Revisiting Organizational Socialization: Testing A Model & Gaining A Competitive Advantage with People

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this publication was to test an organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates, which was published in 2009 by the Publishing House of South China University of Technology, to determine if the model was still relevant. This work encompassed an examination of the lived experiences of professionals as those encounters related to organizational socialization. The author presented the salient themes which emerged from interview, questionnaire, and focus group data collected from 135 professionals residing in the United States. This research supported an existing framework on organizational socialization and revealed the prominence of workplace betrayals. Implications for human resources were discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As societies around the globe become more diverse, scholars and practitioners will benefit from extending their comprehension of how employees are socialized and how they experience organizations, as talented employees can help organizations gain a competitive advantage. The great resignation emerged as a current trend in society prompting professionals to leave their posts in search of better opportunities. Employees were resigning for a variety of reasons. Some wanted better pay. Others desired better work-life balance, better organizational fits, etc. According to the Great Resignation (2022), "Roughly 3% of the American workforce voluntarily left their positions in the late months of 2021. Though all regions and most career fields have seen a reduction in the number of available workers, the food service, healthcare, and warehouse industries have been most drastically impacted." When the pandemic started, some employees were inspired to rethink their career choices, and others opted to pursue more rewarding opportunities. "Roughly 10 million jobs are available in the workforce. This number will likely continue to rise…as workers recognize the power they have on the economy. Many Americans who quit at the end of last year did so in search of a higher income" (Great Resignation, 2022). The report suggested that employees who resigned for better pay were likely to be successful given current trends. Switching jobs resulted in faster wage growth than remaining in one's current role.

The great exodus may have had hiring managers frantic about retaining personnel while leaders desperately sought to keep them engaged (Gates, 2023; Macey & Schneider, 2008). These changing environments may have implications for organizational socialization as some of the old socialization practices and tactics may no longer be as effective. Extant research made assumptions about how organizational members were socialized (Jablin, 1984; 1987; 2001; Gates, 2009), and subsequent research needs to examine current organizational socialization frameworks to determine how they capture, or fail to capture, the essence of how employees perceived they were socialized into organizations (Gates, 2009).

HUMAN RESOURCES

The term human resources traditionally has been defined as "the experiences, capabilities, knowledge, skills, and judgement of the firm's employees" (Parnell, 2021, p. 227). It can be evaluated on three levels: 1) board of directors, 2) top management, and 3) middle management, supervisors, and employees (Parnell, 2021). Essentially, human resources efforts have to do with the strategic management and the development

of employees because "even the best strategies will fail without a talented workforce to implement them" (Parnell, 2021, p. 228). The term human resources management gained popularity in the 1960s when a greater emphasis was being placed on employee motivation and related matters. It tended to entail recruiting, hiring, onboarding, training, developing, and managing employees so that they could add value to their respective workplaces (Liu, Bartram, Leggat, 2020; Zhang, Gates, Neal, & Stark, 2009; Boon, Hartog, & Lepak, 2019). Because employees are crucial to organizational success, it's imperative for organizations to comprehend how organizational members experience organizational socialization and human resources activities in general.

According to Boon, Hartog, and Lepak (2019), employees respond differently to strategies designed to manage employees, a notion which has been supported by other scholars such as Liu, Bartram, and Leggat (2020). In a study examining the experiences of doctors and nurses during recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and transformational leadership, etc., statistical differences between nurses and doctors were evident. The study also addressed job security, training, information sharing, job quality, and team building (Liu, Bartram, Leggat, 2020). These findings suggested that organizational members regard processes and experiences with human resources differently, which produced a greater need to comprehend human resources management on individual and systemic levels.

A growing trend in the field of human resources had to do with psychological contracts. These contracts referred to the explicit and implicit organizational agreements, the fulfillment, and non-fulfillments of workplace relationships as they related to mutual obligations, expectations, and promises (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017). When contracts were breached, employees felt betrayed or like they had been subjected to injustices. Mutual respect, acting in good faith, open communication, sharing information and other resources tended to help promote positive interactions and clear contracts. Expectations have to be communicated for both parties to fulfill the contracts (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017). "Employer and employee will have to create good intentions, confidence, and feelings of attachment in the minds of each other which will in return strengthen their bond and also influence on how they intend to behave and reciprocate their mutuality towards each other" (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017, p. 109). These contracts were contingent on mutually respectful relationships as healthy professional interpersonal relationships were crucial to organizational socialization. Organizations can enhance human resources management, as it relates to engagement and socialization, by improving the psychological environments created for employees (Hussain & Mubarik, 2021).

One way in which psychological contracts have been fulfilled in the workplace was with greater flexibility, especially during a Covid19 era. With the increase in remote work which resulted because of the pandemic, new hires anticipate more flexibility, customization, and personalization with the onboarding process (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Moreover, hiring, onboarding, as well as training and development were expected to be interconnected so as to enhance the process of integrating employees into organizations (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Another way to maintain these psychological contracts and to enhance employee engagement was by maintaining work environments that were conducive to success. Hostile environments whereby employees were bullied and/or treated rudely caused workers to become less engaged because they had to exert a lot of psychological energy processing and making sense of workplace concerns (Gates, 2023; Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019; Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021). Organizations must promote collegial interactions so as to cultivate communication climates conducive to employees being more productive (Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021). Workplace bullying causes stress, and the distraction may result in less engagement and compromised productivity. However, family support can help mediate the influence the stress has on employees (Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019; Gates, 2023).

Ultimately, research on human resources management revealed that the primary focus of personnel was on rewarding, motivating, training, and safety (Marko, Radivoj, Hamina, Jovana, 2022). The secondary issues seemed to be job evaluation, socialization, job satisfaction. However, employee turnover and engagement were emphasized as this may remain a salient concern for hiring managers (Marko, Radivoj, Hamina, Jovana, 2022; Gates, 2023; The resignation, 2022). While these functions and outcomes are

important, Boon, Hartog, and Lepak (2019) suggested that organizations needed to place a greater emphasis on systems, not individuals, because systems shape individual experiences. Human resources systems were designed to encompass a variety of human resources practices that enable organizations to achieve overarching goals. Consequently, examining the systems in place to socialize organizational members may be a reasonable task (Gates, 2009; 2023).
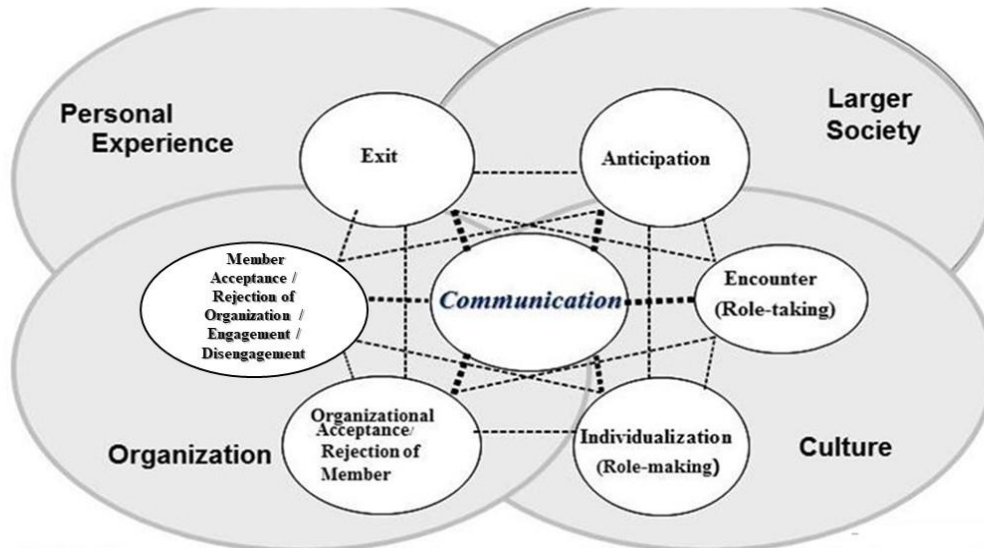
ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Organizational socialization has traditionally been defined as the ongoing processes of integrating organizational members into organizations, the process whereby organizational members learn the ropes of their respective jobs (Gates, 2020; 2009; 2002; 2001a; 2001b; Allen, 1995; 1996; Jablin,1986; 2001; Van Mannen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In Jablin's (1982, 1984, 1987, 2001) conceptualization of the process, which he referred to as "assimilation," it encompassed anticipation, encounter, metamorphosis, and disengagement/exit. However, not all organizational members experience organizations in this fashion (Allen, 1995; 1996; Gates, 1998; 1999; 2001a, 2001b; 2003a; 2003n; 2009; 2020; 2023; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000). Jablin's model may not have fully captured the essence of how some non-dominant group members, such as African Americans, Latino/as, Asians, women, etc., experience organizations (Gates, 2021a; 2021b; 2020; 2019; 2001; 2002; 2003 2009; 2001a; 2001b; 1999; 1998; Caraballo & Gates, 2011). Moreover, not all organizational members are disengaged prior to exit. Some people are engaged right up until they exit because they want good references from their current employers should they need them in the future. Excitement about forthcoming opportunities may create enough happiness and joy for employees to remain engaged as happy workers tend to be more engaged and more productive (Luthan, Luthan, & Luthan, 2021).

