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AN EVALUATION OF CULTURE IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: DOES TAKING CONFLICT PERSONALLY OUTWEIGH CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS IN MANAGING CONFLICT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATIN AMERICANS?

Lindsey Ann LeBaron
Florida International University, lalebaron@gmail.com

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**AN EVALUATION OF CULTURE IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: DOES TAKING
CONFLICT PERSONALLY OUTWEIGH CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS IN
MANAGING CONFLICT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS
AND LATIN AMERICANS?**

By: Lindsey LeBaron, MS Candidate

Chair: Dr. Hugo Ottolenghi

Committee Member: Dr. Judith Bernier

Committee Member: Dr. Nurhayat Blige

A professional project presented to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication of
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Master of Science.

Florida International University

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ABSTRACT

The channels we use to communicate have adapted to reflect new ways of life. Through the creation of the printing press, print media became the major source of giving and receiving information until the age of social media and technology. Social media and its many networks (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) have made communicating with multiple audiences easier and faster. Information from any part of the world is now accessible to everyone in possession of a smart device.

With this influx of knowledge comes a plethora of opinions. It is no longer the responsibility of the media to present information, rather, it is now the media's responsibility to filter the correct messages to the masses. Social media, through its ability to build connections, has allowed businesses the opportunity to market their products to global audiences within a matter of seconds.

Advancements in technology using the internet and social media have made our world progressively connected. Search engines now have access to information both credible and personal, offering readers a plethora of information about many different topics and opinions. With each new advancement comes greater opportunities for businesses and communities to expand their services and connect with people globally. "Intercultural responsibility is an important development as it offers a framework of voice, global ethics and solidarity which work within conceptualization and critiques of globalization, democracy and human rights" (Phillips, 2013). Social media may also affect the ways that businesses interact in the future. Dijck (2013) stated, "In December 2011, 1.2 billion users worldwide - 82 percent of the world's Internet population over age 15 - logged on to a social media site, up from 6 percent in 2007. Within less

than a decade, a new infrastructure for online sociality and creativity has emerged, penetrating every fiber of culture today.”

Adversely, a more connected world could potentially bring more misunderstandings and conflict than we have seen in the history of the world. Naivety can be a weapon in creating schisms and conflict. Those who do not have cultural sensitivity may unintentionally offend those of different countries through their personal belief systems and ideologies. Additionally, existing racism and bigotry in the United States could halt company equality and affect positions of power for those of different color. Findings from Smith & Hunt (2021) reveal that there are few differences across management that support or determine a white individual’s understanding of racial disadvantage.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has additionally changed the ways in which businesses function. As many employees have opted or have been selected for remote working, barriers to understanding language and emotions could potentially play a role in creating more misunderstandings in solving conflict. The pandemic has opened new opportunities for every country to connect with each other through an increase of online activity. TikTok (which started in 2016,) GoogleMeets (started in 2017,) and Zoom Meetings (established in 2012) have gained more followers in recent years and have redefined the ways that businesses and communities interact with one another socially and culturally.

As the world continues to change, business leaders will need to find new ways to adapt in cultural, social, and professional ways. Greater developments in communication will require communications leaders and business professionals to better understand cultural considerations

and the ways that each individual person reacts to conflict to better resolve disputes in a multicultural world.

As this project is limited by time restraints, primary research will focus on the ways opposing cultures handle conflict in the workplace and will discuss the ways that power can be a barrier to conflict resolution. Further research needs to be conducted regarding cultural development and conflict management in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To navigate the importance of conflict management in a multicultural world, this review will be divided into two parts. First, it will explore cultural considerations and ethical decision-making to better understand how human behaviors and cultural identities can affect conflict management. Second, it will dive into conflict resolution styles, taking conflict personally, the concept of power, and emotions in conflict. Finally, it will provide information on how working in the United States has affected people of Latin and African American descent. This review provides an understanding of an individual in conflict as represented in the research and provides a brief synopsis of how the academic world views the ways that businesses resolve conflict in the United States.

Part I: How does human behavior and cultural identity affect conflict management?

In considering how to best approach conflict in a constructive manner, managers need to be aware of the cultural and ethical views of their employees. “People in different cultures quite often have different ideologies, and such differences are important to an organization. They determine the basic assumptions shared by people in a particular society, which in turn form the basis for their interactions with others in the workplace” (Xie et al, 1998). Jonas & Fritzsche (2013) found that “The ingroup is representative of a person’s cultural worldview; at the same time, defining the self in terms of the ingroup may elevate a person’s subjective sense of immortality.” Every individual has a unique background that defines the ways they interact with others and manage conflict when it occurs. If managers are aware of these unique considerations, the conflict process will be met with greater understanding and better solutions for all parties involved.

Cultural Considerations

The ways in which a person reacts to conflict can be influenced by many differing factors. Familiar circumstances, gender, age, race, and culture are all factors that need to be considered when approaching conflicting opinions in a global market (Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995). For purposes of this research, we will focus primarily on the value of culture and the fundamental aspects of the intrapersonal communication process.

Hofstede (1980) identified three levels of uniqueness in human mental programming: individual, collective, and universal. Each level introduces a different aspect of the human psyche that can help businesses better understand cultural values and personal belief systems. The most basic level, universal, identifies mental programming that is shared by all or most of humankind. According to Hofstede, “it includes a range of expressive behaviors such as laughing and weeping and associative and aggressive behaviors.” The second level is called the collective level. It includes the language in which we express ourselves, the ways we interact with family and friends, the respect we show others, and “the way we perceive general human activities like eating, making love, or defecating and the ceremonials surrounding them” (Hofstede, 1980). The final level is the individual level. It is the most unique part of mental programming and describes the personality of each person. “No two people are programmed exactly alike, even if they are identical twins raised together” (Hofstede, 1980).

