama obtained numerous academic and professional achievements. He was the first African American to become editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, and he worked as a community organizer in the Roseland neighborhood on the South side of Chicago. His political career includes a stint as a state legislator and a brief career as a United States senator for the state of Illinois.

In this study, participants talk about Obama in questions on leadership, success, characteristics of heroes, diversity, and family values. Toward the end of my interview, I asked participants to talk about whether race and sex will or did influence the outcome of the Democratic primary to assess how much they would expound on the subject of race and gender. I wanted to see if participants would speak openly and candidly on these subjects. As we shall see, a vast majority of the comments about Obama derived from questions that did not directly refer to him. In this analysis, I use the idea of projection to show how white-male elites project their ideas of leadership through the conceptual metaphor of Obama as Great Man. In this analysis, projection constitutes a metaphor to show how respondents discuss a particular topic through which Obama becomes a source to project knowledge.

I use projection<sup>13</sup> as a metaphor to show how respondents discuss a particular topic that projects discourses onto a corresponding historical figure. Consider the idea of a video projector: it takes a video signal, projects it through a lens, and an image appears on a screen. In this case, the signal represents respondents' discourses on leadership, Obama represents the conduit or lens through which respondents articulate their ideas; the crux of their argument represents the screen upon which ideas are projected. I later will discuss what is possibly mediating or foregrounding the signal that is being sent. For now, I focus on white-male discourses on leadership as projected through Barack Obama, the Great Man metaphor.

#### *Obama as Great Man*

In this study, the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man subscribes to discourses on progress, leadership, and race relations of white-male elites as projected through the prevailing imagery of Barack Obama. At the conceptual level, these statements stem from apparently neutral descriptors that reverberate in meanings that converge to shape understandings of Obama. At the ideological level, white males employ such metaphors and descriptors through perspectives that function as rhetorical strategies to minimize race in constructing a race-transcendent figure. In this analysis, I demonstrate how these white-male elites rely on metaphorical statements and descriptions to construct the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor. In a sense, Obama becomes a productive source through which to project presupposed knowledge about the source domain (e.g., metaphorical language or other descriptors) that is mapped onto the target

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term *projection* as a metaphor as a means to explain how white male elites project metaphors onto and descriptors through Barack Obama. I am not using this concept in the Freudian sense as a psychological defense mechanism in which human beings project undesirable and unwanted thoughts onto someone else.

domain (e.g., leadership). These metaphors and descriptors function to provide support for the respondent's position.

The Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor carries strong positive connotations on leadership and embodies the desired outcomes of race relations in society. Obama becomes a novel metaphor (Santa Ana, 1999) to propose new meanings in challenging or shifting existing discourses on race.<sup>14</sup> In this study, the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man helps us understand how participants in my interviews incorporate metaphors and other descriptions of language that project through Barack Obama in constructing discourses that symbolize racial progress, exemplify qualities of leadership, impact younger generations, and construct the qualities of a race-transcendent leader.

#### *Symbolizing Racial Progress*

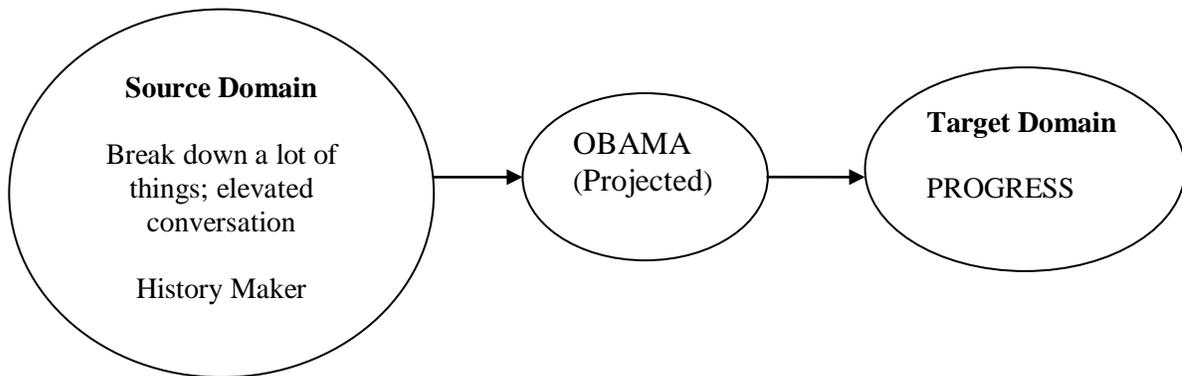
Respondents project metaphors and descriptors onto Barack Obama to support discourses of progress. Eleven respondents asserted that Obama's campaign, in and of itself, represented racial progress in the United States. One respondent stated quite frankly that he believes that nothing would change, while others made no explicit or implicit comments connecting Obama to racial progress. Progress, in this case, represents the belief that people will not be judged by their racial or ethnic status or that significant social advancement would be made. In constructing the image of Obama, cogent symbols for racial progress and leadership emerge, making him a convenient metaphor for respondents to mediate discourses on progress. Figure 1 shown below demonstrates the projection process through which white-male elites use metaphorical language and

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<sup>14</sup> Other studies have focused on other famous men and women of color such as Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, and Frieda Kahlo in highlighting discourses that deny race, reinforce liberal notions of autonomous individual subject, and examine positive representations of race and gender (Cloud, 1996; Inniss & Feagin, 1995; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Molina-Guzman, 2006; Peck, 1994; Smith, 2008; Squires, 1997).

descriptions to project discourses of progress through the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man.

**Projection Process (Figure 1)**



Respondents project motion and builder metaphors through Obama by showing that they embrace the lexicon that involves a definite movement and manufacturing of social and racial progress. For instance, when discussing the Democratic primary, Jamie states:

Man that is progress! Now, if we elect an African American that is enormous progress. So, you know, I am damn proud right now. I don't think that everything is good, and I think that there is a lot of bad shit in the world. But you know I define that as progress that we we've made it, that we've done this. I think that this is going to break down a lot of things. The conversation has already been elevated. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

The conceptual metaphor, Obama-as-Great-Man, is characterized through the ontological mapping of Obama as an object of progress. Obama becomes an object of history through which progress gets signified. In this case, Jamie projects motion metaphors through Obama to highlight his ascendancy to the Office of President as a form of progress. In

substantiating notions of progress, Jamie projects two motion metaphorical phrases, “breakdown a lot of things” and “conversation has already been elevated.” Each of these metaphors establishes the progressive yearnings of Jamie as Obama exemplifies the interruption in the regular and uniform institutional patterns of electing of white-male presidents. This interruption of normal arrangements constitutes a move toward a new phenomenon, one that presumes racial progress and equality. Motion metaphors imply the action of moving; in other words, Obama’s election signifies moving forward in improving current social conditions. Thus, Obama emerges through motion metaphors in ways that his presence in leadership moves society in a more positive direction. Motion metaphors stem from the belief that Obama will alter conversations on racial progress and justify them as well.

In further amplifying the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor, Greg asserts: “If he is elected president that’s progress... it’s a milestone in history. [He is] a history maker (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008). Greg projects the builder metaphor of “maker” through Obama to show that his accomplishment would demonstrate that the people in the United States are making strides to alter the course of history. The history when linked to the builder metaphor, maker, represents Obama as the cornerstone for aspirations toward desired social goals of progress. Through the builder metaphor, Obama is an exemplar of the manufacturing of more ideas of racial progress and inclusion. The builder metaphor also establishes Obama’s credentials as someone who shares in respondents’ hopes for racial progress. The builder metaphor, which is frequently mentioned to describe historical figures (Lu & Ahrens, 2008), constitutes Obama as the source through which progress is constructed and actually visible to others.

Motion and building metaphors indicate that Obama embodies progressive social and political ideologies that advocate change and reform.

### *Constructing Leadership*

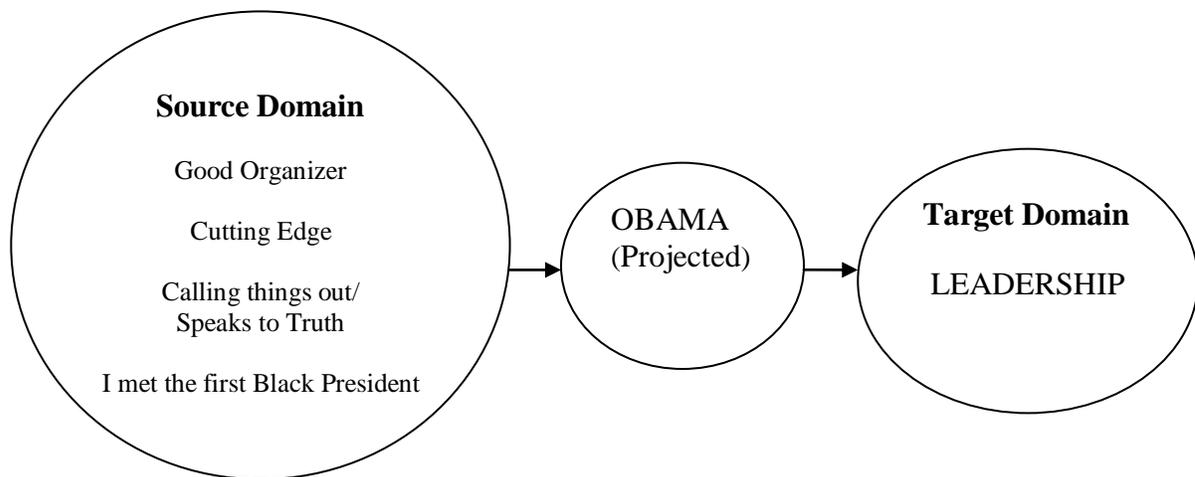
Respondents used metaphors and other descriptors in constituting the construction of Obama through discourses that described particular character traits that make him the most appropriate person to lead the country. All but one participant expressed great admiration for Obama. For the most part, respondents spoke positively about his potential as a leader of the United States. They talked about Obama's educational achievements, intelligence, and the resonance of his political campaign on hope and change. They also lauded his public-speaking abilities, as some participants were enthralled with his speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Almost all respondents talked about specific character traits that make him a viable candidate for President of the United States.

Nonetheless, even as most respondents expressed admiration for him, three respondents believed that he was too inexperienced to run for President. They also question his choice of personal confidants. Only one respondent expressed uncertainty in talking about Obama as a leader. Yet, other respondents found it inexcusable that he associates with the likes of Jeremiah Wright and Michael Pfleger, both of whom used the pulpit to express unflattering opinions of Senator Hillary Clinton. As Denny states, "I think Obama has a problem because he is hanging out with some extremely liberal people. It's like the man is blowing up the levies, those kinds of people" (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008). That being said, although participants express bemusement with Obama's circle of friends, for the most part, they admire his tenacity and knack for

rallying people around a tangible political message. For example, several participants talk about how young adults, specifically in colleges and universities, have galvanized and campaigned for Obama.

In continuing to discuss the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man, I examine some of the character traits that white-male elites in my interviews project onto Obama to discuss valuable qualities of leadership. The ontological mapping of metaphors and other descriptors show how white-male elites in my interviews construct qualities of leadership through their discourses on Obama. Figure 2 demonstrates the projection process through which white-male elites use metaphorical language and other descriptors to project their ideas on leadership through the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man.

**Projection Process (Figure 2)**



In my interviews, I chose not to debate or express my opinion to participants. I made comments on a particular viewpoint only if the participant asked for it. However, during my interview, I found that many participants wanted to hear my opinion on Obama and my thoughts on racism and sexism in the Democratic primary. Yet, there

were some instances where I sensed that participants wanted to hear my opinion to produce their own thoughts. I engaged in good-natured and spirited exchanges with respondents when we discussed the Democratic primary and the general election. Most participants provided enthusiastic and passionate critiques of both Senators Clinton and Obama. Emotion is pivotal in the way they project on Obama, because it provides the impetus for them to enthusiastically articulate their viewpoints. As mentioned previously, respondents expound on his educational achievements, but they also stress particular character traits, such as being articulate and a good organizer as well.

For example, Greg states, “I have gotten a reputation as a good organizer, organize things kind of like Obama” (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008). In this statement, Greg describes himself through a perceived character trait of Obama—“good organizer.” In this case, Greg’s sense of self emerges through his perception of Obama. Mead (1934) makes a similar assertion when he talks about the self as being actualized through taking the role of the other. In his statement, Greg’s actions are projected through Obama especially when considering the phrase “organize things kind of like Obama.” His own qualities as a leader are made real through a perceived character trait of Obama. In a sense, Obama becomes a central metaphor for “organization.” This metaphor accentuates qualities that accent one’s ability to act in bringing people together with common interests. The underlying meaning of the *organizer* metaphor is that these individuals engender enduring power in representing people or communities. Greg sees Obama through the conceptual metaphor, “organizer,” as one who is able to facilitate coalitions as an important decision-maker.

In addition, while discussing Obama's performance in the Democratic primary, Jamie talked about specific character traits that make Obama a viable candidate to lead the United States. In attesting to his comments on Obama's leadership effectiveness, Jamie asserts, "You know, I listen to Senator Obama. It's interesting that he is calmly speaking a lot of truth... calling things out to what they are, at least he has so far in his presidential campaign" (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008). During the Democratic primary, Jamie refers to Obama using *fidelity* metaphors such as "speaking a lot of truth," and "calling things out." A fidelity metaphor describes phrases or words that presume the observance of strict promises or implies accuracy and steadfastness.

The fidelity metaphorical phrase "call things out" can be isolated for metaphorical focus. This metaphorical phrase is subject to action in describing particular character traits of Obama. When someone "calls out" another person or speaks to a particular condition, this expression usually signifies a rant against an enemy or to directly oppose and contest the status quo. There is another metaphorical process at work, here, which complements the capacity to "calmly speak the truth." Fidelity metaphorical phrases work, in this case, not to engender mere rants where someone vehemently opposes another, but it signifies peacefully, "calmly," exposing and debunking what may appear to be conventional thought. In other words, Jamie uses fidelity metaphors to secure Obama's positioning as a charismatic but placid leader who characteristically speaks truths in a manner free from threatening passion. In a sense, Obama is taken more seriously as a leader because he does not incite anger and express vitriol when asserting his political viewpoints. The construction of emotion is ironic in relation to black men

who are typically featured in mass mediated texts as overly aggressive, overexcited and highly emotional (Brown, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Orbe, 1998; Smith, 2008).

Another respondent, Paul, in providing his perspective on the Democratic primary, is uncertain whether either Clinton or Obama have the leadership abilities to manage the office of President. Still, he points out what he perceives as the difference between both candidates' election campaigns: "Hillary ran kind of a traditional political campaign. Barack is more cutting-edge, I think he will be more creative. I think that media likes that, likes it more creative rather than traditional politics [*sic*]" (Paul, personal interview, August 4, 2008). In his statement, Paul praises Obama for using more effective persuasive means to garner media attention, while he criticizes Clinton's campaign for using customary political tactics. During the interview, Paul expressed displeasure for both Obama and Clinton, while preferring to heap meritocratic praises on the likes of Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell. Nevertheless, Paul admired the way the Obama campaign used interactive websites like "My Space" to network and connect with younger audiences. In isolating the descriptor "cutting edge," we observe that this language positions Obama at the forefront of using innovative technology as a strategy for political campaigning.

Another respondent, Mark, talked about having dinner with Barack and Michelle Obama about ten years ago. In his discussion of the Democratic primary, Mark felt compelled to talk about what he told his mother after the dinner:

I remember saying to my mother, shortly after that, I met a guy who I think will be the first black president of the U.S. My mom is like you know from your lips

to God's ears but I don't think it is not going to happen while I am alive. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

While this statement maintains literal connotations, Mark sees character traits in Obama that make him a viable leader and possible candidate for President. During their interaction, Obama worked as a community organizer. Mark discusses his admiration for Obama through his personal interaction with him. In his statement, we see Mark expresses his admiration for Obama, which causes him to forecast that Obama would be the first black president. In projecting onto Obama the qualities of “President,” he ascribes character traits seen in leaders who are able to preside over others and make important decisions that influence a populace. Mark anticipates what necessarily has not occurred, but imposes the qualities of a President on someone who does not hold the office. Thus, Obama gets signified within this personal interaction as someone with the potential to be the President of the United States.

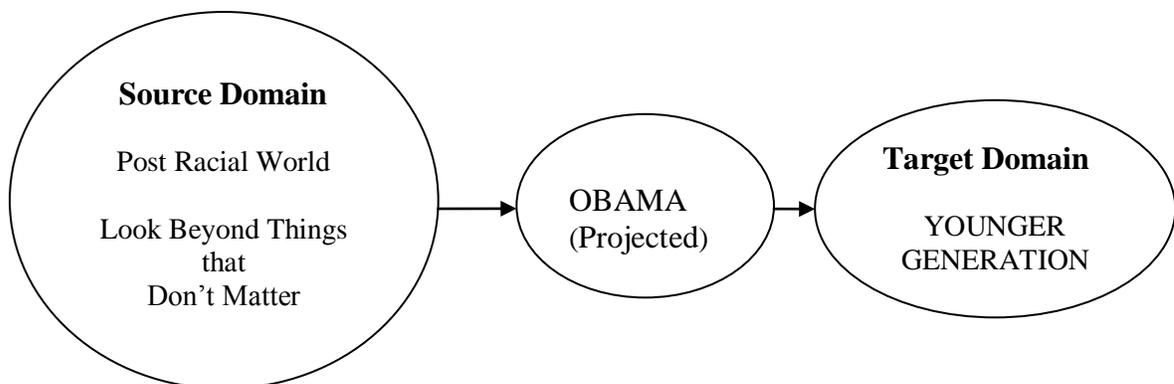
#### *Transcendent Metaphor and Obama-as-Great-Man*

##### *Impacting Younger Generation*

Respondents use metaphors in projecting discourses onto Barack Obama that highlight his ability to relate to young people. Respondents speak about Obama in ways that call attention to the perceived disinterest and disillusionment of the young people in the United States. Some respondents believe that older generations are disconnected from the younger generations. They find it very difficult to relate to them. For example, Kevin mentioned that I was one of the few young people that he could engage in a conversation with for more than twenty minutes. When I told him I was over thirty, he laughed and said, “Well, I guess I haven’t accomplished that task as yet, but trust me—you are young

compared to me.” Although Obama is around the same age as many of my participants, they admired how younger audiences gravitate to him. For many respondents, someone like Obama may play a pivotal role in rallying young adults around a common goal. In continuing to discuss the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man, I examine some of the metaphors and other descriptors that white-male elites in my interviews project through Obama to explain certain qualities that allow him to influence younger voters. The ontological mapping of metaphors and other descriptors show how white-male elites in my interviews construct discourses that project through Obama, qualities that implore younger people to listen to him. Figure 3 demonstrates the projection process through which white-male elites use metaphorical language and various descriptors to project their ideas that influence younger audiences.

**Projection Process (Figure 3)**



We can admit without much empirical evidence that the pressures and challenges faced by those in generation Y<sup>15</sup> are quite different from those faced by baby boomers or generation X, for that matter (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). As a generation Xer, I find it

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<sup>15</sup> This is a term used to describe the demographic cohort born between 1980 and 2003. This group marked by the rise of cultural and political conservatism and the advent of technological advancements such as the Internet. Generation X describes those individuals born between 1965-1980, an era marked by social indifference and unrest.

interesting and somewhat distressing to listen to my students, the vast majority from generation Y, talk about never having to use a pay phone, never having seen a mullet hair style, or not watching cartoons like *The Flintstones*. Yet, members of generation X and Y share similar characteristics as social pressures keep members of these generations constantly in motion, preoccupied, and quite disconnected from baby boomers (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Several respondents<sup>16</sup> appeared indifferent to intergenerational differences as they lament apparent bravado, style of dress, perceived lack of professionalism, and perceived disinterest of younger generations. Several respondents, still, applaud younger generations for their mastery of technological innovations and ability to engage with those who are culturally different.

That being said, many participants believe that Obama potentially could ease the cynicism of younger generations. Respondents not only emphasize the impact that Obama may have as a leader, but more often highlight the impact that he may have on future generations. In my discussions with white-male elites, I did not prompt them to talk about younger generations. Yet, surprisingly, many felt compelled to discuss intergenerational differences and to provide their perspective on the behavior and attitudes of younger generations. For the most part, when respondents talked about younger generations, they discussed the potential that Obama's presidency would have in arousing their interests. For instance, Jamie asserts, "I think [young people] have got opportunity now with Senator Obama. I think that they have the opportunity to see a great leader" (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008).

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<sup>16</sup> Based on their reported ages, most participants were born within the baby boomer generation, 1946-1964; only one participant based on age belonged to the Generation Y cohort. There were no participants who suggested they belong to generation X.

In further discussing the impact of younger people, I observed several descriptors and metaphors that respondents used to emphasize Obama's impact. In talking about diversity within his industry, Greg asserts:

I was with a group of young professionals, in fact any group of people under thirty that I speak to are diverse. The conversation for them is not "Geez, should we have diversity?" it's "we have diversity." For them, it's a pretty different expectation, and they go from a very different starting point than anybody in my generation... so 50 years from now when the historians write the history of the diversity movement, right in this transitional time to a situation like Obama talking this post-racial world where race goes from this highly politicized and highly emotional front [in] our minds as either a good or bad thing, to a piece of the wall paper, to what difference does it make we are all people? (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008)

Greg talks about the confluence of culturally diverse young professionals within his industry. He also applauds these individuals for celebrating the cultural diversity within his industry. Yet, I want to isolate and place the *transcendent* metaphor "post-racial world" into focus. This metaphor describes a society wherein the boundaries of race have been surpassed and where racism is no longer a central problem. The election of Obama signifies the move to a post-racial world, and as we shall see, white-male elites project transcendent metaphors onto Obama.

A common response from participants is to equate desires for a post-racial world through transcendent metaphors with the inspirations of the younger generations. As Kinder and McConnaughy (2006) assert, Obama's popularity is so immense that he

transcends both his political party and racial divides. It appears also that Obama successfully sutures generational divides. What is essential in Greg's statement, especially when considering his initial statement, "the conversation for them is not "Geez, should we have diversity?" it's "we have diversity," is that the transcendent metaphor of the post-racial world intermingles with the desires of the younger generation. These discourses highlight Obama as representing the possibility for a generational shift in political orientations.

Tyler concurs with Greg,

My kids have a whole different experience from me. I think that is gradually changing. I think that is why [Obama] does so well with younger people. They are more willing to look beyond things that don't matter so much... I think there are a lot more people that are getting to that point to really say it really doesn't matter. I think that is why he appeals to young people. (Tyler, personal interview, August 29, 2008)

Tyler projects the transcendent metaphor on Obama to assert that people are moving forward by minimizing the social significance of race. For Tyler, Obama's appeal is tied to the idea that the significance of race is diminishing, as exemplified in the transcendent metaphor, "look beyond things that don't matter." As Clayton (2007) argues, a great deal of Obama's appeal and popularity derives from his ability to transcend race. Clayton asserts that his charismatic style rhetorically unites Americans to disavow racial stereotypes.

In emphasizing Obama-as-the-Great-Man, Tyler projects through Obama transcendent metaphorical expressions that Obama's success ties to the dwindling

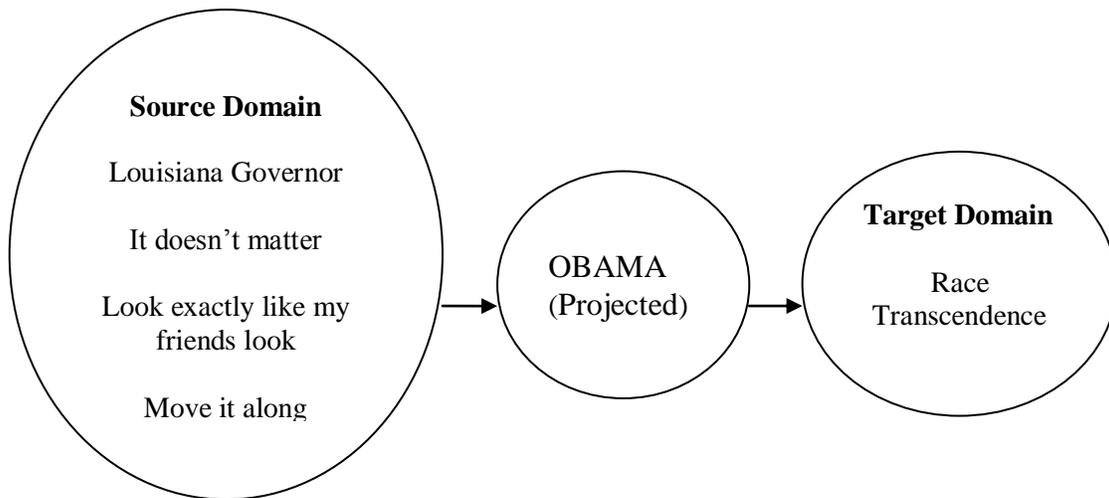
significance of race. Transcendent metaphors that signify post-racialism as projected through Obama provide him the discursive space to gain traction alongside Martin Luther King Jr. The transcendent metaphor of “post-racial world” emerges in the national discourse in the same subtext with catch phrases as “colorblind” or phrases like “beyond things [race] that don’t matter so much.” As Haney Lopez (2006b) asserts, the U.S. public indeed is leaving race and racism behind, which reflects a modest belief of improving race relations. Respondents believe the younger generation may be more ready to adopt a post-race consciousness than baby boomers that grew up in the era where overtly racist practices were much more prevalent.

#### *Anointing the Race-Transcendent Leader*

Respondents talk through metaphors that project through Barack Obama discourses that see him as a race-transcendent figure. Respondents talk about Obama in ways that call attention to their desire to move past issues of race. Obama’s election to the Office of President and his physical body become the means through which respondents attest to ideas of minimizing race in anointing him the post-race figure. Many respondents express confidence that his election will not only signify progress, but it will also allay arguments that verify the sustenance of racial barriers. In continuing to discuss the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man, I examine some of the metaphors that white-male elites in my interviews project through Obama in constituting what it means to be a race-transcendent figure. The ontological mapping of expressions and metaphors show how white-male elites in my interviews construct discourses that project through Obama in positioning the declining impact of race. Figure 4 demonstrates the projection process through which white-male elites use metaphorical language and

various descriptors to project their ideas through Obama in their understandings of a race-transcendent leader in constituting the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man.