The process of assimilation as described by Jablin (1986; 2001) seemed linear in the rendition of what Jablin (1986; 2001) refers to as assimilation, not socialization, whereas other scholars have articulated a different, and perhaps a competing, perspective (Allen, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Gates, 2002; 2003b; 2009). For example, Gates (2009), who preferred the term "socialization" due to the negative connotations associated with the term "assimilation," suggested that the dynamic process of organizational socialization was ongoing and everchanging as people are constantly receiving information and encountering aspects of their respective workplaces and their environments that shape how they show up in organizations. Gates (2002; 2003b; 2009; 2020; 2023) also suggested, as did Allen (1995; 1996), that not all organizational members are accepted; not everybody reaches metamorphosis. Some people never become fully integrated into the workplace due to marginalization such as racism, sexism, classism as well as other factors including but not limited to traumatic workplace betrayals, such as sexual harassment, pay disparities, and more (Gates, 2023).

In the organizational socialization model devised by Gates in 2000 but published in 2009, the model contained the following components: 1) anticipation, 2) encounter, 3) individualization, 4) organizational acceptance/rejection of member, 5) member acceptance/rejection of organization (encompasses engagement and/or disengagement), 6) exit, 7) communication, 8) culture (simultaneous influence of personal experiences, larger society, culture, and organization) (Gates, 2002; 2003b; 2009). Gates (2009) attempted, in her organizational socialization model, to account for more of the experiences of professionals from a broader spectrum of the population. She recognized that many organizations are comprised of heterogenous groups, so she wanted to account for that in her rendition of socialization. A myopic approach to organizational socialization would be to assume that all organizations are homogeneous and to expect all professionals to experience workplaces exactly the same. Assuming all organizations are comprised solely of monolithic cultures and acting based on that way of thinking, that paradigm, would be a disservice to all organizational members, especially those from traditionally disenfranchised groups. Gates (2009) was among the scholars urging organizational members to take more than just a perfunctory view at organizational socialization. Gates (2009) hoped to promote or inspire a paradigm shift, a different way of thinking, one whereby the workplace

existences and experiences of all people could be encompassed in models on organizational socialization so that a more global approach to the construct emerged.

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION MODEL BY DR. DENISE GATES

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- **PHASES**
  - Anticipation
    - People anticipate how they will experience organizations based on messages from their environment such as community members, other organizational members, school, media, friends, family, church, colleagues, etc. These messages can shape perceptions about an organization.
  - Encounter
    - When organizational members first enter an organization, their expectations are tested. They experience culture shock when expectations are vastly different from what they anticipated. Realistic job previews can reduce chances of culture shock.
  - Individualization
    - Employees/members can influence organizations. They make their unique marks on organizations.
  - Organizational Acceptance/Rejection of Member/Employee
    - Organizations can embrace or reject employees/members. This is experienced via inclusion, exclusion, gossip, negative experiences, positive experiences, etc.
  - Member/Employee Rejection/Acceptance of Organization / Engagement and Disengagement
    - Employees/members can accept or reject organizations. Regular/poor attendance, sabotage/assist programs. Praise behavior that is appreciated or complain about unwanted behavior.
  - Exit
    - Pre-exit (planning the separation), announcement (giving notice that separation is upcoming) , exit (organizations have to adjust to absence of employee/member). Employees can be fired or voluntarily leave organizations.
- **CONTEXT**
  - Interactions within organizations are shaped by the context of interactants.
    - Personal experience
    - Organization
    - Larger Society
    - Culture
- **COMMUNICATION**
  - Influences all aspects of the process
- **DOTTED LINES**
  - Indirect connection between phases. People experience socialization differently as in-group and out-group members

The purpose of this present paper was to determine if the organizational socialization model by Gates (2009) was still relevant today in a Covid19 era. It investigated the relevance of extant renditions of organizational socialization as posited by scholars such as Jablin (1982, 1984; 1987, 2001). Jablin's 2001 conceptualization of organizational socialization, or assimilation as he calls it, in the publication "Organizational Entry, Assimilation, Disengagement / Exit" was extended by Gates (2009) in the publication "The Managerial Communication Process: Organizational Socialization Model," an award-winning paper published by the Publishing House of South China University of Technology. While still highly respected by many, Jablin's (1982, 1984, 1987, 2001) rendition of assimilation was regarded by some scholars as problematic (Allen, 1995, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Gates, 2002; 2009; 2023). Critics of Jablin's model argued that he made assumptions about workplace experiences. In the current paper, the

organizational socialization model devised by Gates (2009) was applied to the experiences of 135 professionals to determine if that model was still relevant and applicable today. With the rise of the great exodus, as well as Covid19, scholars and practitioners may benefit from comprehending how professionals perceive they experience organizational socialization today.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) To what extent does the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates capture, or fail to capture, the essence of how professionals experience organizations and/or their professions?
2) What are the implications of these organizational experiences as they relate to human resources?

METHODS

This research utilized qualitative research methods (Cresswell, 2003) to conduct in-depth interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires to capture the essence of how 135 professionals experienced their respective workplaces. A total of 71 business students from a midwestern university completed an open-ended questionnaire. Another 53 professionals participated in in-depth, one-on-one interviews by phone and/or Zoom, interactions which lasted from 22 minutes to one hour and a half. The people who participated in the interviews were selected using the snowball technique (Cresswell, 2003; Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). That means that after each interview, participants were encouraged to submit the names of other professionals who could be interviewed.

