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Beneficiality of Affirmative Action in Corporate America According to African Americans

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Beneficiality of Affirmative Action

in Corporate America

According to African Americans

A Thesis

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II

Beneficiality of Affirmative Action in Corporate America

According to African Americans

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University of Nebraska, 1999

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The purpose of this thesis was to examine whether or not Affirmative Action programs were considered beneficial by African American employees working in corporate America. The focus group method was the means of data collection. Thirty-seven participants from several corporations in a major metropolitan area were audio taped during three separate focus group sessions (an all-male group, an all-female group, and a combined group). Results suggest that the participants feel Affirmative Action is beneficial to African Americans overall in providing the opportunity for consideration of positions within corporate America. Results also indicate participants believe African American women receive more benefit from Affirmative Action than African American men in corporate America and that white women were the main beneficiaries of Affirmative Action.

III

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Affirmative Action Initiative was originated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964(PL 88-352; 42 USC 2000 et seq.) This act protects constitutional rights in public facilities, and public education, and prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs. This act was amended by the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (PL 102-166), which provides for the elimination of discrimination in the private and federal workplace on the basis of sex, race, religion, and national origin.

Furthermore, the Civil Rights Act instructed businesses to actively recruit African Americans and women to fill open positions within their organizations in order to balance employment and ease racial tension in the United States. Although the government's commands received open support from many different organizations and large American corporations, it also received great criticism and dissension from others.

Growing public displeasure with federal support of Affirmative Action has caused several organizations to

abandon their Affirmative Action programs and in 1999,

Affirmative Action programs appear to be facing extinction.

The issue is often debated in political platforms and

several states have voted to ban Affirmative Action

practices in recent years. Various arguments have been

presented both for and against the continuation of such

programs. One of the more prominent arguments for the

continuation of Affirmative Action programs is to promote

"justice." (Peterson, 1994) This argument contends that

Affirmative Action policies provide dignity and respect for

its participants and the society and this is in line with

American's personal values. Therefore, it is fair that

minorities and women are protected and assisted in

obtaining positions within white, male dominated

organizations.

The most prominent argument opposing Affirmative

Action is the "merit" argument (Peterson, 1994). This

argument contends that Affirmative Action is unfair because

individuals are believed to be evaluated more heavily on

the color of their skin than on the credentials they

possess. Due to this unfair system, the most deserving

individuals, regardless of their race, are being passed

over in order for an organization to fill a quota.

It is imperative to examine how Affirmative Action currently impacts the African American community because of the increasing numbers of minorities entering corporate America each year, the static growth of all minority sub-populations in the United States, and the potential tremendous ramifications directly linked to the abolishing of Affirmative Action initiatives.

The present study examines institutional racism in the United States of America, Affirmative Action in America and its effects. More recent literature on African Americans has shown that they possess more dissatisfaction and discontent within their occupations as well as with society (Gary, 1995). Other literature states that African Americans are under irregularly high levels of stress with their occupations as well as society as an aggregate (Austin & Dodge, 1992). Various theories will be presented pertaining to racism, dissatisfaction, anomia, and stress.

Due to the levels of stress African Americans must endure, their overall unhappiness with their occupations and integration into mainstream society, the question is raised whether Affirmative Action programs truly improve African American employment conditions and their overall level of life or whether Affirmative Action programs have

no impact on improving or assisting with changing societal employment norms.

Review of Literature
Society's culture theory and structural perspective theory

Kowalewski, McIlwee, and Prunty (1995) reviewed two competing theories concerning sexism, racism, and establishments. The first theory presented expressed the perspective that a society's culture plays a major role in forming the psychological attitudes of its individual citizens. This theory contended that racism and racial stereotypes have been present throughout the history of the United States and present within the "major agents of socialization" (Kowalewski et al., 1995, p.202). Some of these agents were radio, magazines, television, films, and textbooks. According to Kowalewski et al., the belief that culture is society's driver for racism explains the attitudes and actions of the dominant members of society as well as the attitudes and actions of the subordinate members.

The second theory presented was structural perspective theory. This theory focused on the "relations of political

and economic power among the dominant institutions of society" (Kowalewski et al., 1995, p.203). The Structural Perspective Theory suggested that self-interested groups seek power and privilege by controlling major institutions. This attempt to maintain hegemony causes the dominant group to engage in practices that reduce subordinate's opportunities to enter the domain of power. These reduction practices include direct tactics such as employment discrimination as well as indirect tactics such as supporting cultural values that sanction the status quo.

The concept of cultural hegemony

Lears (1985) examined Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. According to Lears, Gramsci defined cultural hegemony as "the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of their dominate position and function in the world of production."

Gramci's concept furthermore stated the ruling groups impose a direction on social life, and subordinates are

manipulatively persuaded to conform to the dominant fundamental's culture. Lears added that the concept of hegemony must be paired with the notion of domination. Therefore, it is necessary for consent to hegemonic culture and forced compliance to hegemonic culture to coexist.

Lears also expressed that Gramci's concept was not a closed or 'static' system of ruling class domination, but more a society in constant evolution where the creation of counterhegemonies remains a live option. Roger & Simon (1982) stated that hegemony is a process of continuous creation and, due to its massive scale, inevitably will be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop.

The theory of whiteness

Flagg (1995) discussed *whiteness* in corporate America. Whiteness was defined as white people measuring non-whites against norms that reflect behaviors or characteristics associated with whites; non-whites are forced to conform to these unconsciously white expectations or risk an unfavorable evaluation. According to Flagg, whites make decisions totally unconscious of their whiteness. Within the article, a story of two sisters was shared. One sister, (Yvonne) attended Princeton University, graduated

with honors, and received a Kellogg fellowship to pursue her MBA from Northwestern University. She became an accountant at Goodson Badwin & Indiff, a major accounting firm with more than five hundred accountants internationally. Due to Yvonne's success with the firm, she was the first African American in line to become a regional supervisor. In this article, Yvonne was described as "comfortable" with the "white"(2021) manner of speech, dress, and hairstyle. Her personal attitudes were also in line with her firm's. Despite Yvonne's glowing reviews and quantifiable contributions to the company, she was passed-over for the supervisor position. The reasoning for her not being promoted was her client's complaints about over billing for hours on projects (a practice considered common with the accounting industry as well as with Yvonne's peers within the firm). This blemish on Yvonne's record essentially destroyed her potential for advancement within Godson, Badwin, and Indiff.

Yvonne's younger sister, Keisha, attended Howard University and majored in biology. Keisha was very Afro centric in her attitude and attire. After college, Keisha worked as the only black scientist for a firm that developed agricultural products. Keisha also excelled in

her job but she approached it with a much less
assimilationist style. Initially, Keisha's approach to her
work had no impact on her performance review. However, when
her firm began to experience growth and she was in line for
a new division head positions due to her performance and
abilities, Keisha was also held back when all other
original team members were promoted. The reasoning for
Keisha's lack of advancement was that Keisha "lacked the
personal qualities that a successful manager needs. Keisha
was considered, 'just too different'" (Flagg, 1995 p.
2027).

The glass ceiling

The Glass Ceiling is defined as, "the invisible
barrier that hinders (individuals) from obtaining top
positions" (Hymowitz and Schellardt, 1986, p. 1). Due to
the glass ceiling, the most deserving candidates do not
always get the job. Things like nepotism, brown-nosing,
bad luck, club ties, and simple discrimination continue to
get in the way (Dunkel, Jones, Nelson, and Burgower, 1995).

Institutional racism: Prerequisites, freezing, and mapping

Although the United States is a nation where multi-
ethnicity and cultural diversity are integral attributes of
its character, recent data and racial incidents show that

African Americans continue to experience racial

discrimination in many areas of society (Ezorsky, 1991).

Racism is a hateful and callous type of behavior that is

exhibited in many facets of our society. American society

persists in exhibiting ethnic and racial stereotypes even

when facing social change. These stereotypes continually

affect the behavior of individuals (Gilbert, 1951).