#### Projection Process (Figure 4)



Many respondents believe that Obama exemplifies what it means to be a race-transcendent leader that is independent of the black community. West (1993) describes the race-transcendent leader as one who unifies a diverse coalition of Americans around a progressive agenda. According to West (1993), this leader originates in the black community and gains transcendent quality by championing social justice built on resistance. This leader also appeals to the common humanity of all people. For many, Obama occupies the space of the transcendent leader through statements in his speeches like “we are all Americans,” glorifying humanity and supporting ideas built on patriotic viewpoints. This statement alone does not mirror race-transcendent leaders, as many race-conscious leaders make similar statement. Nonetheless, unlike his predecessors, Martin Luther King Jr., Shirley Chisholm, or Jesse Jackson, Obama does not tie the black struggle to fundamental American struggles. Instead he provides equal weight to both

black demands for access to social institutions and white resentment to those very demands (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008).

The conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man hinges on viewpoints that substantiate him as the race-transcendent leader. In their statements, many respondents state, quite frankly, that they admire Obama because he does not make statements that solely focus on the black community. He can equally represent all viewpoints in the United States. Obama certainly complicates the idea of the meaning of blackness in the United States. For instance, Dean sees Obama as symbolic of racial progress and sees him as an exemplar of making the assertion that being black does not limit one's potential. Neal and Chandler expound on Obama's intellectual acumen and familial upbringing, and assert that Obama is just like them. Although many participants see Obama as a leader who is articulate, well-educated, and a good community organizer, the overarching value through which they respect him pertains to seeing him as a race-transcendent leader. As a post-race rather than race-polarizing figure, transcendent metaphors reveal the major quality that Obama's presidency would bring to the United States.

For instance, Denny, an attorney from New Orleans and I openly talk about the Democratic primary and the impact of Hurricane Katrina. As Denny talks about Katrina, he immediately alters the conversation and begins to talk about Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal.

We have our governor, here, he is Indian. He is an extreme right wing. [He is] very smart guy and young. He ran against the [former] governor four years ago and lost. Some of the studies said that because Northern Louisiana is racist, people wouldn't vote for him. But he never said anything about it. He is kind of

like Obama. Obama never talks about that, he just assumes the better part... They would ask him a question about it and he would just duck it. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

For Denny, Bobby Jindal is not only a worthy candidate because he is intelligent, but he is worthy because he never points to racism as an excuse for his failures. In isolating two phrases, first, Denny states that Jindal “assumes the better part;” this metaphorical phrase accents Jindal’s ability to look at character traits rather than biological or physical skin color. Second, he also uses the transcendent metaphor “he would just duck it;” this metaphorical phrase shows that Jindal evades excuses tantamount to racism in explaining considerations for losing the election in Northern Louisiana. Denny uses these transcendent metaphors to show his admiration for Jindal because he evades explanations of race and looks past phenotypical characteristics such as race, in choosing to judge people based on their personality. In a sense, Jindal becomes a transcendent metaphor himself to which Denny projects the same post-racial discourses through Obama in highlighting features of a race-transcendent leader. Therefore, Jindal complements other transcendent metaphors because he buttresses the declining impact of race as a serious social concern.

Another respondent, Chandler, discusses Obama’s post-racial appeal. Chandler and I had an interesting discussion about the presidential election and significance of imagery and symbolic representations that each party uses to set the line of demarcation on issues like abortion, gay marriage, and tax cuts. During the course of the conversation, Chandler spoke eloquently about the differences between Jackson’s and Obama’s campaigns while simultaneously expressing his antipathy for Sarah Palin. I wanted to

know a little more about these differences between Jackson and Obama, so I asked Chandler to further elaborate his perspective.

I don't think it is of coincidence that Barack Obama is a person of mixed ethnicity and he got the classic WASP, you know, he went to Harvard, editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, it is harsh to say this but for many whites he is a safe person of color. You know, that is unfortunate with where we are at, but that is better than no person of color, progress you know is not going to happen overnight. (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

In his statement, Chandler verifies the discourses on whiteness as he sees the opportunities granted to Obama as normally given to white people—"he got the classic WASP." Nevertheless, his statement directly illustrates my initial assumption that Obama redefines what it means to be black for many whites. In highlighting the changing significance of blackness through Obama, I want to isolate two phrases that Chandler uses to describe Obama.

For Chandler, Obama's mixed ethnicity underscores qualities of a race-transcendent leader. In redefining what it means to be black, in the former statement, he accentuates that Obama belongs to a variety of disparate cultural groups, pointing to the absurdity of the significance of race as it relates Obama. For Chandler, in understanding Obama as a race-transcendent figure, one need to appreciate his life as revolving around numerous racial mixtures, his father is from Kenya, his mother is white American, his stepfather was Indonesian, and he grew up in Hawaii around Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Native Hawaiians. Thus, Chandler assumes that the black-and-white paradigm did not dominate his reality. In addition, Chandler uses the metaphorical phrase a "safe

person of color” in substantiating the transcendent imagery around Obama. This metaphor is understood in relation to Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. Before making this statement, Chandler asserts that he believes that they are only interested in matters that support black communities.

In providing context, Chandler sees Obama as maintaining characteristics of leadership that make him more noteworthy than other black leaders such as Sharpton and Jackson. Chandler sees Obama as “safe person of color.” The “safe” descriptor complements the aforementioned fidelity metaphor, in that both indicate that Obama does not vehemently oppose others on issues, in this case, of race. The difference is in style rather than content, as the “safe” descriptor indicates that he does not heighten the politics of race in outwardly debunking its influence in social institutions. Thus, Chandler views Obama through the “safe person of color” descriptor to illustrate that Obama is more sympathetic and does not try to use wedge issues that diminish race relations.

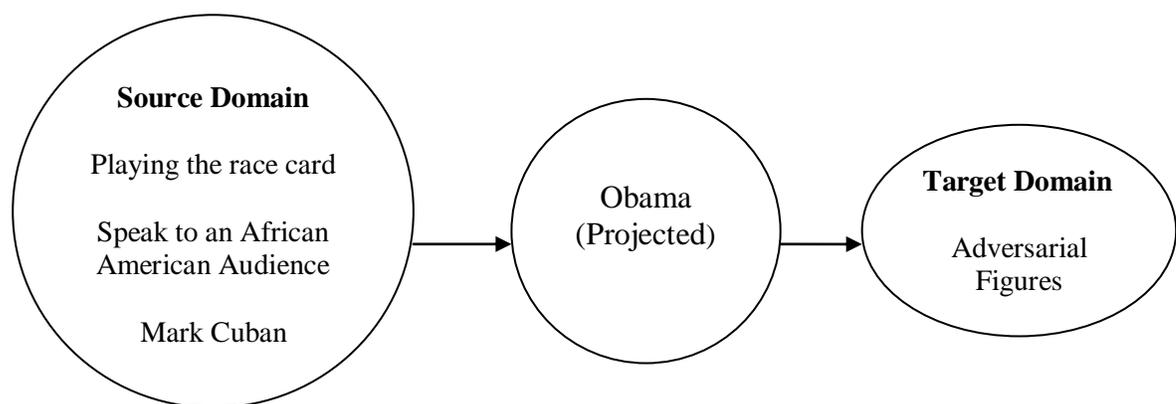
Another respondent, Jamie, whom I interviewed during the Democratic primary, predicted that Obama would be President of the United States. In his statement, he expressed his sentiments on the possible effect his election would have on African American men: “I mean I can imagine what an African American male is thinking now when their parents have always told them that you could be President. And there is about to be an African American president of the U.S.” Here, the emphasis on the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man highlights the limitless possibilities that Obama’s election would create for African American men. What’s problematic is that his statement, “what an African American male is thinking now” places the office of

Presidency as an appropriate male domain especially one that permits African American men to go far and have free reign over what is viable.

*Adversarial Leaders as Race Conscious*

Respondents use metaphors in projecting through Barack Obama discourses that show him to be different from other leaders they abhor. Respondents speak through Obama in ways that call attention to characteristics not afforded to other leaders. In continuing to discuss the conceptual metaphor Obama-as-Great-Man, I examine some of the metaphors that white-male elites in my interviews project through those they dislike because they lack the character traits of Obama. The ontological mapping of descriptors and metaphors show how white-male elites in my interviews construct discourses that project through Obama to call attention to adversarial figures that do not speak for all races and ethnicities. Figure 5 demonstrates the projection process through which white-male elites use metaphorical language and descriptors to highlight the shortcomings of adversarial leaders.

**Projection Process (Figure 5)**



In projecting their ideas through Obama, respondents contest discourses that they consider adversarial. In assessing individuals who they see as adversarial, respondents project their ideas through Obama to explain why they disapprove of specific actions from other leaders. I use the term *adversary* not to show that these individuals pose an outright physical threat or are considered hostile foes to participants. The struggle for white-male elites here involves a struggle over meaning and the legacy of political and social ideas. Let us consider, for example, the concept of racial equality since it is relevant in discourses that construct Obama through the Great-Man metaphor. Hypothetically speaking, a liberal might believe that conservatives, who emphasize colorblindness, distort the notion of racial equality. They might argue that the conservative fetish with this concept formalizes racial equity and strips it of its rationale. Conversely, conservatives might claim that they preserve the true meaning of racial equality, while liberals have perverted its meaning by demanding affirmative action. In both cases, each side may transform the meaning of racial equality within their own viewpoints, which result in a struggle over its underlying meaning. In this analysis, white-male elites judge the viability of leaders based on the way they navigate the minefields of race talk.

Several respondents question the credibility of individuals who cultivate the politics of race in explaining the continuity of oppressive social circumstances. They see these individuals as exploiting their own prejudices against other races to gain social advantages. As we shall see, respondents bolster Obama's credibility precisely because they believe that he does not stress the significance of race, which is quite different when you consider the impact of the body politic. Many respondents believe that when Obama

does stress race, he bolsters more patriotic appeals in focusing on the broader virtues of appealing to humanity. For instance, Mark talks about the function of racism in the Democratic primary.

I was so angry at the Clinton campaign, because they were suddenly playing the race card against Obama. And um, and now I am reading the polls that show all the people, 6 percent will say that they will vote for Obama but when they go into the voting booth, they just can't vote for a black guy. Yes, it shows progress, but at the same time it exposes some of the racism that still exists and I am concerned.  
(Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

In his statement, Mark makes certain the continuity of racism through statistical evidence that he provides on the percentage of people who said that they could not vote for Obama because he is black. In this statement, nevertheless, I want to isolate the *game* metaphorical phrase “playing the race card,” which signifies the penchant for individuals to act on bringing the issue of race and racism into certain situations. For Mark, the game metaphor “playing the race card” constitutes a risk or wager taken by Clinton that eventually cost her Democratic primaries. Through the game metaphor, Mark admonishes that playing the race card constitutes a risk with potentially perilous consequences. That is, this is a risk that Obama does not have to take as a racial-transcendent leader.

Another respondent, Kevin, speaks to Obama’s appeal as a transcendent figure in comparison to other black leaders: “Jackson and Sharpton speak to an African American audience, their agendas are designed for African American constituency, [and] their actions are designed for an African Americans. Obama makes an appeal to a broader population” (Kevin, personal interview, September 17, 2008). In his statement, Kevin

clearly explains what he perceives as the difference between Obama and other black leaders like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. If we take a look at the descriptor “agenda” as it fundamentally underscores a plan that must be acted upon or carried out in a collective sense. In using the term “agenda,” Kevin professes to the universality of Obama by projecting through him the desires to maintain an ideological commitment to a wider population. On the other hand, both Sharpton and Jackson maintain a narrow agenda that solely appeals to the African American community. Kevin views Obama as an individual that obtains universal subjectivity in ways that appeals to the masses. The construction of Obama-as-Great-Man depends on his ability to obtain universal subjectivity in the eyes of the masses.

Finally, Chandler provides a unique take on explaining the difference between Obama and Sharpton and Jackson.

Al Sharpton is Mark Cuban [billionaire owner of a professional basketball team] and Barack is not. Barack would fit in the country club, Sharpton would not. That is my analogy. Barack is not going to push this in your face. What I think that Sharpton and Jackson do, and it hurts their cause is makes people feel bad whether intentionally or not, and humans natural instinct is to get defensive about it and recoil, and push back and dig your heels even further. Barack doesn't do that. You know, he doesn't make you feel bad. He talks about hope and change. He just goes about it differently. (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

Chandler highlights the difference between Obama and other leaders like Sharpton and Jackson in justifying his widespread appeal. Chandler appreciates Obama because he

does not express viewpoints that make others take a defensive posture. This statement complements the “safe” metaphor signified through Obama in his previous statement. Chandler uses “Mark Cuban,” a human being, as a metaphor to highlight characteristics of someone who would seem as unworthy of entering the “country clubs.” In the initial portion of the statement, he uses the *fitness* metaphors “fit” to highlight the ability of someone to perform specific tasks or aspects that would garner participation in social networks. Chandler speaks through what I call a metaphor that signifies arrogance and snobbishness, to describe “Mark Cuban.” These metaphors not only signify one who is arrogant or self-assertive, but also one who is flippant and frivolously impolite and discourteous.

In taking a closer look at the fitness metaphors, “fit,” in describing Mark Cuban, Chandler sees Sharpton as unfit to perform behaviors required to be accepted in the country club. On the one hand, Obama, metaphorically speaking, “fits” the country club because he perceives him as being able to enact performances of whiteness, and may easily adapt to the prevailing norms of the country club. Chandler projects onto Obama the qualities exemplified in someone who is primed for the country club. Obama is seen as a race-transcendent figure that does not challenge others on issues of race and looks to appeal to universal values. Thus, Obama makes it comfortable for white-male elites to co-opt the meaning of blackness through race-transcendent appeals.

### Summary

In this chapter, I demonstrated the various and complex meanings to which white-male elites construct leadership. This analysis shows that white-male elites talk about leadership as enabling others, making things happen, being able to balance

responsibilities of work and home, and creating a vision that provides direction for followers. In this analysis, white-male elites' descriptions of leadership tend to coalesce around numerous metaphors that define how they understand, constitute, and enact leadership. The sports metaphor, vision metaphor, balance metaphor, and building metaphor seem to run throughout their discourses on leadership, yet each participant triggers unique conceptual mappings and communicates different messages in talking about effective leadership. For example, the balance metaphor appeared to trigger a set of metaphorical mappings that constitute the negotiating of demands inside and outside of the workplace. Other metaphors such as blending, empowering, juggling, and implicit insinuations to sacrifice are discourses that revolve around the balance metaphor that shows that leadership signifies the intermingling of various responsibilities at home and work. At the same time, the sports metaphor triggered a set of metaphorical mappings that constitute various meanings and understandings of leadership. For instance, metaphorical mappings such as scorekeeper, team, coach/teacher, quarterback, wanting the ball, and setting the course all constitute unique discourses that inform the way my participants see leadership.

In addition, I highlighted how white-male elites construct metaphors to highlight Barack Obama as the exemplar for leadership. In this analysis, I showed that white-male elites introduce various discourses to structure meaning on Obama. White-male elites verify the conceptual metaphor, Obama-as-Great-Man, to signify the various meanings that underscore his leadership abilities, which are quite different from previous constructions of leadership mentioned in the first section. For example, in justifying the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphors, white-male elites talk about Obama as symbolizing

racial progress, a good organizer, a race-transcendent figure, and impacting younger generations. These themes coalesce to underscore how Obama gets signified through various metaphorical representations such as history marker, safe person of color, post racial, and cutting edge to new a few.

Evidence on racial progress juxtaposed with persisting racial tensions show that a substantial portion of the white population still holds negative stereotypes of blacks and other minorities, and whites and minorities have different views of the persistence of racial discrimination (Bobo & Charles, 2009). Considerable talk surrounds Obama's candidacy because he is the first African-American to quickly gain widespread popularity and support for his campaign (Asante, 2007). Obama also constitutes a conceptual metaphor for incorporating various meanings to his black body, which simultaneously functions to control discourses of other black bodies as well. In a sense, Obama becomes the exception to prevailing racial stereotypes or prototypes in constructing black identity. While Presidential leadership is an important aspect of shaping the role of political effectiveness, the question of leadership is, for white-male elites, a proxy for race. That is, race becomes a salient aspect for participants' evaluations of a black Presidential candidate's appeal. Obama's nomination and election represents a historical event that marks the moment of an implicitly white transcendence of U.S. racial history. The racialized framing suggests that such transcendence implies that white-male elites' discourses function to describe black leadership. This section provided context for understanding how white-male elites talk about Barack Obama, I provide further explanations for white elites' talk on Obama in Chapter 7 (Discussion).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

#### WHITE-MALE ELITES' TALK ON DIVERSITY

This chapter presents the results of the data gathered from white-male elites on their understandings of cultural diversity and diversity training within their organizations. The research question that guided this chapter of the analysis is: how do white-male elites, understand diversity? In this chapter, white-male elites provide their perspective on such topics as cultural diversity in the workplace, diversity-training workshops, and affirmative action. Personal stories underlining the main theme of each section precede in-depth description and interpretation of results.

#### White-Male Elites' Constructions of Diversity

A few years ago, I worked as an office manager in a nonprofit organization in Chicago. At the time, I was working on my Master's degree in Communication and thinking about pursuing my PhD in Philosophy or Communication. One day, while making thousands of copies on a copy machine in preparation for a board meeting between the CEO of the organization and the members of the board, I sat at my desk and picked up one of the assigned books for my class on African American Philosophy. As the copy machine ran copy-after-copy of CEO reports, I sat at my desk and read a book on Cultural Studies. It was a very unique book for a Philosophy course, but I found it to be very helpful in understanding theory and concepts like identity, suturing, and erasure. As I was reading my book, the CEO walked in the office and stood near the door. I felt his presence as he watched me from the aperture of the door, but I neither looked at nor acknowledged him. As I kept my eyes on my book, he walked toward my desk and stood

behind me. He then said, "What are you reading?" I replied, "A book on theory," assuming that he would not be interested. He then stated, "Well, who are you reading?" I sensed that he was familiar with the book so I replied, "Paul du Gay, Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Slack, among others, they are Cultural Studies scholars." He expressed that he was somewhat familiar with Cultural Studies, but he was mostly interested in books dealing with economic theories. Since we both attended DePaul University, we started to engage in some small-talk on our graduate programs. At this moment, he replied, "Oh, you know, you are an interesting guy, how about you and I go to lunch?" I informed him that I had to make a few more copies, but he told me that he would find someone else to finish them. So, we both decided to go to the downstairs restaurant in our office building for lunch.

As we waited for the waiter, we started talking about the Chicago Cubs baseball team. We both were Cubs fans and lamented their mistakes on the baseball field along with the costly decisions by their manager. At this juncture my boss changed the subject and stated, "Everyone seems to think that you are overqualified for your position. Now, I know that you are going to continue on with graduate studies so I will not offer you a place in our organization. I do, however, have a few questions for you before you leave this organization." I shook my head in approval as I earlier had informed him and other employees that I would be leaving my job to pursue my PhD at Howard University. He continued, "Where do I find someone like you? I recruit at colleges and universities, and place advertisements in the newspapers that people like you would read, but I just cannot find anybody!" I was a little confused and I began to ask him, "Like me, any particular characteristics about me..." He interrupted me, "You know, you are a pretty sharp kid and

you are black. It's not only that, but I struggled with the stuff that you are reading. I went to graduate school too, you know." I did not really understand the direction of the conversation as this interaction became a little unnerving.

As I started to respond again, he interrupted once more, "I will put it another way; how do I get more diversity in the organization? We don't have any diversity and I feel like we need to change the direction of the company. I'm just a white guy; I don't know much about diversity?" I looked at him intensely; this time I was perplexed for a moment. Maybe I was still thinking about that "you are a sharp kid and black too" comment. He then continued, "Chris, I don't know what diversity means, where do I go to find it, and how much is good enough? Can you give me some advice?" I looked at him and said, "You know, I can offer a few parochial comments on diversity, but you would see right through it, so I will answer honestly. I really don't know! I cannot pin it down, but maybe the question of diversity is too complex to be pinned down." He looked at me and said, "Well all right, how did you feel about the Chicago Cubs baseball game this afternoon?" This conversation is indicative of the difficulty of understanding the notion of diversity within organizations. The notion of *diversity* in organizations appears to produce various understandings. That is, the complexity in understanding the meaning of workplace diversity derives from various understandings in discourses that advocate achievement of diversity through the ideological construct of meritocracy, discourses that promote equal opportunity for all persons, and other discourses that presume the preparation of individuals to interact with diverse colleagues and customers. The value of diversity and diversity trainings in the workplace comes through the belief that individuals who are historically disadvantaged deserve opportunities for advancement, to be treated fairly,

and to work in a supportive environment. Yet, in a multicultural context, questions still remain about the meaning of diversity and the impact of diversity training in organizations.

White-male elites implement several strategies in taking active roles in fostering diversity in their organizations. Several participants mentioned that their companies post job advertisements on Internet sites or in newspapers that blacks, Latinos, and gays and lesbians might see. Some mentioned that they target people of color when making hiring considerations. One person stated that he places the onus on his human resources department to find qualified people of color. Another person pointed out that he ensures that his organization has someone who is representing women and persons of color. Another person commented that when he gives speeches to other white leaders, he encourages them to place photos of people of color in their newsletters and advertising to foster diversity.

In this study, I wanted to understand how white-male elites understand the idea of diversity. I think it is important to identify how they uniquely assign meanings to the notion of diversity and act on these meanings. By understanding how white-male elites, in my interviews, perceive diversity in an organizational context, we can better understand how they construct and negotiate categories like race, gender, class, and sexuality. Examining white-male elite discourse on diversity exposes unique connotations of diversity through which these elites politicize, re-politicize, or even spurn it entirely. In talking with white-male elites, it is interesting to see how versions of diversity are amendable to producing multiple perspectives, personal and professional growth, and

racial, gendered, and economic equality. In this study, I intend to examine the divergent ways that participants talk about diversity.

### *Discourses on Diversity*

Unquestionably, a variety of definitions, conceptions, and terms influence our understanding of diversity. Socially, many people define diversity through multiculturalism. Multiculturalism embodies the ideology of allowing members from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to maintain their own unique lifestyles in promoting diversity. Definitions of diversity also are driven by social policies, requiring and promoting tolerance of different lifestyles and backgrounds of members from different cultures within nation-states, universities, and hospitals, to name a few. For instance, affirmative action is a social policy that aims to remedy past and present discriminatory hiring practices by white-male employers. As another example, the term *inclusion* constitutes a social practice, ensuring a level of support and comfort for women and people of color within organizations (Stewart, Crary, & Humberd, 2008). Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds could be uncomfortable, unsettling, and vexing, on the one hand, but also could produce dynamic give-and-take, on the other hand. Some, like Robert Putnam (2000), in rejecting contact theory that shows time spent with those of other backgrounds creates harmony between groups, find that diverse communities tend to distrust their neighbors. As such, higher diversity creates lower social capital as levels of trust consistently decrease in interactions amongst members from different cultural groups.

Many conservatives and some liberals believe that the use of quotas and affirmative action to achieve diversity is controversial and unnecessary. Others believe

such policies are fair in remedying discrimination. Either way, it is just as harmful to deny the challenges that diversity presents in society as it is counterproductive to ignore its desirability in providing access and opportunities. Diversity in the workplace not only symbolizes the financial proclivities of globalization, but it also is arguably a moral and political imperative when its promotion rectifies past discrimination and injustices in the removal of sexist and racist barriers to achievement. By understanding how white-male elites, in my interviews, perceive diversity in an organizational context, we can better understand how they construct and negotiate categories of gender and race. The following analysis shows that these white-male elites draw upon and incorporate various dimensions of these discourses on diversity in a variety of ways. Based on my interviews, participants engaged in veiling identities, minimizing identities, and illuminating identities when talking about diversity.

#### *Veiling identities*

In my study, I asked participants to tell me how they understand diversity in the workplace and in the United States. A common response repeatedly related diversity to understanding different perspectives or ideas. Although diversity in the workplace embodies commonly spoken and understood notions based on physical differences, many respondents stated that they view diversity as the embodiment of “multiple perspectives” or “being open to new ideas.” In these cases, white-male elites in my interviews engage the communication strategy that I call *veiling identities* when discussing their understandings of diversity. Veiling identities invokes a communication strategy to re-politicize notions of physical differences in definitions of diversity. Before I turn to my respondents' statements, I will briefly explain the notion of veiling identities.

In my analysis, I call attention to the notion of veiling identity as a re-politicizing strategy used by participants to discuss the seemingly self-contradictory nature of talking about diversity. Du Bois's metaphor of the *Veil* is noteworthy in this regard because it not only connotes physical social barriers that blacks faced but the social structures that limit ways of knowing the world. The Negro, to paraphrase Du Bois, is concealed from the white world by a vast veil (Du Bois, 2008). Metaphorically speaking, veiling identities describe the ways in which respondents place a veil over discussions of differences and representations of identity that may accent one's racial, gendered, or sexual identity to substantiate their own particular way of (not) talking about diversity. In a sense, speaking of diversity in terms of "multiple ideas" or "perspectives" constitute discourses in which the strategy of veiling identities allows respondents to circumvent characteristics of diversity that directly derive from racialized and gendered subjectivities. Therefore, respondents engage this strategy to indicate, implicitly, that they are unaware of the external object itself, e.g., diversity as understood through identity politics, but only representative forms of it; diversity meaning "different." The communication strategy of veiling identities complements studies that examine the ways that white people speak about minorities using various denials of racism to create positive self-presentation (see van Dijk, 1992). Yet, these respondents use discourses that may indicate some awareness of the object itself even as they deny identity categories. According to Hall (1998), identities are resources of history, language, and culture. Identities are not who we are or where we came from, but how we are represented and how representations influence how we represent ourselves.

For instance, many participants understand diversity, as inevitable, cultivating different perspectives that may intersect, overlap, or compete with each other, giving rise to the eventual coordination of a solution. Tyler expresses this conviction in his understanding of diversity:

I think that, you know, diversity is [he pauses for a few seconds]. I think you want to bring people in your organization that you want to feel comfortable, that are a fit to different positions [*sic*], but you also want people with different perspectives and different experiential backgrounds. That is when the organization will be successful. (Tyler, personal interview, August 29, 2008)

Tyler is a university provost who desires to hire a more diverse faculty. Tyler believes that white women are well-represented in faculty positions at his school, but he still feels that his university lacks faculty of color. Tyler feels that the location of the school dissuades faculty of color from applying to the university, as it is situated in the midst of an all-white community. That being said, when I asked Tyler about how he understands diversity in workplace, he stated that his preferred definition centered on the need to manifest divergent perspectives. Tyler begins by stating that diversity underscores the need for potential employees to feel comfortable and to be flexible within the organization. He then talks about his desire to have people with different perspectives and experiential backgrounds on the faculty. When I asked Tyler to clarify the meaning of experiential backgrounds, he referred to individuals who worked in different places, who have traveled the world, and have unique work experiences. This underscores his aspiration for having employees who are “flexible.” What is interesting is that Tyler’s

initial statement in calling attention to the lack of people of color in the university does not necessary complement his definition of diversity in the workplace.