In addition to the interviews, 20 people participated in a total of two focus groups. One focus group centered on organizational socialization while the other one focused on employee engagement and human resources management. Because some people participated in interviews as well as focus groups, they could only be counted once as participants in the present study, which means the total number of participants was 135, not 144. Of the 135 participants, 80 were Caucasian, 45 were African American, 5 were Latino, 3 were Asian, and 2 were Greek. A total of 66 of the participants were male, and 69 were female. The interview and focus group participants ranged in age from 27 to 82 years old, with the bulk of the participants being between 32 and 58 years old. The college students who completed the questionnaire were primarily between the ages of 18 and 25. The educational levels of the 135 participants ranged from doctoral degrees, master's degrees, law degrees, bachelor's degree, high school degrees, and one high school dropout. Four of the participants in this study admitted to being millionaires. A fifth lady who has been part owner of a thriving bank for over 30 years was suspected of being a millionaire or billionaire, but she has not confirmed her status. Nevertheless, she was regarded as a closet millionaire (or possibility even a billionaire), and she described her financial situation, with a smile, as being "very comfortable." She did admit to managing assets worth in excess of two billion dollars. With the exception of a receptionist and youth center director as well as the students, all of the other participants could be classified as middle to upper-middle class.

College students were given a picture of the organizational socialization model by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) along with a description of the model and all of its components. Then they were asked via a questionnaire to explain the extent to which the model by Gates (2009) captured, or failed to capture, the essence of their workplace experiences. All of the college students were Caucasian business students. They were told that if they had never had jobs, they could focus on any organization they had ever joined, such as a university (Gates, 2009; 2002; 2020; 2023).

The focus groups were comprised of 16 African Americans, two Latinos, one Greek, and two Caucasian participants. Eight of the focus group participants were male, and 13 were female. The focus group findings were utilized to inform the interviewing processes. In other words, the insight gleaned from the focus groups was followed up on during the interviews. During the first focus group, the professionals were shown an organizational socialization model by Gates (2009) and asked to discuss each component of the model. They also were given another document that explained the socialization model. Then participants were instructed to indicate how closely the model captured or failed to capture the essence of how they experienced

the workplace. During the second focus group, participants discussed human resources management and employee engagement, particularly as it related to changes resulting from Covid19. They spoke about how they were experiencing socialization and human resources management differently due to Covid.

The final method of data collection was interviews. A total of 53 professionals were selected for interviews, utilizing the snowball technique (Cresswell, 2003; Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). After each interview, participants were asked to provide the names of other professionals who could participate in the study. This technique gives researchers access to people and networks to which researchers may not otherwise have access (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). The professionals who were interviewed were Caucasian, African American, Latino/a, Asian, and Greek. They were from Indiana, Texas, Utah, Nevada, Ohio, Missouri, Arizona, Illinois, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, Connecticut, Alabama, Georgia, California, Washington, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Maryland, North Carolina, and Arkansas.

Phone and/or Zoom interviews were conducted with the 53 professionals from a wide range of careers ranging from fortune 100 leaders, bankers, mortgage loan officers, factory workers, university deans, university professors, university presidents, government workers, military workers, case managers, pastors, construction workers, business consultants, business owners, pharmacists, politicians, company presidents, chief operating officers, receptionists, financial services agents, youth program directors, real estate professionals, general managers of a radio station, etc. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were tape-recorded and analyzed numerous times until no new themes emerged.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates captured, or failed to capture, the essence of how professionals experienced the workplace and/or their professions. It also sought to identify the implications for human resources management. Results revealed overwhelming support for the organizational model devised by Gates (2009), and the findings also substantiated claims of a variety of workplace betrayals.

Support for Organizational Socialization Model by Gates

All 135 of the participants indicated that the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) captured the essence of how they experienced the workplace. An African American female pharmacist in her 40s from Missouri, said:

> "I think it captured the essence very well. I like how you noted the interplay on all of the different factors. So sometimes when you see a model like this, it's very simplistic…our lives and careers never follow such a direct path, so looking at your model with interconnected circles and all the lines that go in between, it's very accurate…all of these different things you've noted play a huge part in how we navigate."

Echoing the same sentiment, a 60-year-old African American woman who is co-owner of a bank in the Midwestern part of the United States, said, "I think it [the socialization model by Gates (2009)] offers something that we can look toward to, as far as, you know, keeping employees aware of what's going on in organizations." This executive, who has an MBA, went on to say: "I think this is something you would have for managers. How will you keep employees motivated?" The aspects of the model by Gates (2009) that encompasses motivation is acceptance/rejection of organizations by organizational members. During this phase, a member's degree of acceptance and rejection will be gauged, perhaps, or shaped by their level of engagement. When organizational members embrace their organizations and are engaged, they are expressing acceptance of their organizations. When members reject their organizations, they may become less engaged, and their disengagement may be a sign that they are rejecting something about their respective organizations. This part of the model is where managers may be challenged to devise strategies to keep employees engaged. This is a crucial part of socialization that needs to start with making the right hiring decisions and ensuring

that superior-subordinate professional relationships are healthy (Gates, 2021). When organizations plug people into the right positions, they are selecting employees who have values and business practices that are congruent with those values espoused by organizations. Therefore, employees may be more inclined to be motivated to do their jobs when organizational fits are right. Once the right fit is secured, organizations can help retain employees by keeping them challenged, showing them how important their roles are to organizations, cultivating healthy workplace interactions devoid of racism, sexism, sexual harassment, traumatic workplace betrayals, debilitating stress levels (Gates, 2023; 2011), cultivating and maintaining healthy interactions with supervisors (Gates, 2021), giving them opportunities to advance, showing them they are valued, promoting equity in pay, etc. (Gates, 2023).

To summarize some of the remarks about the model by Gates (2009), one 27-year-old African American business consultant from Missouri with a doctoral degree said, "I find that this model is a great depiction of my own experience through the workplace, and how the organizational model is established…[the model] mimics almost to the tee what I have gone through in my own history."

A 60-year-old Greek business owner and multi-millionaire from Florida said, she supported the model by Gates (2009). "It went over just about everything in my workplace."

A Latino, female, marketing executive in her 60s, said the model fits "very closely. I just love what you said and how you work with individuals."

A 51-year-old, African American, MBA-level, female healthcare consultant from Texas said, "It's a very inclusive model."

A Caucasian, male, City Manager and Dean of Students, from Indiana said, "I think you've done a great job of capturing it."

A 58-year-old African American, male president of a company from Alabama said, when asked if the model captured the essence of his workplace experiences: "It does. It's fascinating to walk through the journey using your model."

A 72-year-old Caucasian, male engineer who resides in Arizona said, "In looking at every aspect of your model, I would say it shapes how my career has advanced."

A 48-year-old African American pastor and financial services executive from Utah said, "I think this model has captured my personal experiences perfectly. I would assume that this model would capture anyone's experience perfectly because I think you have covered all of the different dynamics that an individual would face when approaching any organization to work with them or to serve them in some capacity. I think you have done a very good job of presenting us with a panoramic view of how people experience the workplace." The participants in this study unanimously agreed that the model by Gates (2009) adequately captured the essence of how they experienced the workplace.

Managing Human Resources

The lived experiences articulated by the participants in this study revealed several implications for human resources management. Many participants shared stories indicative of a need to create more welcoming workplaces. While some participants felt that they had mentors in their respective organizations or professions that assisted them in making sense of the workplace, others desired more support. Onboarding programs, designated mentoring programs, informal mentors, and/or supportive bosses assisted professionals in learning the ropes of their respective organizations. However, some said they were not supported by human resources personnel. "They have not done anything to help me," one African American professional in his late 50 with a doctoral degree said. He felt like he was not supported within his organization.

Others recalled changes that resulted due to Covid19 as they relied more heavily on computer-mediated communication such as Zoom, Skye, and other platforms. They also noticed more remote work

opportunities which saved them on the commute to work. However, when it was time to return to the office, some professionals, according to an African American co-owner of a bank, who manages employees, wanted to find roles that more closely matched who they were today. She said, Covid19 gave people time to reassess their lives and to determine if they were moving in the direction they wanted to go. Some people wanted more pay. Some people wanted better benefits. Others wanted a new profession all together.