For many years, researchers have used the individualism-collectivism (IC) value construct to better understand cross-cultural constructs, organizational behavior, and intercultural communications research. Individualistic societies tend to focus on the self while collectivistic societies tend to focus on the things that benefit the groups they are a part of. According to Mooij

(2021), “between 70% and 80% of the world’s population is more or less collectivistic. The Anglo-Saxon world is individualistic, and so are the northern countries of Europe, whereas the southern and eastern countries are more collectivistic.” With this consideration, managers in a U.S. workplace setting may not understand a good portion of their employees who follow a more collectivistic approach. In the future, it may become a problem for workplace unity if managers are not willing to adopt or at least understand other cultural ideals.

While individualism is increasing worldwide because it is “linked with wealth” (Mooij, 2021), the concept behind individualistic beliefs is more of a relative concept to most of the world. The United States is widely an individualistic society that supports personal rights and individualism. As more cultures immigrate to North America, it will become more important for American-based businesses to integrate principles of collectivism into their conflict management solutions as a need for individual support will be a foreign concept to many in this construct.

While most of the academic world still values the IC value construct, current research supports some alternative ideas. In recent years, researchers have found that the IC value construct does not accurately explain the ways that people react due to their personalities and cultural background. In a cross-cultural study between Japan, Thailand, and the United States, McCann et al (2010) coined the term imagined interaction as interactions that “reflect an individual’s innermost beliefs, attitudes, and values, as well as the socio-cultural structures that help to shape a person’s sense of self.” Additionally, Nisbett (2003) and Cohen (2001) argued that every society has developed its own definition of cultural value orientations because of different historical and geographical differences. Wallenfelsz & Hample (2010) stated, “If the individual imagines that a conflict situation will be unpleasant and unproductive, the actual interaction may, in fact, turn out that way. On the other hand, the conflict linkage may distort

reality.” Smith (2006) stated that “we need adequately researched national-level dimensions of culture if we are to understand and try to manage the contemporary maelstrom that we refer to as globalization.”

Ethical Decision-Making

The value of culture can help businesses understand the ethical reasoning behind a person’s decisions, which can, in turn, help managers better understand the needs of their employees during a conflict. The study of ethics can help societies and businesses better create an equitable world and offer a better understanding of the consequences of misunderstanding and inequality. “The question of ethics cannot be uncoupled from the aesthetics and symbols of the actions in question” (Phillips, 2013). The immersive nature of the internet has solved many problems within connectivity, but it has also created many problems in an ethical workplace environment. “While immersion leads to knowledge that can hardly be replaced by using more formal approaches, it also elicits ethical dilemmas” (2021).

A moral person aims to take responsibility for daily living by acting under the best interpretations of goodness. Language, religious affiliation, philosophical doctrines, and social and economic inequalities are and will remain hurdles in the battle for globalization. “Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged” (Collste, 2016). As social media has opened the gate to cultural differences, companies in the United States need to learn how to overcome cultural boundaries to build a globalized world. Managers will need to account for cultural differences to be ethical in their decisions and honorable in their dealing with their employees. Hwang & Chung (2018) found that “business ethics, such as perceived fairness, trustworthiness, and open exchanges, are indeed

critical, not only for reducing conflict, but also for transforming detrimental conflicts into positive/functional conflicts.”

Part II: How personality, power, and emotions can affect conflict resolution?

As diversity is introduced more often into the business setting, the ways managers handle conflict will need to grow and expand to meet new multicultural demands. Ting-Toomey et al (1991) found that “Cultural variability influences conflict styles, with U.S. members using a higher degree of dominating conflict style than their Japanese and Korean cohorts, and the Chinese and Taiwanese members using a higher degree of obliging and avoiding conflict management styles than their U.S. counterparts.” Research has also shown that leaders who have international backgrounds may be more equipped to handle cross-cultural conflict. “Executives from countries which differ in culture tend to adopt different strategies to resolve conflict, develop different anticipations about possible results, and be motivated by different causes” (Elsayed-Ekjiouly & Buda, 1996).

Conflict Resolution Styles and Taking Conflict Personally

Understanding the individual conflict styles of employees can help managers resolve conflict as it occurs. “Conflict styles are patterned responses, or clusters of behavior, that people use in conflict. Style preferences develop over a person’s lifetime based on a complicated blend of personal characteristics, life experiences, and family background” (Hocker et al, 2022). The Rahim (2011) Model classifies five conflict styles that people use during conflict situations: avoiding, obliging, dominating, integrating, and compromising. Each style can give managers a glimpse into how their employees handle and mitigate conflict.

A study conducted by Trudel & Reio (2011) found that “integrating and dominating styles significantly predicted both instigator and target incivility, while the accommodating, avoiding, and compromising styles did not attain statistical significance in the regression equations.” Choi (2013) found that dominating, collaborating, and avoiding roles can play a role in predicting whether an employee will find job satisfaction. Choi & Ha (2018) found that a “collaborative conflict-management culture positively influenced job satisfaction and perceived work productivity; however, a dominant conflict-management culture negatively influenced job satisfaction in the USA.” Lewicki et al (2006) found that tactics for negotiation have been classified into two categories: distributive and integrative. Adair et al (2009) found that “clashing negotiation repertoires has been shown to generate challenges for adaptation and adjustment.”