Paul agrees with Tyler's assessment in his explanation of diversity: “Diversity is, um, [long pause] a range of perspectives and also based on a variety of reasons. You know a lot of different perspectives where people come from” (Paul, personal interview, August 4, 2008). Paul is a lead partner in a law firm. Paul mentioned that he did not have any experience initiating diversity in the workplace. When we talked about his definition of diversity in the workplace, Paul stated, quite frankly, that he disavows definitions of diversity based on identity categories and prefers to obtain employees with unique perspectives. Like Tyler, Paul ends his definition alluding to one’s background, “where people come from.” In rejecting definitions of diversity based on identity categories, Paul seems to prefer bringing in individuals from different backgrounds other than differences based on race, gender, and sexuality in obtaining diverse perspectives.

In both statements, Tyler and Paul engage in the communication strategy of passive veiling of identities, revealing the self-contradictory nature of their statements in attempting to talk about diversity. Case in point, initially, they engage the discourse of veiling identities when they both describe diversity as the inclusion of “multiple” or a “range” of perspectives in the workplace, which, in turn, deflects attention from definitions that signify racial or gendered identities. However, in making what they perceive as an active construction of diversity, they use passive language such as “different perspectives where people come from” or “different experiential backgrounds” that alludes to the significance of cultivating different cultural backgrounds or racial and gendered identities in discussing divergent perspectives. In effect, their engagement with

passive veiling of identities entails the subtle, possibly unintentional, acknowledgment of conventional understandings of the politics of diversity in trying to describe it through the axiom of creating divergent perspectives.

White-male elites, in my interviews, also construct diversity through the notion of “being open to new ideas.” According to Jay (while making huge circles with his arms), diversity is: “Be open. Be open to new ideas, be open to new thoughts, be open to new beliefs, and be open to new ways of doing things. That doesn't mean you have to agree, but you have to be open to them” (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008). Jay is the director of an organization and has been heavily involved in participating in diversity-training workshops. Jay, however, was the only participant who stated his displeasure for the idea of diversity outright. He openly referred to diversity as a form of affirmative action that he considered unfair. He believes that individuals should be hired based upon characteristics other than racial and gendered identity. Hence, in veiling identities, Jay provides an ambiguous definition of diversity that stresses being open to new ideas, thoughts, and beliefs. Jay continues on and talks about instances in his life where he had to be open to others’ ideas, even when he did not agree with them. For Jay, listening to opposing ideas at the very least makes him aware that such ideas exist.

Jamie takes a similar stance in explaining diversity:

Personally, I define diversity as people with different ideas. You know, I like people with different ideas. I like arguments in my boardroom. I want people to mix it up (he makes a fist and throws a right cross in the air), I have a very diverse staff...I've got it all sitting at my table and I value that because people have

different angles. I think diversity has got to be all of those things. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

Jamie is a university chancellor and emphasizes the importance of actively recruiting persons of color to his university. Jamie talks about making it mandatory for personnel in the human resources department to bring in persons of color, students, and staff to the school. Ironically, like Tyler, who also desires diversity in the faculty ranks, Jamie prefers a definition of diversity in the workplace that emphasizes the infusion of ideas. While it appears that Jamie understands diversity in terms of cultural identity—he mentions that he has a diverse staff, “I’ve got it all sitting at my table,”—he complements this statement with notions that underscore the importance of obtaining different ideas, “people have different angles,” to describe diversity.

In these statements, we see that both Jamie and Jay engage in the strategy of veiling identities by negating cultural identity markers in their description of diversity as creating “new ideas.” In negating cultural identity markers in their definitions of diversity, they discount racial and gendered constructions that underscore the infusion of diversity in the workplace. Jay and Jamie, however, exhibit discourses of veiling identities in different ways. Jamie's personal definition of diversity derives from notions of “ideas” and “different angles.” Jamie further explains his stance through the use of the metaphor “mix it up,” signaling the convergence of combative ideas. The continual repetition in using “ideas” to describe diversity in connection with “mix[ing] it up” provides emphasis to his description of diversity in ways that negate understandings of identity.

Jamie's statement, however, is similar to those of Tyler and Paul, in actualizing the discourse of *passive veiling of identities*, which reveals the self-contradictory nature

of his statement. While Jamie does explicitly assert his personal definition through the lens of differing “ideas,” his statement, “I’ve got it all sitting at my table” and “diversity has to be all those things,” implies an awareness of meanings of diversity through gendered and racial identities that connects to the discourse on diversity as differing “ideas.” On the other hand, Jay engages in the discourse of *active veiling of identities*, because he does not acknowledge the identity politics of diversity at all. He merely sees diversity as “being open to new ideas...beliefs...thoughts.” This communicative action may constitute a denial of gender or racial inequities in solely upholding the discourse of “ideas” as significant to workplace diversity. In veiling identities, respondents deny that diversity manifests in cultural differences, which is a model articulated by those on the left side of the political spectrum. As such, in their definitions of diversity, white-male elites, in my interviews, minimize identity markers that underscore the significance of diversity in the workplace. They choose to view diversity in terms of understanding different ideas and perspectives. Each participant, in his own way, talks about diversity in terms of ideas and perspectives and rejects notions of diversity based on the infusion of individuals with different identities. Participants who engage the communication strategy of veiling identities ultimately deemphasize the importance of identity, which works along with colorblind discourses. As Haney Lopez (2005) asserts, colorblindness as an ideology commits to protecting racial inequity, but intellectually it is not a theory of racial inferiority; rather it constitutes race as an abstract and meaningless category.

#### *Minimizing Identities*

Some participants explicitly acknowledge the significance of racial and gender identity politics embedded in conventional definitions on workforce diversity.

Respondents simultaneously describe diversity in ways that fit his political and moral objectives and minimize the significance of these differences in the workplace. In this section, I refer to the communication strategy of *minimizing identities* to describe the communicative practices in which respondents use words that reveal their understanding of diversity according to its identity politics, but they also express their indifference to it. This strategy of minimizing identities is similar to Bonilla-Silva's (2003) idea of “minimizing race” when white respondents suggest that discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life circumstances even as they acknowledge its existence. Hence, in society, there are strong codes against the direct expression of racial viewpoints (Billig, 1991). For example, in their study on relational accounts of black and white interracial marital partners, Thompson and Collier (2006) assert that couples continually emphasize being a couple rather than being a product of race or ethnic identity categories.

In my analysis, “minimizing identities” constitutes the ways that respondents encode explicit variations in their understanding of what diversity is and its desirable outcome. In this sense, participants re-politicize diversity in that they express a working knowledge of political and moral definitions of diversity, but immediately, denounce the recognition of gendered and racial identity markers in describing diversity. Minimizing identities entails particular communicative styles and rhetorical strategies that substantiate definitions of diversity in accordance with racial and gender identities while endorsing a colorblind outcome. Similarly, Haney Lopez (2005) talks extensively about understandings of colorblindness that present race as skin color to justify a regressive understanding of race in lacking social meaning. Colorblindness contains an “anti-

categorical element” (p. 74) that doubts racial taxonomies. This politics with respect to the existence of a white category follows from efforts to distance race from various social contexts.

In the case of this analysis, then, respondents make a semantic move in minimizing identities by defining diversity in terms of “people” rather than “ideas.” For example, Ray expresses his convictions in describing diversity:

To me, diversity is simply a term that reflects a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, and I don’t care whether it is color, culture, or historical origins. I think that diversity has come to be a term that generally applies to color or national origin, less to national origin, unless it is clearly Hispanic, Chinese, or Japanese. So in some ways, to me, diversity is not a term that means much to me anymore, I think that has been used inappropriately at times, you know, I think the more important thing is to look at people regardless of those characteristics.  
(Ray, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

Ray is the CEO in a large organization in Chicago. Ray stated that the practice of obtaining workplace diversity has been a major objective for his organization. He stated that his organization has successfully recruited and retained white females and is actively involved in recruiting persons of color. Ray talks about diversity in the workplace as underscoring the confluence of people for different cultural backgrounds. Ray emphasizes understandings of racial identity categories in his definition; however, he does not include gender or other identity categories as a part of understanding diversity in the workplace. He immediately rejects this definition of diversity as he sees it more appropriate to look outside of racial identity categories.

Denny takes a similar stance to Ray in his description of diversity:

You know, with diversity, you have to have a critical mass of the discriminated classes whether it be black, Hispanic, and women into the workplace so that it can become more commonplace and accepted, and less of a matter of anybody thinking of anything about it. It's normal and once you get to that stage I think that probably then the benefits at a certain point are diminished. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Like Ray, Denny calls attention to racial and gendered categories in his definition of diversity. He understands this definition as the commonly accepted definition of diversity. During the interview, Denny openly denounces the inclusion of these identity categories and desires to see them diminished in definitions of diversity. Both Ray and Denny employ discourses on diversity that represent the communication strategy of minimizing identities. In a sense, both Ray and Denny's language constitutes discourses of diversity in that they explicitly show that they understand its political, the former, and moral, the latter, descriptions. These descriptions on diversity based on race and gender, nonetheless, do not accurately capture their reality, and thus, they prefer to talk about it either through ideas or diminishing based on definitions prescribing identity categories. Hence, both Ray and Denny acknowledge that definitions of diversity in the workplace are central to racial identity. However, they disavow the politics of race and gender within ideas of diversity, because it is simply not a part of the way they desire to understand the concept from their own perspectives.

For instance, Ray describes diversity in accordance with ethnic diversity in highlighting its application to “color,” “national origin,” and “culture” and thus provides

attention to different identities that signify diversity. Ray, however, expresses indifference —“diversity does not mean much to me anymore”—to the idea of diversity represented through racial identities. In minimizing identities, Ray acknowledges conventional definitions of diversity in the workplace based on individual race, culture, and national identities, but he abhors these identities because they are not colorblind. While Ray defines diversity along ethnic lines, Denny talks about diversity as moral and political imperatives. The term *diversity*, nonetheless, sends a distress signal for Denny, who, even as he yields to the impact on race and gender in the workplace, can only acknowledge its necessity in its invisibility or normalcy. In minimizing identities, Denny acknowledges the past injustices of people occupying subordinated positions on the social hierarchy in the workplace—he defines it as a “critical mass of discriminated classes whether it be black, Hispanic or women”—but he discusses its meaning only through its negation, “it's normal and once you get to that stage...benefits at a certain point are diminished.”

Finally, Dean, a president of a university, stated quite frankly that diversifying the staff is an important goal for his school. Dean approved of the gains made in diversifying the student body, but he felt that the university needs to work to find more faculty and staff of color. Nonetheless, like other academic leaders, Tyler and Jamie, Dean talks about diversity in ways that diminish identity politics:

Well, I think it is a microcosm of the whole country, I mean, we are a diverse country, a diverse community of people. ... I think that, um, (looking down at the floor while rubbing his chin with his fingers) that progress comes when you start judging people on their leadership and character, period. Not on anything else and

it is encouraging to me, I am proud to be an American because we have made progress, it hasn't been perfect, but it is steady progress, and its culminated in what just happened recently. (Dean, personal interview, March 17, 2009)

In talking about diversity through minimizing identities, Dean takes a similar stance as the aforementioned respondents by focusing on the confluence of individual difference, except that his is more suggestive of ideas of multiculturalism. Unlike his counterparts, Dean also does not outwardly disavow identity politics of diversity, but he endorses a colorblind reality to which he minimizes racial identities in preference for judging people solely on character and leadership abilities. Although he acknowledges diversity in terms of individual differences, he makes a discursive move of negating these differences by going back to historical disclaimers (judging people by character, which resembles content in the “I have a Dream” speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.). This disclaimer acts as a rhetorical shield to save face in the midst of an uncomfortable interaction between racially diverse individuals (the black interviewer and white interviewee). As van Dijk (1992) asserts, racial discourses tend to have disclaimers and other denials, which suggests that language users who say negative things about minorities are well aware of the fact that they may be seen as breaking social norms for tolerance. Using such disclaimers constitutes a semantic move that is cliché in colorblind ideologies advocating principles of humanity and universalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Therefore, in minimizing identities, Dean further negates the significance of individual difference through his statement, “culminated in what just happened recently.” Here, he refers to Obama's Presidency as an example of diversity reaching its apex. In minimizing identities, white-male elites, in my interviews, use language to express their

inner thoughts in adopting the communicative conventions reminiscent of ideation, political, moral, and multicultural definitions of diversity, but they also use language that depoliticizes their position by disengaging from the concrete reality of these conventions. Minimizing identities provides respondents the discursive space to advance the U.S. cultural narrative acknowledging universality while minimizing identity politics of difference. In this section, although each participant talks about definitions of diversity in the workplace in accordance with identity politics, they deemphasize identity in preference for minimizing race and emphasizing more colorblind proclivities.

### *Illuminating Identities*

In the final section of examining definitions of diversity, I found that a few participants provide definitions that authenticate race and gender as essential to understanding diversity. In this case, participants employ the strategy of *illuminating identities* in describing diversity. In illuminating identities, respondents politicize descriptions of diversity by making identity politics crucial in the politically-laden experiences of diverse individuals and to understandings of diversity. I also assume that their acknowledgment of racial and gendered identities in their definitions of diversity derives from their own direct personal experience of being or feeling marginalized by others.

For instance, Greg and his wife adopted a girl from India. Greg told me a story of experiencing racism in Chicago. One day, Greg walked into a grocery store with his child in his arms. There, he met an elderly white woman while standing in line near the check-out counter. The woman asked Greg, “Who is this little girl?” Greg stated, “Oh, this is my daughter, she is adopted.” Unexpectedly to Greg, the woman then replied, “Oh wow,

how do you kiss her?” as she walked away. Greg stood shocked and speechless. He referred to this experience in the grocery store as, “Racism 101.” That being said, in many of Greg’s comments, he deferred to race and gender as factoring in various social contexts. For example, in his statement, Greg engages the discourse of illuminating identities in his description of diversity:

I think that it’s taken to be the active encouragement of differences largely external differences in people, racially, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and other differences. It’s largely not taken to mean differences in opinion. It is externalized differences, the differences that you can point to as opposed to, you know, he is big business and she is anti-big business. That sort of philosophical/ideological diversity is not generally taken to be, it’s more of the external differences. (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008)

Greg talks about diversity in the workplace through the acknowledgment of differences with various identity categories. He sees diversity in the workplace as constituting external differences based on skin color, sex, and sexuality in referring to what he considers observable physical differences. He even refutes previous statements made by other participants who perceive diversity as the infusion of unique ideas or perspectives.

Similarly, Mark, a Jewish white male from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who is a U.S. attorney in Chicago, also engages the strategy of illuminating identities. During the interview, he immediately started talking about race and religion, although my initial questions did not require such information. Mark angrily informed me about his experience attending a school and hearing anti-Semitic remarks from his peers. Mark

talked about the many derogatory remarks he heard from other students, causing him literally to fight it out with many of these students. In my interview with Mark, I could still see that he was angry about this experience with other white students who constantly degraded his Jewish subjectivity. In his definition of diversity, Mark employs the strategy of illuminating identities through his own interpretation:

When I think of the term *diversity*, I think of, I guess I think on two different levels. The surface level, I think of people of different colors and gender[s]. Um, when I think of it more deeply though I think of people who come from different backgrounds regardless of skin color or genitalia, I think of people who come from different economic backgrounds, different family background, um, because you can have um two white guys, two black guys, it is not like that the two whites are going to be more similar to one another than the two blacks. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

Although Mark's firm is not actively involved in creating a diverse workforce, Mark talks about his understanding of diversity on two levels. He sees diversity, first, through identity categories based on race and gender. Secondly, he further elaborates on his definition to include family, economic background, and he even emphasizes the diversity among whites. I assume that his experience of being treated differently by other whites based upon his Jewish identity allows him to see the diversity within white people.

Both Greg and Mark view diversity through the construction of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual difference. In illuminating identities, they both see diversity as constituting "external differences" connected to one's physical existence. In fact, Greg disagrees with his counterparts and has reservations about viewing diversity through

notions of the marketplace of ideas. Unlike, other participants' definitions of diversity, both Greg's and Mark's understandings of diversity constitute illuminating identities in considering how observable differences in race, sex, and gender may constitute differences in opportunity and achievement. Veiling and minimizing identities, in viewing diversity in terms of "ideas" or minimizing it does not provide the discursive space to make such considerations, because the assumption is that race, gender, and sexual orientation are unimportant in constructions of diversity.

#### White-Male Elite Views on Diversity Training

The United States is more culturally diverse today than at any point in its brief history, yet many people live in segregated communities and interact primarily with others like themselves. For many people, the workplace offers an opportunity to interact with others different from themselves. The workplace represents a microcosm in disproving de facto segregation, on the one hand, and constitutes struggles in efforts for equality and respect, on the other. Many organizational leaders, notwithstanding, include diversity-training workshops within the workplace to help employees learn how to manage and gain appreciation for cultural differences. Diversity-training workshops are designed to increase trainees' awareness of other cultural groups in the workplace and to increase the inclusion of outgroup members in promoting better harmony. Diversity trainings are also designed to protect organizations against civil rights violations and give companies a competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized world. Unlike multicultural or intercultural trainings, which focus on educating people on cultural differences, diversity training prepares organizations to take advantage of diverse employees in increasing productivity and building appreciation for cultural differences

rather than training people to merely understand how others are different (Holladay & Quinones, 2008).

In the workplace, there is an increased reliance on diversity training, but amazingly, there is little empirical data that documents the features of its effectiveness (see Holladay & Quinones, 2008; Kulik & Roberson, 2008). This study represents a starting point to obtain white-male elite perspectives on the effectiveness of diversity training. Since many of the respondents participated in diversity-training workshops and are responsible for organizing and managing them, I want to cultivate knowledge on the value of diversity training. My analysis indicates that white-male elites engage in two communication strategies in expressing their opinions on diversity-training workshops: they talk about diversity as common sense and deemphasize its value within organizations.

#### *Diversity Training is Common Sense*

In talking with participants, I wanted to understand their perceptions of diversity-training workshops. Fourteen respondents expressed that they did not see the value of diversity-training workshops, one respondent argued for its termination, and one respondent expressed support for these workshops. Respondents either claimed that they had serious reservations about diversity-training workshops or claimed that their content lacked value or was merely common sense. For instance, Greg participated in diversity-training workshops and was instrumental in his company's decision to provide one million dollars annually for three years for diversity recruitment and retention. Greg spoke positively about procuring more persons of color and ensuring the ascendance of

white females into upper-management positions in his organization. In talking to Greg about whether he had participated in an effective diversity-training workshop, he stated:

Not really! But by the same token, no pun intended (he laughs) I have also not seen a good time management program either. I have also not seen a good expense management program. They were all trying to teach you something that I was already good at, and people are who terrible at those things, could go to a time management program everyday and do nothing at all but waste their time.

(Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2008)

In supporting the idea that diversity is common sense, Greg asserts that he has not participated in an effective diversity-training workshop. He bolsters this claim by stating that he also has not participated in an effective time- and expense-management program either. Apparently, for Greg, these programs are ineffective because they teach material that he already knows. In seeing diversity-training workshops as maintaining common sense knowledge, he expressed discontent for these workshops in his initial statement, but he immediately makes a semantic move<sup>17</sup> in referring to other programs that have not been helpful to him in qualifying his initial statement. Greg further affirms that a problem may derive from how the audience receives the messages in diversity training programs. When Greg asserts, these programs, “teach you something that I was already good at,” he confirms that people attend diversity training programs, but are unreceptive to the perceived commonly known information provided in these trainings.

Chandler, who was a pioneer in instituting diversity training within his industry, makes a similar statement, “A lot of common sense stuff. [He pauses] It is good to hear

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<sup>17</sup> Semantic moves are strategic because they are determined by content of speech sequences that link between a subsequent or preceding proposition (see Van Dijk, 1992).

formally. But it wasn't something that I didn't inherently know” (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008). Chandler negates the effectiveness of diversity training by stating that most of the material is independent of specialized knowledge that is familiar to him. Chandler states that most of the information describes tactics for managing diversity and presupposes that it works to manage all employees in the same way. He also states that it was natural for him to treat everyone the same. In seeing diversity training as common sense, Chandler sees the content as innately acquired and thus may be equally shared by others.

In this sense, for Chandler, the content in diversity-training workshops equates to knowledge that most people already have or should possess. In referring to diversity training as “common sense,” Chandler negates the effectiveness of diversity training by stating that he haphazardly views the content in diversity-training workshop as “good to hear.” Yet, the content is mediocre because he appreciates cultural differences and diversity. The outcome of this strategy possibly resembles Bonilla-Silva and Forman’s (2000) work in explaining the communication strategies that white students use, such as stating that “I kind of support and oppose...affirmative action” (p. 62).” Students both save face and avoid appearing racist with this move.

Tyler, in his role as a university provost, is responsible for creating initiatives and measures for instituting diversity on campus. Nonetheless, Tyler initially did not view diversity- training workshops as helpful. Tyler also discussed whether he observed any benefits in diversity training:

Not really. I don't really need it. One of my jobs for the last couple of years in working on campus hiring policies and procedures, and diversity has been one of

our goals... we are not as an institution very good at it in terms of our diverse faculty, staff, or students. (Tyler, personal interview, August 29, 2008)

In bolstering the idea that the content in diversity training is merely common sense, Tyler stresses that it is something he, personally, does not need. He then talks about his own efforts in the university in creating policies for hiring diverse candidates, but he admits that his institution could put more effort into seeking diverse candidates. A common strategy in discussing diversity as common sense, participants see the content in diversity-training workshop as mostly knowledge that they already possess, that most people share.

#### *Deemphasizing the Need for Diversity Training*

Participants talk about not only what they already know, but also what they already have done. In talking about what they have already done, they view diversity as irrelevant to them by providing cultural rationales (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2003) explains that whites use a cultural rationale in explaining the status of non-white subjects in society. Here, participants provide cultural rationales in making semantic moves that participants make in viewing diversity-training workshops as irrelevant from them. In deemphasizing the value of diversity-training workshops, white-male elites talk about them in two ways: as irrelevant and as forced compliance.

#### *Diversity Training is Irrelevant*

When I asked Ronald about whether he felt there were any benefits to diversity-training workshops, he stated:

My [long pause] initial reaction is negative for me personally [swaying in his chair from side-to-side] because I don't really feel I need to have, [*sic*] I mean I

don't even think about it. I was raised in an area where there are mostly white people, but I was around people of different skin colors and different cultures and I appreciate being around them and I love them. Skin color doesn't even matter. It is not even something we think about. I noticed it sometime if I haven't seen someone who I have never seen before. (Ronald, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

In stating that he has a negative reaction to diversity training, Ronald explains that he opposes such training, but not necessarily altogether. Ronald states that he would not benefit from diversity-training workshops because he did not see himself as being racist. Ronald then attempts to diminish the impact of his initial statement—that he sees diversity training as negative—by vehemently stating that skin color is not important, suggestive of corrective reactions when there is a possible threat to one's integrity. Ronald believes that skin color is unimportant, along with enacting a strategy for appreciating racial differences “people of different skin colors... I love them” in denying racism. Finally, as evident in his statement, he uses the first-person singular personal pronoun “I” in owing up to his preference for participating in diverse communities, but also he uses the personal pronoun “I,” implicitly, to distance himself from those who need diversity training and see race. Thus, in seeing diversity training as irrelevant for him, Ronald used the personal pronoun “I” to assert a particular viewpoint as someone who is blind to skin color, but he also distances himself from those whom he perceives as racist.

Ryan enacts a similar strategy in explaining why diversity training is irrelevant for him:

When I hear diversity training, I feel like I don't need that, but then maybe not all people are like me. I don't even like thinking about it because normally when I meet people, I mean yes, [and] there is a certain amount of judgment, in judging people by their color... I guess, I feel I have no expectations, because I know plenty of white people who are idiots and jackasses. Some of my best friends have been from other countries and very different cultural backgrounds. (Ryan, personal interview, September 16, 2008)

Ryan did not have any responsibility in organizing diversity-training workshops, but he annually participates in numerous workshops. In his statement, Ryan verifies that he does not see diversity training as relevant to him because he has friends from diverse cultural backgrounds. Ryan's friendships with members of culturally diverse backgrounds make diversity training unnecessary for him. The claim of friendship with people of culturally diverse backgrounds maintains a colorblind and pluralistic outlook by which self-reports of friendship denote evidence of trust and interaction with friends that transcend race. Yet, these self-reports of friendship otherize in ways that denote some distance from persons of color. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) suggests, some whites conflate reports of friendships with persons of color as meaningful cross-racial interactions to minimize the influence of racism.

In using the personal pronoun "I," Ryan owes to a particular belief of not seeing and seeing race simultaneously. These semantic moves further illustrate why his participation is uniquely unnecessary. In substantiating this viewpoint, he distances him from those, "white people who are idiots and jackasses" whom he considers racist. Both Ryan and Ronald negate their initial comment on diversity training by using rhetorical

strategies that distance themselves from those who see color and highlight their own personal interactions with persons of color. In uncovering their communication strategies, progressive ideas formulate views that advocate colorblind racist ideologies and acknowledge seeing race simultaneously. These communication strategies are indicative of how participants make semantic moves that distance themselves from others who may fundamentally need to attend diversity-training workshops.

*Diversity is Forced Compliance*

Participants also use communication strategies in their statements where they are less concerned with the impact of their statement on me and respond in ways in which their sense of integrity and self-worth does not need to be reaffirmed. Respondents made statements to attest to what they perceive as true and immediately made other statements that provide evidence of support. Hence, respondents worry less about potential backlash from their statement and articulate strong convictions against mandatory diversity training.