Stereotypes are held with "deep and emotional, indeed

seemingly irrational conviction by many citizens" (Katz,

1991). Institutional causes and consequences of racial

exploitation have existed since the seventeenth century.

In fact, it has been argued that the entire social,

cultural, legal, and economic infrastructure of the United

States was built on the key reality of racial

discrimination (Cose, 1992).

Bullock and Rodgers (1976) presented a modified style

of racism, institutional racism (also known as

institutional subordination). Institutional racism was a

less obvious style of discrimination. It has been defined

as "placing or keeping persons in a position or status of

inferiority by means of attitudes, actions, or

institutional structures which do not use color itself as

the subordinating mechanism but instead use other

mechanisms related to color" (Downs, 1970, p. 79).

Prerequisites. Bullock and Rodgers (1976) presented three types of institutional racism in their article. The first and most ubiquitous type of racism is the creation of *prerequisites* or preconditions that exclude innumerable amounts of African Americans for no apparent reason.

Direct economic prerequisites were described as the exclusion of African Americans from many urban neighborhoods. Due to African American families earning low to moderate incomes in the 1970's, they were priced out of the "nicer" urban neighborhoods. The term *crowding* was introduced and defined as "population density in black areas of cities" (Bullock and Rodgers, 1976 p. 213). The city of Atlanta is an example of the effects of crowding. Atlanta is a city with a majority African American population. However, the African American population only occupies twenty percent of the city's land. The long lasting impact of crowding has been the remaining segregation of many state's racial communities.

Freezing. The second type of institutional racism presented was named *freezing* and said to occur when standards (rights) were rigorously applied to all applicants but only after most whites qualified during a

period of less stringent requirements. An example of freezing came after the 1964 Civil Rights Act allowed African American men the right to vote if they could demonstrate a sixth grade reading ability. The effect of this law was to keep literate African Americans from voting while allowing illiterate whites to vote.

Mapping. The final type of institutional racism presented was named *mapping.* Mapping is the apportioning of African Americans into separate districts to weaken their political position. The example presented by Bullock & Rodgers (1976) focused on Alabama in 1965. Due to the use of mapping in Alabama in 1965, African Americans only received three representatives in the Alabama House when the population of Alabama was twenty-six-percent African American. In 1974, when a Federal Court discontinued mapping in Alabama, thirteen African American representatives were voted into the State House.

Law, Employment and Discrimination

Merit is defined as a tangible quality which can be loosely described. Merit is mostly the bundle of ability and skills that individuals possess and upon which the allocation of opportunities and rewards should be based (Rosenfeld, 1990). Haney and Hurtado (1994) described

merit as measurable and justifiable for job advancement;
merit was also considered the most appropriate
determination of position advancement.

The fairness heurisitc. According to Peterson (1994),
fairness is an individual's impression of the general
fairness of an organization, authority, or policy, which is
used as a major criterion for support or opposition to the
policy. Individuals are highly attuned to a policy's
fairness based on: (1) how well the procedure shows respect
and dignity for its participants (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and
(2) its congruity with personal values (Rasinski,1987).

Fairness is the heuristic most closely in support of
Affirmative Action policies (Peterson, 1994). "Empirical
support for this theory can be interpreted as supportive of
the affective explanations of Affirmative Action"
(Peterson, 1994, p.102).

The tradition of meritocracy. Affirmative Action
however violates meritocracy. Kleugel & Smith (1986)
define meritocracy as the American tradition of believing
that people should succeed in life through their own
ability and hard work. Their success should not be based
on who they are or whom they know (Kleugel & Smith, 1986).
Although Americans express opposition to Affirmative Action

policies, they express support for the principle of racial equality (Schuman, Steeh & Bobo, 1985). In American culture, racial differences remain salient. It is a feature that is complex, baffling, and seemingly resistant to change.

In spite of the fact that many Americans wish to ignore or deny the continuing impact of racism in this culture, discussion of race issues permeate American public discourse (Levernz, 1996).

Americans' arguments concerning achieving one's objectives often require sacrificing or seriously compromising other important objectives. Making public policy choices, in brief, means making tradeoffs (Snidermen & Tetlock, 1991). And to support a particular policy means "trading" the fulfillment of one cherished value for another (Tetlock, 1987).

Social representation theory addresses the structural barriers to minority underemployment through remedies like Affirmative Action. However, these types of programs have endured extreme scrutiny and litigation recently (Haney and Hurtado, 1994). The congressional opponents of the Civil Rights bill repeatedly insert merit as their argument in an attempt to defeat the bill. Their argument was that new

legislation would disown the time-honored principle of merit-based hiring and promotion in favor of "quotas". Proposition 209 (a proposal in California to end the use of Affirmative Action practices) and other arguments have been presented to dispute the position of Affirmative Action.

Affirmative Action

Affirmative Action is arguably the most controversial and divisive public policy of the 1980's and 1990's. Opinion polls have shown support for the policy well below a majority consensus and it has remained low for over a ten-year period (Kleugel & Smith, 1986).

Affirmative Action is more than a single program, it is a set of policies under which many individual procedures fall. Among each individual procedure is one common factor, the inclusion of categorical membership (race, sex or physical disability) where rare societal resources such as college admission or employment are allocated (Peterson, 1994).

In 1993, Cornel West discussed Affirmative Action practices in the United States in a book entitled *"Race Matters."* According to West, Affirmative Action is a redistributive compromise and concession from big business and big government. Affirmative Action was obtained by

American progressives and liberals (individuals who push for substantive redistributive measures that make opportunities available to the "have nots" in society) and should be viewed as neither a major solution to poverty nor a sufficient means to equality. It should be seen as a device that ensures discriminatory practices against women and people of color are diminished.

In "Race Matters" Cornel West presents the nihilism issue in Black America. According to West, nihilism is "the philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards of authority; it is, far more the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaningless, hopelessness, and most important, lovelessness." (West,1993, p. 14) Today in the United States, West sees the threat of nihilism more powerful than ever because of the lack of black leadership and the saturation of market forces and moralities in black life.

The Gallup Poll Monthly (March 1995) studied public sentiment concerning the Affirmative Action issue. Gallup surveyed 1003 adults by way of telephone. Two questions were asked. The first was whether the public generally approves or disapproves of the use of affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to women and

racial minorities in such areas as obtaining jobs and promotions.

The second question was whether the public generally approved or disapproved of the use of quotas in award jobs or school admissions or if they approved of Affirmative Action programs only if they did not use quotas.

According to Gallup, 50 percent approve and 45 percent disapprove of Affirmative Action for women, while 40 percent approve and 56 percent disapprove of Affirmative Action for racial minorities. 57 percent of Americans said that Affirmative Action programs were not needed for women while 56 percent said that Affirmative Action programs were not needed for racial minorities. Furthermore, the poll showed that 50 percent approved and 40 percent disapproved of using quotas for women and 40 percent approved and 56 percent disapproved of using quotas for racial minorities.

Institutional Racism

Perceived Discrimination Theory (Sanchez & Brock, 1996) is specifically designed to measure the effects of ethnic and minority status. Previous research has focused on the correlates of self-reported ethnicity and has ignored the method in which ethnicity-related stressors have influenced employee outcomes. Furthermore, according

to Sanchez & Brock, there is no data available concerning whether or not ethnically relevant stressors have effects on employees beyond those of all employees.

The mistreatment and racism that both African Americans and women have faced has caused them to exhibit a higher level of discontent (Braddock, Crain, McPortland and Dawkins, 1986).

In 1995, Ramey conducted a study of African American women as administrators in higher education. The study's purpose was to determine if any perceived obstacles or barriers were faced by these women as they advanced to their present positions. This study found that the most often cited obstacles or barriers to advancement were: racism, fifty-three percent of respondents; sexism, forty-one percent of the respondents; and family issues four percent. Some of the other cited obstacles or barriers were perception of incompetence, lack of authority, limited opportunities for networking, and isolation.