As companies employ more people of varying ethnicities, it will be important for managers understand the conflict management styles of their team members, while additionally supporting an individual’s personal response to conflict based on other circumstances that do not apply to culture. Researchers are currently evaluating other aspects of conflict that have not been considered before. One such study focused on taking conflict personally. They found that “taking conflict personally may not always be directly linked to conflict management styles in cultures that privilege independence, because such a perception can compromise the ever-important sense of the self as independent” (Kim et al, 2015). Hample (1999) found that “taking conflict personally is positively associated with an avoidant conflict management style, communication apprehension, low self-confidence, and low ego defense maturity.” Miller & Roloff (2014) found that “those who take conflict personally may have a much more difficult time achieving closure during a hurtful episode and therefore engage in rumination while attempting to accomplish closure.”

Positions of power in the workplace

This paper hopes to find evidence that sheds light on the reasons why positions of power can affect the performance of employees. The concept of power has influenced the ways in which societies and communities are built. “Power distance measures the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Mooij, 2021). The ways that managers may obtain their power can be through both positive and negative means. Historical leaders like Genghis Khan and Hitler established power through threats and fear, whereas leaders such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi established power through means of peaceful protests. Just like leaders of the past, business managers in the United States have been given a certain amount of power by virtue of their job title and responsibilities. What they do with that power can positively or negatively affect the ways their teams interact with one another and find success in the workplace.

While those who have been given power can use it for good or ill, they are limited in power by the responses they receive from those they work with. “People with power do not always choose to exercise their ability and even if they do, how effective they are depends on other people and their responses” (Hocker et al, 2022). Effective use of power starts with building relationships of trust and understanding.

When managers focus more on understanding how group members respond to conflict based on personality and cultural background, they will be better equipped to address needs and will gain additional power through the trust they receive. Trompenaars (1994) states that “practices such as promotion for recognized achievements and pay for performance assume that individuals seek to be distinguished within the group, and their colleagues approve of this

happening.” Hooper & Martin (2008) found that “differential treatment of team members by a leader is associated with poor team communication and lower levels of liking, trust and respect among coworkers.”

Although individuals may be part of a team in the workplace, studies show that situations other than a person’s cultural background can determine whether that individual feels welcomed by their team members. Positions of power that other team members have, such as management or charisma, can create imbalances of power in the workplace. “Group membership within a social system does not accurately capture oppressive societal structures which inform an individual’s social experience, with implications for their cognitions, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors” (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2020). Mooij (2021) additionally adds that, “power distance measures the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” Hocker et al (2022) stated, “we respond to conflict differently based, in part, on our different orientations to what power is - positive, negative or benign.” Managers who see an imbalance in power need to understand how to create a better balance among their employees.

Emotions in conflict

Understanding the part that emotions play in conflict can help managers find permanent solutions. Every person reacts to conflict using different conflict styles and each style can be influenced by the emotions that each person is feeling. People can cause anger, joy, love, fear, and other emotions through the things that they say and do. Many authors such as Tahtinen and Blois (2011) and Chakrabarti and Berthon (2012) state that “emotions should be studied at the social level” and that “a person’s emotions affect the people around them.” Ilizarbe (2019) stated

that, “Processes of dialogue may be the result of extreme and violent confrontation, and this needs to be addressed and understood before agreement is set as a goal.”

Negative emotions, such as anger, hurt, fear, and sadness, contribute greatly to the responses managers may receive during conflict. Liu, M. (2009) found that “across cultures, participants’ anger was found to reduce both their own use of integrative issue linking and their counterpart’s use of integrative prioritizing, both of which have been consistently found to yield win– win outcomes.” Additionally, “delegitimization... has the highest correlations with fear and hope, personally as well as collectively” (Halperin et al, 2008). A misinterpretation of emotion can have consequences when approaching conflict. Both parties must have a “common emotional worldview and emotional configuration” (Baele et al, 2016) for parties to find common ground.

Part III: How does working in an environment that is significantly different from their upbringing affect people of Latin and African American descent?

African Americans and Latin Americans are two populations that continue to grow at a fast pace within the United States. In 2019, the annual growth for Latin Americans reached a record high of 60.6 million in the United States and the annual growth for African Americans reached a high of 48.2 million people (Bureau, 2021). Although the United States is predominantly white with 258.7 million in 2019, growth within the Latin and African American populations is projected to continue to increase (Bureau, 2021). As these two cultures continue to grow in the United States, managers will need to understand how working in environments that are significantly different from their upbringing can affect people of Latin and African American

descent. The next two sections will focus on how working in the United States has affected Latin and African American populations.

How working in the United States affects Latin American populations

Despite major growth in equality and individual rights, Latin Americans are still experiencing workplace discrimination and misunderstandings. According to a study conducted by Conway et. al (2016), Latin Americans in the United States are experiencing poor health due to factors other than long hours at work. Some of these factors include social or occupational conditions and occupational type. Raineri (2018) found that interventions to avoid biases and initiatives to support trainings for underrepresented groups of employees are often requested in the workplace by Latin Americans.

In a study of 20 Latina workers in North Carolina, every participant described a demanding work environment “that is contingent and exploitative, with little control or support” (Rodriguez et al, 2015). Garcia et al (2021) found that Latin Americans experience isolation, mistreatment, disrespect, mockery, and a feeling that they are less qualified than others from coworkers especially of White American decent.

How working in the United States affects African American populations

Even though racial discrimination is a topic viewed negatively by the United States, studies show that there are still instances where African Americans are experiencing cultural discrimination. In a study of 150 randomly sampled African Americans, Fleming & Welburn (2012) found that many African Americans are experiencing negative stigma that is affecting their ability to succeed in the workplace. Respondents of this study highlighted three aspects of

this stigmatization including being over-scrutinized, misunderstood, and disrespected.