Dean desires to include more diversity-training workshops for faculty and staff within his school. Dean attended diversity-training workshops at his previous places of employment. He even participated on a task force ensuring that other universities, to paraphrase his words, show racial diversity, not only on the football team, but also within the student body. Dean wants to change attitudes about diversity-training workshops and desires to make it a university-wide priority in the near future. He asserted that his school created a position and hired someone to lead a diversity task force within the university. That being said, Dean discusses his concerns with diversity-training workshops:

You know, it depends so much on the audience and where they are. A lot of people sit through it, and they do it because it is required. You know, I have seen these things and everyone in the organization has to go through it, and they sign off on it, and then they are done. I don't think that is the right way to do it; you have to hold it up as one of the significant values of the organization. (Dean, personal interview, March 17, 2009)

Dean begins by declaring that the success of diversity-training workshop depends on the audience. He asserts that most people in the audience do not take it seriously, and he held the audience accountable for its success or failure. In further emphasizing his point, Dean made another semantic move, in pointing to the audience (or employees), and firmly declaring that organizations must take responsibility in ensuring their employees take diversity workshops seriously. For Dean, forced compliance dictated the success or failure of diversity-training workshops.

Greg agrees with Dean when discussing the seriousness of diversity-training workshops:

The people who don't, it's not like they are anti-diversity, but they just don't care about it, it's not an issue that they deal with. It's kind of like turning out the health insurance card, everybody has to do it! We sit there and we mark our time and we do it. (Greg, personal interview, August 8, 2009)

Greg uses the metaphor of the insurance card to highlight the idea that organizations force their employees to attend, just like everyone has to buy insurance. Therefore, employees did not take these workshops seriously because of attendance obligations.

James attended only a few diversity-training programs as his organization did not require employees to attend them. Yet, he believes that organizational leaders must take charge and make diversity training a priority so that employees take it serious. Yet, in his statement on diversity-training workshops, James appeared indifferent to its significance:

I am not sure, given that I don't know about what they are. I don't have an opinion. I have heard people talk about them. That's a big question. I will just say that I am not sure, because I am not an expert in the area. [Long pause] Gut level, whatever it is going to be, it needs to be something that is going to engage people. The last thing we want to do and this is what I hear often happens, it is this forced compliance stuff, you know, there is probably no way to get around it. You are going to have to force people to go through it whether they want to or not. (James, personal interview, July 25, 2008)

James expresses uncertainty with diversity-training workshops. He discusses his lack of expertise in the area, which also contributes to his ambiguity. His indifference to diversity-training programs is explicitly stated as he sees them as constituting “forced compliance stuff” and as forcing “people to go through it.” James expresses his ambivalence (see Billig, 1991; van Dijk, 1993) to diversity-training workshops through the use of the term “force.” Considering James rarely participated in these workshops; his uncertainty may not be as a result of knowledge, but as a result of having been compelled to attend these workshops.

Finally, Jay participates and attends diversity-training workshops, but he does not see them as valuable or helpful. Jay believes that the content in these workshops is too theoretical, complicated, and, quite frankly, boring. Jay travels abroad, and thus he would

rather see diversity-training workshops that resemble intercultural training. He desired to learn different strategies for communicating and engaging in appropriate cultural practices with others around the world. Jay expresses how he feels about diversity-training workshops:

I am opposed on principle to anything that is mandatory for any of these kinds of things. Okay, you are not going to change people's beliefs and you don't change people's values by forcing it down their throat. The idea about illuminating people, or enlightening people, the idea of making it mandatory, or the idea of if you choose not to participate in it, you're a bigot. I think is equally deplorable. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

Jay is obviously disgruntled about mandatory attendance to diversity-training workshops. Jay further elaborates on this point through using the cliché, “forcing it down their throat.” Here, Jay resists compulsory diversity training because through this cliché, he views it in ways that trainers force you to listen to their ideas and coerce you into accepting them. In resisting compulsory diversity-training workshops, he condemns what he perceives as people being labeled “bigots” if they choose not to attend these workshops.

#### White-Male Elite Views on Affirmative Action

White males historically have played a crucial role in developing legal and political institutions in crafting changes to discriminatory systems in response to resistance from white women and people of color. Affirmative action refers to policies that take race, ethnicity, and gender into consideration in promoting equality opportunity and increasing cultural diversity in employment, education, and in government contracting (Ezorsky, 1991). In the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy was the first to use the

term *affirmative action* when he issued Executive Order 10925, aimed at creating better opportunities for white women and people of color in hiring processes. President Lyndon Johnson issued further executive orders, extending affirmative action to include other traditionally disadvantaged groups like Latinos, Asians, and the disabled as well (Skrentny, 1996). He also required contractors to affirmatively desegregate all-white job categories in the workplace. Kennedy and Johnson saw affirmative action as a strategy for dealing with historical discrimination. Affirmative action thus stresses a constitutional commitment to equality, fairness, inclusion, and economic integration. These concepts capture its goal in addressing centuries of segregation and the essence of anti-discrimination laws passed more than forty years ago.

Since its initial implementation in the late 1960s, many affirmative action programs were effective in bringing modest numbers of people of color into the workplace. Initially, federal judges viewed affirmative action as both a remedy for compensating women and persons of color who endured a long history of de facto and legal discrimination, and as a prompt political response to civil rights inequalities (Plous, 2003). As Skrentny (1996) states, the basics of affirmative action remain in place: the policy considers the limited allocation of resources based on group difference, such as race and gender. Yet, the debate on affirmative action among politicians and constituents alike remains one of the most contentious political issues in the nation. Proponents of affirmative action argue that this policy seeks to remedy imbalances created by disproportionate representation in education and organizations of underprivileged groups in society (Ezorsky, 1991). Opponents assert that affirmative action devalues meritocratic practices and substantiates preferential treatment where unqualified candidates get hired

over qualified candidates (Plous, 2003). In my interviews with white-male elites, I wanted to understand how they perceived and understood affirmative action policies in the workplace. Thus, I asked participants to provide their perspective on affirmative action as an example of a government-sanctioned program aimed at facilitating social progress.

First, I wanted to see how participants structured their discourse in conversation with me. In my analysis, I found that many participants enacted a communication strategy that I call *buffering*. Buffering describes the ways that a person enacts communicative choices that shield or lessen the impact of opposition to a position or perspective. In this case, white-male elites buffer in their statements as a semantic move through which they try to make themselves appear accepting to the subject matter by initially providing an ephemeral and positive opinion of the subject matter. These positive statements provided them the discursive space to deviate from initial opinions or feelings and call upon more contrasting viewpoints. In other words, the term *buffering* is indicative of communicative choices that white-male elites make in providing a positive statement on a subject matter as mere political correctness to make negative statements. In a sense, my presence as a black-male interviewer possibly influenced their answers as white-male elites' attempted to mirror my presumed perspective. White-male elites shadowed my perceived viewpoint in substantiating existing racial inequalities to neutralize the interview context. Thus, in the presence of a black male, white-male elites may have felt obligated to talk in ways that indicated some understanding of racial dynamics.

For example, when I asked participants to discuss their feelings on affirmative action, they initially spoke positively about affirmative action through representations of social advancements and racial or gendered progress. After providing such positive interpretations of affirmative action, they continued by expressing feelings of indifference to affirmative action. In buffering, respondents initially expressed support only as a red herring to state more sincere convictions about a particular topic. Respondents also may buffer in their statements to maintain their sense of integrity and allay potential disagreement from me. Thus, buffering may function in ways that makes the respondent appear less antagonistic in their opinions on affirmative action in my presence.

In this study, participants make semantic moves through buffering to enact several communication strategies in discussing affirmative action. As we shall see, respondents engage the discursive strategy of buffering throughout this analysis to call upon contrasting communication strategies to affirmative action. The overarching theme is that affirmative action is unfair in that it negatively affects qualified and unqualified individuals in society. In using the semantic move in buffering, white-male elites view affirmative action by employing various communication strategies in discussing affirmative action as an unfair policy. They discuss affirmative action as reverse discrimination, as doing a disservice to African Americans, and as already successful.

#### *Affirmative Action Creates Reverse Discrimination*

Prominent in the statements below are discourses that the participants in my study engage in rejecting affirmative action through what they deem as reverse discrimination. Reverse discrimination is discrimination against members of the dominant group in

providing preferential treatment to members of the subordinate group. Although it is a common misconception that affirmative action only helps unqualified people of color, in fact, it assists the most qualified persons of color in gaining access to opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them. In buffering, we see participants affirm affirmative action policies as beneficial and crucial for diversifying the organizations at the outset of their statements.

For instance, Denny works as a partner in a law firm in New Orleans. In my interview with him, he stated that his organization actively recruits persons of color to their law firm, but they have been unsuccessful in finding quality lawyers of color. Denny believes that a paucity of lawyers of color provides them with better opportunities to advance more quickly to upper-management levels in law firms than white lawyers. Denny proceeded to initially give support for affirmative action: “I think that affirmative action has done a lot. I mean it has helped to integrate” (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008). Denny uses language that affirms compulsory affirmative action initiatives as fundamental in producing social integration and in providing opportunities for equal access to social institutions. Jamie, a vice chancellor, also voiced his affirmation for affirmative action: “I don’t personally have a problem with [affirmative action].... I think that there are people that will always know that race will play a big part in it and economics will play a part in it” (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008). Like Denny and Jamie, Jay, a director in an organization and a campaign manager provided similar initial support for affirmative action: “Like affirmative action, the ability to recognize that somebody has some deficiencies or so, I think is valuable” (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008). In the onset, each participant spoke positively about affirmative action.

Yet, all participants immediately thereafter negate its significance and relevance in the post-civil rights era where people of color and women are increasingly more visible in the workplace. Many white-male elites in this study took issue with affirmative action because they believe it promotes reverse discrimination that works against whites. A shared perspective of these participants as well as other respondents presupposed that affirmative action programs breach principles of meritocracy and that preferential hiring of persons of color and white women substantiates reverse discrimination. For instance, Denny asserts,

I think that integration has helped, but I think it is time for it to end because it [is] the reverse and it starts to work against everybody involved. One of the things that everybody wants in the workplace is perceived fairness. If you start to chip away at that it's not good for the minorities in the office. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Denny believed that affirmative action helped to move underprivileged groups into mainstream society. However, he justified ending affirmative action because it is the “reverse,” meaning that integrating underprivileged groups is society in decreasing opportunities for those who do not benefit from affirmative action. Denny, in conjuring the idea of “fairness” suggested that affirmative action, as presently understood, diminishes equivalences and leaves out those who do not benefit from its policies. For Denny, integrating underprivileged groups into the mainstream almost amounts to charity for some that will eventually exclude opportunities for others.

Further Jay describes his perception of affirmative action policies:

But, I think discrimination of all kinds is wrong, so if I am going let in a black person, who is not as qualified as a white person, I think this is discriminatory to the white person... I do not agree, with things like affirmative action, I have no use for those kinds of things. I don't mind helping people, but I don't believe in doing everything for them. Meritocracy works, those that can should...It is a perversion of what it means to be a graduate... I like the idea of a colorblind admissions process. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

As mentioned previously, Jay understands the value of affirmative action, although not in redressing past and present discrimination, but in helping those with other perceived deficiencies. For Jay, deficiencies are not those created from the impact of dominant white-male practices in society, but these deficiencies are ascribed to those who cannot help themselves. His understanding of deficiencies is underscored in his statement on affirmative action. In bolstering the discourse that sees affirmative action through the lens of reverse discrimination, he immediately equates affirmative action with the term *discrimination*.

To further elaborate on the discourse of reverse discrimination, Jay asserts that “meritocracy works” by implying that affirmative action does not provide opportunities for people based on demonstrated merit or talent rather it mostly helps those who are unqualified and unable to help themselves. Jay also discusses the impact of affirmative action on white people by speaking through his own body in stating, “I don't mind helping people, but I don't believe in doing everything for them.” Here, the personal pronoun “I” is analogous to those who do not benefit from affirmative action, while the people whom he helps are beneficiaries of affirmative action. Thus, the crisis of the

white-male body becomes a metaphor that signifies philanthropic means that donate support to people of color and white women without compensation or material reward. The term *help* is prevalent in Jay's statement, not as a means to assist those groups that are systematically oppressed, but to signify those who selfishly do not help themselves.

In further denouncing affirmative action, Jay sees it as perverting the school system. Although perversion implies a deviation from the norm, it is also used to describe abnormal sexual behaviors. In a sense, Jay uses the term perversion to illustrate that affirmative action constitutes a violation of the norms of meritocracy and colorblindness. As such, Jay prefers a "colorblind" admission process because he assumes that whites lose out to unqualified candidates when trying to get into universities. Contemporary proponents of colorblindness draw a straight line from dissension to their own impassionate advocacy for being blind to race (Haney Lopez, 2006b). Jay views affirmative action as a moral dilemma and struggle for him. It is difficult for Jay to justify the idea of providing what he alludes to as preferential treatment to "unqualified" individuals over more deserving individuals. Hence, in describing affirmative action as reverse discrimination, Jay understands affirmative action as having two meanings: first, he implies that it deviates from American norms and values of meritocracy. Second, he believes that it creates a sense of despondency and dejection for whites that are not beneficiaries.

Jamie shares both Jay and Denny's viewpoints on affirmative action:

People are getting in [to the university] because they are diverse, and my kid didn't get in. ... I want you to hire an African American and Latino... You have affirmative action to get people into colleges that aren't qualified, but if you have

a qualified student and all things are equal it is incumbent upon you to breed diverse students and breed diverse employees. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

Jamie believes that affirmative action is necessary, not to remedy past discrimination but to get unqualified people into spaces that they do not normally occupy. Here, we see familiar assumptions about affirmative action policies, which portend to argue that it places “unqualified” black and Latino employees in educational and occupational settings. Jamie views affirmative action through the lens of accomplishing diversity in academia as well. While Jamie states that he supported affirmative action, especially as an administrator of an elite university, he buttresses affirmative action opponents’ arguments by implying that preferential treatment is given to unqualified candidates. For Jaime, these practices shrink job possibilities for *white*, coded “qualified,” job seekers. His statements point to racial identity politics as undermining the discourse of equal treatment.

Even more interesting is that Jamie uses and emphasizes the term *breed* to discuss the process of allowing persons of color in places and spaces that they normally would not occupy because of past and present discrimination. I immediately presume that you breed a homogeneous group of animals within a given species like horses or dogs. The assumption here is that when you are breeder, you are sorting out individuals from a group that have necessary qualities you seek in fitting your desired model. In this case, when Jaime uses the term “breed,” he accents his dissatisfaction with having to be at the forefront of race-based hiring and admission within the university. In a white supremacist context, breeding also infuses racialized heteronormativity as white racialist desire to

preserve the white race in the midst of racial and ethnic demographic changes (Daniels, 1997).

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the reverse discrimination discourse derives from the quota discourse in constituting numerical hiring and promotions. Only three respondents invoked the idea of quotas when talking about affirmative action. Those who talk about quotas made conventional claims that individuals displace other more qualified individuals whom would be hired otherwise. Yet, quotas are misunderstood as affirmative action.<sup>18</sup> For example, Mark states:

Oh man, um, I have mixed feelings. Okay, I think that affirmative action has been necessary and to some degree still is necessary because I think... there are hardwired prejudices in everybody. You need some mechanism to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to succeed... It used to be that quotas represented the feelings for minorities [like] Jewish quotas, black quotas, in colleges where it couldn't be any more than a certain number. Now quotas have taken on the meaning of minimums. I guess I would like to see and maybe this is pie in the sky. I would like to see a forum of affirmative action that doesn't require racial quotas, I am not smart enough to come up with that mechanism because I think when you apply hard quotas, it tends to, it skews. Um, I think it just becomes artificial. That is why I think that quotas can skew the hiring process. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

Unlike other respondents, Mark believes that affirmative action is necessary because the innate prejudices in some people circumvent opportunities for other people. When Mark

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<sup>18</sup> Quotas merely reflect to a numerical system for hiring and promoting particular racial group members, while affirmative action redresses systematic historical disadvantages based on race and gender.

admits that affirmative action is necessary to remedy the innate human tendency toward prejudices, he acknowledges the possibility that racism may play a role in hiring processes. However, he is uncomfortable with the term of quotas in determining who does or does not get hired and sees them as forced and contrived. At this juncture, Mark insinuates that affirmative action perpetuates a quota system, which sheds light on the references to reverse discrimination. Seeing affirmative action as quota is a typical move made by opponents who resist its policies in the workplace (Plous, 2003). In his statement, Mark commandeers the discourse on affirmative action and gains a rhetorical upper-hand through communicative choices such as numerical requirements for racial quotas. Mark believes that using quotas makes the hiring process “artificial,” but in using this term, he does not refer to the policy as superficial; rather, he sees the practices implemented in determining who gets the job through “racial quotas” as spurious.

#### *Affirmative Action Does a Disservice to Minorities*

After expressing their support and dissatisfaction for affirmative action, respondents begin to highlight the negative effects that such policies have on persons of color. In buffering, respondents believe they have the leverage to make responses that may appeal to me, including my own sense of achievement. Respondents argue that affirmative action is harmful to its beneficiaries a claim frequently made by white and black conservative analysts alike, as they warn that people of color are prone to rejection in the workplace. For example, Denny stated:

You know, listen to Clarence Thomas and he is pissed off. He graduated second from [Yale Law School] and everybody treats him like it meant nothing... like, it didn't really count. So I think some people say that they don't want people to

discount my achievements when I make them. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Denny believes that affirmative action causes others to discount the achievements of blacks in the workplace. In providing credence to this point, Denny discusses Clarence Thomas as an example of an African American male whose achievements go unrecognized because his work is perceived as a consequence of charity. For Denny, Thomas will never get credit for his achievements, because affirmative action appointed him to the bench. As Denny further states that Clarence Thomas is “pissed off,” he expresses his anger through Thomas' apathy to give credence to the idea that affirmative action affects white and black self-esteem. For Denny, Clarence Thomas becomes the rhetorical conduit to express the morally dire, frustrating, and depressing consequences of affirmative action in alleviating black self-achievements. Pointing to Clarence Thomas not only highlights Denny's disillusionment with those who benefit from affirmative action policies, but also emphasizes how racial body politics become an important rhetorical strategy to indicate his disapproval of violations of meritocracy.

Jamie emphasizes the negative impact of racial body politics involved in being perceived as someone who benefited from affirmative action.

That stuff is always going to be there...that just makes it all bad, that allows everybody to stereotype you and say that you were promoted because of your race... How would you feel about it? That issue contributes a lot to the downside of it. There is always, you know, I mean, hell, I have been on hiring [committees] where people are equally qualified and the diverse candidate got the job. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

In discussing diversity, Jamie engages the strategy of active veiling of identities in talking about diversity in terms of ideas rather than cultural identity. Yet, in making an argument against affirmative action, he acknowledges cultural identities in considering the propensity for his organization to hire equally qualified persons of color over whites. Jamie points his finger at me when he states, affirmative action “allows everybody to stereotype you and say that you were promoted because of your race.” He then asks a rhetorical question, “How would you feel about it?” In any case, when Jamie rhetorically gestures toward me, he wants me to carefully deliberate and reflect on how affirmative action delimits my own accomplishments. While pointing at me, Jamie uses the personal pronoun “you” as a rhetorical strategy to warn me that affirmative action undermines my achievements. The personal pronoun “you,” in pointing and referring to me, also constitutes a distancing strategy to which he delineates and separates himself from me, a benefactor of affirmative action. For example, in using the personal pronoun “you,” Jamie indicates that he would never be seen as unqualified or stereotyped because, as a white male, he would never be viewed as an affirmative action hire. While as a black man my achievements would be seen through the lens of affirmative action. As such, Jamie implies through his statement and the physical gesturing of pointing his finger at me, that racial identity politics in hiring and admitting individuals into social institutions subverts standards for equal treatment.

Similarly, Jay continues to discuss the impact of affirmative action on people of color:

I think it does the minority a disservice, because at the end of the day if you got a degree from Harvard, people think you got in just because you happen to be black.

You are looked upon differently... If I am Al [a fictional character that Jay creates], I probably am never going to forget the fact that I didn't get to go to medical school because my spot that I was qualified for was given to someone less qualified. I am going to feel discriminated against and that is going to go down to another generation or to another group. I don't think you solve someone else's discrimination by creating a new one [Jay laughs]. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

Jay believes that affirmative action creates discord for persons of color. In his statement, Jay talks through the imaginary character “Al” to express how he would feel if an unqualified person received a job that he deserved. In his commentary, Jay refers to himself [he points his thumb to his chest] through the character Al who lost his “earned” position in medical school to me [he pointed to me], the “less qualified” person of color. Through Al, Jay revives the discourse of “reverse” discrimination to show how he feels that affirmative action violates notions of fairness. Al is symbolic of concerns that whites have when so-called reverse discrimination and quotas are invoked in favor of one group at the expense of another group because one’s gendered or racial identity should be a variable in hiring practices. Through the character Al, Jay explains that preferential treatment displaces individuals like him, whom would normally be favored based on factors of individual achievement over individuals like me. Jay positions affirmative action against black achievement albeit in a different manner.

By pointing at me, Jay brings about an affirmative-action character whose achievements are based on my black body. In his presence, nonverbal bartering aside, I became the apparatus to rhetorically drive his arguments against affirmative action. Jay's

discourse departs from notions of opportunity, espoused in his initial statement on diversity, as he positions himself though the fictional character Al in the corner of ideals of meritocracy and distances himself from the black body (me) that is inherently less qualified. When Jay literally points to himself as Al who feels discriminated against because he did not get into medical school and then points his finger at me as “someone less qualified” who took his spot, he rejects the racial politics through my body that spurns him.

### *Affirmative Action is Successful*

A recurring theme among respondents is that affirmative action programs have been successful. All respondents feel that affirmative action programs were necessary at one point in time, but now see such policies as dispensable and even discriminatory, as shown above. Yet, participants see affirmative action as successful to provide reasons for significantly evaluating, curtailing, or totally eliminating it. For example, James talks about affirmative action in ways that espouse its success to suggest eventual elimination.

It was something that has been necessary, and something that is still necessary. Um, you know, I think we are at a point where we have to take a look at [it]... [long pause]. If we are talking [within the context of] organizations maybe we need to get to the point of examining how it is [going] be applied at this point. I don't know how it is going to look. But, I do feel that the discussion is coming, because of our Barack Obamas. It is a discussion that is long overdue... That's the way I view affirmative action... We've certainly made progress, but we [still] have ways to go... everybody is better for it... its resulted in people getting the

opportunity. But, we still have a long way to go. (James, personal interview, July 25, 2008)

James surmises that affirmative action programs precipitated changes in recent decades, and must be further examined to understand whether it is presently necessary. In his statement, James acknowledges the possibility that discriminatory workplace hiring practices exist. However, he believes that the workplace is diverse and calls for, at the minimum, an evaluation of the current success in increasing diversity. James believes that the workplace diversity efforts have been successful. He also presumes that white-male attitudes have changed enough to justify reevaluation of these programs and policies. For James, Barack Obama is symbolic of the success of affirmative action programs and the need for at least reconsidering them. For many white-male elites, as we have seen, Obama signifies progress and attests to improved opportunities for disadvantaged groups in the workplace. James refers to specific cases to which affirmative action is necessary. James calls upon exemplars of race to represent affirmative action's triumph and its eventual end.

Denny takes a slightly different approach to discussing the success of affirmative-action programs:

Yeah, I guess it has been diminished because it has been successful. Isn't that the idea [throwing his hands up]? If the idea is to succeed you don't need it anymore. Now, I am not so naïve to say that there is no discrimination around, but you know the difference between now and thirty years ago is light years in terms of hostility, treatment, and in terms of encouragement... Affirmative action like some people bitching about it and so forth has done what it is supposed do, it has

integrated the workplace... that doesn't mean that you continue a program that 90% of the way there. ... I think affirmative action has been so successful because it creates exposure... It's normal and once you get to that stage I think that probably then the benefits at a certain point are diminished. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Denny vehemently expresses his desire to see the end of affirmative action. In this statement, he provides the subtext for underlining reasons for ending affirmative action. The crux of his argument shows that affirmative action must end because it accomplished its objectives in creating social opportunities for its benefactors. Like James, Denny feels that affirmative action programs have been successful in creating more diversity in the workplace. Denny, however, feels that its success justifies the need to finally put it to an end. Denny vehemently expresses this viewpoint using what he considers evidence for its termination.

For instance, Denny believes that affirmative action has created opportunities for people of color and even provides an arbitrary numerical justification “90%” in explaining its success. Denny exaggerates the time frame of efforts in remedying discrimination, “difference between now and thirty years ago.” Exaggerating the time frame allows him to support claims that attitudes on discrimination have changed so much that affirmative action programs must be removed. He then solicits an unsubstantiated and arbitrary number to suggest that affirmative action has created a wide array of opportunities for people of color and women. Thus, Denny sees affirmative action exclusively as a program that guarantees equal opportunity for persons of color and white women as it allows them to compete fairly with white males. Research shows,

however, that racial and gendered disparities exist on many levels in the nation's workforce (Haney Lopez, 2006c; Patterson, 1997).

### Summary

In this section on definitions of diversity, white-male elites talk through complex meanings when describing their understandings of diversity. White-male elites' rely on three communication strategies—veiling, minimizing, and illuminating language—in talking about diversity. In white-male elites' descriptions of diversity in the workplace, it was common to speak of cultural differences as a civil strength or hindrance in representing its meaning. Many white-male elites, in my interviews, attend to different understandings of diversity that lead them to construct different meanings for it. The way that respondents frame diversity may influence the way they foster strategies in diversifying the workplace. How white-male elites frame and impose their vision of diversity and social difference is paramount in understanding how they may endorse or dispute the concept of diversity.

In the section on diversity-training workshops, I asked white-male elites about the effectiveness of diversity-training workshops. In this analysis, I found that white-male elites talked about diversity training in two ways: they either viewed it as common sense or deemphasized the value of diversity-training workshops. White-male elites frequently disavowed any benefits in having diversity-training workshops, and expressed dissatisfaction with content in these programs. In using the aforementioned communication strategies, respondents explain that they do not see any real value to these workshops and express an unfavorable outlook for future programs. Yet, participants were unable to specifically point out its failures.

In the section on affirmative action, I asked white-male elites about their perspectives on affirmative action. In buffering, respondents express support for affirmative action and then unleash their irritation for affirmative action policies. In this section, we saw white-male elites engage in three communication strategies in discussing affirmative action, including describing it as reverse discrimination, referring to it as a disservice to African Americans, and bolstering its success to justify ending affirmative action policies. White-male elites, in effect, explicitly talk about race-based hiring practices; however, their responses reflect opinions slighting the historical discrimination of people of color and women. Respondents rely on preexisting oppositional discourses of affirmative action to reject support for affirmative action. In this case, respondents try to implicate racial identity politics as a subversion of the prevailing conditions of meritocracy and as a disruption to equal treatment.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RESULTS

#### WHITE-MALE ELITE PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND RACE

This chapter presents the results of the data gathered from white-male elites and their constructions of race and gender in talking about leadership and diversity. White-male elites provide their perspective on gender roles, the advancement of women, and on how they see race functioning in society. White-male elites' communication strategies and content provide the impetus for themes with each section on race and gender, which precede in-depth description and interpretation of results.