Institutional racism has also been identified in the pursuit of education. Racism in classrooms has been tied to biases in ideology. These ideological biases are blatant (Rahim, 1990). Knowledge is tied to Christianity, Anglo-Saxon culture, discipline, and social order (Rahim,

1990). Benevolent multiculturalism views the school as an alien culture for many students (Gibson, 1984). The North American school system was built on a homogeneous model of society that demands students to conform to this model to benefit from educational programs (Gibson, 1984).

The Equity Theory predicts that both negative and positive inequity will produce distress in the worker, which he or she will seek to reduce. Inequity has been studied in various experiments. Blacks' discontent was studied by Austin and Dodge (1992). According to Austin and Dodge, African Americans exceeded whites in financial dissatisfaction in all nine years of a nine year study. In five of the nine years, African Americans expressed more job-dissatisfaction. African Americans' were characterized by "anomia of despair and distrust, and of job and financial dissatisfaction" (p. 581).

In a study of job satisfaction affected by inequity (Perry, 1992) African Americans were used to test the equity theory regarding "distress." African Americans were asked to evaluate their job satisfaction in terms of treatment and pay. Perry found that there was a "direct relationship between job satisfaction and job rewards" (p. 569). African Americans felt that they were not receiving

rewards correlate to their performance. This negatively affected the African American workers' job satisfaction.

Burke (1991) studied the work experiences of minority managers and professionals concerning their satisfaction and issues with employment. Within the study, Burke examined three categories--the experiences and treatment of the minorities within the organization, the employees' personal experiences and demographic variables. Burke's study found that a consistent pattern was present across the three minority work experience measures that minorities would have to develop behavioral styles consistent with corporations.

Minorities and stress

In 1995, a study examined the amount of stress involved in the work of police executives was conducted by Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson. This study found that police chiefs who were minorities as well as long time members of the force experienced higher levels of stress than their white counterparts. Ethnicity was also measured as an independent variable in this study. Alone, ethnicity was not a significant correlation to their role's stress. However, the addition of work stress made the relationship a negative stressor.

Sanchez & Brock (1990) studied the perceived discrimination among Hispanic employees. They hypothesized that perceived discrimination would adversely contribute to employee outcomes going above and beyond other work stressors such as role conflict and ambiguity. Furthermore, the effects of perceived discrimination on employee outcomes will be moderated by salary level: perceived discrimination theory will affect those with high salaries less than those with low salaries. The study found that, "A culturally relevant work stressor, perceived discrimination contributes to employee outcomes above and beyond that of work stressors" (Sanchez & Brock, 1990, p. 713).

The Social Identity Theory states that "people classify themselves into social categories by prototypical characteristics drawn from the category members. Individuals who perceive they are treated unfavorably because of their membership in a social category would experience feelings of inadequacy and personal conflict" (Sanchez & Brock, 1990, p. 705).

Therefore, perceived discrimination represents an individual's perception that selective and differential treatment is occurring because of the individual's ethnic

group membership. Evans and Evans (1995) performed a study on middle class African American men, their stressors, and their coping techniques. As a result of their study, they found that job-related stressors were ranked extremely high among African American males as a cause for depression.

Austin & Dodge (1992) published a study on African Americans and women and their levels of despair and dissatisfaction in the United States. This study examined the indicators of the anomia, despair and distrust, and of job and financial dissatisfaction. The study found that African Americans and women exceeded whites in discontent in most instances.

According to Austin & Dodge, the Federal Administration showed a relationship with job dissatisfaction among African Americans. During the Nixon/Ford, and Reagan years of Administration, African Americans were more discontent with their employment. However, during the Carter Administration, African Americans were much more satisfied with their employment. White women seemed to be more in line with the Ford /Nixon and Reagan Administrations. According to Austin, this was due to white women having race in common with the Presidents.

Gary (1995) studied African American men's perceptions of racial discrimination. This study measured racial discrimination by several independent demographic and socio-cutural variables. The study found that racial discrimination was most frequently perceived in the workplace.

Purpose of This Study

In the review of relevant literature, it has been found that the Structural Perspective Theory suggests self interested groups seek power and privilege by controlling major institutions. This attempt to maintain hegemony causes the dominant group to engage in practices that reduce subordinate's opportunities to enter the domain of power. Some of these power reduction practices include direct tactics such as employment discrimination as well as indirect tactics such as supporting cultural values that sanction the status quo. To combat the control of these dominant self-interest groups, Affirmative Action practices have been initiated.

Merit has been defined as mostly the bundle of ability and skills that individuals possess and upon which the allocation of opportunities and rewards should be based (Rosenfeld, 1990). Upon this definition of merit the

American tradition of *meritocracy* is based. The American

tradition believes that people should succeed in life

through their own ability and hard work. Their success

should not be based on who they are or whom they know.

Because of this tradition, Affirmative Action meets

resistance in America.

Due to African American's perceived discrimination in

employment in corporate America as well as a lack of equity

in compensation and appreciation, African Americans exhibit

more stress and overall dissatisfaction with employment

opportunities. This has raised the questions which form

the basis for this study.

Specifically, the purpose of this study is to

determine whether a group of African American corporate

professionals perceive Affirmative Action as beneficial in

their gaining employment and increasing their opportunities

for success. To examine this issue the following

generalized research questions are raised:

R1:   *Do African Americans feel Affirmative Action is*

   beneficial or not beneficial?

R2:   *Will African Americans express fairness as the basis*

   for supporting Affirmative Action rather than

   any other argument?

R3: *Do African American men feel Affirmative Action has assisted them less in obtaining their positions than it has assisted African American women?*

R4: *Overall, do African Americans feel that white women have benefited more from Affirmative Action than African Americans?*

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

In order to probe the mental processes of corporate African Americans and their opinions on whether Affirmative Action initiatives are beneficial to their career's advancement, the focus group method of research was elected. Focus groups gain access to important qualitative information other data collection methods do not readily provide (Quible, 1998).

According to O'Donnel (1988) focus groups have become an increasingly popular method of creating qualitative information for two reasons. First, they provide information that is received in individual interviews. Therefore qualitative information provides broad-spectrum information due to a setting that encourages spontaneous and candid reactions. Secondly, for certain research topics there are no other qualitatively valid or reliable methods of data collection available.

The focus group process

The focus group is a moderator-directed discussion of a particular topic with a homogeneous grouping of participants (Linda, 1982). The common focus group size is eight to 12 individuals; however, the outside limits are

six to 12 participants (O'Donnel, 1988).

Participant selection.   In order to develop a
successful focus group, the participants selected for the
study must share a common denominator such as affiliation
with an organization, interest in the topic being
discussed, use of the same product or service or an ethnic
tie to a select background (O'Donnel,1988). The
individuals may or may not know other participants on the
panel but to be productive, they must be willing to serve
on the session (Welch, 1985).

The moderator's responsibilities.   According to
Quible (1998) the moderator is critical to the success of
the focus group process. Often, a moderator is a
professional consultant or has experience as a focus group
leader. Therefore the moderator and participants will most
likely be unfamiliar to one another. The moderator's
primary role is to "promote interaction, probing for
details when need arises, and to ensure the discussion
stays focused on the topic of interest (Quible, 1998 p.30).
The moderator does not need to be an expert in the topic
being discussed but must have a sufficient understanding of
the topic to conduct the session (O'Donnel, 1988). The
moderator must also possess an empathetic attitude and an

effective questioning style that will enable him/her to impartially participate in the group without leading the participants to the desired response (Quible, 1998).