“Interviewees describe episodes where their interpretation of situations clashed with those of their coworkers – as when a tall and strong African American man jokes with his white female supervisor, while she interprets his behaviour as a threat” (Fleming & Welburn, 2012).

Other studies further show that African Americans in the workplace are experiencing discrimination in the workplace. McDowell & Carter-Francique (2017) found five themes that emerge to define the experiences of African American athletic directors including: occupational stereotyping, racial and gender stereotypes, career constraints, criticism and scrutiny, and identity conflict. Decuir-Gunby & Gunby (2016) stated, “additional education, higher incomes, and even marriage are not associated with experiencing fewer racial microaggressions.” Assari & Lankarani (2018) found that African Americans who work in a predominately white workplace experienced more discrimination.

Research Questions

As the world becomes increasingly integrated, managers will need to focus more on the ways that power can affect an individual based on their personal response to conflict. It is becoming more and more difficult to place people into cultural classes because of the interactive nature of the media. While each of the subcategories discussed in the literature review adds context to the discussion of culture, emotions, and conflict, time constraints limit my ability to conduct extensive research on each of these categories. For purposes of this project, primary research will be conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does taking conflict personally outweigh cultural distinctions in managing conflict in a U.S. business setting?

RQ2: How do African Americans and Latin Americans in the United States distinguish positions of power in conflict?

These research questions will help in understanding how cultural distinctions and the personal emotional response can influence conflict resolution. Businesses in the United States will need to understand cultural and personal distinctions of these two groups when settling misunderstandings in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the ways that a person's personality surpasses cultural distinctions in conflict management. As businesses hire employees from African and Latin American populations, they will need to come up with better ways to internally connect with their employees. Traditionally, many businesses have created core values and mission statements to help their employees not only focus on the mission of the company but feel comfortable in a culture of belonging. While having a general idea of the cultural background of each employee is important when solving conflict, changes in technology are giving people more freedom than ever to adopt ethical, moral, and fundamental principles from other countries into their individual personas. For this reason, a study of an individual's personal reaction to conflict will help managers better meet the needs of their employees. An individual's personal response to conflict is a subject that has not been well explored in academia, so further research supporting this topic is necessary to find further evidence to support this idea.

The Relational Theory of Power and RICE

Primary research questions for this study will focus on the concept of power dynamics in the workplace. "Power is a fundamental concept in conflict theory" and "perceptions of power are at the heart of any analysis" (Hocker et al, 2021). To effectively learn whether a person's personality outweighs cultural distinctions in conflict, the study asked power-influenced questions that focus on what each person does when they are confronted with workplace issues. A focus on power will help future researchers see how each person handles conflict.

The Relational Theory of Power

The Relational Theory of Power discusses the importance of connection in power distinctions. U.S. managers cannot have power, either small or great, unless there is someone involved in the process. “Power is based on one’s dependence on resources or currencies that another person controls, or seems to possess” (Hocker et al, 2021). Every interaction that a person has is influenced by the Relational Theory of Power. In some situations, one may feel like they have more significant power than another because of the position they have or the knowledge they have about a subject and vice versa.

Many of the questions included in the focus group will be influenced by the Relational Theory of Power. This study asks questions about relationships each participant has in the workplace and see how they interact with each relationship. A focus on relational power can provide some valuable insights to understanding personal response. Asking relational power questions will also provide information regarding responses fueled by cultural background. For this reason, questions regarding potential power struggles that focus on culture will be asked to see if a person’s individual response to conflict is more important to each subject than cultural background.

RICE

The acronym RICE helps conflict managers understand and manage power currencies. Power currencies show people the resources they own that are valuable to others (Hocker et al, 2021). The power that a person has is generated by currencies one has that other people need. The more currencies a person has, the better equipped they are to gain more power in their

relationships. RICE stands for resource control, interpersonal linkages, communication skills, and expertise.

- R – Resource Control: power one has due to an informal or formal position they hold such as a manager or parent who can offer rewards or punishments based on behaviors. Everyone regardless of position will be in control of resources that others need.
- I - Interpersonal Linkages: power one has as a member of a larger system. Those who have interpersonal linkages are a liaison between two groups and gain power by connecting with others. Many people gain power through the interactions they have with others and the groups they are a part of.
- C- Communication Skills: power one has based on conversational skills, persuasive ability, listening skills, and an ability to form close bonds with the people you interact with. Many managers look for employees who have good oral and written communication skills. Those who have good communication skills will gain power only if their communications skills are valued by others.
- E- Expertise: power one has due to special skills, talents, or knowledge that are useful to the task at hand. If one is the only person in the group with a skill that is needed, they can gain power to influence the decision-making for the task at hand.

This study will fuse principles of RICE into the analysis of the focus groups to better understand the ways that power influences how individuals react honestly to conflict when it occurs. As part of this study, questions will be asked that assess whether participants feel powerful in difficult circumstances to understand why they may not feel powerful to speak honestly in some circumstances over others.

The Participants

Age range will include men and women ages 23-35 who are either first- or second-generation citizens of the United States of Latin, African, or White American descent. Participants are either currently in school or are young professionals. Most participants will be Latin American or African American. While both demographics are determined to provide rich data for analysis, this paper postulates that a good portion of the meeting will be dedicated to workplace discrimination and misunderstandings from the color of their skin. For this reason, two or three participants who are White American will be added to the third focus group as a potential outlier. This outlier could offer context on whether an individual's personal response to conflict outweighs a person's cultural background to answer the first research question.