#### White-Male Elite Perspectives on Gender

I grew up in the inner-city of Chicago, in a black neighborhood where ethnic conflicts, mostly involving gang affiliations, between blacks and Latinos were commonplace. Growing up in the segregated ethnic enclaves of Chicago, black, Mexican, Polish, and Italian, to name a few, created tensions that too often resulted in dire consequences. In these cultural spaces, race and ethnicity subsumed other identity categories overlooking how class, gender, education, and sexuality functioned in society as these were seen against the backdrop of race. In reflecting on these circumstances, talking about gender was only acceptable when observing the realities of social inequalities, homosexuality was seen as an abomination, and class stratifications were nonexistent since these ethnic enclaves consisted of mostly working-class individuals. I guess everybody wanted and needed money, but ideologies of individual responsibility and freedom made people reluctant to consider divisions of labor. In these neighborhoods, people seemed to galvanize around racial and ethnic conflicts, while other expressions of identity remained silenced. For instance, black and Latino men and women called for

racial uplift at various functions, blacks complained about Korean business proliferation in their communities, white communities, with the help of the police, enforced lines of physical and psychic de facto segregation, and elementary and high schools celebrated ethnic holidays and taught students about leaders of color—both men and women. The omnipotent narrative within these communities revolved around racial groupings and ethnicity and not anything else.

That being said, racial politics drove the ways that I understood my lived experience as racial epistemologies influenced how I experienced the world. Early in my college career, I began to learn more about gender and class, as I read assigned material from bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Karl Marx. Yet, it was not until graduate school that I actually began to understand the influence of sexism, racism, and heterosexism as functioning altogether. About seven years ago, I was sitting in my Critical Race Theory class along with other masters' students from various programs. On this day, we were reading an article on intersectionality written by Kimberle Crenshaw, when a white female student raised her hand and said, "You know, I think gender trumps race because women can be raped." She talked explicitly about others' experiences of being raped and went on to paraphrase, "men are better able to protect themselves than women." Immediately, thereafter, one of the white-male students refuted her argument as convoluted and strange and stated, "You are like me (meaning having white identity), and you should not have any complaints."

After making his point, a black woman, who stated that she did not necessary agree with the logic of the other female student's argument, came to her defense, particularly the "you are like me" comment. She brilliantly exposed flaws in his argument

by highlighting predominance of sexism in society and in his statement. Yet, one comment really sticks with me to this day. She stated, in comparing his statement to discourses of race and gender in black communities, to paraphrase, “Black masculine ideologies smother the role of racism and sexism in diminishing the lives of black women.” I thought it was amazing to think of the ways that rhetoric of racial unity, both in my communal experience and in the white-male student’s statement, silences a whole range of identities constituted in one’s body. As I continued to read more and talk about the ways that patriarchy manifested in society, I began to understand the plight of black women. Even in my own neighborhood, I started to see that many black men, and even some black women, did not embrace gender as part of the struggle in talking about progress. I am not saying these struggles do not exist, but they remain silenced in many instances.

In listening to the black female student talk about intersections of racism and sexism and hearing the painstaking ways that the white female student spoke explicitly about rape, I began to see gender as more than calls for equality, but also as an embodied experience. Gender also became more visible in the black women’s critique of the white-male student’s statement. Later on, other ideas of gender surfaced, but I consider this experience as significant in rethinking how I understand particular manifestations of gender. In this study, I wanted to understand how white-male elites talk about gender and perceive differences between men and women. In listening to white male elites, they embrace gender as an embodied experience and explicate gender differences as a part of the struggle for inequalities in the workplace. Yet, they still bring about their own particular manifestations of sex differences that advance sexism.

Gender is neither an inherent nor a fixed category as individuals express it as they interact with others in society. Gender is a social and symbolic construct that varies across cultural meaning. That is, individuals learn to embody gender as it derives from cultural ideas that specify expectations of each sex (Wood, 2005). Gender changes over time; even as we are born male or female (sex), we learn to act in masculine or feminine ways (Dow & Wood, 2006). The complexity of gender demonstrates how gender is constructed in multiple interacting levels of society as it cannot be reduced solely to individual or institutional levels (Spade & Valentine, 2004). Queer theorists arose in gay and lesbian and feminist studies to challenge the conventional ways of viewing both sex and gender as binary categories of male and female, and masculinity and femininity as they value spaces beyond these categories (see Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990, 1995). Queer theorists, in challenging assumptions that identities are fixed, posit that terms such as men, women, straight, or gay need to be called into question because they essentialize by focusing on one aspect of an individual. Yet, queer studies are not only relevant to gays and lesbians as the word *queer* refers to anything departing from what society considers normal. Queer studies maintain implications for understanding sexuality including heterosexuality, race, class, and other aspects of identity (e.g., Halperin, 2004; Sloop, 2004).

There are several theories that show how we develop gendered identities and explain why gender inequalities exist. These theories complement one another in explaining the multiple ways that gender, communication, and culture come together. For example, biological theories explain observable differences between men and women. This approach maintains that gender is both innate and static and refers to essential

characteristics of males and females (Vannoy, 2001). Cultural theories of gender explore differences as qualified by the influence of culture. Cultural theories explore how individuals learn social expectations and values about gender. For example, within U.S. culture, some individuals classify social life through gender roles in which women are caretakers (Wood, 2005) and provide care to infants. Critical theories direct our attention to the structures and practices in society that classify people into inequitable groups. For example, standpoint theory notes that members in groups designated by race, gender, class, and sexual identity shapes how individuals experience and understand social life (Collins, 1998b). According to standpoint theory, women and men develop skills and understandings as a result of their membership in socially constructed standpoints. Collins (1998b) uses standpoint theory to show that black women scholars hold dual standpoints as “outsiders/within” as members of minority groups who hold membership in elite institutions. Performative theorists (e.g., Alexander, 2006; Butler, 1990, 1993; Halberstam, 1998) argue that gendered identities come into being through citation and repetition. The presentation of self constitutes political acts that point out the insufficiency of binary categories such as male and female, straight or gay. Queer performative theorists posit that gender is performed rather than something we have in any given context. Thus, without the action of performance, there is no gender. Organizational communication scholars examine how masculinity and femininity are co-constructed (e.g., Mumby, 1998) and provide attention to gendered functioning in particular organizational forms (Ashcraft, 2006).

In this section, I asked participants to describe their perceptions of gender roles in society. I also asked them about the meaning of being a “self-made man.” Finally, I asked

them if the glass-ceiling metaphor still is pertinent in organizations. In this portion of the analysis, I devote attention to particular content discussions on the perceived qualities of men and women. I think it is important to examine the particular word choice that participants use in constructing gender differences in society. Second, in paying attention to white-male elite discourses on the glass ceiling, I devote attention to the particular communication strategies that participants use in describing the glass ceiling.

### *White-Male Elite Constructions of Gender*

White-male elites talk about gendered expectations that shape their perceptions on the ways that men and women are supposed to act and perform according to defined gendered categories.<sup>19</sup> In this section, white-male elites responded with answers based on gender when I asked questions on family values, their understandings of the meaning of being a self-made man, and their perception of gender roles. White-male elites tend to rely on traditional explanations of sex as a biological, static, and unchanging fact, and of gender as an attribute though which we are taught to behave or perform specific roles. This study shows that white-male elites habitually overemphasize biology in explaining sex and gender and underestimate social facts that explain gender (e.g., O'Brien, 1999). White-male elites substantiate notions of natural sex and gender differences as binary thinking is pervasive in labeling male and female roles in society. White-male elites enact several communication strategies in bolstering discourses of biological determinism to understand gender differences: they view women as cooperative and men as competitive; women as maternal and men as protectors; and women as fragile and men as strong.

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<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, I understand that gender theorists challenge notions that essentialize gender into binary categories, as gender is socially constructed through stereotypical or expected behaviors of biological males and females. People rarely question how they learned about sex and gender, so we go through life assuming that gender is relatively simple (Spade & Valentine, 2004).

*Women are cooperative*

Several participants highlight the term *cooperation* to discuss their perceptions of women's role through descriptors such as consensus builders. For example, three men in the same industry used the term *consensus* to assert that women work toward establishing agreement in the workplace. In referring to women as more cooperative than men, two of these men believe that women in their organizations overcome gender barriers because of their willingness to build consensus. Another man from a completely different industry as the other three males used the descriptor "consensus building" to explain differences between males and females. These discourses not only describe particular characteristics given to women, but they also stem from the allocation of gender roles in the organization. They also emerge from their own constructions of what it means to be a man. For instance, Denny declares in his statement about the differences between men and women:

Men are more direct in terms of interact[ing] with each. Women tend to be, [he pauses] it's always the case as everybody agrees, women are more consensus builders and men are more competitive. Kid the other person and give them a little crap, but women you know take it a little more personal, because it interferes with God-given consensus. So, I think it's a different personality between men and women. There is a certain testosterone built into this thing. That's my perception. A little more aggressiveness and directness is expected of men.

(Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

In constructing women as "consensus builders," Denny talks through descriptors such as competitive and construct male behaviors as directly opposite from women's

behaviors. In this case, Denny views men through familiar biological constructions that frame men as “more competitive” or to explain qualities that women lack. Alternatively, Denny sees women as less direct in their interpersonal communication style and less likely to engage in competitive activities. That is, a man is expected to be willing to engage in competitive ventures where he strives to defeat or overwhelm his opponent, whereas women avert competition to enact more collaborative behaviors. Cooperation is not only sustained in perceptions of women, but it is further established through descriptors that see men as more competitive. Denny further bolsters his understanding of a male’s competitive desires through other descriptors such as “aggressiveness,” and “directness,” all of which he presumes to be natural male behaviors. These concepts imply a tendency for men to challenge each other unprovoked in making efforts to succeed. Denny also uses naturalistic and deterministic terms such as “God-given consensus” and “testosterone” in substantiating the binary between men and women to bolster claims that view them as “consensus builders.”

Two other men only talk about women when I asked about how they understand gender roles in their organizations. Neal states, “Women are more natural at *consensus building* and getting people to work together” (Neal, personal interview, September 29, 2008). Chandler agrees, “I think that women are much more adept at consensus building, [this is] the kind of leadership that you have to demonstrate in nonprofits” (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008). In talking about women as consensus builders, both men suggest women benefit the organization because they are effective in creating harmony and agreement. Chandler and Neal speak through the descriptor “consensus building” to explain that women seek to sustain agreement and encourage harmony rather

than discord. In this sense, constructing women as “consensus-building” becomes more presumptive as it is seen as instinctual, as if women are predisposed to create harmony and avoid personal affronts. These discourses on female behaviors set expectations for gendered performance in the workplace. In assuaging female agency, participants bring their gender schema about men and women to bear by setting expectations and thus naturalizing gendered hierarchies that imply that women lack competitive traits. According to Glick and Fiske (1999), similar expectations circumvent opportunities for women to become organizational leaders. That being said, respondents associate cooperative traits with deferential behaviors. In the same way that communal prescriptions serve to counteract social changes that threaten men’s social positions (Glick & Fiske, 1999), cooperative prescriptions undermine women’s capacity to enact more competitive or achievement-oriented traits.

#### *Women are Biologically Maternal*

In constructing biological constructions of gender, another theme indicates that participants view women as *maternal* in seeing them as nurturing and motherly in their orientation. In this case, seeing women as maternal indicates that respondents believe that women should care for their children. Most participants talk through biologically deterministic terms in discussing gender roles in parenting. Participants commonly refer to their own fathers as hardworking, as breadwinners, and as the head of the household, while participants referred to their mothers, for the most part, as homemakers. Four participants—Tyler, James, Chandler, and Greg—commended their mothers for their work ethic in maintaining a full-time job and doing necessary household chores.

In talking about women and men, there still tends to be a bifurcation in understandings of the meanings of gender. Popular knowledge constructs discourse about women and gender that relies on essentialist notions (Ashcraft, 2001; Calas & Smircich, 1993; Mumby & Putnam, 1993). The following represents an ideal type for the biological construction of gender based on prescribed gender roles in childbearing and childrearing. Most participants tend to make clear delineations in describing the role of both men and women in familial responsibilities. For example, with the exception of Greg, Jamie, and Chandler who grew up without their fathers in their lives; white-male elite discourses emphasize childrearing as a significant role and responsibility for women. The following represents an ideal type in the way that white-male elites talk about gender roles through familial responsibilities. Ronald is the youngest respondent and is single without children. Ronald relied on a biological basis in making assertions about gender roles in bearing children. In answering a question on gender roles, Ronald paused for a moment so he could locate the words to explain what it means to be a self-made man. Ronald chose to speak in terms of science to explicate his understandings:

Biologically, let me say this... It is the woman who has to carry the child, who has the nutrition to carry the baby. The woman has a lot of food resources invested in the baby, well as the man he just makes some sperm and that is pretty cheap. I think that for a woman there is this subconscious primordial instinct to be a mother, to take care of this investment because there [have] been so many resources put into it. But, for a man, I don't think that instinct is quite there, I think his instinct is to protect the mate and protect her from being impregnated by

other males so that you can ensure that only your gene is passed on, so I think that as far as it goes in terms of instinct. (Ronald, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

Ronald averts my question on what it means to be a self-made man, instead choosing to talk about biologically constructed gender roles. In highlighting the maternal discourse, Ronald speaks through the lens of biology to conclude that certain gender roles are inherent dispositions and constitute an unlearned fixed pattern of behaviors. He appropriates biologically deterministic language in accounting for how he understands gender roles through childbearing and rearing. Ronald affirms discourses such as woman as *nurturing*, “it is the woman who has the nutrition to carry the baby.”

In using these descriptive stereotypes, Ronald explains gender roles as constituting biological variables in conjunction with the complex interplay between genes and environmental variables such as family. Ronald further corroborates women as biologically maternal by describing women’s role through the expression, “primordial instinct to be a mother.” Ronald, in using the term *protector*, minimizes men’s role as nurturers and underscores male’s biological behaviors: “he just makes some sperm” to “ensure that your gene is passed on.” What is problematic, Ronald implies, is that the man cannot occupy the role of the nurturer, because he does not have the “primordial instinct to be a mother.” Instead, through the protector metaphor, Ronald validates discourses that view the male’s role as the supporter of the family who protects women from undue harm. In assuaging female agency, Ronald attests to these discourses in asserting that women need protection because they are vulnerable as mothers and fragile as human beings. More importantly, these biological constructions of gender roles not only delineate social responsibilities according to gender roles, but they substantiate

heterosexuality as well. Participants, like Ronald, significantly, conform to the expectations of heterosexuality in attesting to maternal roles of women and the protector role of men.

*Women are Biologically Fragile*

The final theme indicates that biological constructions also describe women as *fragile*; women are referred to as weak, effeminate, slow, extraneous, and soft. White-male elites talk about women as emotionally and physically fragile to indicate that women are feeble, lack strength, and are liable to yield in certain circumstances. Fragility emphasizes discourses that provide attention to perceived deficiencies in female behavior. For instance, as I inquired about his perception on gender roles in the workplace, Jay discussed gender roles in military combat. Jay chose to talk through aspects of military combat to explain how he felt about working with women to accomplish goals. Jay grew up in a military family. He speaks eloquently about military strategy through the likes of General George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Marshall. Here, Jay provides his perspective on gender differences in describing the prescriptive fragile stereotype:

Men by and large are the meaner, stronger, more physical, the more brutal, the more of those things. And you know from accomplishing the goals and missions perspective... I don't want to worry about the slowest person in my unit. I want to be worried about taking the hill. I don't want to worry about extraneous matters. I just want to be able to move my resources wherever I need them. You can't do that when you have men and women together. On all of those levels, I think that men are the beneficiaries of many great things in this society. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

Immediately before making this statement, Jay asserted, quite frankly, “I think I am glad that I am a man. I would not want to be a woman.” His justification for this statement is explained in the statement above. In viewing women through fragile discourses, Jay’s discourses support sexist norms that construct women as the physically and emotionally weaker sex. Jay uses descriptors such as “meaner” and “brutal” in substantiating essentialist gender characteristics that enact descriptions of men as being physically stronger. In describing women as, “slow,” Jay indicates that women cannot keep up with his pace, and through using terms such as “extraneous matters,” he asserts that women in combat situations are external to these matters and do not belong.

Kevin concurs in the following statement:

Modern women mimic men; they wear slacks, blazers, and they experience their femininity but it seems to me the biggest challenge for women in the business world is [being] clear minded, [and] focused, and not soft, weak, or motherly.

These qualities are not professional in the business world. (Kevin, personal interview, September, 17, 2008)

Kevin asserted before making this statement that he believes that women have made progress in the workplace. He even mentions that barriers to equal treatment still exist in the workplace. Nevertheless, Kevin adheres to fragile descriptions through terms such as “soft,” “weak,” and “motherly.” These terms complement the discourse of mimicry in explaining that women must overcome the challenge of enacting feminized traits. Kevin, in highlighting the term *fragile*, believes that the latter descriptions hamper the professional advancement of women in the workplace. Mimicry indicates that women must leverage their sexuality and prescribe to the stereotypical male behaviors to thwart

obstacles that hinder their progress in the workplace. In assuaging female agency, the fragile discourses attest to how men devalue women in the workplace. Therefore, women must meld masculine assertive behaviors seamlessly to attract attention to their actual competence.

### *Views of Women's Advancement*

The glass ceiling is a metaphor describing the barriers that prevent women from rising above a certain organizational level. When encountering the glass ceiling, women may feel that they lack support and feel powerless in confronting the effects of gender stereotyping (J. Williams, 2005). Although the glass ceiling thwarts opportunities for women in the workplace, white female representation on corporate boards and in executive level and managerial positions is growing, albeit at a very slow rate. Some capture their view of women's progress through the expression, "the fight is over, the battle is won" (Lear, 1994, p. 10). As one respondent, Ray, states: "Well [our organization] is 86 percent female, so I guess you would say the barriers are for us men" (Ray, personal interview, September 30, 2008).

Ironically as participants construct gender as a binary category using essentializing and reifying descriptions, they appear to be encouraged and vindicated by women's progress in the corporate world. Some participants discuss how their organizations actively recruit women into the organization. One respondent, Greg, stated that, in the mid-late 1970s, organizations within his industry made it an obligation and priority to seek out women for various positions. Once employers hired women for these positions, they altered the dynamics within the workplace to cater to women's needs. Another respondent, George stated that mostly white women represent over 70 percent of

the entire industry and are visible in high-profile positions such as CEO and executive director. Other respondents, like Jamie and Ronald, talk about the success of women like Hillary Clinton to exemplify the breaking of the glass ceiling. Each of these participants, however, mentioned that there are still wide disparities in pay between men and women in similar positions in their industry. In this study, I was particularly interested in obtaining their thoughts on the glass ceiling and listening to them talk about the progress women have made in garnering employment in their organizations. In this section, white-male elites rely on two communication strategies: transcending gender and bolstering gender to extend the scope of success.

### *Transcending Gender*

In this study, eleven participants talked about the increasing opportunities and the advancement of women in the workplace. Participants, mostly in academia or service industries, mentioned that women constitute the majority in their fields and within their organizations. One respondent, Jamie, even stated that he implores the women in his organization to act like “bitches” and “bulls in the china shop” when they feel as if something or someone is hindering their professional success. The strategy of *transcending* is prevalent in discussions on women’s progress. This strategy joins facts or sentiments with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute (Ware and Linkugel, 1973). A speaker uses the transcending strategy as a rhetorical strategy to move the audience away from present conditions toward some more abstract view.

In this analysis, the transcendence strategy is used by participants when they provide sentiments and opinions that buttress the progress of women by divorcing gender

stereotypes altogether—like personality traits, social roles, and occupational roles—from the purview of the decision makers. Six respondents used this strategy to explain the ascendance of women in the workplace. The transcending communication strategy moves the listener from viewing gender stereotypes as real to suggest that biological attributes of gender are inconsequential in present-day society.

For instance, Ryan believes that the glass ceiling exists, but he cites various examples within his organization of women who are succeeding and went on to succeed in other places. Thereafter, Ryan provides his own perspective on why women averted the glass ceiling:

People are looking beyond gender and whether individuals have the characteristics for the job. Gender doesn't really matter, it's not whether you wear pants or skirt, it's can you lead and do you have the capacity to listen? It's about whether you have the basic skills that you need, in a sense, to be in these positions.

(Ryan, personal interview, September 16, 2008)

In providing his account on the advancement of women in the workplace, Ryan discusses how traditional notions of *sex difference* do not function to impede the success of women. In using the transcending strategy, Ryan believes that leaders transcend gender in supporting and making decisions women's advancement in the workplace. When he states, "it's not whether you wear pants or a skirt," he asserts that leaders transcend gender stereotypes in making decisions. Therefore, male leaders are impervious to traditional gendered traits, attributes, and roles that historically have impeded the success of women in the workplace.

Jay makes a similar testament in his viewpoint on women's advancement in discussing whether Hillary Clinton would be a suitable candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination:

I don't think that this country has a problem with strong women whether it is Nancy Pelosi... I don't think there is an issue in this country with a woman being elected as president any more. She will fail or succeed based on who she is. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

Jay uses the transcending strategy in his statement to show that people in the United States no longer consider gender as a factor in making political decisions. In using the transcending gender strategy, Jay indicates that he trusts people in the United States to make decisive and nonsexist political decisions. He believes that society has advanced in ways that no longer consider gendered traits and roles that historically subjugate women in making decisions on elected officials. In his statement, Jay believes that people transcend meager gender stereotypes, traits, and roles in their decisions to support individuals they like personally, as he states, "she will fail or succeed based on who she is." In transcending gender stereotypes, traits, and roles, he indicates that glass ceilings have been punctured in ways that allow women to move freely to the top of the political hierarchy normally commandeered by white men. For Jay, gender stereotypes, traits, and roles are no longer salient for people in the United States because we have learned to judge others on their performance rather than on their gendered identities.

*Bolstering Gender to Extend the Scope of Success*

Other respondents use the *bolstering* and *extending strategy* in discourses on the glass ceiling to strengthen arguments that leaders transcend or look beyond gender when

making decisions on advancing and hiring women in the workplace. They also extend the scope of success to include other racial identity categories as well. The *bolstering strategy* refers to any rhetorical strategy that reinforces the existence of fact and sentiments (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). A speaker uses bolstering as a rhetorical strategy to identify with something viewed favorably by the audience. In the case of bolstering strategies, the speaker is limited to some extent by the reality of the audience. Participants talk through the bolstering strategy to assert that one group achieved progress in the workplace, and thus it is paramount to account for other groups' progress as well. Participants also use the extending strategy to stretch ideas or presuppositions in other directions by enlarging the scope of influence.

For instance, a speaker may provide an opinion or idea on a particular topic to advance other ideas in the same topic. The bolstering and extending strategy in communicating gender is a strategy used by respondents when they express opinions that justify an organization's efforts in ensuring the progress of white women to which progress stretches to racial groups as well. In doing so, they also call attention to alleviating barriers for all persons of color in providing access them. The bolstering and extending communication strategy moves the listener from seeing the gender gains as real and, in two responses from participants, trivial, when emphasizing the need for more persons of color in the workplace.

Three respondents used this strategy to discuss the progress of white women in the workplace, but they also insisted on the inclusion of women from other racial groups. The following statement represents an ideal type of these responses as it summarizes how each respondent uses this strategy as they bolster gender to discuss extending success to

other racial identity categories. For example, George, a prominent CEO of an agency that makes important decisions about health care in the United States, talked openly and passionately about adopting two children, one visually impaired and the other with various mental disabilities. George gives credit to his wife for helping him manage and adjust to the difficulties in raising his children. George was one of the few participants who spoke without much hesitance about race, gender, class, and sexuality. For example, in talking about the progress of subordinated groups in the workplace, George was the only respondent who accented the importance of ensuring the inclusion of gay and lesbian people in his organization. George when talking about the glass ceiling in his organization and women's advancement states:

Specifically, I told them [human resources] that I don't want them to address females, of course females of color, but not white females because I think that white females are making great strides. More than half of my senior staff is white females. Not to say that women aren't discriminated against, but I think that is not as big as an issue as racial diversity. (George, personal interview, September 29, 2008)

In his statement, George discusses the prevalence of white women in his organization. In bolstering gender, George specifically heeds the success of white women in his organization as he lauds the progress that white women have made in the workplace, "white females have made great strides." George uses the bolstering strategy in support of the notion that white females have punctured the glass ceiling. He substantiates these statements with numerical justifications, "half of my senior staff is white females." During the interview, he also mentions that over 75 percent of his staff is

women. In using the extending strategy, George recognizes that women of color are not prevalent in his organization and acknowledges that the scope of progress must be expanded to include women of color as well. He accounts for the lack of presence of persons of color in the organization, “I don’t want them to address females, of course females of color, but not white females...is not as big as an issue as racial diversity.” Thus, George wants to extend progress to include women of color as he emphasizes the lack of attention to hiring females of color in his organization. George uses the extending strategy in conjecturing on the lack of racial diversity within organizations. George, thus, believes that the representative success of white women in his organization could be expanded to include other racial groups as well.

#### White-Male Views on Race

The topic of white privilege considers a set of advantages procured by all whites beyond those experienced by persons of color. Sex and gender privilege indicates a set of advantages procured by all men, beyond those experienced by women. On the one hand, these topics may make those who occupy privileged positions feel uncomfortable because it requires them to consider unaccounted for social benefits. These individuals may deny responsibility in benefiting from such privileges. On the other hand, these topics may divert attention from racism and sexism and their effects, by making the bearers of privilege the center of attention. Privilege, like any other social phenomenon, is extremely complex. Like whiteness ideologies, white privilege has often been unexamined by those who benefit from it most. Although there are general patterns, privilege plays out differently depending on the context and other aspects of identity (e.g.,

Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1992). Many authors agree that white privilege goes unexamined because it has been adopted as the norm in society.