The affirmative action focus group

For the purposes of this study three focus groups were devised for a dialogue on Affirmative Action. The three focus groups were composed of one group of twelve males, one group of eight females and one combined group of four males and five females. These corporate African Americans were solicited to participate in the focus group process and the actual individuals who were selected to participate in each of the focus groups were selected randomly from a composite collection of participants. The focus groups were composed of individuals at comparable levels and years of experience from various corporations in the Denver, Colorado area.

The individuals solicited to participate in this study were all college graduates working in for-profit organizations in the Denver metropolitan area. All participants worked in their corporations for a minimum of two years and were either executive-level employees or management level employees. Production workers were not solicited for this study. The age of the participants or

the length of time they have worked within their

corporation was not heavily weighed in their solicitation

for participation.

The solicitation process. To solicit participation

for this study, letters were sent to large banking,

communication, insurance, health, and technical

corporations in the Denver area asking for their assistance

for in completing this study. (A sample solicitation letter

has been included as Appendix A.) Public appeals were also

made to individuals at two churches in the Denver

Metropolitan area. Personal calls were made to corporate

African American individuals the study administrator

currently knew in the Denver Metropolitan area. In the

solicitation letter, the participation of the contacted

individual was requested. Their assistance was requested

in identifying other corporate African Americans that they

knew to participate so that the study can be completed.

The solicitation letter contained a small form requesting

the respondent's name, title, name of company, number of

years within the corporation, age, and sex. There were

also spaces for the names, phone numbers and addresses of

other possible participants. The solicitation process

commenced on October, 9, 1998 and was completed on October,

26, 1998. In all, there were thirty-seven respondents.
The most effective method of response was personal appeal
yielding 46 percent (17 participants) of all respondents.
Participant identified individuals supplied 30 percent (11
participants) of respondents. Church appeals yielded 22
percent (8 participants) and solicitation letters to
corporations yielded 3 percent (1 participant).

The participants were divided by sex and numbers were
assigned to both males and females ascending from one to
thirty-seven. From the composite numbers were circled
randomly by an assistant to fill slots for all three focus
groups and the participants were then contacted to schedule
a meeting date. For individuals that were unable to meet
with the majority group, an alternate was selected from the
remaining unselected participants.

The all-female focus group and the combined focus
group were held at the study administrator's residence and
the all male focus group was conducted in a church hall on
a weeknight. The duration of the focus groups averaged
around 1 hour and twenty minutes. Prior to starting each
focus group, the group participants were seated along side
one another and instructed not to divulge their identity or
employer. Seats were not assigned and several individuals

were believed to not be acquainted with each focus group's nucleus.

Questions within the study. In order to examine the research questions presented in the previous section, a set of questions was created to assess the participant's perceptions. The questions asked focussed on four main issues:

- Whether Affirmative Action programs are beneficial for African Americans in their pursuit of employment in large corporations.

- Whether Affirmative Action is fair in the employees pursuit of a position within a corporation given the merit driven structure of corporations in America.

- Whether men and women feel they have benefited from Affirmative Action programs equally in their career's advancement.

- Whether African Americans feel that Affirmative Action programs have been as beneficial to them as they have to other races.

The specific questions asked are included as Appendix B.

Evaluating the participant's responses. The responses received from the participants were recorded on audio tape

during the interviews so that the flow of the dialogue was not affected.

After completing all three interviews, the audio tapes were played back and each focus group's majority answer to each question asked was recorded. Explanations and dissenting opinions were also recorded to track the frequency of a particular response.

CHAPTER 3

Results

A table summarizing general types of individual participant responses is given in Appendix C. Specific, detailed responses given to the focus group questions were as follows.

To your knowledge, have you benefited directly from affirmative action programs? Where and how?

The male group (N=12) unanimously answered that they had directly benefited from Affirmative Action programs. The most common response from the male group was that they had benefited from Affirmative Action because without Affirmative Action programs they would not have been considered for their current positions. Four of the twelve males stated that their Affirmative Action benefit was greater in allowing them to complete college because, after receiving their school training, they were competitive for their positions in corporate America. One of the male group respondents stated that the benefit for him was only through his college experience because he is certain he was selected for his position due to his qualifications and education.

The female focus group was composed of eight

participants. Of the eight participants, seven felt that they had benefited from Affirmative Action in obtaining their current positions. The most universal response from the female group was that Affirmative Action programs have forced quotas and the quotas are quite often the reason African Americans are hired. One woman did not feel Affirmative Action had personally assisted in her career. She believed that her employment and advancement was based solely on her merit and accomplishments. She felt that Affirmative Action did not benefit her in college because she did not receive any scholarships or assistance through school.

In the combined group (N=9), the respondents unanimously felt they had benefited form Affirmative Action Programs. Again, the most common response was that without Affirmative Action programs corporations would not consider African Americans for corporate positions. There were no dissenting opinions voiced in this group.

Does your employer have a documented affirmative action program?

    a. How do they enforce their program?

    b. Would you consider their practice effective? How?

Nine of the male group participants said that their

corporations had documented Affirmative Action policies.

Two of the participants said that their corporations had

Equal Employment Officers (EEO) that tracked employment

trends within their organizations. Two participants voiced

no responses concerning documented policies.

None of the male respondents believed that their

organizations had "effective" Affirmative Action policies.

The most common response was that corporations maintain the

minimum level of minority employees. Participants also

believed that African American employees were only hired

for the financial benefits involved. Male participants

discussed government funds given to corporations for each

African American employee hired.

The female focus group also stated that most of their

organizations either had a written affirmative Action

policy or EEO officials but none of the women believed

their organizations' Affirmative Action practices were

effective. Two female respondents stated that they

believed the policies were cosmetic. They did not see any

progress in their organizations that corresponded to their

companies' policies. One female respondent, an attorney,

stated that considering all of the competent minority

attorneys she knew, she had an extremely difficult time

understanding why there were so few minorities in comparison to the number of white attorneys her office employs.

The combined group also stated that their corporations did not effectively enforce the policies they had documented for their organizations. Four of the nine participants in this group were not aware of any documented Affirmative Action policies within their organizations. A female respondent said, "African Americans are only appeased to allow them (corporations) to conduct business as usual." This comment was agreed to by all respondents. A respondent in this group also said the African Americans were not significant enough to corporate America for corporate America to recognize and consider African Americans without legal ramifications.

In your opinion, are affirmative action programs beneficial? What makes it beneficial?

The male group unanimously agreed that Affirmative Action was beneficial due to the opportunities it provided African Americans. Stating their belief that less than 15% of the entire population was African American, the male group felt that white America would naturally employ white America because they control the corporate world. Eight

males agreed that without Affirmative Action programs mandated by the government, they would not have any of the opportunities that are available and without a doubt would not have any position comparable to the ones they held within their organizations.

Two of the respondents said that the benefit of Affirmative Acton is more prevalent in the pursuit of a college degree. They believed that the key to advancing in corporate America is college. Race aside, these two respondents believed the paramount benefit of Affirmative Action is the opportunity to attend integrated colleges.

The mixed group overall felt that the opportunity to be considered for corporate positions was the main benefit of Affirmative Action. Both a male and female respondent felt that the only reason Affirmative Action programs were beneficial was because they were protected through the government. Without government intervention, the Affirmative Action program would have failed. Now, because of the buying power of African Americans, it makes good business sense to hire African Americans. A banker stated that his organization places minority employees in minority branches to entice the minority

community to bank with his organization because African Americans are working within the community. However, it is very difficult for those minority bankers to be promoted to downtown or suburban white branches regardless of their ability or seniority because they are merely marketing ploys and the bank has no other desire for such employees.

What, if any, are the cons that you see with affirmative action programs?

The male group felt that the main con of Affirmative Action is the lack of African American dependence on African Americans. With integration into mainstream white society, the male group believed that the strength of the African American Community was lost. Instead of African American teachers, who had a vested interest in African American children's education because they were the future of their shared race, white teachers were now teaching black children. These white teachers did not particularly have as great an interest in the success of the African American children's education as the black teachers did because they did not share the same heritage. Economically, the male group felt that the loss of the African American business community was also a con of

Affirmative Action because African American businesses today would be more independent and more advanced than they currently are because African Americans would have built and cultivated their own corporations instead of going to work for the white corporate firms.