All participants for the first two focus groups are required to be of the Latin and African American population. The third focus group will be a mix of Latin, African, and White Americans to see if responses to the focus group questions changes when there are multiple cultures involved. Having three focus groups will help researchers see whether the topics discussed will help the third group stray away from cultural distinctions in support of personal preferences. This mix of populations will hopefully provide rich information about the importance of the personal response to conflict as opposed to cultural differences.

As both hypotheses are centered around workplace conflict, each participant will be working in a part-time or full-time capacity. Most of the participants will work full time while others will still be in school. This study will include participants who may have grown up with social media which includes a younger age demographic than the traditional 25-35 age range. Additionally, a focus on this age range will aid in assessing a pool of millennials that both grew

up with social media and remembered a time before social media and the internet. Having both old and young age millennials will hopefully provide context on whether individuality and personal response should be more of a focus than cultural distinctions when solving workplace conflict.

The Procedure

Due to limited resources and time constraints, this study will use focus groups to better understand how taking conflict personally may outweigh cultural distinctions in managing conflict in a business setting. The use of focus groups will also provide a more qualitative approach. Since this study aims to find whether personality outweighs culture, focus groups will provide detailed research to support this project and will provide enough evidence to help future researchers see the merit of this study. While not included in the primary research, the use of a survey could add rich information that would benefit this subject. For that reason, a mock survey in the appendix of this project is included for future use in more elaborate studies.

This research will comprise of three focus groups of four to six people per group. The first two will analyze how each population handles conflict within their own personal demographic. The first focus group will concentrate on Latin American populations, and the second will focus on African American populations. The third focus group will be a mix of Latin, African, and White Americans. To incite better discussion and give each participant enough time to discuss each question, each focus group will be around 45 minutes long. Each focus group will be held on an online Zoom meeting. An online setting will remove discomfort or unease associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and eliminates researcher bias and time constraints. All focus group questions for this study are included in the appendix of this project.

Participants were found using a clustering method and then randomly put into focus groups. Letters were sent to members of the Lambda Eta Phi Honor Society, a society that has connections with students at Florida International University. Additional messages were sent through social media channels asking friends and associates if they would be willing to participate in the focus groups. Individual messages/emails were also sent to family members and close friends asking them to reach out to friends and associates who would be willing to take part in the study. Finally, messages were sent to former student associates of graduate school classes and group projects. To avoid relational bias, friends and associates were asked to send messages to their friends to get a snowball sample selection of participants with whom there was no direct connection. At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a demographic sheet (see appendix) from which further conclusions for this study could be drawn based on demographic information. Each participant was additionally asked to add their demographic information unanimously in the chat section of the Zoom meeting so the comments could remain impartial and randomized.

Demographic Results of all Three Focus Groups

Tables 1, 2, and 3 shown below showcase the demographic information for 14 participants: four Latin Americans in the first focus group, four African Americans in the second focus group, and six participants of Latin, African, and White American descent. These charts additionally showcase the educational background of each participant and whether they grew up in a bilingual home. All names associated with this study have been deidentified to protect the identities of every participant involved, allowing this study to be as impartial as possible to avoid unnecessary bias. All comments made by participants were additionally deidentified and randomized to avoid potential biases.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

INITIALS	GENDER	GROUP	AGE	RACE	INCOME
A.D.	Female	1	25	Latin American	\$75,000
S.P.	Female	1	26	Latin American	\$20,220
C.V.	Female	1	30	Latin American	\$30,000
G.C.	Female	1	31	Latin American	\$49,000
J.B.	Female	2	24	African American	No Income
H.N.	Male	2	29	African American	\$78,000
D.C.	Female	2	30	African American	\$50,000
N.M	Male	2	32	African American	\$42,000
R.R.	Male	3	23	Latin American	\$40,000
M.H	Female	3	24	White American	\$54,000
M.T.	Female	3	25	White American	\$34,000
G.G.	Male	3	29	Latin American	\$60,000
K.W.	Female	3	31	White American	\$105,000
S.C	Female	3	32	African American	\$42,000