Dalton (1995) and hooks (1992) observe that whiteness allows white people to construct the world in their own image through a racist system that reinforces their power and privilege. Not all white people adopt privileges of being white in the same ways. In fact, some white people have a hard time accepting the idea that white privilege is a powerful force from which they benefit because they do not feel privileged (A.G. Johnson, 2001). For example, gender, class, or sexuality places many whites at a disadvantage, as inequalities imposed by such identity categories may be so prevalent that they mask privileges received having white racial identity. As such, some scholars go to great length to specify privileges that white people enjoy, often quite apart from conscious choices and distinct identity categories maintained by white people (e.g., Jensen, 2005, A.G. Johnson, 2001; McIntosh, 1992; Wildman, 1995). These scholars argue that whites cannot make deliberate decisions to disavow privileges because white privilege is socially institutionalized. Thus, white scholars work to unlearn racism and combat the system of privileges (Jensen, 2005; Kivel, 1996; Warren, 2003; Wise, 2005).

When I went on job interviews to secure an academic position, almost all of the people evaluating me did not look like me—they were mostly white (with the exception of one black woman and two women of Asian descent). I certainly was not a racial reflection of my interviewers and struggled in many ways to interact with them. Similarly, another black-male job candidate, extremely well-read and bright, mentioned to me that he found it difficult to connect on an interpersonal level with white interviewers. He did not feel comfortable at any time in the job interview process. As a black man, for the

most part, I may always have to seek acceptance from white people in order to gain access to social institutions in pursuing my goals whereas many white people may go their entire lifetime without having to answer to someone unlike themselves, racially or culturally. In a racist world, this constitutes a disadvantage for me.

On the other hand, as a student at Howard University, in Washington, D.C., while sitting in a classroom with all black males and females, I noticed that male students would easily and quickly co-opt and dominate classroom conversations especially on topics bridging the misogyny of black women with rap lyrics in hip hop music videos. For instance, my male friend and colleague from Cameroon ignored the plight of many of these women and successfully shifted the discussion to economic benefits and sexual liberation of women in these videos. It was intriguing to observe how the women in my class conceded to his viewpoints without much resistance until another male colleague and I revisited the original topic. In a sexist world, all these moves, by my male colleagues and me, constitute an advantage for us. The complexities underlining privilege may look different and maintain different meanings for anyone within these contexts. There are many other strands and instances, too many to mention here, that account for the complexity of privilege when we consider modes of identity maintenance, construction, and contestation. This story shows the idea that viewing the world through one singular aspect of identity limits the influence of other identity markers. As such, for some white-male elites, locating themselves as privileged subjects, rather than oppressed subjects of affirmative action, provided insight into advantages they still have in various social contexts.

In this study, I wanted to understand how white-male elites in my interviews talk about topics of race in society. As leaders who are white males, I thought that it would be interesting to see how they understand race in relation to diversity, especially given the outcome of the Democratic primary between Hillary Clinton, a white American female, and Barack Obama, an African-American male, and the start of the Presidential campaign between Obama and John McCain, a white male. In these interviews, I wanted to understand their communication practices in discussing race in society. I also wanted to get a sense of how openly they would engage the subject of race and racism with me so I decided to ask very basic questions to obtain, at the very least, a working knowledge of how they talk about race and racism. I felt that a serious discussion on race relations, while necessary and warranted, would not be pertinent for this study and would be necessary in a different time and for a different project. I also wanted to observe their level of comfort in discussing their ideas on race with me and to understand the communication strategies that white males in my interviews use to talk about the construct of race when talking about diversity.

I asked participants to reflect on such things as the 2008 Democratic primary, affirmative action, and diversity, which generated several statements exemplifying their constructions of discourses on race. All participants, at some point in the interview, initiated the conversation on race and racism. For instance, when I asked a question on heroes in U.S. history, some respondents talked about such African American figures as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, or Barack Obama and began to elaborate on issues of oppression, privilege, slavery, or hip hop culture. Many participants articulated their views on race by recounting personal experiences with members of other racial groups.

They discussed their perspectives on particular social issues imbued with racial politics and expressed their admiration for a particular historical figure of African descent. Their views also come from their sense of positioning of being privileged white men in the social hierarchy. Their sense of positioning derives from positive or negative images of whiteness, blackness, masculinity, and heterosexuality. Their constructions of these identity markers came to the fore in many of their answers. Although numerous respondents spoke eloquently in discussing their understandings of race and limited contact with persons of color, past and present, one respondent mentioned that he grew up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. The following examines several accounts of respondents and their constructions of race and, at times, gender. In this study, I found that white-male elites engage in the following communication strategies in talking about their privileged social position: they corroborate privileges and minimize race.

Many participants in this study profess to the reality of white-male privilege. They do not deny privileges as part of their experiences and call attention to social networks that provide them with certain perks. While there is diversity within their perspectives, they share a general understanding, even while mentioning in passing, of their own social privilege. In my discussions, eleven white-male elites acknowledged, directly or indirectly, that they occupy a position of privilege or dominance in society. In highlighting their own sense of white-male privilege, they discuss their own social positioning in relation to notions of progress, the disenfranchisement of black voters in Florida, their perceptions of social disparities between men and women, and the opinions on the democratic primary.

### *Corroborating Privileges*

A contribution in this study is that it allows for self-reflection from the respondents in talking across subjects of gender, race, class, success, and leadership. While I did not ask participants questions that require them to acknowledge their own privilege, many readily talked about the meaning of race and gender in discussing their own social positioning. In corroborating privilege, I discuss how white males authenticate and verify whiteness and maleness as definite sources of privilege. The act of corroborating, in a sense, refers to how respondents substantiate privileges of being a white male. In corroborating privileges, white male elites use discourses that attest to whiteness and maleness as increasing the possibility of garnering access to important social, political, and economic advantages. The idea of corroboration is similar to Harris's (1993) proposition that becoming white increases the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one's life rather than being objects of other's domination. This study is different from other analyses on whiteness and maleness, where persons of color and white women interrogate, deconstruct, and uncover discourses of whiteness and provide implications for its reproduction, in that white-male elites themselves admit to and substantiate their own privileged social positioning. Corroborating privileges involve the highlighting of relative benefits and resources that race and gender offer to white males. The following provides examples of how participants view their privilege in engaging the communication strategy of corroborating privileges.

For example, there is an extremely flamboyant, rich, and demonstrative white-male owner of a professional basketball team, named Mark Cuban. Cuban loudly and enthusiastically cheers for his team, yells at referees, and implores the crowd to get

involved at basketball games. Mark Cuban is a billionaire white male who wants to buy a professional baseball team, but a conglomerate of professional baseball owners must approve him. After engaging in a discussion with Chandler on what he perceived as divisive and disruptive politics of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, I wanted to understand his perspective on Cuban. I know that many people consider Cuban to be a polarizing figure like Jackson and Sharpton, and so I wanted to see if Chandler would have similar opinions about him. Therefore, I asked Chandler if he thought Cuban would be approved by the other baseball owners. He responded:

Hell no! He is a free spirit. He has been fined for interfering in the game. He says what he thinks, and he is a trouble maker... I want somebody who appreciates the club as that it isn't just a business proposition... Yeah, the other boys don't want that. My analogy, he would be Rodney Dangerfield in Caddy Shack coming into the country club. Loud sports jacket, obnoxious, he just doesn't fit in. (Chandler, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

In corroborating privileges, Chandler admits that a social network exists where men enact a particular discourse for themselves in making and preserving connections. Chandler further makes known that the “club,” a psychic or physical space where white males congregate, is not only solely for establishing business connections, but also there are expectations for behavior in participating within these social circles. There are also heterosexual undertones in using the term “free-spirit” to describe his behavior. Chandler believes that flamboyant and free-spirit individuals would not be accepted in the country club. These concepts are pejorative adjectives to describe gay men whose behaviors stereotypically reflect audaciousness in behavior and appearance.

In pointing to Mr. Cuban's behavior through actor and comedian Rodney Dangerfield, he asserts that one must behave with regard to decorum in these spaces, and cannot conduct oneself without regard to appropriate manners or acceptable moral behaviors of the club, or like "Rodney Dangerfield in Caddy Shack coming into the country club." In corroborating privileges of whiteness and maleness, Chandler substantiates the existence of a social network that preserves social elite connections where those who "fit in" enjoy its benefits. He also calls attention to particular protocol for behavior that does not condone flamboyance in a way that one attracts attention to himself. In corroborating privileges, Chandler reaffirms significance of these spaces for reconstituting the privileges of whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality.

In constructing the discursive space of the club, Chandler corroborates privileges associated with class and behavior as well. Here, Chandler uses the term "fit" to refer to an appropriate decorum within the club. The decorum explained within this social network emphasizes upper-class elite behaviors performed within these contexts. For instance, in describing the club as a "business proposition," he shows that the "club" represents a place where those within the corporate elite co-mingle. That being said, Cuban is a white-male billionaire who owns a professional National Basketball Association team, and Dangerfield was one of the most well-respected and richest white-male comedians in Hollywood. Yet, as both are elite white males, they would not be accepted to the country club because they would disregard the limits of appropriate behaviors within these situations.

As one respondent, Ronald who attended one of the best boarding schools in the country asserts, "my mom sent me to finishing school [so that] I could learn [how to

perform] professional behaviors like looking someone in eye, holding a wine glass, and having a firm hand shake” (Ronald, personal interview, July 14, 2008). In corroborating privileges, the discourse on decorum appropriately describes appropriate social behaviors learned and enacted in particular contexts. Ronald, unlike Chandler, identifies the required etiquette enacted in these contexts and, like Chandler underscores its significance in being professional. Professional, here, serves as a euphemism in implying upper class, heterosexual, white-male behaviors that are suitable in the physical and psychic space of the country club. The country club represents a place where white-male elites not only engage those within their own social networks, but it signifies a cultural space in which to corroborate privileges associated with race, gender, class, and heterosexuality. Both Ronald and Chandler make known that there are social networks where membership has its privileges, and a certain protocol for behavior in participating in these social spaces is paramount.

Respondents also engage in corroborating privileges in that they confirm its significance in their lives in obtaining systemic advantages, but they also acknowledge the impact of whiteness and maleness on persons of color and white women. Respondents engage in the strategy of corroborating privileges in confirming the social advantages that benefit them. Yet, respondents also acknowledge the impact of privilege in influencing the social positionality of other racial groups and women. In a sense, respondents not only confirm their own social positioning and standing within the social hierarchy, but they also acknowledge how whiteness and maleness affects persons of color and white women.

For instance, Mark discusses the significance of being white and having connections in succeeding business.

You don't succeed, unless you have business. It is easier for connected white men to bring in business than for African American and Hispanic men, or women.

Because there are more white [males] running businesses than there are minorities and women. I think that perhaps some business owners...refer business to lawyers they may feel more comfortable working with someone like them [*sic*]. And they also may hang out in the same social circles, hang out in the same country clubs, go on the same health clubs, have their kids go to the same schools, those are all sort of the connections that lead to business development by lawyers. So if white Protestant guy who is on the north shore and is at a partner in law firm, he is going to have the connections that an African American guy who, um, doesn't have the same options, who didn't necessary grow up with the same connections, who didn't necessary go to the same country clubs, and don't hang out in the same social circles, and who doesn't see a lot of African American faces heading up corporations. (Mark, personal interview, October 6, 2008)

In corroborating privileges, Mark appears aware of the privileges of whiteness and maleness as he notes that white men more easily bring in business than African American and Hispanic men and women. Similarly, Mark asserts that being white provides advantages that are not afforded to persons of color and white women. Therefore, he acknowledges that women and people of color do not have access to social circles that white males frequently inhabit. In corroborating whiteness, maleness, and class privileges, Mark also highlights the various social institutional strands “hang out in the same social

circles, in the same country clubs, go on the same health clubs, [and] have their kids go to the same schools.” These spaces afford white males certain social advantages that are not given to those without these connections. The “social circles” or “country club” is representative of the “old boys club” which constitutes a network of business and social connections for white males, and where white males enact privileges associated with race, gender, class, and heterosexuality.

### *White Male Views in Minimizing Race*

When Julius Wilson (1978) published *The Declining Significance of Race*, he asserted that class rather than race was the central factor in black progress and mobility. I remember discussing this book with one of my professors, who almost twenty-five years later, appeared very excited about these findings. When my professor talked about the book in class, I presumed that he would use the book to provide a presentation on economic inequalities and to engage in a discussion on class privileges. Yet, I discovered that he wanted to highlight Wilson’s findings to minimize the significance of race and make a totalizing statement that class was the overarching problem in society. As I listened to him traverse discussions of Marx, the Frankfurt school, and excerpts from Wilson, I watched the class nod in approval and show support for his assumptions about the prevalence of class ideologies. It was interesting to see my colleagues make articulate responses about economics and class stratifications even in debating the continual existence of the middle-class in the United States. I immediately thought back to how, in previous discussions, subjects on race and gender created debate, confusion, and silence. In reflecting, we did not discuss issues of heterosexuality. Yet, everyone appeared to be engrossed and satisfied without much questioning with Wilson’s work.

After the discussion, I could see that my professor wanted my opinion on the ideas of class and was unsettled by my silence. This professor knows that I am interested in issues of race and wanted to obtain my opinion on the book. Therefore, I presumed that he either wanted to engage in a debate with me, or wanted to see if I would refute his viewpoint. The professor walked up to me and said, “You were pretty quiet today.” I replied, humorously, “Being the only African American male in the classroom, I was using my body to perform the discourse of today’s lecture—racial silence.” He laughed and said, “It’s not always about race.” I replied, “Of course, I know that, I understand theories of class stratifications and the link between racism and poverty from my own personal experience. But, I don’t think it is necessary to take pleasure in concluding that one category overrides others.” At that juncture, we engaged in one of the more thought-provoking discussions on identity politics that I had ever experienced as a student. During my interviews, some white-elites corroborated privileges, while others minimized or denied the significance of race in preferring to discuss other social identifications as the sufficient source of social inequalities. Even more, some respondents were resistant to the idea that whites maintain social privileges over other racial groups.

Some white-male elites, in my interviews, use various communication strategies to minimize or deny the significance of race in society. The idea of white privilege, however, does not focus on how much work white males have put into their craft, rather the advantages gained from being white and male in society’s racial hierarchy. Bonilla-Silva (2003) talks about the minimization of race as a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer central factor in affecting minorities. This is a common colorblind strategy that allows whites to accuse persons of color as being hypersensitive or using race as an

excuse in determining one's plight. In general, many respondents articulate, in some way, the declining significance of race in various ways: They bring race to the fore and pull it back with conversations of class; they also project class through historical figures and deflect racial embodiments. These statements represent ideal types as participants common engaged these particular communication strategies in discussing race.

#### *Minimizing Race through Class*

In any case, although most respondents believe that discrimination exists, some dispute its salience. In my discussions with white-male elites, respondents minimized race by acknowledging it directly but then bringing up class as the significant factor in influencing social struggles. Several respondents discussed an event with dire consequences in race relations, which was immediately followed by a statement either denying the significance of race, or expressing discourses of egalitarianism, individualism, and neutrality. This semantic move constitutes an indirect strategy of minimizing race in their statements.

In this analysis, there are numerous examples from white-male elites who minimize race in discussing class. White-male elites also minimized race by appealing to patriotic discourses, indicating that gender issues were more imperative, or by espousing that nowadays people are more colorblind. The following represents an ideal type for the way that white-male elites minimize race in through discussions of class. For instance, I asked Denny about social progress in today's world to obtain his thoughts on the extent to which civil rights movements created social advancements. Denny started with a brief discussion on progress and a leader's obligations in eliminating social barriers, but immediately thereafter, he shifted his discussion to sharing his thoughts on Hurricane

Katrina. Denny works in New Orleans as a partner in a small law firm and witnessed the aftermath of Katrina. Denny stated that he left New Orleans before the storm and arrived home to minimal damage. Denny, however, expressed his concerns about media representations of Hurricane Katrina. Denny vehemently states:

There is no question there are a lot of people who believe that Bush pushed blacks out of the city and so forth. I mean, New Orleans, now, has become a less racially diverse city... We had a history of discrimination, but in the last 25 years we have had black mayors and judges. People connect a lot of dots, but it is easy to connect dots that are not legitimate. Let's go back to the conspiracy stuff. When they tell you about the 9th Ward, which is a predominantly black area, but you go down four miles there is St. Bernard Parish, which is predominantly white, it got completely wiped out too and 15 percent of the people who left there have all moved up here in higher land (he laughs). These racial conspiracies are motivated by money! Let's face it will always be about money, that [is] really [it]. (Denny, personal interview, July 14, 2008)

In his statement, Denny talks about the decline of the black population in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina. In his discussion, here, Denny blames the media for sensationalizing the story of displacement of blacks, the slow response of the Bush Administration, and the severe aftermath Hurricane Katrina. Denny acknowledges that New Orleans is “less racially diverse”—meaning that fewer blacks are visible in the city of New Orleans. Yet, Denny then makes a semantic move to diminish race by highlighting the abundance of the black political leaders in the city and by denying that race was a significant factor in the response by the Bush Administration. The “conspiracy

stuff” alludes to the media representations of Hurricane Katrina. Denny, thereafter, makes another semantic move in minimizing race in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by stating that white communities suffered a similar fate as black communities. Finally, in mentioning that “these racial conspiracies are motivated by money,” Denny makes the last semantic move in this strategy by bringing class to the fore, stating that the consequences of Hurricane Katrina are tied to material yearnings rather than race. For Denny, claims of group domination can be made with greater ease with respect to class, in relying on conventional capitalistic values—“it’s all about money”—to diminish the significance of race.

#### *Projecting Class through Historical Figures*

Bonilla-Silva (2003) identified the strategy of projection in colorblind statements made by white students, “I am not a racist, but . . .,” which act as a buffer before or after someone states something that may be interpreted as racist. In my study, projection maintains a different discursive strategy in the discourse of minimizing race. A majority of respondents pointed to historical figures to discuss topics of leadership, success, gender, and race. In minimizing racism, several respondents project their viewpoints through political leaders, to diminish the threat of appearing racist. In a sense, the corresponding historical figure becomes a conduit to express their ideas and alleviate any rejection from me.

White-male elites project their opinions on numerous historical figures, including Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and Abraham Lincoln. White-male elites justify their own viewpoints and perspectives by calling attention to similar opinions and practices to other historical figures and leaders. In minimizing race, white-male elites deferred to historical

figures talking about their influence in substantiating appeals to equality, pointing to the content in the United States Constitution, or alluding to specific practices of leadership that benefited black people. For instance, when I asked Jamie about progress and if there were any social barriers that prevented people like me from becoming successful, Jamie replied:

Of course there are, but you know I think that Martin Luther King would look at poor whites, Hispanics, Latinos, and Asians and say that these people are still left behind, and often times in greater numbers. I mean, where I am building a university is statistically the poorest area in the U.S. It is poorer than Appalachia, highest health disparities, lowest educational attainment, highest unemployment, and worst quality of life and economic disparities in the U.S. So I see the poverty, I think people like Robert Kennedy would say that it is a shame that we are not winning this war of poverty. Poverty doesn't care what color you are, there are poor whites as well as any other racial groups. I think that MLK, a lot of message his was racial and a lot of it was economics, and especially toward the end of his life. He would look at these wars going on and see that these are the same issues. (Jamie, personal interview, July 15, 2008)

Jamie speaks eloquently about the significance of poverty in the United States, but at the expense of race. For Jamie, it is clear that economic issues resonate with him and should garner much need attention. Besides citing statistical evidence on the effects of poverty near the university that he is constructing, Jamie makes the semantic move of projecting his views on poverty through leaders such as Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. This semantic move allows him to safely express his viewpoints in minimizing my

question on racial progress and social barriers. Jamie's statement in minimizing race can be broken down as follows.

First, he stated, to paraphrase, that Martin Luther King would observe the plight of several other racial groups, not including African Americans in his list, and express dissatisfaction in their social conditions. Here, he not only speaks through Martin Luther King, but he also speaks for him. Second, he projects a visceral emotion, "shame," through the corresponding image of Robert Kennedy, who championed the war on poverty. Lastly, he comes back to Martin Luther King, after acknowledging the significance of race in his message, but in calling attention to his interests in poverty. We know that poverty is an issue of racism, but it is important here to see how it becomes a justification for deflecting race through prominent historical figures. Negotiating the seemingly contradictory view that race matters, but, at the same time, it matters in passing. Projection is a rhetorical tool used by several participants to escape possible disagreement from me and affix onto someone with historical acclaim or fame.

### *Deflecting Race*

Several respondents also directly denied the significance of race. Respondents, who used the colorblind strategy, not only to minimize the significance of race, but also to deny it by making claims of ignorance ("I don't see color"), denying its significance in their lives or by making other semantic moves that dismiss the fact that race affects the respondents' lives (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). What is important to note is that respondents do not outright deny race, but they make semantic moves that deflect race. In deflecting race, respondents do not entirely deny the existence of race or racism in a given context; they subtly deviate, veer or turn away from it for a moment to minimizing its significance.

While deflecting race in their statements, respondents do not eliminate it from their understanding as they acknowledge my existence as a non-white subject within our discussion. Racial difference, for these respondents, thus, is not actually seeing different bodies, but seeing bodies as fundamentally marked as well. That is, in deflecting race, respondents do not disavow the racial bodies, but they choose to ignore the markers of privilege or subordination that come with being persons of color. Jay abhors affirmative action as a social policy and believes that it unfairly disregards merit. In summarizing his viewpoint, Jay states:

For all practical purposes, I am pretty much colorblind not that I can't tell that there is a difference between you and me for example, but I don't see that as being a big deal. Um, I have had friends of all colors and stripes, sizes and shapes, ethnicities and what have you because of where I lived that's the way it was, so I didn't think that was different. I just thought that was [short pause], so now I get to meet a guy to find out later on that he was Jewish, I didn't know he was Jewish he was just my friend. (Jay, personal interview, July 18, 2008)

In deflecting race, Jay does not want to recognize race as influential to him. Here, Jay explains the product of his racialized life through friendship networks, “friends of all colors and stripes, sizes and shapes,” neighborhood affiliations, and in the intersection between him and me as nonracial outcomes. As colorblind elements, these friendship networks become superficial contacts as they are not identified by name, rather as self-evident facts of obscuring race. He also talks about meeting a Jewish friend and uses Jews as a parallel to persons of color to deflect race in our conversation. First, in minimizing race, he outright acknowledges that he is colorblind, meaning that he chooses

to ignore other's racial composition in interracial interactions. Second, in minimizing race, he abhors the politics of racial difference in interactions between diverse groups of people. While he observes the phenotypic difference between the both of us, he does not see it as significant in our interaction. Finally, he uses language that maintains colorblind elements in the communicative sequence he chooses, "of all colors and stripes, sizes and shapes, ethnicities and what have you." His communicative choices complement the communicative sequences that people, who want to appear to be colorblind, make when they say I don't care if you are black, white, green, or purple. Ironically, while he says that he is colorblind, he constantly refers to elements of color in deflecting race.

Ray, too, provides his understanding of deflecting race through the denial of its significance:

One of the good things that I see happening with kids who are the ages of my grand children... they do not see color. When I grew up I would have seen color, I would have seen you as a black person, a Negro, or African American or whatever. My grandson doesn't see color, he just sees another kid that he plays with in school. I think that is a wonderful thing that has happened. (Ray, personal interview, September 30, 2008)

Ray, like Jay, offers elements of colorblind discourse in his statements. He engages a similar communicative sequence in describing my racial subjectivity, "black person, Negro, or African American or whatever," to explain how he would see me when he was child. Here, he accents the importance of race while growing up in an all-white community in the Montana. After making this statement, he makes a semantic move, as he projects the discourse of colorblindness through his grandson in expressing his desires

to deny the significance of race. Here, he views race as an identity marker that was transparent in the past, but blurred in the present. In denying the existence of race, racial difference becomes counterproductive to a critical understanding of one's racial embodiment.

### Summary

In this section on the white-male elites' constructions of gender, white-male elites talked about their perceptions of men and women in society, the glass-ceiling, and the meaning of being self-made man. In this analysis, I found that white-male elites talked about gender using mostly biological notions that reify gendered categories to construct common sense notions of gender roles in the workplace and nuclear family. Even more, the role of heterosexuality undergirds the demarcation of gender in white-male elite statements. White male discourses constitute gender differences, which are informed by heterosexual normativity.

Paradoxically, white-male elites talked about the glass-ceiling in vindicating women's progress in the workplace. White-male elites used two communication strategies in providing evidence for the success of women in organization, including explaining that white-male elites transcend gender in making decisions and bolster gender to expend the scope of success to persons of color. White-male elites frequently disavowed any benefits in having diversity-training workshops, and expressed the dissatisfaction with content in these programs. Subscribing to differences between men and women becomes a constitutive force in identity construction because bifurcated explanations of identity rely on excluding one group.

In most research of whiteness, as stated in chapter two, when interviewers ask whites to reflect upon their own whiteness, they frequently begin by negating it with statements that disavows their own identity, but they also show an awareness of what it means to be white in interactions with persons of color. This analysis shows that white-male elites engage communication strategies to attest that the embodied white heterosexual masculine subjectivity allows for the increasing possibility of garnering social, political and economic privileges. White-male elites acknowledge that these privileges are not necessarily available to historically oppressed groups, but also white-male elites who cannot perform the norms and standards created within white-male social networks. White-male elites engage the communication strategy of corroborating privilege to highlight the relative benefits and resources that they acquire as elite white heterosexual men.

In my interviews with white-male elites, they engage communicative choices and interpretations that underscore communicative actions that validate their understandings in corroborating privilege. White-male elites also engage in communication strategies in minimizing race through highlighting class, projecting through historical figures, and making communicative choices by deflecting race in constituting colorblind appeals. White-male elites' constructions of race provide evidence from (re)articulations shaping discourses of white hetero-masculine ideology. This section provided context for understanding how white-male elites talk on gender and race.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION

In the final chapter of this research, I revisit my stance of a black heterosexual male researcher who investigates the discourses of white heterosexual male participants. Then, I review the two major research questions and summarize my findings for this research. Next, I offer implications for studying white masculinity and suggestions for reevaluating diversity-training programs. Finally, I discuss the contributions and limitations of this study as well as future research avenues.

#### White Bodies, Black Gaze

In March 2008, in his speech on race, Barack Obama provided a personal account of love and admiration for his Caucasian grandmother. Obama reflected on her generosity and benevolence as she guided him and made personal sacrifices for him. Yet, as Obama lauded his grandmother for enabling his success, he spoke about her occasional utterances of racial stereotypes and her confessed fears of black men who passed by her on the street.<sup>20</sup> Even as she undeniably taught her dark-skinned grandson compassion, her white gaze on black bodies signifies a feature of whiteness and the various stereotypes that can accompany its construction. To paraphrase Angela Davis (1998), the black body is not free from ideological frames of reference that reduce it to levels of criminality. Historically, the white gaze distorted imagery of black bodies within a context replete with mythopoetic contradictions (Yancey, 2008). Yancey's book, *Black Bodies, White Gazes* provides a detailed account of how white gazes habitually marginalize and restrict

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<sup>20</sup>See transcription in the *New Times* [on-line] [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/us/politics/18textobama.html?\\_r=1&incamp=article\\_popular&oref=slogan](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/us/politics/18textobama.html?_r=1&incamp=article_popular&oref=slogan). See George Yancey's book *Black Bodies, White Gazes* for a more detailed account of this speech.

black bodies from disturbing white embodiments and being. Yancey claims that the white gaze<sup>21</sup> objectifies the black body as it constitutes the semiotic, material, and sociopolitical processes that reinforce the importance of the ontological space of, what he refers to as, white ego genesis.