This same professional also noticed that burnout was causing people to rethink their career choices or at least their workdays. "Burnout is an issue. I think after we came out of the pandemic, it's been difficult for people to get back into the groove of working that 8-hour-day. Working at home allowed people to find a way to be more efficient and condense the workday," she explained. The issues of work-life balance came into play when professionals were expected to return to work after being home with their families, especially their children, during the pandemic. "There was this mass burnout of people, burnout from things that happened because of the pandemic, burnout because of being at the office or wherever you were 8, 9,10 hours," she said. "You just needed your brain to relax some." The pandemic had taken its toll on some professionals, and any support offered to them was much needed.

However, a salient theme that emerged from analysis of the workplaces experiences of the 135 participants in this study had to do with traumatic workplace betrayals or activities that implied or perhaps resulted in rejection or a lack of support from organizations. Participants spoke of a variety of disturbing experiences such as: 1) racism, 2) sexism, 3) sexual harassment, 4) pay disparities, and 5) harassment via false accusations or unjustified disciplinary actions. While human resources teams tended to contribute in meaningful ways by offering onboarding programs, mentors, training and development, etc., the professionals who participated in this study required more support managing issues related to: 1) racism, 2) sexism, 3) sexual harassment, 4) pay disparities, and 5) harassment via false accusations and/or unjustified disciplinary actions.

Racism

Racism was a prevalent concern for participants who were African American, Asian, and Latino/a. A Latino lawyer from Utah said he was treated unfairly. "I have felt minimized and sometimes overlooked until they actually realize I have skills…I generally have to do something above and beyond." Pressure to overachieve in order to just be accepted is a common theme that emerged in the experiences of Latino/a and African American workers (Gates, 2021). Other Latinos/as felt abused as well. A Latina woman in her 60s said she was devastated when her team accused her of aggression when in fact she was just being herself and doing her job. Her normal way of talking was perceived by her Caucasian colleagues as anger and aggression even though that was not her intent. Had their observations stopped there, the offense may have been easier to digest. However, her suspicions about their racist motives escalated when they proceeded to remove her from the office due to alleged aggression. She said marginalization for her manifested as an unwarranted punishment, which she was adamant had resulted due to her race. She had to contend with negative perceptions of her communication that would have been deemed fine in reasonable organizations.

An Asian man also felt marginalized. "The marginalization happened in the management consulting world," said an Asian, male, chief operating officer who resides in the D.C. area where he does policy and system reform. "If you understood the culture better, you were plugged in more. I didn't have that. Without having that, you sort of get marginalized in some ways. You're not at the table. You're not included for those water cooler conversations or hallway conversations," advised this participant who said he once worked for President Obama. He said he was constantly subjected to stereotypes about his race in a previous role working as a consultant in the D.C. area. One stereotype in particular had to do with young Asian men buying Honda Civic cars and customizing them. He was teased about this in addition to being subjected to racial slurs he didn't think his colleagues realized were racial slurs.

"I have experienced blatant racism, but it did not impact my relationship with this individual. I don't think he was aware that he was saying racist statements. Um, and I'm still friends with his boss, and I think he's a great person. He would say things like, um, you know, do you like to lice out your car. You know young Asian men, a lot of them, you know, buy those Honda Civics and they modify them, right, they put those loud mufflers on them and whatever," he laughed. "And I guess lice it out is a term that they use, but um he would say things like that without really knowing that it could be construed as racist."

This professional said this same man also teased him about his last name. He made jokes about the pronunciation of his name, etc. This Asian professional talked to the man about his behavior, and the offending party was very embarrassed and sorry. "I really don't think he realizes that it could be construed that way," the Asian man added.

One African American female professional from Missouri said she was appalled by an encounter with a lady at her job. She said, "I needed the code to get in the restroom, and the older Caucasian woman on duty asked me if I was there to clean the bathroom." This woman who has a doctoral degree held a leadership role in her profession, but her colleagues treated her like she was the janitor. While it is possible for people with doctoral degrees to scrub toilets, that was not in the job description of the professional at this fortune 100 company.

Sometimes community members subjected professionals to marginalization when they were on assignment or perhaps traveling on business. For instance, an African American journalist with a doctoral degree said she was called the "N" word while covering a story. Known for her resilience, she ignored the derogatory comment and kept working. She had that "I'm not about to let anything come between me and my money" attitude about her which allowed her to dismiss attempts to marginalize her. Similarly, an African American university dean who works for a predominately Caucasian school, said, "I've been pulled over a couple of times [by the police] in the city of [name of her town] for no reason, you know, it's the color of your skin." So the climate in the community can shape how educators, students, and other professionals experience universities. The women attributed the abuse they endured to racism. However, both were determined to rise above it.

While Caucasian participants may enjoy privilege due to their race, a Caucasian news anchor and journalist from Pennsylvania said he recalled hearing racial slurs in the workplace targeting African Americans. He said he heard his colleagues refer to African Americans as jigaboos early in his career. Sometimes he ignored the remarks which made him uncomfortable, and in other instances when it was safe to complain, he would discourage such infractions. He didn't want to be associated with the negative terminology used to describe African Americans. He also recalled how the stations were being pressured to diversify the news teams, resulting in African Americans inadvertently being placed on air prematurely. They didn't have enough experience to be on air, yet there they were, he added. "They died on air," he said, of the new talent who lacked the skills to cut it in that workplace. Unfortunately, many of those fast and certain failures were African Americans trying to get into the news business. Perhaps the problem also had to do with entitlement. A Caucasian engineer said some people feel entitled to certain jobs and pay because they have these fancy degrees; however, some of them lack the experience and capacity to perform those jobs well. Some people look great on paper, but they can't perform in the workplace, he suggested. Regardless of the reason, racism seemed to be a common theme across races and genders.

Further substantiating the prevalence of racism, an African American president recalled vividly how he was subjected to discrimination. "I've seen people galvanize to try to marginalize me. Organizational members tried to perpetuate a false narrative…I can get my own narrative," said an African American president of a company in Alabama. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, this participant said, "Something about them caused them to think they could marginalize me." This professional prided himself on never compromising his values for a job. "If I lose a job, then I lose a job, but I will never lose myself in the process

of working for somebody," he cautioned. Integrity mattered to him. He spoke about standing in his own power and not falling victim to marginalization. He resisted pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture. "It's dangerous for your mental health to not be who you are," he said. The ability to be genuine and authentic in the workplace seemed to matter to the African American professionals; however, many suggested that they "Couldn't keep it 100 at work," all of the time for fear of being fired. This meant that some employees kept up the pretense that all was well in the workplace even when it was not. In other words, they didn't feel safe sharing 100 percent of what they either thought or what they experienced because they didn't trust how it would be construed by others, especially when communicating across cultures.

Double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007/1903) caused some of people in this study to be cognizant of the unique perspectives the world tended to have of them while they also had their own perceptions of themselves. Perhaps they felt like they had more than one identity as they wrestled with fully being seen and appreciated in the workplace. To be successful, some said they had to negotiate how much of their authentic selves they could reveal in the workplace; they assessed their respective workplace cultures and determined how authentic, or forthcoming with information, they could be. The participants who were happier in the workplace did a better job of securing roles in companies that espoused values that were congruent with their personal values. When people could not be authentic at work, they tended to exert more psychological energy, looking for strategies to be successful and making sense of encounters whereby they felt marginalized. An ideal existence was one in which a workplace and employee had mutual respect, one in which employees felt their respective companies embraced their identities and values. The participants in this study determined how to garner greater workplace acceptance based on the cultures of their respective workplaces. They knew when to keep it 100 and when to keep it 75 or 80, according to one African American politician from Georgia, who explained the degree of authenticity he expressed in the workplace. Essentially, race was a salient theme in this study, but participants had strategies to manage it.