Table 2. Participant Educational Background

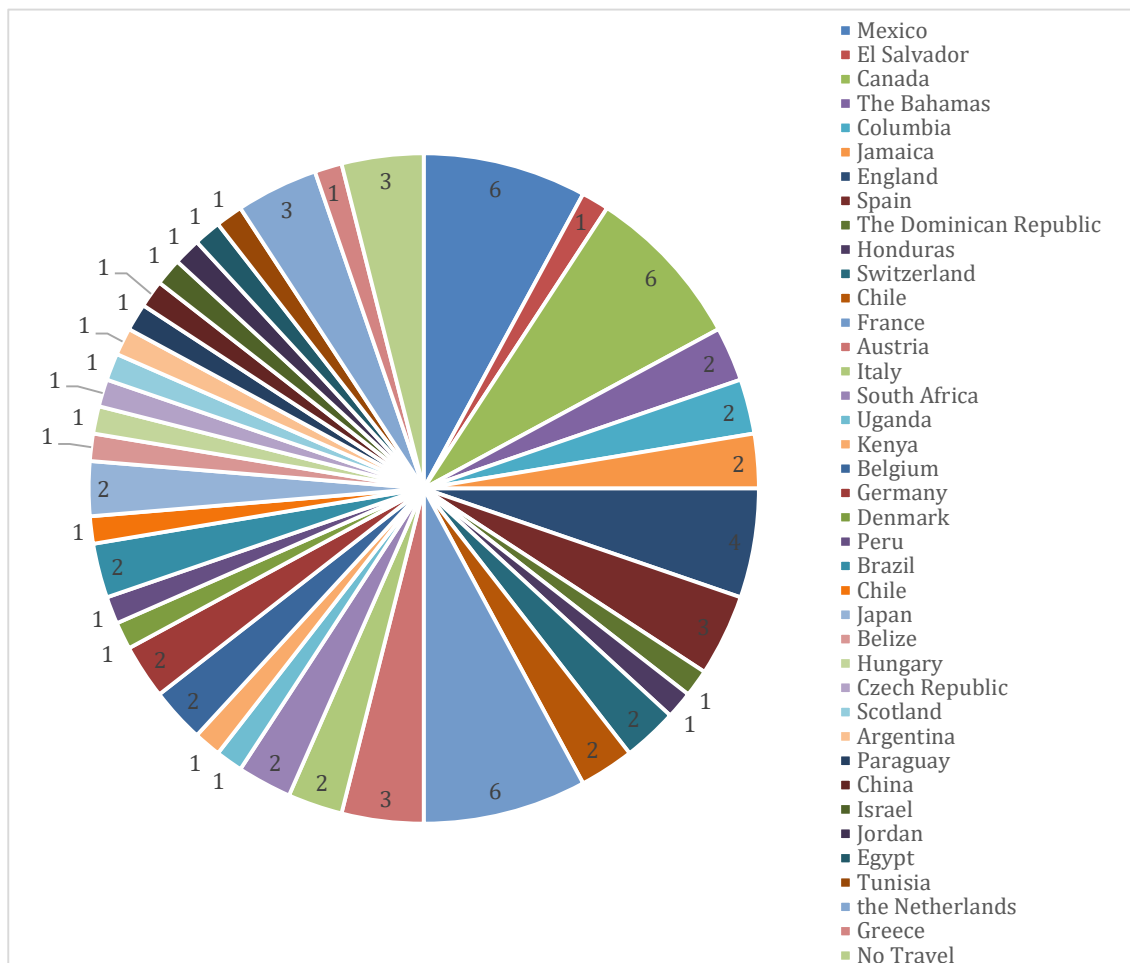
RACE	ATTENDED COLLEGE	CURRENTLY ATTENDING	NAME OF UNIVERSITY CURRENTLY ATTENDING
Latin American	Yes	No	
Latin American	Yes	No	
Latin American	Yes	Yes	Florida International University
Latin American	Yes	No	
Latin American	Yes	Yes	Salt Lake Community College
Latin American	Yes	No	
African American	Yes	Yes	Full Sail University
African American	Yes	No	
African American	Yes	No	
African American	Yes	No	
African American	Yes	Yes	Montco Community College
White American	Yes	No	
White American	Yes	No	
White American	Yes	Yes	Utah State University

Table 3. Languages spoken at home

RACE	BILINGUAL HOUSEHOLD? Y/N	LANGUAGE SPOKEN
Latin American	Yes	Spanish
Latin American	No	English
Latin American	No	English
Latin American	Yes	Spanish
Latin American	No	English
Latin American	Yes	Spanish
African American	Yes	English, Runyankole
African American	Yes	English, French
African American	No	English
African American	No	English
African American	No	English
African American	No	English
White American	No	English
White American	No	English
White American	No	English

One of the demographic questions asked was regarding whether they have traveled internationally. Because the world is becoming more integrative, the future of business and workplace conflict will require leaders who are familiar with other cultures, are not racially biased, and have a desire to understand and learn from other countries. This study additionally postulates that leaders who have these qualities will be more capable of handling workplace conflict with every member of their team regardless of their racial background and will be better equipped to focus on an individual's personal response to conflict. This question was an important part of answering the first research question about an individual's personal response to conflict. This study postulates that participants who have done more international travel are better equipped to understand and mitigate conflict than those of other cultures. As shown in the chart below, all 14 participants are well traveled and have traversed many interesting locations all around the world.

Chart 1. Countries visited by participants



RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Conducting three separate focus groups intended to analyze cultural differences in both mixed and homogeneous cultural groups yielded rich data for this study. To ensure that each participant felt comfortable with any statement they made during their focus group session, each participant was told that their responses would be made anonymous for the study. This was done to make sure that each participant felt safe to give their honest experiences and opinions due to the delicate nature of workplace conflict and the questions that would be asked during the study.

All the participants in each focus group were excited to offer their opinions and gave honest and open opinions about conflict they experienced during their careers. In discussing experiences where conflict occurred in the workplace, some respondents focused completely on examples of workplace discrimination due to their culture or skin color, some discussed gender discrimination, while others discussed experiences where they worked in a collaborative and safe environment where their abilities to do their job were more important than their cultural background. Each group was given the same questions during their sessions (see focus group questions under appendix) to see whether participants' answers were similar despite cultural and personal differences. Every group's session averaged around an hour and 15 minutes for a total of three hours and 45 minutes.

The first group focused on the Latin American culture and the responses they have experienced in their careers. The second focus group had a similar purpose but focused on African American culture and their unique response to conflict in the workplace. These two focus groups were created to answer the second research question about positions of power in conflict for Latin Americans and African Americans. The third focus group will provide results

for the first research question regarding an individual's personal response to conflict in a business setting.

Most of the Latin and African American participants expressed that they were the only person of color in their given workplace. Of the 11 Latin and African American participants, six stated that they work in environments where they are part of the majority and inequality was not an issue. The responses of these individuals provided some intriguing evidence that supports research question one as cultural background was not a factor for them when overcoming workplace conflict. Other factors such as gender inequality, naivety in a new position, and an inability to work with their boss became focal points of discussion in focus group three as reasons for being unheard.