Against this backdrop, the title of my dissertation is *White Bodies, Black Gaze*,<sup>22</sup> which provides an exploration into the experiences and perspectives of white heterosexual elites through the eyes and voice of a black heterosexual male. In Frantz Fanon's (1967) critical explorations of black experiences, he asserts that the white imaginary has "woven me" (p. 112) or smothered black experiences out of thousands of details, stories, and anecdotes. Hence, the black body is the typical object of the white ethnographic gaze; this gaze makes blacks appear strange and exotic (Kelley, 1997). In a sense, the white body constructs the black body through binary logic, making the white body appear normative (Alexander, 2004). As Kelley (1997) poignantly asserts, "When lookin' for the REAL Nigga" (p. 15) white anthropologists, political scientists, and economists compete for grants from Ford, Sage, and Rockefeller to get a handle on the black internal "threat" in the United States. Kelley asserts that these researchers make discoveries to justify the so-called *underclass* using terms like *nihilistic*, *dysfunctional*, and *pathological* as common adjectives to describe the black urban community. He goes on to criticize a host of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers for constructing black

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<sup>21</sup> In feminist theory the *male gaze* expresses an asymmetrical relationship, an objectifying gaze on women. Black feminist scholar bell hooks produces the notion of the oppositional gaze in imploring black women to reject stereotypical representations in film and instead to actively critique them.

<sup>22</sup> Like Bryant Alexander (2004) who apologizes to Franz Fanon for appropriating the title of his book in an article he wrote on the performativity of whiteness and the construction of black bodies, I apologize to George Yancey for reappropriating his title to indicate a particular location where a black man studies white males.

urban life through critiques that merely function to emphasize black survival, misinterpret black expressive aesthetics such as playing the dozens<sup>23</sup> as pathological, and misrepresent relationships between black men and women.

Given the above, it is clear that white gazes construct meanings on black embodiment and cultural practices. In this dissertation, however, I shifted the existing dynamics for research explorations by gazing on whites rather than being gazed at by whites. I, a black heterosexual male researcher, shifted the gaze to studying white heterosexual male elites in examining how white-male elites in this study talk about leadership and diversity, and negotiate meanings within intersecting identity categories. More generally, my dissertation complements the notion of *studying up* in merely revealing the context in which the black heterosexual male researcher constructs meaning about white heterosexual male bodies. In studying up, members of traditionally oppressed groups based on either race or gender examine historically privileged bodies and assume the position of the *knowing subject*. While studying up based on race solely represents the context of the interaction between white participants and me, this study essentially investigates how white heterosexual male elites talk about leadership and diversity with a black heterosexual male researcher.

### Research Questions

In review, I conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews with white-male leaders in their organizations. Two research questions guided this study on white-male elite discourses on leadership and diversity. The first question, “How do white-male elites talk

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<sup>23</sup> The dozens is a playful verbal contest involving a large number of black people who compete by talking about each other's *mama* or *daddy*. According to Kelley (1997), commentators concluded that playing the dozens was a “boy thing” (p.33), but in fact, evidence suggests that young black women engaged in these activities as much as their male counterparts.

about leadership?” addressed the communication strategies that arise when white-male elites provide their personal descriptions of leadership. Thus, I wanted to understand how white-male elites in this study make sense of leadership in an organizational context. In understanding these white-male elites’ talk on leadership, I focused on communicative choices, particularly, metaphors and other descriptors that white-male leaders enact in describing leadership and in emphasizing their preferred leadership style.

The second question, “How do white-male elites talk about diversity?” addressed the communication strategies that surface when white-male elites talk about diversity in the workplace. I assessed how white-male elites in this study understand diversity and talk about diversity training in organizations. In understanding these white-male elites talk on diversity, I focused on communicative choices, particularly, metaphors, semantic moves, and descriptors that white-male leaders used when talking about diversity. I examined their discourses on diversity to see if they are consistent with those of cultural diversity in organizations and their communicative choices in understanding their constructions of race and gender.

Finally, in understanding how white-male elites in this study construct their ideas on leadership and diversity, I discuss how some white corporate heterosexual males (re)produce discourses of white masculinity while engaging in a conversation with a black heterosexual researcher. The larger theoretical concern of this dissertation considers the possibilities for exploring articulations of white masculinity through intersecting discourses on race, gender, and sexuality. But first, I begin this section with a summary of findings that relate to the first and second research questions—white-male elite discourse on diversity and leadership.

## Findings

To study white-male elites' discourses on leadership and diversity, I used techniques within grounded theory methodology to aptly name categories, make comparisons, and create concepts that describe the communication strategies of white-male elites in this study. I coded ways respondents mobilized their arguments, opinions, and stories using metaphors, shifts in content, constructions of self and other, and racial and gendered generalizations. In this study, I was particularly interested in the communicative strategies—overarching content and semantic moves—of white-male elites in discussing their perceptions and understandings of leadership and diversity. I will discuss leadership and diversity in separate sections; within each, I will summarize the codes that emerged in the data and themes that correspond to white-male elite discourses in the construction of leadership and diversity respectively.

### *White-Male Elite Discourse on Leadership*

By understanding how respondents make sense of leadership in an organizational context, we can better understand if they buttress existing discourses on leadership or construct new discourses for themselves. In talking about leadership, white males, in my interviews, preferred to enact various styles of leadership including authoritative, servant, and collaborative leadership styles. All white-male elites, at some point, even provided examples of past historical figures like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, and George Marshall or contemporary figures like Barack Obama, who influence their own understandings of leadership. In sum, most white-male elites in this study expressed that their leadership style constitutes a desire in prioritizing and enabling

employees' success. This study showed that white-male elites in my interviews provided numerous descriptions of leadership that influence the way they guide their employees.

First, some leaders expressed a desire to employ, what I referred to as, *madman* leadership in describing ways they manage interactions and demand compliance from their employees. In exhibiting madman leadership, these leaders described themselves as being “maniacs,” “crazy,” “intimidators,” and using “fear” to represent overzealous desires for the utmost performance from employees. Some leaders also used sports metaphors to show how the leader functions in similar ways to a coach of a team. The madman metaphor of leadership underscores communicative practices that typify *bullying*, which requires a more aggressive form of authoritative leadership style (Greenleaf, 2003) of making strict requests or inducing fear in employees.

Second, some leaders used metaphors, descriptors, and phrases to highlight their active involvement in getting employees to accomplish organizational goals. I described these leaders as *those who want to make things happen*; they see leadership as the ability to get things done through other people. In exhibiting this quality of leadership, these individuals described themselves as being involved—“stirring the pot,” and “setting the course” for the organization. The *construction* metaphor is pervasive as these leaders see themselves as a “builders” responsible for molding employees to accomplish organizational goals. Leaders, who see leadership as making things happen, talk about leadership in ways that exemplify transactional leadership—ultimately considering the ways the leaders get people to make something happen (see Kouzes & Posner, 1987). These leaders, however, choose to distance themselves from employees because their major objective is to complete required tasks.

Third, some leaders made communicative choices in talking about the demands of negotiating activities in the workplace and at home. These leaders see effective leadership as *striking the balance* or balancing the demands of work and other areas in their life. In exhibiting this quality of leadership, some white-male elites used metaphors of *balance* such as “blending” and “juggling,” to illustrate the significance of being able to both increase productivity in the job and manage family life. In some white-male elite responses, children were a legitimate source and consistent reference for achieving the work-life balance.

Finally, a common theme that appeared repeatedly underscored how leaders provide a context for *enabling others*. White-male elites talked about leadership in various ways to emphasize how they enable employees to perform tasks. Some leaders talked about enabling others in *prioritizing employees*. In exhibiting this leadership quality, they see leadership through *protector*, *service*, and *educational* metaphors that signify a willingness to lead employees to make sound professional decisions in their career. Other leaders talked about leadership through *sports* metaphors<sup>24</sup>—such as “coach” and “team”—to emphasize their responsibility in training and improving the performance of the team. These discourses can be seen as part of servant leadership generally (Greenleaf, 2003) as leaders ensure their employees’ highest priorities are met and work to provide resources in improving their employees’ self-worth.

In addition, as part of the enabling theme of leadership, leaders made communicative choices that emphasized the importance of the *vision* metaphor. Through the vision metaphors leaders desired to provide vivid directions in anticipation of what

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<sup>24</sup> Participants in this study used sport metaphors in various places serving different functions of talking about leadership.

will come. The vision metaphor of leadership is similar to what are known as transformative leadership styles (Burns, 1978), with leaders motivating and energizing employees through an unambiguous and intelligible message that encourages employees to freely execute job-related tasks.

In concluding the enabling theme of leadership, the presence of the personal pronoun *we* was prevalent in some white-male elite discourses of leadership. Some leaders used sports metaphors to construct the organizational identity and image through the inclusive *we*. Others emphasized leadership through phrases showing collective and symmetrical relationship between them and their employees. These leaders see leadership as deferring personal credit for organizational accomplishments. The personal pronoun *we* as a communicative choice underlined collaborative leadership styles, as employers and employees work together through sharing responsibilities to accomplish organizational tasks (see Kanter, 2003).

#### *Barack Obama: The Great Man Metaphor*

White-male elites in this study also discussed their understandings, perspectives, and expectations on leadership through a prominent contemporary figure, Barack Obama. They often articulated *Great Man* theories of leadership (Carlyle, 1841) in portraying Obama as destined to act when called upon to lead others. In this study, many white-male elites embraced Barack Obama as a conceptual metaphor for constructing the Great Man discourses as Obama gets signified through multiple metaphorical representations and descriptions of leadership.

The conceptual metaphor, *Obama-as-Great-Man*, is seen in various discourses on positive connotations of leadership and on imagery of essential black masculinity. The

ontological mapping or projecting of leadership qualities onto Obama's body makes him the subject of progress. Some white-male elites used motion and builder metaphors to describe qualities that ontologically viewed him as the leader in manufacturing ideas of racial progress and inclusion. Next, some white-male elites constructed the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor through talking about particular character traits that make him a capable leader. White-male elite discourses also contained fidelity metaphors and descriptors showing that Obama would act in bringing people together within common interests.

White-male elites also constructed the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor through the *transcendent metaphor*. For many white-male elites, Obama transcends boundaries and obtains universal appeal in championing a common humanity of all people. Some white-male elites described Obama as transcending intergenerational differences in impacting and influencing younger generations. Other white-male elites also projected the transcendent metaphor onto Obama in signifying him as the exemplar of the *post-racial world*. In this case, white-male elites in this study believed that members of younger generations are immune to the overt racist practices of legal segregation and are more likely adopt a post-race consciousness where the boundaries of race have been surpassed.

At the same time, some white-male elites used metaphors and descriptors to talk about adversarial figures who do not speak for *all* race and ethnicities. Therefore, many white-male elites in my study see Barack Obama discourses as uniquely different from other black leaders. Some white-male elites use game metaphors and descriptors—such as agenda—to highlight black leaders like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton as bringing up

the issue of race and racism into situations where it is not necessarily appropriate. Other white-male elites questioned the credibility of these leaders who cultivate the politics of race and exploit their own prejudices against other races to gain social advantages.

#### *White-Male Elites' Talk on Diversity*

In this study, I wanted to understand how these white-male elites make sense of cultural diversity within an organizational context. It is important to obtain white-male elites' responses to diversity in organizations as almost all of these leaders make decisions that may influence the implementation of diversity-training programs. In talking with white males on diversity, I observed that they maintain a variety of descriptions for diversity in the workplace, view diversity-training workshops as ineffective, and are ambivalent about affirmative action policies. In addition, some white-male elites provided contradictory and ironic constructions of gender and race in talking about diversity. In sum, white-male elites assigned multiple meanings to their perception of a diverse workplace.

For instance, examining white-male elites' talk exposed unique connotations through which they politicized or re-politicized constructions of diversity. Some white-male elites enacted the communication strategy that I refer to as *veiling identities* when discussing their definitions of diversity. Veiling identities invoked a communication strategy to re-politicize notions of physical differences in definitions of diversity. In a sense, speaking of diversity in terms of "multiple ideas" or "perspectives" allowed respondents to circumvent characteristics of diversity that directly derive from racialized and gendered subjectivities.

Some white-male elites also minimized the significance of cultural differences in the workplace in what I refer to as *minimizing identities*. Minimizing identities entailed a communication strategy in politicizing diversity in accordance with racial and gender identities, while re-politicizing it in endorsing more colorblind language in imagining outcomes. Finally, in *illuminating identities*, some white-male elites politicized diversity by authenticating race and gender as essential to understanding diversity. These discourses highlighted observable differences in race, sex, and gender in achieving diversity.

White-male elites, in my interviews, also provided their perspectives on the effectiveness of diversity training. White-male elites engaged in two communication strategies when talking about diversity-training workshops. First, some white-male elites claimed that they had reservations about diversity-training workshops because the content was merely common sense. In viewing diversity training as common sense, however, some white-male elites believed that content on respect for differences was innately acquired and thus equally shared by others. Second, other white-male elites deemphasized the need for diversity-training workshops by distancing themselves from those who *see* color. They also expressed indifference to mandatory attendance to these workshops because they either feel coerced by trainers to accept their ideas or that most people in the audience do not take it seriously.

White-male elites, in my interviews, also provided their perspectives on affirmative-action policies in the workplace. I found that many participants enacted a discursive strategy that I call *buffering* when making statements about affirmative action. In buffering in their statements, respondents initially only expressed support for

affirmative action to provide more sincere convictions about its policies. But this initial support was followed by assorted communicative moves. Some white-male elites rejected affirmative action in deeming it reverse discrimination. In talking about affirmative action, many white-male elites asserted that it diminishes equality and leaves out those who do not benefit from its policies. This discourse implies that affirmative action does not provide opportunities for people based on demonstrated merit; rather, it mostly helps those who are unqualified and unable to help themselves.

Furthermore, many white-male elites asserted that affirmative action is harmful to its beneficiaries. In pointing to African Americans, like Clarence Thomas figuratively and me literally, racial body politics became a source of the disillusionment and a rhetorical strategy for disapproving of violations of meritocracy. White males imply that affirmative action leads to preferential selection of unqualified candidates, creating animosity toward benefactors of this policy. Finally, some white-male elites believe that affirmative-action programs have been successful. These individuals call upon exemplars of race, like Barack Obama, and presume that affirmative action accomplished its objectives in creating social opportunities for people of color and women.

#### *White-Male Elites' Constructions of Gender and Race*

By understanding how white-male elites, in my interviews, perceive diversity in an organizational context, we can better understand how they construct and negotiate identity categories of gender and race. In the section on gender, white-male elites provided their perspectives on gender and perceived qualities of men and women. In this study, some white-male elites talked about gender in bolstering discourses of biological determinism to understand gender differences in three ways.

Many white-male elites normally described males as engaging in *competitive* ventures, whereas they described women as enacting more *collaborative* behaviors. In addition, other white-male elites viewed women as *maternal* in seeing them as nurturing and motherly in their biological orientation. These men reaffirmed discourses that see women as innately nurturing, while men take on the role as the supporter of the family who protects women from undue harm. Furthermore, some white-male elites bolster biological constructions of gender by describing women as fragile, weak, slow, extraneous, and soft—while these men view themselves as physically and emotionally strong and vital.

Finally, and ironically, as many white-male elites reify binary categories of gender, they extol women for overcoming the glass ceiling. For instance, some white-male elites enact the transcending strategy of gender in providing sentiments that divorce gender stereotypes from decision making. Other white-male elites used the bolstering and extending strategy to assert that they look beyond gender when making decisions, but also vow to extend the scope of success to racial groups.

In addition to gender, white-male elites provided constructions of race as well. In this portion of the analysis, I found that white-male elites engaged in two communication strategies when talking about race. Some white-male elites used the communication strategy of corroborating privileges. In corroborating privilege, these individuals acknowledged themselves as sources of privilege constituted in whiteness and maleness. Other white-male elites believed that their body afforded them increasingly possibilities of social, political, and economic advantages. Some white-male elites also postulate the

declining significance of race by minimizing it through conversations of class and deflecting race altogether.

### Constructions of White Masculinity

After exploring white-male elite talk on diversity and leadership, I discuss how these discourses operate in constructing white masculinity as conceptualized and performed. In fixating the black male heterosexual researcher gaze onto white heterosexual male elites' bodies, I discuss how this research contributes to our understanding of white hetero-masculinity. At this juncture, I engage in selective coding where I consider the larger strategies that appeared across the data. Through selective coding, I identified specific strategies within the data in (re)articulating characteristics of white masculinity.

In this study, I argue that we must not only stop at understanding white masculinity solely through hegemonic practices that reinforce binary ideologies of *good* and *evil* or simply through negative constructions of subordinate groups. White masculinity is a normative means for asserting racial, gendered, and sexuality identities relative to the other—it is an enactment of privilege along the lines of these identity categories. My study shows that some white-male elites still manifest racist, sexist, and heterosexist discourses that secure the subordinate positions of people of color, white women, and gays and lesbians. Yet, some still have, shrewdly and discreetly, embraced liberal and multicultural discourses and comfortably articulate visions of equal opportunity for *all*. Therefore, white masculinity continues as an assemblage (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of contradictory and contested meanings that rely on a variety of articulated possibilities in establishing hegemonic white hetero-masculine order. A

theory of white masculinity ideology must come to grips with contradictions in the process of unwittingly showing racist and sexist cards in white male responses (Leonardo, 2005). Communication operates within various power relations and those power differences impact the way that communication interactions occur. In theorizing white masculinity, we need to examine how communication, within a particular locale where power differentials exists, constitutes the negotiation of identity politics within social anxieties of the multicultural context. By examining nuanced talk, we can look at how white-male elites, in this study, negotiate their identities in a context where social anxieties come to the fore as more white women and people of color obtain access to spaces usually occupied by mostly white males.

For example, through the black gaze, I observed some white-male elites initially support affirmative action and combat it with white-victimization discourse; I observed that some white-male elites conjure traditional gendered stereotypical generalizations and then talk about transcending gender by disavowing gendered stereotypes and bolstering women into positions of authority; I observed many white-male elites acknowledge the existence of racism in society, but call on discourses for minimizing and transcending race; I observed that some white-male elites affirm equality and fairness in society, but acknowledge their own sense of race, gender, and sexual privileges.

I observed one leader espouse the need for enacting authoritative leadership and then discuss the need for prioritizing employees; I observed one leader state that women should behave like “bitches” in breaking the glass ceiling while another leader asserted that women should mimic men if they wanted to join executive positions. I observed another leader engage the communication strategy of veiling identities and then certify

cultural identities in making an argument against affirmative action; I also observed one white-male elite talk about his experience of seeing racism projected onto his adopted daughter's body and another discuss his experience of feeling discrimination as one of the few Jewish people in his neighborhood. Finally, I observed two white-male elites congratulate me for working on my PhD and moments later gesture (pointing their fingers) at me as an unqualified benefactor of affirmative action. Even under the guise of multiculturalism, these fractured interpretations still produce mythologies of racial, gendered, and sexual superiority and inferiority. In response to research that mainly identifies constructions of white masculinity in the mass media and in the classroom, I suggest that examining *nuanced talk* in face-to-face conversations with white-male elites where power differentials exist is essential for providing specific examples of the contradictory meanings in constructing of white masculinity.

#### *Characteristics of White Masculine Ideology*

The following represents a few characteristics for constructing white masculinity as observed through the gaze of a black heterosexual male researcher. In this conclusion, white masculinity takes the form of ideological exposure. That is, I provide attention to ideologies of white masculinity that emerged from white-male elites' talk on diversity and leadership. I consider the ways that white-male elites' talk on diversity and leadership contributes to our understanding of white hetero-masculinity. In this case, I politicize the voice of white corporate hetero-masculine self to provide the subtext for articulating the conscious and unconscious investment in white masculinity. In exploring particular manifestations of white-male elite's talk, this dissertation provides specific details on how white-male elites, in my interviews, perform white masculinity.

In this study, I argue that paying attention to how white men talk about their own racial and gendered privilege provides insight into the processes of producing white masculinity. In this case, I provide four characteristics of white masculinity that exemplify white-male elite discourses, in my study, on leadership and diversity. I observed that white-male elites in my study engaged in several communication strategies that provide specific detail on how white male elites perform white masculinity by swerving race, polarizing gender, controlling preferred black masculinity, and verifying privilege.

*Swerving from Seeing to Not Seeing Race*

Colorblind ideology—asserting an essential sameness between racial and ethnic groups despite unequal social locations—is the dominant racial ideology in the United States (Frankenberg, 1993). As an ideology, color-blindness works to obscure institutional arrangements that construct racial identities as “cultureless” (Perry, 2001, p. 109) in defending the racial status quo. Colorblind ideology draws on abstract liberal notions of equality to disconnect race from unequal power relations (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Therefore, colorblind racial beliefs emerge as the denial or distortion of the existence of racism (Haney Lopez, 2006c). Studies on white masculinity provide little substance in understanding the nuances of *talk* in how colorblind ideologies are constructed in discourses of those who claim to be *blind* to race. Certainly, studies show that some whites tend to be colorblind to their own racial privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), but it is not clear how these individuals manage color-blind ideologies when engaging conversations on race. In reproducing white masculinity, this study shows that even as

these white-male elites embrace colorblind ideologies as their preferred discourse, they still engage in discourses on race to make various claims on affirmative action.

In talking about diversity and leadership, some white-male elites expressed viewpoints for being blind to race, yet they made semantic moves that substantiate racially coded meanings on a particular topic like affirmative action. In coding the data, themes emerged that show white-male elites in my interviews either rhetorically denied the salience of race or, subtly veered away and deviated from race when discussing such topics as affirmative action and diversity. Some white-male elites make colorblind appeals to blur the line between claims that substantiate race and claims that maintain impassionate pleas to be blind to race. In this sense, in reproducing white masculinity, some white-male elites politicize race by showing working knowledge of political and moral dilemmas of race and racism in society, but, immediately, re-politicize it by denouncing race for more appropriate observations outside of racial identity categories.

The themes that emerged in the data show that as individuals portend to engage colorblind ideologies, the contours of race are readily visible even as individuals attempt to deviate from claims of race and racism in society. While scholars embrace colorblind ideologies as the dominant racial ideology, this study shows that practices in illuminating race are still dominant in society. Consider recent events surrounding the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, as the term *racist* was being bandied about by many white-male political figures prompting discourses of white-male bashing and victimization. In addition, Barack Obama's response to white policemen who confronted an African American professor, Henry Louis Gates, as a neighbor reported two black males trying to gain entry in to a home. This event perpetuated long enduring discussions

and concerns about overzealous and, at times, racist treatment of white police on black people. These developments show that *race* breaks out everywhere in uncomfortable and disruptive ways; race is still a powerful and productive signifier as it is an inevitable feature and product of the United States (Dyson, 2003).

### *Polarizing Gender*

Binary oppositions have value within “either/or” extremes, but they also can be reductionist in establishing meaning (Hall, 1997). Derrida<sup>25</sup> argued that there are rarely neutral binary oppositions. White masculinity ideologies effectively work through simple framings of *difference* between bodies. This study showed that rich distinctions cluster around links between men or physical strength—protector, competitive, and strong—and females or whatever is instinctual—expressions of collaboration, maternal, and weak. Some white-male elites’ presentations of self evolve from binary categories such as male and female, and straight or gay. It is in the context of particular aspects of biology where white masculinity comes to the forefront.

In many white-male elite discourses, there are numerous binary oppositions in bodily characteristics based on sexual orientation. These discourses polarize extreme opposites—each a signifier for absolute difference between males and females. Some white-male elites construct gender using essentializing and reifying descriptions, as gender is socially constructed through stereotypical behaviors of males and females. For example, some white-male elites use of concepts like *instinct* or *God-given* to give sexism the appearance of truth and scientific validity. Several white-male elites relegate sex to a relatively simple construct based on expected gendered performances. As such,

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<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida (1981) argued that often one pole of the binary is usually the dominant one, which includes the other within its operation.

some white- male elites discussed family values in ways that support functional gender roles. To think of sex as a biological construct pulls on the history of human focus on the binary logics of the body—its function and structure—and acquaint the body with broader views of essentialized stereotypical behavior and social life.

White masculinity underscores perceived heterosexual male behaviors as a means to thwart obstacles that hinder their progress in the workplace. Therefore, women must perform hetero-masculine behaviors to gain attention to draw attention to actual competence. Assumptions of heterosexuality (e.g., work-life balance for the sake of the children) operate as a taken-for-granted ideology as being in a heterosexual relationship is considered normal whereas anything else is suspect. The co-construction of masculinity between white-male interviewees and me constitutes a shared system of thinking that suggests the overarching power of sexuality as systems of heterosexism go uncontested. In these interviews, the system of sexual meanings is often silenced to such a degree that white-male elites felt comfortable expressing commonly held heterosexual norms with me (e.g., conforming heterosexual stereotypes of men). The silencing of heterosexuality reveals how sexual expressions become regulated within other intersecting systems of oppression (Collins, 2000).

#### *Controlling Black Masculinity*

Enlightened racism as a concept derived from Jhally and Lewis's (1992) work, posits that the hypervisibility of the Cosby family on network television reinforced a notion of social mobility—that blacks can achieve upper-middle class status. Other popular black success stories, such as Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, and Colin Powell attest to this viewpoint. In my interviews with white-male elites, I observed that they not

only provide explicit understandings of gender differences, but they also implicitly shaped what I consider to be an ideal black masculinity. In many ways, mass media and some researchers construct black masculinity as aggressive, hypersexual, violent, and pathological (Ferber, 2007; Kelley, 1997). Ferber (2007) explains that white supremacist ideologies, in effect, tame black men to ensure the separation of blacks and whites. Themes emerge from that data that recognize Obama as a human symbol for racial progress, leadership, and race transcendence. Many white-male elite discourses mark Obama as convenient metaphor for mediating discourses on a preferred black masculinity.