One male participant believed that the black community was also lost because African Americans began to integrate their residences with white residences and suburbs as well as their work therefore, he believed that the con of Affirmative Action was the loss of the African American communities identity. Another of the male participants believed the con of Affirmative Action was the white perception that African Americans were taking all the jobs away from them. In actuality, African Americans are still being hired into corporate America disproportionately less in terms of the overall population of the United States.

The final statement made expressing the cons of Affirmative Action was that due to the assistance of such policies, African Americans may believe they are inferior to whites because they are asking for assistance in providing opportunities for employment.

The female group believed that a major con of Affirmative Action was the stigma associated with the

program. With African Americans, regardless of your
credentials or expertise, you have only been hired due to
your race and the need for more of you to fulfill
Affirmative Action guidelines. One participant stated that
the stigma associated with Affirmative Action is present
from high school through the corporation and that corporate
African Americans continue to carry undue stress because
the stigma. Another participant added that the stigma
associated with Affirmative Action constantly forces
African Americans to prove their worthiness to belong and
forces African Americans to constantly change jobs trying
to find a position that they do not feel the need to prove
their worthiness for the position. Also, according to the
participant, this stigma causes corporate African Americans
to die sooner, have high blood pressure and more health
issues.

One participant believed that the con of Affirmative
Action is the lack of assistance in maneuvering through the
corporate system. According to the participant, quite
often few African Americans are employed in any one
company. Because there are so few in the organization,
there are not adequate mentors to assist the young
employees in learning how to cope in the corporate world.

The mixed group felt that the con to Affirmative Action was the fact that it was a burden as well as an opportunity. One female participant of the group said that as an African American, you have to work at 110 percent at all times. You don't have the luxury of working at even 99 percent at any time because you will be evaluated even more harshly than your white counterparts. Another female participant said that quite often as an African American you have earned your promotion and are performing those job requirements long before you are granted the promotion.

A participant disagreed at calling Affirmative Action a burden. He said that Affirmative Action forces African Americans to excel: "As a black man in America you can not be average and succeed. You must be excellent and I think that is a good thing because it makes us stronger and smarter… If you are white and average, you can do very well and buy a house in suburbia. However, if you are black and average, you will not succeed. If that is a burden, it is a burden I will accept any day because it makes me sharper."

Would you say that affirmative action has been a help or a hindrance to your career?

The male group unanimously felt that Affirmative Action

was the only reason that they were awarded their interviews for the positions they currently held. There were no descenting opinions voiced in the male group.

The female group believed that Affirmative Action has been both a help and a hindrance in their careers. Affirmative Action is again seen as primarily an opportunity maker but according to one participant, the corporation wants you to fail so they can say she/he does not belong and as an African American, you have to be physically and mentally tough enough to endure the issues that arise due to your employment. One participant did not feel Affirmative Action programs had any bearing on her gaining her current position.

The mixed group unanimously agreed that without Affirmative Action they would not have the opportunities they currently have. Many members stated that Affirmative Action has opened many doors and is a successful method of providing equity in hiring practices and because of its success as a program it is now under so much scrutiny.

Has it been a help or a hindrance to your career's advancement opportunities? How?

Many of the male group participants felt that the success or advancement of an individual had nothing to do

with Affirmative Action but the individual's ability to perform job tasks and gain the respect of coworkers and employers. Affirmative Action was again referred to as the opportunity for employment or a device to level the playing field so that all individuals had a fair chance at employment. The success or advancement is purely considered the responsibility of the individual. The "glass ceiling" was referenced by one participant. He believed that Affirmative Action may assist in reaching as far as middle management however, if it does, you will not advance any further due to the "glass ceiling".

The female group overall felt that Affirmative Action was a help to their careers. Many believed the same as the male group, without Affirmative Action, they would not have the same prospects for a career and certainly would not have the positions they presently hold. One participant felt that Affirmative Action was not helpful toward her career. She stated that because she paid her own way through college and was hired for her credentials into her position that she did not feel assisted by Affirmative Action. Although she did not believe it directly assisted her, she did think that prior Affirmative Action work and Affirmative Action policies being in effect was a

contributor to her employment.

The mixed group shared different opinions. A few male participants agreed that without Affirmative Action, they would not have been promoted into their positions even after they had been hired into the company and excelled in their positions. One female participant stated that she felt Affirmative Action was assisting white women in advancing with her employer. "More white women have advanced and been hired at my job than any other so-called minority group over the past few years."

Do you support affirmative action programs in corporate America? Why?

The male group unanimously supported Affirmative Action programs overall. One participant believed that Affirmative Action should be abandoned once the United States has integrated to the point that African Americans are in a position to continue hiring other African Americans and are not threatened with the loss of government controlled Affirmative Action policies. The participant felt that Affirmative Action is a policy as destructive as the food stamp policy because if African Americans are not forced away from Affirmative Action, African Americans will not be able to successfully compete

in the white dominated market without stigmatization.
Furthermore, the participant felt that it is unfair for
people with lesser qualifications who have not attempted to
achieve a higher level of excellence and a betterment of
themselves to receive the same benefits as the individuals
who struggled and worked to gain worthiness of such
accomplishments. This was referred to in the male group as
the "microwave age" where the individuals do not want to
strive for accomplishments but receive the rewards of those
accomplishments now.

The female group supported Affirmative Action
programs. One participant stated that Affirmative Action
opens a door for minorities to gain employment, however, it
also introduces the opportunity to hire non-qualified
minorities which will effect the perception of all the
minorities within the organization. According to another
participant, Affirmative Action forces corporations to
diversify by the command of the government. The female
group unanimously agreed that although the corporation
receives both government funding and excellent employees,
the diversification process would not continue in corporate
America if Affirmative Action were abolished.

The mixed group unanimously supported Affirmative

Action. A male participant shared that he believed corporate America is now hiring so many white women because by expanding the base of minorities to choose from to include white women, they reduce the number of blacks and other minorities they need to employ to maintain government regulations.

What is one word that would summarize your reason for supporting Affirmative Action?

The words presented from the male group were; equality, slavery, and opportunity. The reason given for the word slavery was that if it was not for programs like Affirmative Action, white America would like to reinstitute slavery.

For the female group the words given were; tenacity, opportunity, and experience. The reason given for choosing the word tenacity was: "If you are strong enough and determined enough to strive for success, then the opportunity should be available for you to achieve success."

The mixed group gave words as well as names to summarize their reason to support Affirmative Action. The words were: opportunity and equity. Reginald Lewis and Clarence Thomas were the two people named. In explaining

the reason behind identifying Reginald Lewis, the participant said that Reginald Lewis would have never had the opportunity to enter Harvard if not for Affirmative Action. However, because he was accepted into Harvard Law School, Reginald Lewis gained access to several opportunities and became a billionaire through many business deals he completed.

How do you feel about the argument made for abolishing affirmative action due to the use of merit in corporate America?

One participant of the male group felt that in time, Affirmative Action should be abolished and all races should compete on merit but not until such time that minorities would survive the change. According to another participant, it seems impossible to abolish Affirmative Action because white America controls all the wealth and positions and without Affirmative Action, there is no legal remedy to their monopolizing all corporate opportunities. The male group also felt that there are not enough minorities in management level positions. Minorities are more often hired for the labor-intensive positions but not the management level positions.

The female group believed that without Affirmative

Action white America would not hire African Americans because they are a threat to the white male's job. One participant stated that racism is still prevalent in America and that Affirmative Action programs must remain intact until racism has effectively been run out of America. Also, until there are more minorities in executive-level positions, it is important for affirmative action to remain intact.