On the other hand, those who were the minority in their workplace experienced discrimination, segregation, and racism. Responses from these individuals provided context to support research question two regarding positions of power as many of the participants stated that they did not feel comfortable speaking up in an environment where most of their team members were White. This finding suggests that Latin and African Americans who work in the United States are often put in situations where they have low power currencies because of fears associated with racism. With this mix of experiences in the workplace, results were inconclusive on whether workplace environment is a factor when resolving workplace conflict. Future research that has a larger pool of participants may provide more insights for this result.

While many of the responses given during all three focus groups related situations of discrimination and misunderstanding, the consensus for every participant was a desire to be understood, valued, and seen for who they were as individuals over the color of their skin, their familial background, or gender. Additionally, many respondents sent individual messages after

their sessions wanting to learn more about this study at its conclusion. After further questioning, most of the participants who sent messages after the sessions did so because they felt like this research was important for their progenitors and citizens of the United States who face conflict in the workplace. At the beginning of each focus group, at least one participant in all three focus groups asked if their responses needed to focus on discrimination or if they could feel free to discuss how they personally felt in conflict situations. This response shows that respondents would prefer to discuss their individual response to conflict over discriminations they have experienced due to their cultural background. To remain a passive participant, no emotional response was expressed throughout each meeting and answers provided were mostly yes or no answers so the responses given by each participant could be clear and honest.

This section is broken up into five sections; focus group one, focus group two, focus group three, conflict management styles of all the participants, and the results summary.

Part I: Focus Group One - Latin American Group

Focus Group One consisted of four people of Latin American descent between the ages of 25 and 31. Each person is currently a working professional, and one participant is currently in school while working part time. Two main themes were discussed often by every participant in almost all of the questions asked. The first focused on the notion that they needed to work harder than everyone else to remain on equal grounds with their team members, and the second focused on their perceived inability to use their voice when conflict occurs.

Theme One: Work harder than everyone else

Many career-focused individuals are told that if they work hard at something and become the best they can be, then they will find a good job and gain the respect of their managers and climb the corporate ladder. According to this focus group, working harder than everyone else might not always provide positive results. The first theme expressed the idea that Latin men and women must work harder than anyone else to be counted as an equal member of the group. In some cases, participants felt that they had to work extra hours to keep their jobs and to avoid confrontations with coworker's and management. This is an important theme to highlight as it could greatly affect power plays within the Latin American population dynamic in the workplace. Further research will need to be conducted to determine whether this theme may affect power plays within other cultural dynamics. Increased capacity for burnout and inequality in the workplace could additionally ensue due to lack of appreciation, disrespect, and managerial complacency. Some examples from the focus group include the following assertions:

- "I was told by one of my bosses that "it is in their nature to slack off, but you need to stay on top of it all."
- "If the administration would wake up and see how much my coworkers and I hold the school together like glue, they might treat me better in fear that I would leave next."

As mentioned above, both participants felt like they were giving their best effort to their job while other members of their team potentially took advantage of their effort. Relational Theory of Power states that a person can maintain, lose, or gain power through the influence of another person. One cannot gain power, either positive or negative, unless there are other people involved. These responses appear to show that in a workplace setting, maintaining positive

relationships with co-workers and management is an important part of finding great workplace balance, and can create an environment where all parties involved can solve conflict in a constructive and supportive way.

This culture of working too hard in the Latin American population could negatively impact the balance of power among team members in any workplace setting. In answer to the second research question, if this culture of working harder than others is a consistent theme for Latin American people, their position of power will always be placed lower than their coworkers. This many cause issues such as an inability to find equal ground in the workplace, burnout, no promotional opportunities, and may lead to them leaving the company.

Theme Two: Refrain from using their voice

The second theme was an inability of the participants to use their voice to speak up when something was wrong. Some participants felt like their opinions were never valued when in a group setting and, in some cases, other participants felt like they could not speak up for fear of what other team members would say, think, or do. Instead of speaking up, they tolerated other team members' bad behaviors. Some examples from this focus group include the following:

- “Too many times I have heard, "Well, there's nothing we can do about that." If talking to my supervisor won't help fix the situation, then I don't see the point in bringing it up. I just don't have evidence that I can tell a manager about an issue and get results from it.”
- “If we could make a place where I’m not judged for speaking out that would be ideal.”
- “I work in an environment where there’s an equal amount of males and females. In meetings with administration, I have tried to voice my opinion but was brushed over. I didn’t feel seen or acknowledged so I stopped speaking up.”

- “When you ask for things and they constantly say no, it’s hard to want to speak up.”

These responses suggest that even when employees have the necessary skills, talents, and abilities as others, performance will decrease if they do not feel like their voice is heard. Van Gramberg (2020) found in a study regarding the employee voice in resolving conflict that, “those employees who reported bullying, harassment, or uncivil behavior were less likely to successfully resolve the dispute...disputes related to employment conditions and supervisory decisions are independently associated with stronger intentions to quit.”

The results of this study match well with Van Gramberg’s study in that many of those who attempted to reach out to management were met with cynicism, or were ignored, and as a result, they did not use their voice again when there was a problem. Effective communication is a key element in resolving conflict in the workplace and as described in the notes for this focus group, they felt their voice was silenced for the following reasons: discrimination, gender identity, naivety in a new position, or an inability to work with their boss.

Part II: Focus Group Two - African American Group

Focus Group Two consisted of four people of African American descent between the ages of 24 and 32. Three participants are currently working professionals and one is currently in school while completing internships part-time. This section will analyze the individual and cultural responses of these four African participants as they relate to conflict they have experienced in the workplace. Two main themes that were discussed often by every participant in almost all the questions asked. The first theme focused on the notion of the “Angry Woman/Man,” and the second theme focused on feeling purposely separated from the groups they work with and feeling like their opinions are silenced.