Sexism

Women who were African American, Caucasian, Latino/a, Asian, and Greek complained of sexism. A 47-year-old current doctoral student and academic consultant said her boss directly told her he wanted a man to work in a particular leadership role at his school. "He said he didn't want to put the comment in an email, but he told her face-to-face that he wanted a man for that job." He didn't think a woman could handle the disciplinary issues required of anyone in that role. Similarly, an African America general manager for a radio station said her male subordinate gave her grief. "I just don't think he wanted to report to a woman," she said. He had a history of giving her problems without provocation, and he would sabotage her job by taking things off of her desk that she needed for work. She surmised that he didn't think she deserved to be in the role of general manager or leader. Men made it clear that women should not hold certain roles, and this perspective adversely shaped how decisions were made in the workplace.

In another situation, a pharmacist said she could be standing in her lab coat with her name tag clearly displayed only to have people walk up to her subordinates, particularly male subordinates, and ask questions that only she could answer. "They didn't expect me to be the pharmacist," she said. "The expectation is that my white male student was the pharmacist…I have encountered that throughout my career." She was not presumed to be the pharmacist, nor was she expected to know how to do her job. She would have to step in and answer questions her subordinates should never have been asked in the first place. This encounter was not unlike what a leader from a fortune 75 company in Texas said she encountered. She, too, said her male subordinates did not want to have a female boss. "He didn't want to work for a woman," she said.

On the other hand, a Caucasian military leader in her late 50s, however, noticed how some women took advantage of their roles as women. They used the stereotypes to their advantage. They would pretend not to be strong enough to carry out some of their duties. She remembered women pretending not to be strong enough to carry paper. "You will get that paper over there even if you have to carry it one sheet at a time," she urged the ladies. Women tried to exaggerate their weaknesses to reduce their workloads, but it didn't work

in the military, at least not on this leader's watch. Ultimately, however, sexism tended to be the perpetuation of stereotypes of gendered roles.

Caucasian men tended to agree that sexism was prevalent in the workplace, and they admitted to enjoying a certain amount privilege as Caucasian men. A college president in his 70s said he knew his privilege as a Caucasian man opened doors for him. Similarly, a Caucasian, male consultant, also in his 70s, spoke of the expectations of success. In the fifth grade, the consultant said his teacher told him he didn't need to worry about learning how to spell correctly because when he grew up and started working, his secretary would type all his papers for him. He received messages early in life from his community informing him that he was expected to be successful. In another instance, a Caucasian, male engineer echoed similar sentiments. He admitted to enjoying the benefits of being a Caucasian male. Overall, sexism marginalized women and rendered men, especially Caucasian men, more powerful and in some cases more successful.

Another salient theme regarding Caucasian men was that when they endorsed or supported members of the LBGTQ community, they encountered resistance. One consultant from Chicago said his contracts went away "almost overnight" when he published a paper in support of people who are gay. He had to prematurely retire and pursue other streams of revenue. In a comparable situation, a Caucasian professor from Indiana spoke of recruiting African Americans students for his university, and he recalled the awkwardness he experienced from dominant group members. He also said that when he supported gay students on campus, some people frowned upon it. A third Caucasian businessman from Florida and Indiana reported similar experiences when he supported the LBGTQ community as well as Latinos/as. All three of these men were affiliated with their respective religious institutions, and that may have accounted for some of the resistance. Ultimately, Caucasian men risked retaliation when they supported non-dominant group members, such as people who are African American, Latino/a, and/or gay. They either lost their jobs or were subjected to other social penalties. Overall sexism was a prevalent theme for the people in this study.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was more prevalent among younger female professionals of all races. A Latino man from Utah who was in charge of adjudicating sexual harassment claims maintained,

> "In the organization I was in, it [sexual harassment] occurred more to the younger women, but they were too intimidated to do anything about it. The women that were older and had master's degrees and had confidence in the ability to find another job said, you know, [said] 'I'm not putting up with this. I'm going to report it.'"

He explained that "the women that stood out the most were all very accomplished, very intelligent." So a woman's decision to report sexual harassment was contingent on her confidence level as well as her belief that she could secure another job if she did not prevails during the grievance process. Another woman from Indiana said her decision to report sexual harassment was strongly correlated to her perceptions about whether she thought her employer would believe her.

Similarly, a 47-year-old Caucasian female production supervisor at a factory recalled several instances in which she was subjected to severe sexual harassment. "I was sexually harassed a lot," she said. "I didn't know, I didn't know better. In your early 20s, you just think that's acceptable behavior. In your late 40s, not so much," she maintained. "If you report those kinds of things, you get harassed until you quit or they find a reason to fire you," she explained. Essentially, women who resisted sexual harassment in the workplace could expect retaliation if they complained. Having dropped out of high school to enter the workforce, this woman didn't know how to combat sexual harassment. Perhaps she was still honing her organizational skills and developing greater emotional intelligence. She recalled an encounter whereby she was subjected to unwanted touch from her supervisor.

> "So I was bending over," she explained, "to fill up my water bottle, so we had like a water cooler, and I was filling up my water bottle, and my boss came behind me and put his foot in between my legs and touched my vagina with his foot."

She recalled the emotional encounter as though it were yesterday. She left this job and others due to unrelenting sexual harassment. Another factory worker, a man in his 30s, in the same county who did not know this woman, substantiated the claim that sexual harassment was prevalent in the manufacturing industry. He said, "the guys will cat call when beautiful ladies walk into the factory." He also said he's seen sexual harassment go both ways, revealing that women were known to flirt, too, However, the more pervasive abuse entailed men sexually harassing women and abusing their power over them. The factories were predominately male, and women, more frequently than men, were the targets of abuse.

The military was no different. A Caucasian military officer said she had seen and heard more than her share of complaints about sexual harassment, and the typical survivor of abuse was female. The women often entered the military very naïve, she recalled. They often came there telling people they had boyfriends at home. "Now you have 200 boyfriends," she warned them. The younger women were the ones struggling the most to manage unwanted sexual attention. However, an African American man in his 50s said that when he was in the military, another man, propositioned him. He told his abuser: "Dude, I'm straight. I'm good." Then he called his sister-in-law, another enlisted military staff, for support. Family support reportedly helped professionals survive sexual harassment (Gates, 2023).

An Asian woman in her 30s articulated the trauma of being sexually harassed by her boss's friend, someone she had previously respected.

> "When I was working at the restaurant, there were a couple of VIP clients that were 100% inappropriate. I was young at the time. I think I was maybe around 24 years old, so that's kind of me just entering the workforce after finishing college. And I did experience that from a client being completely inappropriate to me, asking whether or not I was married yet and then saw me out in public, and I recognized him and um he was completely inappropriate. He was touching me and groping me in the wrong areas where I had to get up and I had to excuse myself to go to the bathroom. I was completely uncomfortable. I didn't know what to do. I was so young. He was so much older. I really thought that he was actually a really great client and someone that, you know, really valued me as a person and didn't see me as an object, but unfortunately when it was taken out of the workplace and we saw each other just down the street from the restaurant, it was a completely different interaction. And um it really jarred me."