The mixed group was adamantly against the thought of abolishing Affirmative Action policies in corporate America. One female participant expressed that as it stands, the corporate environment currently uses the buddy system and many individuals are hired due to their acquaintances. If Affirmative Action was abolished, there would be no guideline forcing corporations to consider minorities for positions. As an example, the female participant who is a civil engineer stated that in her office, a white woman hired to work on an engineering project has her degree in physical fitness. According to the participant, the rationale given for hiring the woman was her history of academic excellence. The participant stated that regardless of the academic credentials of a black applicant, without a civil engineering degree, she or

he would not be considered for any position within the firm. Furthermore, according to the participant, the white woman is a friend of the boss.

A male participant compared Affirmative Action to farmer subsidy. According to him, Affirmative Action is the same as farmer subsidy, the only difference is that farmer subsidy is a benefit for the majority white farmer when Affirmative Action is for the minorities of America.

As a Black Man/ Women, do you feel you have benefit more from affirmative action than the opposite sex? Why? Can you give me an example of that benefit?

The male group unanimously believed that the African American men benefit less than African American women do because African American women are a double-minority (both a woman and black) and therefore are added assets to their organization. The male group also believed that African American females are not a physical threat to white males and because they are not as physically imposing to the white male as an African American male. One participant felt that the hiring of the African American female over the African American male is another way to control and destroy the black family by not allowing the African American male the opportunity to be the breadwinner and the

leader of his household.

The female group unanimously agreed that they benefit more than the African American male because the African American male is intimidating and threatening to the white male. The African American female is not as feared because she is not as much a threat to white power. There were no descenting opinions.

The mixed group also believed that African American women receive more of a benefit than the black men do again because they are not as physically imposing as African American men. One female participant also stated that she believed that African American women received more of a benefit because they were more open to playing the game and abiding by the rules of corporate America. Black men were not as flexible in that capacity which further increased the African American man's difficulty in surviving and succeeding in corporate America.

What race would you say benefits the most from affirmative action programs today?

What sex of that race do you think benefits the most?

Individuals have stated that white women are the prime beneficiaries of affirmative action, do you agree? Why?

The male group believed that the white women were the

dominant beneficiaries of Affirmative Action. A majority of the male group believed that white women were more often hired because the white male was more comfortable with the white women. One participant believed that the necessity to control the African American employee by a white supervisor brought the hiring of the white women into corporate America.

The female group believed that white women received the greatest benefit from affirmative Action. No reasons were expressed to explain that opinion.

The mixed group also unanimously stated that they believed the white women were the greatest beneficiary of all minorities because of the relationship they have with the white man. There were no descenting opinions voiced.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

For the purposes of this study, four main research questions were identified. The four questions were:

RQ1: *Are there more African Americans that feel Affirmative Action is beneficial than there are African American that feel it is not beneficial?*

Overall, study participants view Affirmative Action as a necessity for their success in Corporate America. Without Affirmative Action programs in the corporate environment, study participants are confident they would not have the positions they currently have. Furthermore, they believe they would not be living a life at all comparable to their current situations.

Furthermore, the participants believe that Affirmative Action's main benefit is in providing the opportunity for consideration of a position within corporate America. This opportunity was viewed as either the policies and procedures currently in place allowing African Americans opportunities into colleges where they can excel and earn the right to interview for positions as well as in the interview process itself by forcing corporations to consider qualified minority candidates for positions. It

was also a consensus belief that corporate employers have only hired and tolerated African Americans due to government programs pushing minority employment as well as the emerging buying power of the African American population.

Distress was expressed concerning the potential abolition of government mandated programs. Participants believed that without governmental intervention, African Americans would no longer be considered for positions when white Americans are available for the same positions because there would be no authority to enforce the consideration process.

While supporting Affirmative Action as beneficial for African American's advancement, African Americans are not happy with the need to employ such programs in the 1990's. Recent history with Affirmative Action programs and corporations suggest to several study participants that without Affirmative Action programs, the social atmosphere in this country would revert back to that of the 1950's and 1960's and all the progress that has been made toward integration and diversity would decline.

Although African Americans feel Affirmative Action programs have been widely successful in providing

opportunities within large corporations, they have also expressed Affirmative Action has been a hindrance to their career's advancement after they have gained a position. Participants believed resoundingly that without affirmative action, they would have not had the opportunities either to enter college or to gain employment in their corporations. However, once hired, Affirmative Action became a hindrance because the participants felt stigmatized by Affirmative Action. Although the policies may have provided an opportunity for a job, most participants felt they were never viewed as qualified for their positions or deserving of promotions, but passed on due to Affirmative Action.

Although Affirmative Action produced stigmatization, participants felt a stigma was the sacrifice required for a career opportunity. As one respondent stated: "African Americans are already stigmatized because we are black. We don't need to look any further than our skin to recognize stigmatization. Therefore, I am not concerned with a so-called stigma. I have a job and I'll take that over the alternative any day."

Although Affirmative action was believed to cause a stigma it was viewed as a definite benefit and a successful method of integrating the corporate structure.

Many participants responded negatively to questions on the Affirmative Action benefit in advancing their careers. Affirmative Action was referred to as a "double-edged-sword" on several occasions throughout this study. It was the participants' position that due to Affirmative Action programs in America, every time a participant advanced ahead of white colleagues, Affirmative Action was often quoted by the white counterpart as the reason for the promotion. Such stigmatization was considered unfortunate and unfair but was not severe enough to view affirmative action a hindrance to their careers.

In all three focus groups, participants stated that their employers had documented Affirmative Action programs but were negligible at best in enforcing their written policies. Corporations were viewed as performing at a minimal level in pursuing diversity in their cultures. The general sentiment of the participants was that corporate America would do no more than what was required by law. Corporate America was not truly believed to pursue diversity, but to appease the minorities and the government so that they can continue business as usual and to make organizations appear effective.

RQ2: *Will more African American express fairness as their*

***basis for supporting affirmative action than any other
argument?***

According to the focus group participants, Affirmative
Action is fair in corporate America. According to the
participants' overall responses, Affirmative Action must
first be defined. The definition most apparent through the
participants' responses is a method to promote equity and
to equalize the standards and procedures utilized
throughout corporate employment practices in America. A
majority of the participants felt that by this definition,
Affirmative Action was fair because once the hiring process
was completed and the employee had been selected, the
advancement process started and the hiring process ended.
The advancement process employs merit as its measure for
determining promotions. One participant said, "Once I
entered the corporation and started to perform, they had to
advance me. They tried not to be in my situation, I was
truly the most qualified."

Concerning the use of merit to equalize the selection
process for both college and employment opportunities the
participants were resoundingly against its usage.
According to the participant responses, African Americans
are constantly rated lower in test scores and education

than the whites purely due to differences in the economic practices between the races. If the average black family could afford to spend one or two thousand dollars on test preparatory courses and practice test materials to enhance their children's exposure and could have advanced experience in test taking procedures similar to the fashion white children do, then the African American children's test results would also be higher.

According to the participants, the true test of merit and skill is in the retention of knowledge and the performance on the job. "It doesn't matter if you were in the top 10% in law school or if you were on law review. What does matter is that you can apply the lessons learned and win the case. I may have graduated in the 30th percentile from my law school, but I am considered an excellent attorney. And merit has everything to do with my performance after training, not prior to it."

Therefore, according to the participants' responses, the use of merit as a standard to select candidates in place of Affirmative Action is considered unfair because of the numerous variables that are not considered with merit. Some participants felt that Affirmative Action is being so severely scrutinized because it has been so effective in

integrating corporate America. An argument made to support this theory was the recent restructuring of corporations and the removing of management layers to reduce expenses and improve morale and efficiency. Middle management as a whole (majority white middle class males) was downsized. This corporate streamlining produced a backlash that initiated all of this Affirmative Action scrutiny, and the subsequent introduction and acceptance of policy like Proposition 209 in California.

