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The Continued Impact of Institutional Racism of African American Professional in Corporate America; the Need for Intra-racial Mentoring

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Keywords: Adult Learning; African American Men in Corporate America; Critical Race Theory; Mentoring; Human Resource Development

Abstract: This qualitative case study explored the continued impact of institutional racism on African American men in corporate America, their survival techniques when racist incidents occurred and the role that mentoring played throughout their careers. The study also delved into the role of mentoring: both formal and informal and more importantly, the need for intra-racial mentoring.

Statement of the Problem

Racism and more importantly the impact of institutional racism continue in all aspects of society including the world of corporations. As stated in the book, *Black Life in Corporate America*:

All along we were concerned that within corporations that there was not a great deal of talk about race. It is mentioned only when it becomes obvious that a racial problem must be dealt with. Subtle racial problems are ignored. Deep-seated ones are often treated as if they don't really exist. (Davis and Glegg, 1982, p.2)

There are obvious racial problems that occur on a daily basis and are overlooked by African Americans in order to get through a typical workday in corporate America. It is up to the African American employee to deal with such attitudes and actions to create ways to survive such attacks.

Because of the fact that institutional racism exists within the workplace, there is the need for assistance in the form of mentorship. Mentoring does not necessarily mean a formalized mentor relationship; informal mentoring opportunities can present themselves as well.

This is a world that they "struggle daily to overcome their outsider status, still shoulder the burden of fighting for acceptance." (Cobbs and Turnock, p. 1). It is the continued impact of institutional racism on African American men and the need for those members of the group who have been successful in corporate America to mentor other African American men who are new to corporate America on the inner workings of the corporate environment.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory: how racism is an everyday occurrence and the tenets of CRT – microaggressions, marginalization and counter-storytelling informed this study and were used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. The participants in this study were asked questions about their experiences with racism in Corporate America, what were their survival techniques in dealing with racism and what role did mentoring play in their professional development.

Research Design

The research design chosen for this study was case study; case study as defined by Merriam and Simpson (2000) is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community (p.108). In using case study, it allowed me to further explore the cases: the continued impact of institutional racism on African American men in corporate America and how mentoring played a role in their survival and professional development.

In this study, seven African American men who have worked in corporate America were interviewed: told their stories and challenges with institutional racism, survival techniques and their views on mentoring (formal and informal).

The four research questions that guided this study were:

- How do African American men deal with institutional racism in their careers in corporate America?
- What are the survival techniques for African American men who spend years in corporate America encountering institutional racism?
- What role did mentoring play for these African American men in their careers in corporate America?
- If they became mentors in corporate America: do they mentor members of your own race and how important is intraracial mentoring?

Findings

The major findings derived from the data were that: (1) racism continues to be a major problem for African American men in corporate America; (2) effective coping strategies were developed over time as it is critical to find ways to take care of their mental and physical health outside of the environment; (3) while mentoring is important; for African American men in corporate America, it continues to be different than their White counterparts. If there were intra-racial mentoring relationships, these relationships were often informal and sometimes secretive however it is imperative to mentor young men from their own ethnic group; and (4) while these men maneuvered through the landscape of the corporate world, opportunities presented themselves from working harder and less about assistance from others.

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