She didn't tell her boss because she didn't feel safe to do so because the offender was a close friend of her employer. "I didn't feel supported. It was every, you know, everyday it was something else that was my fault, so if this was another opportunity for something to be my fault, then I would rather have avoided it, and that's what I did," she explained. Because the climate at her job was already hostile, she was uncomfortable sharing concerns with her boss. The environment was not conducive to divulging sensitive information, so she decided to quit. "I hit a breaking point, and I realized, you know, this is just not worth it, and I had to resign." The abuse, coupled with the lack of support, compelled her to leave.

When the men in this study spoke of sexual harassment, they typically were sharing stories of how women in the workplace were being sexually harassed. However, one African American mortgage loan officer and business owner in his 50s recalled a situation in which a woman brought only donuts and coffee for a male subordinate. "It was so obvious that she liked him." While the male subordinate never objected to the unwanted attention from his superior, his colleagues complained, and the female superior quietly left the Arizona company.

The ways in which organizations managed sexual harassment seemed to vary. One interesting trend was that women who were accused of sexual harassment left companies whereas when the perpetrator was

male, he tended to stay in the company and simply be punished. Women left companies when they suffered sexual harassment as well as when they were accused of sexual harassment. Men stayed in some companies even after being found guilty of sexual harassment. These findings suggest inequitable consequences to women when they endured sexual harassment as the target of abuse as well as when women were accused of it. According to narratives shared in the present study, men tended to have less severe outcomes or consequences when accused of sexual harassment. Future research could determine if this finding is prevalent among male-dominated industries or in general.

Overall, sexual harassment appeared to be more prevalent among female professionals, particularly when they were younger in age or new to their respective professions. Perhaps that is when these professionals had the least societal power or were too afraid and naive to stand up for themselves. The ones with confidence in their abilities to find other jobs were more inclined to report abuse. However, some survivors of abuse just left without bothering to complain because their work environments were so hostile. This especially was the case when offenders were family members and/or close friends to the owners of companies or when offenders maintained close ties to the supervisors of the survivors of abuse. Unfortunately, sexual harassment remained on the menu at many of the companies represented in this study. However, savvy professionals didn't contend with it long before they either complained or resigned.

Pay Disparities

Pay disparities were prevalent with all of the Latino/a participants as well as many of the African American professions and the women. A Latino factory worker resigned when he discovered that all of his coworkers had higher salaries than he had, particularly given that his colleagues were doing less work. This professional asserted that he generated business for his factory and was more productive than the other employees. He was baffled by the inequities. Therefore, he asked for a raise, and when it was declined, he promptly resigned. Similarly, a Latino lawyer said he was treated unfairly. "I did the work, but I was never given the title," he explained.

A Caucasian woman in her late 50s who has served as a banker, business owner, board member, and politician admitted that part of the reason she tended to have lower salaries than her male counterparts was because she didn't negotiate well. She took responsibility for her shortcoming and said that society did a better job of preparing men to negotiate well in the workplace. She said, "Women accept whatever salary they are offered." They don't know if they should counter, or they are uncomfortable making a counteroffer. Another Caucasian woman, a factory working making $60,000, complained about the pay gap. She stated, "Still in 2023, women are grossly underpaid compared to men for the same jobs…We're still treated very differently even though we're doing what most would consider a male job. We don't get the same benefits as most men doing the same jobs. So I think that's kind of sad in 2023." Pay disparities continue to decrease workplace morale for some women.

Disparities in pay tended to surface more in the private sector, not the public, because in the public section pay was determined by a standardized calculation. As a result, differences in pay resulted because marginalized groups were not allowed to have access to higher paying jobs. Therefore, while the pay for all the people in a given job was the same, an African American fire chief as well as an Asian chief operating officer said some people were not permitted to obtain higher paying jobs, which tended to be leadership roles. The Asian executive elaborated, "there's definitely pay disparity, I noticed, in the consulting environment. Um in the government environment much less so because obviously all of those salaries are public and it's much more difficult. All of their salaries are standardized…People of color typically were not considered to be on the management track, so they were expected to just bill a lot of hours. There were differences in pay and billing expectations." Consequently, some participants were denied access to higher paying jobs even though they were qualified to do them.

An Asian woman had a similar experience. She said in one of her jobs she was always paid hourly and that even when she was promoted to manager, she did not enjoy the same salary and benefits as the male manager she replaced. Therefore, she resigned.

> "I was being taken advantage of, you know, I was running myself into the ground trying to continuously prove my value [to her previous employee]. With this company [her present job which she likes], I don't have to prove my values because I'm already valued. As a result, I just continue giving and doing more."

Her strategy in subsequent jobs has been to keep building her skills so she's in a better position to ask for more money, if she finds that necessary. She ultimately said a welcoming and safe culture mattered more to her than money. Consequently, she was happy with the money as long as she was relatively comfortable and safe. A second Asian female professional working as a consultant resigned from a job after her salary was manipulated from well over $215,000 to less than $175,000. A single mother in her 30s, this professional felt that changes had been made to her responsibilities because she'd been outspoken about certain workplace matters. She'd also asked for certain accommodations that would permit her to work from home, so she could care for her small child. After making her wishes known, she noticed that her accounts slowly started disappearing. Those accounts had been re-assigned to men who were less qualified and less skilled. She ultimately resigned due to negative differential treatment and secured a more lucrative consulting role in another firm.

Similarly, an African American female dean of students in her 50s recalled having her title demoted to director. "They demoted my position as dean, and made it director," she explained. When a man had the same job prior to her, he enjoyed a higher salary and a better title. She was doing the same work for less money and a less impressive title than her male counterpart. The participants in this study definitely noticed discrepancies in pay and sometimes in title.

Pay disparities were problematic for the people who experienced it. The most frequent outcome was resignation. When professionals discovered that they were being underpaid, they often quit, sometimes on the spot. The mere thought of being treated unfairly didn't go over well with some professionals. Many would give their organizations an opportunity to correct problems, but in each instance, in which that was the case, requests for raises were denied. The most prevalent response to being undervalued was to seek employment elsewhere. The bottom line was that the professionals in this study did not respond well to managers messing with their money or paying them less than what they deserved.

Safety

Issues regarding safety tended to come from women in this study, and women indicated that they considered safety when electing to accept jobs. A church worker from Oregon in her 40s who had once worked in the fast-food industry recalled being called a bitch at work by her colleague. It was a common occurrence that she and her female counterpart experienced. She said she'd been cursed out before by colleagues and occasionally by customers. She could understand the frustration customers may experience when, on occasion, their orders were wrong, provoking an irate customer to respond with disdain, but she drew the line at colleagues cursing her out. She quit for safety reasons because the climate was so hostile that she feared violence might ensue. Similarly, a Caucasian, female, factory worker in her 40s abruptly resigned from her job after the business owner's son utilized derogatory language to describe her. "The owner's son called me a BITCH to my face," she revealed. This employee who had some high school, said she didn't report the offense because "there's nobody to report to if it's the owner's son." She didn't waste time with the grievance process because she didn't think she would prevail in a complaint against the owner's son. She did, however, have her older brother come up to the factory and confront her abuser before she promptly quit.

Actual or perceived threats of violence compelled other professionals to quit. A 60-year-old Greek business owner closed her jewelry store when she and her co-owner husband were robbed. "My husband was

beaten up," said the business owner. Robberies have a unique way of inspiring professionals to rethink their career choices. These business owners decided to try their luck in the travel industry where they have amassed more than $200 million in business over a 20-year period. The threat of safety caused another profession in her 40s to switch companies, although she stayed in the same industry. She said she worked alone at a third-shift job and would go hours without seeing anybody. Her fear was that if something ever happened to her, such as a robbery, nobody would be around to help. At the time she resigned, she said robberies in her area had been on the rise. She left as a precaution. Other women echoed the need to feel safe. An Asian woman added, 'If I'm in a comfortable position, and I feel safe in my environment, that's what makes me happy." People want to be safe.