White-male elites reinforce efforts to tame black male imagery through Obama by symbolically creating a preferred black masculinity that is the antithesis to mass mediated imagery of black masculinity. In reconstituting white masculinity through Obama, many white-male elites assert that black men essentially make judgments tantamount to race, but they can become *good* African American men, if tamed to transcend racial proclivities. Through the Obama-as-Great-Man metaphor, Obama becomes the source of history through which the white-male self emerges. Therefore, through white masculinity, some white-male elites verify the absurdity of using race as Obama symbolically represents an example of racial progress in asserting that being black does not limit one's potential. In controlling black male imagery, when coding the data, themes emerged that shows that many white-male elites also obtain leverage through responses in appealing to my own sense of achievement as a black man as well. Rhetorical nonverbal gestures constitute a means to control the black body, in substantiating ideals of meritocracy and distancing whites from those who are inherently unqualified. Obama emerges as

symbolic of meritocracy in making claims about black achievements and ideologically serves to reject the racial politics in society that often spurns many white-male elites.

### *Verifying Privileges*

Exploring the contradictory meanings in constructing white masculinity is exemplified in ways that many white-male elites substantiate their own privileges. Politicizing the voices of white-male elites through their own constructions of various identity categories provides a profound impact on our understanding of white masculinity. For example, many white-male elites used various protector, sports, transcendent, and juggling metaphors; they supported gendered stereotypes or showed preference for enacting madman leadership in reproducing white-male heterosexual norms. Yet, many white-male elites in my interviews acknowledge their sense of privileged positioning. Here, I shift the focus from understanding white masculinity through the location of oppressed groups in the context of privilege, to understanding how white males understand their own privileged positioning.

While studies show that some white-male elites do not identify with white masculinity—e.g., *I don't see myself as a white man*—(Farough, 2004; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003); in certain contexts being a white heterosexual male is a consistent identity marker. In engaging the conversation of race and gender with me, many white-male elites verify the relative benefits and resources that race and gender offer to them. These privileges impact the social positionality of persons of color and white women. In constructing white masculinity, these white-male elites not only confirm their social positioning and standing within the gender and racial hierarchy, but they also take heed to how whiteness and maleness *impositions* persons of color and white women.

Using the communication strategy of corroborating privilege, some white males authenticate whiteness and maleness as definite sources of privilege. For example, some white-male elites disarticulate their white masculinity in admitting that a social network—country club<sup>26</sup>—exists where men preserve connections. This move is familiar with the white antiracist scholars who desire and act to unlearn their privilege (see Jensen, 2005; Kivel, 1996; Warren, 2003; Wise, 2005). As some white-male elites reproduced white masculine ideologies that construct gender as reified binary categories, others also appeared, ironically, to be encouraged and even justified in their statements in highlighting women’s progress in the corporate world and freedom to move to executive level positions occupied by white heterosexual males. Yet, they recenter white masculinity in averting terms that explicitly identify the impact of these spaces in creating connections that are not available to people of color and white women. Many white-male elites reaffirm these social spaces for reconstituting whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality as certain decorum verifies behaviors within these contexts. In reconstituting white masculinity, some white-male elites assert that various stereotypes long associated with persons of color, white women, and gays and lesbians are not condoned in these social spaces.

In sum, white masculinity is a dynamic process of the construction of different systems of power that relate to each other. Ideas and a set of beliefs (ideologies) provide a rationale for oppressive intersections. For example, white masculinity underscores a set of gendered messages that reinforce stereotypes, imply characterizations of heterosexuality, and maintain constructions of bodies of color and a sense of privilege.

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<sup>26</sup> The country club also represents the “ole boys club” where some white men make social connections with other white men and enact privileges associated with race, gender, class, and sexuality.

These messages are strongly race(d), gendered, and sexualized in often supporting unique behaviors or assumptions for white heterosexual males and persons of color and white women. However, the contradictory practices of marking privilege and verifying progress, on the one hand, and espousing gender differences and disapproving of them in their hiring practices. On the other hand, coupled with notions of white female and black imagery control verifies the status of white masculinity as a set of contradictory meanings.

In theorizing white masculinity as a representational set of contradictory articulations by white males, this study shows that research must carry on ideological critiques of specific identity categories, but pave the way for understanding, existentially, that the blending of multiple identities into each other is important in seeing the entire scope of white hetero-masculinity. That said, ideologies are always contradictory; however, ideologies persist in society when individuals maintain and substantiate contradictions. The paradox in understanding oppressive intersections of social power is furthered as white men see themselves as privileged in discourses of white masculinity, but they still feel victimized by *reverse discriminatory* acts. While marking bodies of the Other empowers white heterosexual males in reclaiming their own universality, many white-male elites mark themselves in talking about their own power and confronting their own white masculinity. Through white-male elite constructions of self, their understandings of race and gender implicate white masculinity.

#### Implications for Diversity Training

This study arose out of my experience participating in the Diversity Summit in Chicago. After providing a speech on the importance of the history of racism and sexism in providing context for organizational obligations for initiating cultural diversity in

organizations, I wanted to embark on this study in an attempt understand some of the confusion that transpired. In talking to white-male elites, most of whom are responsible for managing their organization's diversity efforts, it became increasingly clear how little they know or possibly, how little we *all* know about the impact of cultural diversity in organizations. After talking to white-male elites and reflecting on some of the bewildered looks of the audience members at the Diversity Summit, it is possible that no one had ever talked to them about diversity in confronting our prejudices and historical circumstances of race and gender in the United States. It is also possible that members of the audience did not want to acknowledge or even hear about the ongoing challenges in justifying cultural diversity in the workplace.

In reflection, it was difficult to have a discussion about these issues when both the audience and I are managing and negotiating very different meanings about diversity. There is much to be said about how discussions of oppressive intersections may go in an array of directions if individuals come in with different understandings and expectations. That being said, while this research is useful in considering the large social implications of oppressive intersections, it is also important in considering further implications that arise in understanding white masculinity and its impact on perspectives of cultural diversity in organizations.

Diversity is a popular topic, as academics and practitioners provide research that addresses pressing questions on racial and gender discrimination, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling, and other diversity-related topics. However, important questions remain regarding what we have learned about diversity and how executives and employers see diversity training and educational efforts. As research addresses essential diversity-

related topics and uncovers the potential impact associated with increasing diversity in organizations, a gap remains in considering leaders' understandings of diversity in the organization. White-male elites in my study provide different perspectives of diversity including their definitions (e.g., in veiling, minimizing, or illuminating identities), motivation (e.g., increasing profits or expanding opportunities for traditionally oppressed groups), background (e.g., training) and context (e.g., implementing diversity workshops as an organizational objective). Many of these men also appeared to be dissatisfied with content (e.g., referring to it as *common sense*) and ambivalent with the lack of direction of diversity-training workshops.

As this study has shown, white-male elites maintained myriad understandings of diversity and expressed contempt for mandatory diversity-training workshops and, upon attendance, being bombarded with *common sense* content—as many see themselves as exhibiting cultural awareness and competence. Therefore, as several white-male elites articulated the value for increasing cultural diversity in organizations, many remained uncertain about the benefits of diversity training—as leaders have shifted focus to considering performance outcomes and bottom-line implications of cultural diversity. Perhaps the impact of training in focusing on similarities and differences are now unnecessary in diversity training. Perhaps the knowledge that people have the tendency to stereotype and have prejudice is universal. Perhaps Jane Elliott's experiment in diversity, which is still used in diversity-training workshops, is outdated.

In this study, I argue that creating effective diversity-training programs must begin with white-male elites who, as men in leadership positions, occupy spaces at the pinnacle of each identity category and have a greater capacity to influence how their

employees engage diversity training in organizations. In this case, I argue that organizational leadership, especially constructed within the scope of white hetero-masculinity, shapes the sensibilities and values of diversity in an organization. That is, if white males show indifference to diversity-training programs, then their employees will likely see these programs as serving similar ambiguous functions. In deferring to so-called colorblind viewpoints, common-sense notions of diversity training, and veiling and minimizing descriptions of diversity, some white-male elites make it difficult to face challenges of rethinking the effectiveness of diversity-training programs. Therefore, I offer a few suggestions for developing diversity-training programs geared toward leaders in organizations. I believe that diversity training must become a site for white-male elites to unlearn their own assumptions in considering the veracity of various modes of resistance to and contradictory constructions of gender and race.

First, it appears that many white-male elites, not all, have lost sight or refuse to acknowledge the significance of providing opportunity for traditionally and historically oppressed groups based on gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality and so on—as they still equate such practices with hiring *unqualified* individuals. Diversity trainers must begin workshops by reiterating the history of oppression in precipitating affirmative-action policies and ask participants to reflect on whether their organizations have met challenges in recruiting and hiring persons of color and white women. This may prompt conversations on what is effective in job advertising, retention, or professional development of members of historically oppressed groups. At the most basic level, evaluating diversity-training programs requires understanding the impact of changing attitudes of race and gender in altering organizational practices and behaviors. In

conducting diversity-training workshops, diversity trainers should provide opportunities for leaders to talk about what works in diversifying the workforce.

Second, in considering conversations with white-male elites, I think that diversity trainers must mull over the complexity or multiple understandings of diversity when teaching and training executives and employees. Themes emerged in the data that shows the range of communication strategies that white male elites use in talking about diversity. Therefore, diversity trainers must sort through a minefield of assumptions, perspectives, and experiences and intervene in addressing contradictory statements, swerving on race, polarizing terms, or making politically incorrect statements. This could be done by asking leaders to engage in discussions on how they understand diversity. Leaders could also be asked to offer their opinions on a national news story in which racism, sexism, and heterosexism are prominent. Diversity trainers could also ask persons of color, white women, gay and lesbians, or disabled individuals to share their stories or ideas about overcoming obstacles to success in the workplace. Diversity trainers should develop ways for white male elites to engage their own (un)conscious assumptions about identity categories and offer considerations for how their perceptions may influence their ideas in creating and managing diversity. The point here is that if white-male elites believe it is worth pursuing cultural diversity, they must unlearn habitual modes of thinking about race and gender in assisting diversity trainers in pursuing the challenging, yet practical work in providing evidence for the financial, ethical, and moral benefits of cultural diversity in organizations. In other words, white-male elites must unlearn the structures of power within their own discourse as it may impede the progressive proclivities that they espouse.

Third, leadership begins with knowledge of the self. Hence, intrapersonal communication is important in understanding one's purpose in leading others. Achieving clarity within the self allows one to create plans and consider possibilities for the future. Upon completion of these interviews, many white-male elites responded by stating that they learned a lot about themselves. I remained silent for the duration of these interviews, allowing white-male elites to articulate personal opinions and to share some private thoughts on race and gender. During these interviews, I learned that white males have a lot to say about various social issues. In using active listening techniques, I provided them the space for reflecting on their childhood experiences, work-related experiences, and earliest experience of race. Using similar practices, diversity trainers could encourage leaders to engage in honest discussions on their own white privilege and their perceptions of other racial, ethnic, and gendered groups as well. In doing so, diversity trainers must desist from taking on the role as the knowing subject and yield to leaders who could possibly provide insights into how their sense of positioning influences organizational diversity initiatives. Diversity trainers must demonstrate respect for honoring confidentiality, so that white-male elites feel free to ask potentially confrontational and embarrassing questions, and share enlightening and difficult stories. Diversity trainers should request leaders to explore unasked and unanswered questions in yielding to a context that supports open communication amongst individuals.

### Implications for Scholarship

#### *Methodological Implications for Studying Up*

First-person experience provides immediate access to the *self* as the self is never a view from nowhere; it is always defined by the perceiver's body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

That being said, this study provides an important methodological implication for studying up in the context of race where white-male elites engage in discussions on race and gender with an African-American researcher. White-male elites demonstrate a sense of conscious self-awareness as they reflect on their own beliefs, embodiment, and agency. Yet, their sense of awareness of whiteness and maleness is intersubjectively mediated, or depends on the social relations with others. That is, white-male elites' awareness of self, as one among others, is framed from the perspective of the Other—as they attempt to see themselves as they see me. In talking with a black-male researcher, many white-male elites' communicative choices on race, gender, and other identities appeared constrained by their perceptions of my social and cultural values. In talking about their experiences, white-male elites made communicative choices when talking about race, gender, and other identities that reflect their perceptions of my socially defined ontology as a black heterosexual male.

In considering the methodological implications for studying up in the context of race, white-male elites frame their discourses in ways that they perceive may appeal to my own understandings of race and gender. This context reveals how race, gender, and sexuality are co-constructed by the actions of white males and a man of color in engaging difficult conversations on race and gender. For instance, in coding the data, themes emerged around discourses that shows some white-male elites co-opting liberal, anti-racist, and multicultural discourses to talk about race and gender, relying on sport metaphors and gendered stereotypes in assuming a shared masculinity, displaying a wealth of knowledge of history to attest to their intellectual capacities, and espousing family values in appealing to heterosexual normativity. In a sense, my black heterosexual

male body compels many white-male elites to talk about race, even without prompting in many instances; while some white-male elites only spoke about gender when I explicitly asked them to talk about their family values or gender roles.

Thus, identity is salient and truly representative in this context. On the one hand, *difference* is a productive source for prompting responses and obtaining meaning; on the other, a male heterosexual normativity presumes a sense of *sameness* that obfuscates the profound modes of speaking within a patriarchal system of language in concealing realities of gender and sexuality, except in reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Thus, in the presence of a black man, these white-male elites may have felt obligated to have some understanding of racial dynamics. Thus, constructions of white masculinity are not solely contingent on representations of the (un)conscious self and other, but also are embodied within an intersubjective element<sup>27</sup>—assumption of belonging with—which defines the process of mutual recognition. There was an assumed shared understanding of gender and sexuality since we both were heterosexual males, and thus, differences in race were more pronounced.

#### *Studying Intersections beyond the Classroom and Mass Media*

This study is distinct from most studies of white masculinity where scholars gather data from convenient locations and easily accessible textual accounts such as in the mass media and the classroom. My study is unique in that I was able to participate in face-to-face interviews with men in positions of power and obtain data from their *nuanced talk* on race and gender. These interviews yielded specific examples of the contradictory meanings in constructing of white masculinity. As many white-male elites

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<sup>27</sup> Grossberg (1982) provides a discussion on intersubjectivity in considering the question of communication as transcending the individuality of meaning.

hide behind colorblind rhetoric and gender transcendence communication strategies, they limit themselves, even as they acknowledge their own privilege, to seeing the impact of their bodies on the existing social hierarchies—even in influencing the social positionality of the Other. This context provides a unique location within the intersectional matrix to observe the process of communication operating in the creative engagement, management, and negotiation of meanings in co-creating, reproducing, and reaffirming whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity ideologies. An interracial interview context—between a black researcher and a white participant—gives rise to unstable meanings of white masculinity that opens up areas for continuing to examine white identity, as different standpoints emerge within such conversations.

#### *Scholarship on Hegemonic Masculinity*

A major contribution of this study is that it offers specific details on how white men in positions of power provide insights that (re)produce white masculinity. For instance, previous and present studies arrive at general characteristics of white masculinity which emphasizes overt understandings of racial and heterosexual power and patriarchy (Brayton, 2007; Dowsett, et. al., 2008; Dyer, 1997; Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009; Robinson, 2000). My study shows, however, that white-male elites use very specific communication strategies—polarizing, contradicting, controlling, swerving, and verifying—operating within particular functions of white hegemonic masculinity—white, heterosexual, and patriarchal power. In considering diversity and leadership, as white-male elites attempt to make anti-racist and anti-sexist claims that, at times, mock progressive discourses and recenter whiteness and maleness, they continue to ignore the sheer reality that there is still a paucity of white females in upper-level

management positions and a dearth of persons of color in organizations across the United States.

White-male elite discourses still contain attributes of racism, sexism, and heterosexism in their engagement within the social world. These discourses, (un)consciously, impact how they might explain everyday mundane (in)actions as there were few persons of color working in offices that I visited and why some admitted that disparities in pay exists between men and women managers in their industry. Warren (2003) noted that he cannot escape inscriptions of whiteness, I would argue his gender and sexuality as well; however, the challenge of white masculinity speaks to the idea that the white heterosexual male self is historically constituted<sup>28</sup> by racist and sexist relations of power that mediate interactions and verify white hetero-masculine normativity. Many white-male elites must work to transgress habitual modes of thinking about race and gender in (re)constituting the white historical self within a context of intersecting identities. As Yancey (2008) asserts, for whites, engaging in a form of relationality requires a suspension of self-certainty and other-blaming.

Future avenues for this research could enhance our knowledge on white-male elite talk on diversity and leadership. As cultural diversity and effective diversity management become essential in the workplace (C. D. Johnson, 2008), the need to reexamine diversity training programs in ensuring that participants are developing the essential skills and competencies required to be effective remains paramount. It is now known that diversity can have both positive and negative effects on organizations (Richard, Murthi, & Ismail, 2008). While scholars believe that diversity creates a competitive advantage in the global

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<sup>28</sup> I received the most resistance from audience members at the Diversity Summit when I made arguments relating to history in assuming that the audience would be ready to engage this discussion.

marketplace, such advantages are tempered by potential problems associated with lower attachment and discrimination among culturally diverse workers (Stauffer & Buckley, 2005). Although there are many positive and negative effects of diversity training, relatively little is known about what works and why as scholars and trainers have only scratched the surface of what needs to come from diversity training workshops. To be sure, in this study, many white-male elites appeared ambivalent and uncertain about learning tactics and their ability to talk about diversity with employees without much conceptual understanding of benefits of diversity training. Therefore, future research must rethink the process and content in diversity-training programs, in considering exposure to multiple ways of thinking about effective diversity training as well as emphasizing the interpersonal or bottom-line benefits of diversity-training programs.

In addition, institutional structures are often raced and gendered—e.g., the impact of welfare policies on women and the impact of the criminal justice system on black men (Collins, 1998a). By identifying race, class, and gender as influencing the experiences of persons of color and white women, scholars have been able to theorize on the impact of institutional practices of patriarchy and racism (see Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). In the same way, race, gender, class, and sexuality are simultaneously intersecting categories in the experiences of white-male elites. Historical patterns of economic prosperity embedded in structural racist and sexist politics have systematically impacted the social status of white male elites. The ascendance of white males in society is best viewed in a theoretical context that includes the intersecting forces of institutional racism, gender inequalities, social class relations and heteronormativity. Intersectionality, as a theoretical concept, is important in understanding white male elites' experiences of

leadership. In linking white male elite discourses with power and privilege, intersectionality provides an approach that may help to explain more nuanced processes within the discourse of white male elites that lead to expanding on the impact of institutionalized racism, gender inequalities, heterosexism, social class relations, and global economies. Even more, an intersectional analysis is also important in providing attention to the effect of historical and social progress in understanding the peculiarities of human experience of race, gender, class, sexuality and other identity categories at the individual and/or collective level. Although, my dissertation examines discourses of race and gender by white male elites, it is also important to extend my research to include understandings on how discourses of white males in leadership positions actively engage with constraints of social structures and the transformation of systems of domination. In addition, research could reflect on the various features and functions of discourse in providing a progressive account of white masculinity as well. That is, we examine what a progressive white masculinity looks like when studying up.

Research must also continue to contribute to studies on men and masculinity by articulating similarities and differences between constructions of white and subordinated masculinities. In this sense, I propose conducting face-to-face interviews with male leaders who occupy spaces within subordinated masculinities. Researchers could benefit from considering the perspectives and experiences of men of color in leadership positions in their organizations; as it is essential to also examine their discourses on diversity, leadership, and success to understand how they construct discourses of masculinity within contemporary multicultural context. Future research should engage men of color

in discussions on the ongoing challenges in understanding how they influence the way society may perceive struggles of race, gender and diversity in the workplace.

### Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in this study. First, the number of participants limited this study. More research participants are needed to yield a grounded theory of white masculinity in understanding if findings from this study hold true across white-male elites. Second, this study reports findings from white-male elites' constructions of race, gender, and sexuality—although a greater emphasis on discourses of heterosexuality is needed. This study provides a foundation for examining white masculinity, yet, future studies must examine how these men also maintain common individualistic and capitalist perspectives, and express ideas on success, progress, and on history that are important to our understanding of white masculinity. There is still much to learn about leaders' discursive representations of intersections, which may profoundly influence theorizing on organizational leadership.

Third, this study is limited in that it does not consider in detail how to engage difficult conversations on race and gender within an interracial context. This study provides important implications for considering the need to think about how different systems of power relate to each other as leaders and I effectively negotiate and manage huge discourses on race and gender in talking about diversity and leadership. In the presence of a black heterosexual male researcher, white-male elites talk about these topics in various degrees. White-male elites provided very personal information on race and gender in their interviews with me. Furthermore, the contradictions in their statements could be contingent on a lack of experience with engaging in conversations on

these issues. This study has much to add in understanding the process of effective communication behaviors in engaging subject matters that society considers taboo.

## APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Before the interview, I informed each participant that the interview would consist of questions relating to their own ascendance to their current position, characteristics of a leader, diversity, and progress. Questions generated focused discussion with white-male elites on various topics. I used the following protocol for the interview process:

### **FAMILY**

1. Can we start with your family history?
2. Where are you from? What family values influenced who you are?

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF HEROS**

3. Who are your heroes in U.S. history?
4. What values can we learn from these individuals?

### **SUCCESS AND LEADERSHIP**

5. What does success mean to you?
6. What personal barriers prevent someone from becoming successful?
7. What are your ideas on leadership?

### **GENDER**

8. What does it mean to be a self-made man?
9. What do you find has changed or has not changed between men and women in your lifetime?
10. Is the gap between men and women in organizational leadership positions decreasing or increasing?

### **WORKPLACE**

11. What makes your organization successful?
12. What do you consider to be a valuable employee?

### **DIVERSITY**

13. How would you describe diversity in the U.S.?
14. Describe a diversity—training program that you conducted or participated in that you considered successful?

### **SOCIAL PROGRESS**

15. Have women broken the proverbial glass ceiling? If so, what does it mean for men?

- 16 How important was race and sex in the 2008 Democratic primary?
- 17 How do you feel about government-sanctioned programs for social progress such as Affirmative Action?

**LEADER'S ADVICE**

18. What advice would you give someone trying to obtain a position (such as yours) in society?

## ADDENPIX B. PARTICIPANTS

The demographic of the final sample of sixteen men is as follows. Fifteen participants identified themselves as white/Caucasian, and one identified as both Caucasian and Spanish. All participants considered themselves to be in a position of leadership within their organizations. They all reported that they were responsible for hiring and terminating employees, initiating and residing over organizational meetings and protocols, creating an agenda that guides organizational objectives, and producing proposals for leading the organization into the future. I not only gave each participant a pseudonym, but also provided for each participant: ethnicity, education, leadership position, age, and familial background.

Participants provided all of the demographic information. I chose to list demographic features for a variety of reasons. First, all participants self-identified as white/Caucasian. It is not my purpose here to make generalizations across races, but to make inferences about the white-male elites in my study that may have implications for a large sample. Second, education was important to report as an indicator of the learning and knowledge skills that participants obtained during the course of their career. Third, I reported their leadership position (e.g., President, Vice-President, etc) to show that the participant ascended to a position in their organization where they have to engage in defining organizational goals and guiding employees.

Fourth, I reported the age range of the participants, because age often is a factor in understanding levels of maturity and experience. Fifth, I reported their familial life to indicate marital status and number of children. I reported this information because I assume that some answers may be informed by being a father, husband, a leader who

raises a family, and their sexuality. Sixth, I reported their involvement and role in initiating diversity initiatives and workshops in the workplace. I inquired about their involvement in diversity workshops because their participation in these workshops may indicate how much they already know or learned about diversity. The following chart identifies demographic information for each of participant in this study.

APPENDIX C. WHITE-MALE ELITE DEMOGRAPHIC

<b>TABLE 1- WHITE-MALE ELITE DEMOGRAPHICS</b>						
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Organization Location</b>	<b>Family Life</b>	<b>Diversity Workshop</b>
Dean	N/A	PhD	University President *25 years CEO experience	Large City in the Southwest	Married with two children; three grand children	Planning and execution
Denny	55	JD	Partner ( Law Firm)	Large City in the South	Married with one child	Planning and Recruiting
Greg	50	MS	Chief Executive Officer *Heads a staff of 25 *Revenue in the millions	Large City in the Midwest	Married with one adopted child from India *Grew up Poor	Donated \$1 million to recruitment/ retention
Tyler	49	PhD	Associate Provost *Faculty Development	Mid-sized Midwestern City	Married with two children *1 of 10 children	Developing initiatives and measures
James	N/A	PhD	Executive Director *Procures \$3 million annually in grants	Large City in the Southwest	Married with one child	Participant
Paul	N/A	JD	Lead Partner (Law Firm)	Large City in the Southwest	Has one child *Family is active in Politics	No Involvement
James	45	MPA, MBA	Director *\$20 million annual budget *Campaign Manager	Large City in the Southwest	Married with four children *Military family	Participant
Timothy	36	MBA	Vice Chancellor *Procured donations in the millions for the University *Leading the Planning of a new University on the West Coast	Large City on the West Coast	Married with one child *Parents were Peace Corps volunteers	Active recruitment of ethnic minorities
George	49	PhD	Chief Executive Officer *Possible for \$25 million budget *Services a substantial clientele	Large Midwestern City	Married with two adopted children; one who is hearing impaired	Planner
Neal	55	MBA MS	Chief Executive Officer *Staff of 140 *Services 1700 members *Annual Budget of \$68 millions	Large Midwestern City	Married with four children *Grew up in Segregated Community	Planner
Ray	N/A	Psy D	Chief Executive Officer *Services 69,000 members *Has 30 national spokespeople	Large Midwestern City	Married with two children with one grandson	Assisted CEO in efforts to develop workshop
Ronald	25	BA *Working on MS	Director *Attended college with sons of CEOs and a President of the U.S.	Large City in the Southwest	N/A	No Involvement

Mark	43	JD	U.S. Attorney *Oversees staff of attorneys	Large Midwestern City	Married with one child *Grew up Poor	No Involvement
Chandler	60	MPA	Chief Executive Officer *Annual Budget in upper \$20 million range *Services 6,000 members *Political Campaign Manager	Large Midwestern City	Married	Planner
Ryan	51	MA	Executive Vice President *Deliberation of Scientific initiatives	Large City on the East Coast	N/A	Participant
Kevin	N/A	MA	Chief Executive Officer	Large City on the East Coast	Married with two children	Participant

N/A: I did not receive a response from the participant

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