RQ3: *Do more African American men feel Affirmative Action has assisted them less in obtaining their positions less than African American women?*

All three focus groups identified a male physical threat as the main reason they believed African American women received more benefit than African American men. According to the focus group participants, African American women are more easily accepted into corporate America because they do not pose a physical threat to the corporate dominance of the white male.

Study participants state that the history of African American women as maids and servants to the white man in slavery is also believed to be carried over to the current employment situation in America and relevant to the fact

that African American women are selected for corporate positions more often than African American men.

According to the focus groups, black men have always been a threat because as a male they are a physical threat to the dominance of the white male. Many participants believe that the natural reaction to the threat of the African American man is for the white man to attempt to oppress and control the threat. Therefore, they believe the resistance to Affirmative Action is an attempt to guard against a threat to their dominance.

Participants also believed that since African American women do not appear as physically threatening to the white male, he does not guard as vigorously against them, allowing African American women to somewhat advance in corporate America.

The participants also recognized and stated that corporations were originated and dominated by the white male. With the white male in power, he will not allow any potential threat a foothold within his domain for fear of a ripple affect allowing more threatening individuals into the white males' organization until the threat gains an advantage and overthrows the white males' authority. Therefore, the white man must attempt to dominate and

oppress the black male to maintain hegemony in the United States.

African American male participants also stated that they face more hostility and unfair treatment in the corporate world than they witnessed among African American women. Corporate America was constantly referred to as a "game" throughout this study. The art of learning how to "play the game" was considered the key to success for African Americans in corporate America. Revealing any of their actual personality may seriously damage their advancement opportunities and heightens already stressful and demanding positions. Conforming in corporate America is prevalent in all aspects of a position. According to the study participants, the way they dress, the vehicles they drive, the time they go to lunch, who they go to lunch with, the committees within the organizations they serve on and their after-hour socialization is all evaluated. This causes African Americans to limit their socialization within their organizations. Some participants stated that they cannot socialize or even associate with minorities at lower levels in their organizations for fear they will be penalized for their alliances or choices of friends within their organizations.

Study participants also considered themselves very honest and emotional people that openly display emotions and freely voice opinions. According to the participants, these character traits are viewed as disadvantages in corporate America. Participants believe that African American corporate employees need to learn to mask their true feelings and beliefs because outspokenness and outward displays of emotion were not appreciated traits and were negatively evaluated. Some participants agreed that they were labeled "defensive" on performance appraisals due to their outspokenness.

RQ4: ***Overall, will African Americans feel that white women have benefited more from Affirmative Action than African Americans?***

According to the participants, Affirmative Action has delivered far more benefit to white women than to any other race or group. It was discussed that most minority managers are white women and the reason that they have achieved such a level in the white male dominated, corporate world is because of Affirmative Action programs.

Many participants felt that African American men receive the least benefit of all groups. According to most participants' experiences and opinions, when a qualified

African American man, an African American women and a white women are all competing for the same position, with all skills and experiences being equal, the white woman will be selected eight times out of ten. In the same situation, participants believed that African Americans are selected only when their race is beneficial to the company for "quota" purposes. Participants feel that African American men are only selected if they are beyond qualified or competent for a position and their race serves as a benefit to the corporation.

White women were believed to be the minority group to gain the greatest benefit from Affirmative Action programs. According to participants, corporate America was more likely to hire and promote white women because they are comfortable with white women in management. One participant said, I think white management says well if I have to hire a minority, at least let it be a white women. That way, we still have a white person in our corner." Study participants also felt that it is unfair to consider white women a minority because they have all the social benefits of being white as well as having business benefits of being a minority.

Participants also felt that religion is a large factor

within their work. Many of the study participants stated
that they were very religious and that they felt revealing
their spirituality in a work environment would be very
costly to their career advancement because it would make
their supervisors uncomfortable.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The structural perspective theory states that self-interested groups seek power and priviledge by controlling major institutions of society. In attempting to maintain hegemony in society, self-interested groups will engage in practices that reduce subordinates' opportunities to enter the domain of power.

In this study, corporations are the institutions and the management of these corporations are the domain of power in practice. As it stands, according to the perceptions of the participants, Affirmative Action is the only tool available to guarantee consideration for entry into these institutions for African Americans. White males, corporate America's dominant group as perceived by the study's participants, are attempting to rally support for the abolition of Affirmative Action. If successful, participants believe the loss of the initiative will further limit entry-points to the corporate domain of power. This system perfectly illustrates the Structural Perspective Theory in action.

This study of Affirmative Action's beneficiality has found that African Americans in the study's focus groups

unanimously agree on the benefit received from Affirmative Action programs. Without Affirmative Action programs many of these African Americans were confident they would not have achieved the levels of success they have currently attained.

However, these African Americans do feel stigmatized at the necessity for such programs because most promotions and advances achieved by African Americans are perceived to be awarded due to Affirmative Action or "quotas" and not on worker qualifications or merit.

Regardless of stigmas, these African Americans accept and appreciate the opportunities provided by such programs. The study's participants do not wish to see these programs abolished fearing that without government promoted and regulated Affirmative Action programs, white, male-dominated corporate America will shut them out because they are not truly wanted or appreciated in that capacity anyway.

Affirmative Action programs were also viewed as a fair practice in corporate America because it forces an equitable amount of consideration on African American candidates as well as white candidates. This is a benefit that African Americans believe hiring policies based on

merit will not provide, thus limiting the opportunities African Americans will have in the corporate world.

African American men and women in the study feel that African American women gain a slight advantage in the benefit they receive from Affirmative Action programs because they are viewed as less of a threat than African American males are to the power of the white male in corporate America.

African Americans in this study believed that white women were the main beneficiaries of Affirmative Action programs. They believe that the white women gain this benefit because they make white men the most comfortable and pose less of a threat to his dominance where the black male is believed the greatest threat to the white male's dominance.

The opinion was expressed that it is unfortunate that in 1999, with the turn of the century quickly approaching, a society as advanced as ours cannot accept its members for their character and intelligence. Corporations and all other economic segments of the United States are dominated by white America and the dominant members of our society are attempting to abolish the one program that provides equity in our opportunities for careers.

Study participants felt that it would be optimistic to believe that our society would continue on its current course and continue to improve its practices and policies with regard to race relations. However, African Americans do not wish to risk the future and advancement of their race on the hope or possibility of a merit system working.

In an ideal situation, the view was expressed that African Americans could simply form their own corporations providing an equitable system for advancing African Americans. Such a system would promote equity in America because African Americans would have a choice. Not only in who they would work for, but also what products they would buy. At that time our country would then be the great democracy it has been striving to become for so long.

However, the African Americans in this study believe it is naïve to think that white America would allow such a practice to occur because such independence and strength provides the greatest threat to the current way of life here in America--the white male dominated way.

Therefore, the participants in this study expressed the opinion that African Americans must continue until such a day arrives that the opportunities along those lines are available, and African Americans are truly free from the

restrictions placed on advancement by white, male dominants here in America. For without such a policy, history would be doomed to repeat itself.

Implications

Study participants stated that Affirmative Action was a "double edged sword." On the one hand, Affirmative Action policies provide career opportunities to minorities by forcing corporations to be equitable in their hiring practices. On the other hand, minorities feel pressure to perform far above the expected level of performance and feel they are being evaluated at a higher standard than that of their white colleagues because Affirmative Action policies are in place and the perception of not being as competent or qualified for the position is believed present.

The implications of this study as related to African Americans are that Affirmative Action must either be accepted for the equity and opportunity it provides along with the perceived standards and label it carries, or African Americans must accept the use of merit solely as hiring criteria. The use of merit will eliminate the perceptions adjoined with the use of Affirmative Action but

will also potentially limit the opportunities for African Americans within the current corporate structure.