A multi-racial woman from a corporation in the Midwestern part of the United States said her colleague overheard another worker plotting to fight her. The woman's colleague thought the professional was in imminent danger, so that colleague, trying to help, informed the Human Resources Department. In lieu of resolving the problem, the worker was offered a severance package, equivalent to one year's salary, and terminated after seven years of employment.

> "When I was let go, someone told me I should go put in an EECO claim because they let me go without cause. I think it was more retaliatory because I complained about my supervisor, and I think it was between her or me. This is somebody that I had a discrimination claim about…When Covid happened, they made her my supervisor. I don't know why they did that because they already knew how she thinks about me. She shouldn't have been my supervisor in the first place…Her kids started working there, and I [was assigned] to be their trainer. Anytime I gave any advice to the kids, I guess they would go home and complain to the mom. Her kids would go home at night and complain about me to her, she would come back into the office and retaliate against me…And then one day she was talking to someone else about me, and she said she wanted to punch me in the face. I heard her talking, but I didn't know she was talking about me. This new girl heard her say she wanted to punch me in the face. So she went to HR and complained, you know. I did not know the lady went to HR."

Ultimately, this professional ended up having a conversation with her Human Resources Department. They made no attempts to resolve the conflict. They simply offered her a severance package. However, her termination may have been expedited by the fact that she threatened to sue the company if they didn't give her a raise and enhance the climate. Her concerns were legitimate, but the fear of being sued may have compelled her employer to act quickly. When operating in a litigious society, all threats of being sued are taken seriously. Companies aren't keen on the idea of having employees coming to work each day, covertly collecting evidence against them for a lawsuit. The one-year severance package was appreciated, but this professional preferred to have her job. Safety seemed to be more prevalent among women in this study. While one woman said her husband was hurt at work, she was the one who made the decision to get out of the jewelry business for safety reasons. The participants in this study said safety could dictate whether they accepted or stayed at a job.

Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions

The final theme which emerged in this study had to do with unwarranted complaints and false accusations. Professionals were being subjected to bogus and/or unfair disciplinary actions as a strategy to harass them. A Latina woman from the Midwest said her colleagues unfairly asked her to leave work for the day because she was too aggressive. She was excited about work and doing her job when a colleague accused her of scaring her. She said the Caucasian colleague expressed concern that the lady may someday come "and hurt her children or something." The Latina worker was offended as she had no plans to hurt anyone. A colleague had expressed concern for her safety even though the Latina woman posed no threat to her safety. The allegation that the Latina professional might become violent was ridiculous. "That was racism. Let's call it what it is," she said. She was made to go home for the day and calm down even though she was not upset and saw no need to leave the job that day. She essentially needed to walk on eggshells and speak in a whisper

so as not to upset her colleagues. She felt like they were looking for excuses to complain about her, meticulously pushing her out of her job with each bogus complaint.

A Caucasian man from Indiana recalled being forced to abandon his job as Dean of Students, which disappointed him. Loved by students, he couldn't understand the president's decision to suddenly replace him with a younger man who was Latino, a man who had less experience. The Caucasian dean said he was regarded as being too radical for the culture of his campus when he took harsh actions to combat sexual abuse (and rape) of students on campus, students who primarily were women. He went on to become City Manager in another area and recovered from the termination well. On the other hand, a Latino Dean of Students from Texas, who is in his 50s, felt marginalized by his employer when they rejected his efforts to eradicate racism. He was conflicted as to whether the rejection was due to his race or his classification as a gay man. However, he felt his removal from the leadership role was unjustified. He said he did not realize that sharing his views about race would be characterized as a "fireable offense." He went on to share that,

> "Addressing issues of race and racism in society had become something that was very important to me…I did so when I was a faculty member, so when I became dean of this college, I wanted to bring that work to the forefront. For the past seven years I focused very strongly on racism and racial justice."

However, his campus did not reward him for the ways in which he enacted or individualized his role. Sadly, he said, "Um, well, I ultimately got fired about three months ago for it." His termination came as a shock to him because he hadn't realized that he was deemed as not complying with workplace policies. Or perhaps the policies only emerged when dominant group members decided they didn't like what he was doing.

Other professionals who participated in this study complained of unfair punishment or false accusations as well. An African American man in his 50s worked as the fire chief in his community. His organization has a policy whereby employees could borrow tools and equipment from the fire station. Like other employees, he borrowed a lawn mower from the fire station when his lawn mower at home stopped working. He followed the protocol at his job for borrowing the loaner mower only to be accused of stealing it by a city leader. He was shocked by the accusation that he would steal. He had not stolen anything. Therefore, he was not disciplined for theft. However, he was subjected to harassment from a city official for doing something he was well within his rights to do. The allegation that he had stolen something could have diminished his good reputation.

In another instance, a 32-year-old Asian from California, who now resides in Alabama where she works as a marking executive, recalled being constantly harassed by her boss in her previous job in the restaurant industry. She spoke about not wanting to check her text messages because he would "constantly berate me." Her boss created a hostile work environment that extended into her personal life because he'd text her even when she was not in the office, harassing her via email and text message, about minute workplace matters that could have waited until she was back at work.

In a comparable situation, a Latino American lawyer, in his 50s, from Utah indicated that he was unfairly investigated. He felt that tax dollars were wasted on a baseless investigation of his business practices because his colleagues did not fully comprehend the scope of his work. The investigation initially suggested that he had "some culpability," he indicated. But the complaint did not prevail when the investigators realized what his actual responsibilities were. He essentially asserted that he had done nothing wrong. He felt that he was not given the benefit of the doubt, and his reputation may have been unfairly tarnished by the probe. Fortunately, his mentor added a note to his file to explain the mishap and to inform others that he was not guilty of any wrongdoing. Completely removing the illegitimate complaint from his file was not in his mentor's sphere of influence. Advancing a similar claim, an African American man in his late 50s maintained that his organization unfairly "took away some of my responsibilities," as a strategy to harass him, spurring this professional to quit that job.

A 51-year-old healthcare consultant from California recalled the stress she endured due to an investigation spanning six to eight months. She felt like the allegations were unjustified, but she still had to go through the process. She was dismayed that someone she'd worked with closely failed to follow protocol when filing a complaint against her. The normal practice was to talk directly to a person if you had a problem. Given that she talked to and interacted with the person on a regular basis, she was perplexed by her colleague's decision to circumvent the grievance process. She said, "This particular peer [who filed a complaint against her with the executive team]…for a complaint to bypass me and go to the executive level, I could only take it personal." She spoke of the immense stress she felt having to defend herself for months. Another shocking complaint surfaced in Rhode Island. A 42-year-old executive from that state with a doctoral degree said he was disciplined for doing what he saw his boss doing. His boss didn't like the way he handled a certain procedure; however, this particular business practice was typical for their workplace, something he'd seen his boss do many times. He eventually left that job. "When you no longer feel valued, it's time to go," he said. Employees don't enjoy devoting time to organizations where they are not appreciated.