The implications of this study on society are that the United States is not fully prepared to remove the use of Affirmative Action policies. Although many individuals believe that now is the time to advance beyond Affirmative Action policies and truly hire individuals based on merit, corporate America still has extremely low numbers of African Americans working within their organizations. Being 1999 it is hard to believe that the sole use of merit will provide growth in the corporate arena when Affirmative Action has only been moderately successful.

According to this study, Affirmative Action has assisted minorities in competing for corporate positions. This success, although moderate, has raised questions of fairness and equity in hiring practices. Affirmative Action is truly beneficial and considered a value added component in the United States. The loss of such a tool will reverse the progress made toward equality in this country and reduce our society to the situation it has worked more than thirty years to overcome.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this are the following:

This study was performed in one geographical location and in one major metropolitan area in the mid-west of the country. The views of African Americans in other cities and other geographical regions of the country can possibly vary from those of the opinions presented. The sample size was less than forty individuals, restricted to one state and may not fully represent the opinions of all African Americans meeting the sample requirements in the region studied.

This study focussed only on African Americans that were college graduates and did not include African Americans that were not college graduates.

The focus of this study of Affirmative Action opinions fell primarily on corporate America and not mainstream America which may represent a different opinion.

The sample selected for this study was not generated from a completely stratified random sample. Therefore the views of some of the study participants may have been biased based on their selection method.

The moderator may have biased the sample in the presentation of the questions and the coding of the data

which may have affected the accuracy of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to several factors involved in the completion of this study, several recommendations may be considered for future research.

Due to time and resource constraints this study was performed in one geographical location and in one major metropolitan area in the mid-west of the country. Expanding the range and regions included in the study may provide a more representative response of the African Americans' opinions.

The sample size selected for this study included less than forty individuals. Future research may wish to increase the number of participants in the entire study for a more representative sample.

This study focussed only on African Americans who were college graduates and did not include African Americans that were not college graduates. Future research may want to include non-college graduates to gauge their opinions of Affirmative Action and the benefit received using Affirmative Action.

The focus of this study, Affirmative Action opinions, fell primarily on corporate America and not mainstream

America. Expanding the focus to include other businesses and careers may represent a more complete picture of the national opinion of Affirmative Action.

Also in this study, representatives were selected and participated from various industries in one geographical area. Although there were several industries used, several other industries were not involved in the study. It would be necessary to attempt to include more industries in future studies.

The sample selected for this study was not generated from a completely stratified random sample. Future research may benefit from using a purely stratified random sample or even a random sample including the views and opinions of white Americans.

This study was performed over the course of several weeks prior to a major national election where Affirmative Action issues were on the ballots and in the media. Future research should be performed over several months other than during the election season to determine whether the views expressed were at all influenced by the media attention or personal concern placed by the responsibility of voting. Performing the study over several months will also affirm the continuity of the participants' responses.

In this study, issues of religion at work and conformity to the white male dominated corporate culture were raised. A future study on Affirmative Action should probe these issues to determine their relation to African American and white American relations in the corporate culture.

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APPENDIX A

Solicitation Letter to Corporations

Jevard H. Hitch
4565 Genoa Street
Denver, CO. 80249
303-307-1566

April 19, 1999

Joe Jones
Major Company
Downtown Denver
Denver Colorado, 80234

Dear Mr. Jones

I am completing my graduate program at the University of
Nebraska by preparing a thesis. This thesis examines
Affirmative Action and African American employees' feelings
on how beneficial or detrimental these advancement programs
may have been in their careers.

I have written you because my thesis is focussed on large
corporations in major metropolitan areas such as yours. I
would greatly appreciate your organization's assistance in
the completion of this study. You can assist me by
informing the African American employees within your
organization of my study and asking them to contact me to
participate in a focus group interview.

Your organization's identity as well your participant's
identity would be kept strictly confidential and the data
collected would be used for the sole purpose of completing
this study. Individuals from other large corporations in
Denver are expected to participate in the focus group and
none of the participants will be required to divulge either
their identity or the identity of their employer to the
group. Your cooperation in this matter is vital to the
completion of my graduate program. If desired, a copy of
the completed study will be supplied to your organization.

Attached to this document is a participant form. If
employees within your organization are interested in
participating, please photocopy this form and have them
complete and return it. In order for this study to be
completed within my graduation timeline, I would appreciate

receiving all participant forms no later than Tuesday, October 20, 1998. I am anticipating the focus group to take place the week of October 25, 1998. The participants selected will be contacted via phone to schedule a concrete day and time.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in the completion of this important study and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jevard H. Hitch
Attachment

Attachment

Please fill out this form, fold it in half and return it to
me by October 16, 1998. You will be further contacted for
focus group scheduling and information on the session
location.
Again, thank you for your assistance. If you have any
questions, please call me at
303-307-1566.

Sincerely,

Jevard H. Hitch
4565 Genoa Street
Denver, CO 80249

Please print to improve the accuracy of the information's
interpretation.

Name:
Position:
Name of Company:
Years at Company:
Years in Corporate America:
Sex:
Degree Type: **Bachelors, Masters, or Doctorate**
Phone number where you are most accessible.

Please list at least two other black corporate employees
you know that could serve on a focus group.

Name:	Phone number:	Position:	Company Name:
1.			
2.			

3.

APPENDIX B

Affirmative Action Focus Groups Questions

Appendix B

Affirmative Action Focus Group questions

Beneficial or Not?

1. To your knowledge, have you benefit directly from affirmative action programs?
   Where and how?

2. Does your employer have a documented affirmative action program?
   c. How do they enforce their program?
   d. Would you consider their practice effective? How?

3. In your opinion, are affirmative action programs beneficial? What makes it beneficial?

4. What, if any, are the cons that you see with affirmative action programs?

5. Would you say that affirmative action has been a help or a hindrance to your career?

6. Has it been a help or a hindrance to your career's advancement opportunities? How?

For or Against
1.   Do you support affirmative action programs in corporate America? Why?

2.   What is one word that would summarize your reason for supporting affirmative action.

3.   How do you feel about the argument made for abolishing affirmative action due to the use of merit in corporate America?

Who benefits more
1.   As a Black Man/ Women, do you feel you have benefit more from affirmative action than the opposite sex? Why?

2. Can you give me an example of that benefit?

Nationality benefit

1. What race would you say benefits the most from affirmative action programs today.

2. What sex of that race do you think benefits the most

3. Individuals have stated that White women are the prime beneficiaries of affirmative action, do you agree? Why?

Appendix C

Summary of Participant Responses

All Male Responses

	#1		#2		#3		#4		#5		#6		#7		#8		#9		#10		#11		#12	
	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con
Beneficial or Not Questions	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
For or Against Affirmative Action Questions	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
What Sex Benefits More Questions	Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women	
Race Gaining Greatest Benefit Questions	White		White		No Answer		White		Latino/ Hispanic		Black		White		White		White		White		White		White	

All Female Participants Responses

	#1 Pro	#1 Con	#2 Pro	#2 Con	#3 Pro	#3 Con	#4 Pro	#4 Con	#5 Pro	#5 Con	#6 Pro	#6 Con	#7 Pro	#7 Con	#8 Pro	#8 Con
Beneficial or Not Questions	X		X		X	X	X		X		X		X		X	
For or Against Affirmative Action Questions	X		X		X		X	X	X		X		X		X	
What Sex Benefits More Questions	Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women	
Race Gaining Greatest Benefit Questions	No Answer		White		White		White		White		White		White		White	

Combined Group Responses

	#1 Pro	#1 Con	#2 Pro	#2 Con	#3 Pro	#3 Con	#4 Pro	#4 Con	#5 Pro	#5 Con	#6 Pro	#6 Con	#7 Pro	#7 Con	#8 Pro	#8 Con	#9 Pro	#9 Con
Beneficial or Not Questions	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
For or Against Affirmative Action Questions	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
What Sex Benefits More Questions	Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women		Women	
Race Gaining Greatest Benefit Questions	No Answer		White		White		White		White		White		White		White		White	