Professionals in this study felt like their organizations harassed them with unjustified complaints, causing unnecessary stress and undermining their employment. Even when the investigators of the complaints ruled in each of their favors, these professionals had to endure the stress and embarrassment of being investigated, which typically concluded with a note in their personnel files. That meant that future promotions in said companies might be limited as their reputations had been compromised. Moreover, the time expended carrying out unwarranted investigations created corporate waste. Imagine what could have been accomplished with the time and other resources allocated to baseless complaints. Unfounded complaints also served to undermine the trust that professionals had in their respective organizations, requiring more psychological energy to process workplace matters. Ridiculous complaints are an abuse of power and a waste of resources because that time could have been utilized for more pressing workplace matters. Unnecessary complaints don't add to a company's competitive advance. It takes away from it as professionals begin to stop trusting their colleagues. Consequently, organizations must create workplaces in which all organizational members can thrive. Organizations can optimize their talent by plugging people into the right jobs and facilitating their successful socialization.

DISCUSSION

The organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2002; 2003a; 2009; 2023) was unanimously supported in this study. All 135 participants indicated that the model captured the essence of how they experienced their respective workplaces and professions. A salient component of the model had to do with organizational acceptance or rejection of employees. Many of the participants recalled instances in which organizations either did not communicate acceptance or created uncertainty and ambiguity about acceptance. Acceptance seemed to spur greater engagement, and engagement influenced productivity. Therefore, employees who didn't feel valued or accepted within organizations either left those jobs, or they stuck around and compromised performance and other workplace outcomes (Gates, 2023; Guo, Qiu, & Gan, 2022). Performance may be in jeopardy due to incivility in the workplace (Guo, Qiu, & Gan, 2022). Because employees tend to be less productive when they are not engaged, perhaps organizations can examine how all employees experience workplaces, illuminating strategies that enhance workplace encounters. Cultivating climates that are more conducive to employees achieving excellence should remain a primary goal of human resources professionals. Organizational leaders may be able to help employees overcome traumatic workplace betrayals, such as racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. Systems that promote healthy professional interactions, inspire greater engagement, and enhance productivity may succeed in reducing turnover.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the organizational experiences of 135 professionals as they related to organizational socialization. Findings revealed support for the current rendition of organizational socialization model by Gates (2002; 2003a; 2009; 202). This work has implications for human resources management as experiences conveyed in the present study were indicative of traumatic workplace betrayals manifesting as racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety issues, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. The themes that emerged in this study may help scholars and practitioners better understand organizational socialization, especially during a Covid19 era when human resources professionals have to work more diligently to keep employees engaged and prepared to handle new challenges. It's imperative to get the people part right because employees can help organizations gain competitive advantages in dynamic markets. Overcoming the challenges articulated by the professionals in this study may help their respective hiring managers decrease turnover and enhance socialization.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper had implications for human resources management. This work might be insightful to people entering organizations as well as to the people who are already in the organizations that were reflected in this study. It also had implications for how these participants experience their existing organizations. A disturbing trend that emerged in this study was that non-dominant group members continue to face marginalization in organizations. Of all the participants in this study, African Americans revealed more hardships than any other group. Other groups may have had difficulties along the way, but they tended to find strategies to overcome them. The African Americans encountered blatant negative differential treatment. Moreover, other organizational members even commented on the struggles of African Americans. For example, a Caucasian, male professional recalled hearing racial slurs directed at African Americans while a Caucasian professor had to contend with people frowning upon his efforts to recruit African American students. When dominant group members tried to support African Americans, Latinos/as, or people from the LGBTQ community, these professionals were targeted, too. These findings suggested that the organizations reflected in this study were still somewhat hostile toward African Americans and other traditionally disenfranchised groups. Consequently, what do these findings mean for the participants in the organizations represented in this study? It means that organizational members may have to contend with racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety issues, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc.

Organizations can help employees overcome these challenges by preparing in advance. They can develop greater emotional intelligence to better comprehend how to handle themselves in challenging situations. They can maintain high self-confidence and high self-esteem so that when bullies try to diminish their self-worth, they can withstand the challenge. They can hone their skills and keep striving for excellence, so as to reduce the chances that others will take issue with their competence. They can familiarize themselves with organizational policies, procedures, and laws governing their organizations. This knowledge may help ensure that employees comply with rules, which may reduce the likelihood of people filing fraudulent and ridiculous complaints against them. When they convey that they know their rights (and when others respect their rights), they may be less of a target for marginalization.

Another strategy to overcome marginalization will be for these organizational members to find mentors. They may want to consider internal and external mentors (Gates, 2019). Mentors within organizations can help people understand the organization's culture, and mentors outside organizations can help people navigate the industry. External mentors also can help answer questions organizational members are uncomfortable posing in the workplace. For example, organizational members may be reticent about asking questions that would cause them to appear incompetent, especially given that some organizational members already treat them like they are. Consequently, that double-consciousness (DuBois, 2007) creeps in enough to compel some organizational members to be strategic about asking questions.

Organizations can support all organizational members by implementing no-tolerance policies for racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety violations, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. They can examine organizational cultures and take measures to root out any negative elements rendering people marginalized. They can implement training programs that promote the desired, and legal, outcomes, and they can utilize the appropriate metrics to help assess their success. Moreover, organizations can consider other ways to socialize organizational members by pairing them with savvy mentors and offering subsequent opportunities for their people to continue honing their skills. Ultimately, socialization is an ongoing process that people and organizations must constantly seek to enhance. Effective organizational socialization may help organizations draw the greatest value out of people, gaining a competitive advantage with organizational members.

APPENDIX

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION MODEL BY DR. DENISE GATES
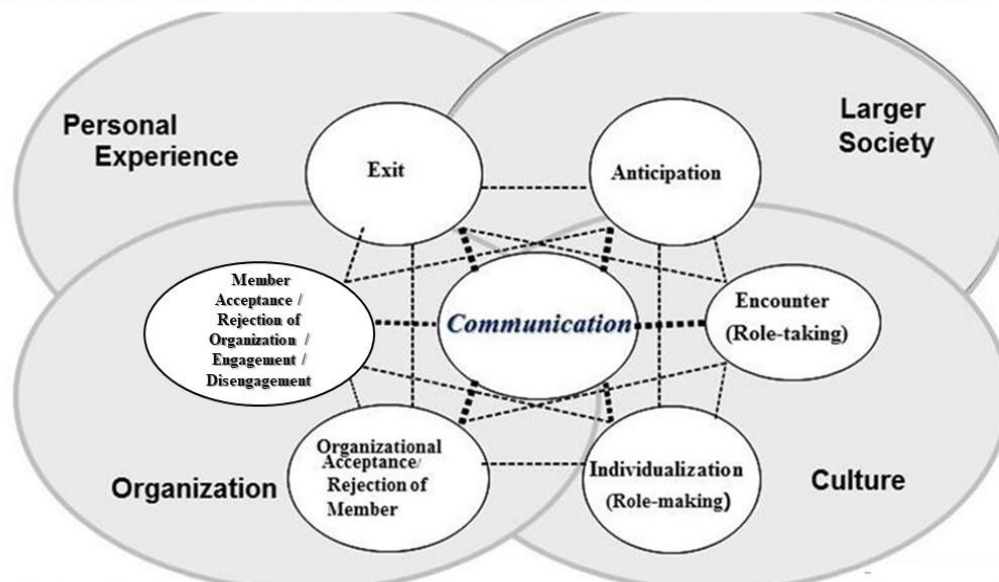
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Dr. Denise Gates is an energetic business professor, prolific author, and devoted talent optimization consultant, specializing in organizational socialization and strategic management. She earned her doctoral degree as well as her post-doctorate in organizational communication and management after a rewarding career in the insurance and financial services industry. A graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, Dr. Gates is known for her organizational socialization model, which was published by the Publishing House of South China University of Technology and utilized by MBA students. She has authored and co-authored a plethora of academic publications over the years, and her research has been presented globally. Her calling is to inspire leaders to draw the greatest value out of others with her research, instruction, and consulting.