Theme One: The Angry Black Woman/Man

The first recurring theme in this focus group was the mention of African Americans showing anger or being “too much.” While many may desire to believe that racism and bigotry have been disbanded from American culture, research continues to prove that there is still a problem. This study may not have focused entirely on how racism negatively affects people of color in the workplace, but it does show that this issue continues to put a wrench in equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace for people of all colors and cultures.

This study focused on the emotional response of each participant to conflict or the appearance of conflict. Responses may have varied a little during this study, but the phrase, “I don’t want to be the angry black man/woman” was a recurring theme in this study. A topic of future research worth discussing is whether this theme is largely an American cultural problem or if it is seen in other countries around the world. All the participants agreed that this term is something that they have heard often in their places of work. They also stated that this phrase has undervalued their contributions and encourages them to be quiet in the workplace. Some examples from this focus group include the following:

- “I can’t be the angry black woman in the workplace. It’s hard to work in a white environment. I’d lose my job in a heartbeat if I spoke out of line.”
- “I have something important to say to people and I should be heard but I don’t want to feel like I’m the angry black woman. It makes me conscious about what I say and how I react because I don’t want to offend anyone.”
- “Being black I have to be very careful how I address problems because I don’t want to be seen as the angry black man.”

Jonas & Fritsche (2013) found that “secure integration in a social ingroup should also reduce further social defensiveness. If managers and coworkers persist in using cultural stereotypes to heighten their power in the workplace, those affected may be limited in their desire to speak up, may decrease their productive ability, and may quit their jobs to find a more inclusive space.

Findings from this theme suggest that managers need to implement more integrative techniques into their management styles so each member of their team, regardless of cultural background and color, may feel accepted and supported. Creating this environment of integration will also limit social injustices, increase workplace morale, and foster an environment where everyone is accepted and valued.

Theme Two: Separated and Silenced

The second theme for this focus group was a general feeling that their contributions are silenced, and they are purposely segregated from the people they work with. While recounting their experiences, many of the participants stated that regardless of their position or education, they are still experiencing moments where white coworkers attempt to degrade or forget their contributions to the team. Some have additionally experienced moments where coworkers or human resources personnel attempted to celebrate a holiday and set up decorations that were racially inappropriate. In these moments, all the participants went to management to try and solve the conflict, but their opinions were undervalued and brushed over. For example, one participant related an experience where members of the human resources department used pictures of the Minions (characters from the movie *Despicable Me*) dressed in Mexican clothes as decoration for Cinco de Mayo. Even though they were not Latin, the participant felt like these decorations were culturally inappropriate and asked if the decorations could be taken down. She

was told by a white human resources representative that she thought it was fine and the decorations were left out. Some examples from this focus group include:

- “I felt devalued and unappreciated because I was the only female and the only black participant in the entire conference. They made assumptions about my country and didn’t ask my opinions about the topic of the conference.”
- “I was at a Diversity and Inclusion seminar and was the only person of color there. You would think that they would welcome my experiences, but I wasn’t called on once for my opinion. I finally raised my hand and said, ‘I have something important to say to add to the conversation. Can I please share it?’ They told me no! My contributions weren’t acknowledged in an environment where inclusivity was the topic.”
- “I remember in meetings my points being completely ignored or dismissed with a condescending remark. Some of those meetings even included topics that gravitate around my own culture and language while I was the only person with my background present.”

From a position of power standpoint, when a person feels like they cannot comfortably speak in the workplace, their ability to gain more power (whether in leadership/resource control opportunities, communication skills, or expertise) is diminished and their ability to gain power in the future is also reduced (Hocker et al, 2022). As a follow-up question, participants were asked if they would be willing to speak up again in another meeting after their previous experience and three of the four participants said they would never speak up again for fear of rejection, anger or bullying from their team members, and disinterest from their leaders. As Hocker et al (2022) suggests, positions of power, in the case of these participants, were diminished because they became unwilling to speak up again. In answer to the second research question, if the

participants continue to choose to remain silent, it will become increasingly difficult for them to gain power in their workplace, and their talents and contributions may be overshadowed by their coworkers and supervisors.

Part III: Focus Group Three - Mixed Group

Focus Group Three consisted of six participants of White, Latin, and African American descent between the ages of 23 and 32. All are currently working professionals and one is currently in school while working part time. This focus group was created to determine whether the types of responses participants give change because they are in a mixed group instead of one of their cultural demographics. The results from this focus group were altered in comparison to the other focus groups. Findings suggested that when groups of mixed culture and race discuss topics of conflict in the workplace, discussion centers more around individual needs and circumstances as opposed to racial and cultural discrimination. This finding suggests that creating open spaces where every member is invited to share their thoughts fosters an environment where an individual can thrive without cultural stereotypes and discrimination.

While discussion still included cultural differences and inequalities surrounding race and color, two themes surfaced. The first was a discussion about conflict with gender inequality, and the second regarded imbalances of power by employee status and position.

Theme One: Gender Inequality

As many of the participants in this focus group were women as opposed to men, the discussion of gender inequality became a focus during this meeting. This is an uncontrolled variable in the research that appeared more often in the discussion than other controlled variables. Even though this theme was not an intended result for this study, it became an important part of this study. Further research must be done regarding gender inequality in the

workplace. This theme could be a potential limitation to consider, so future research will need to do a study where there is an equal representation of men and women or more men than women of the same ethnicity to see if this is still a theme.

When discussing experiences at work where the participants felt like their opinions were not valued because of their background, gender became a well-discussed topic. Some of the responses regarding gender inequality include:

- “I work in a field that is mostly male dominated. A lot of my managers are over 50 and male. At one of our meetings, one of my managers asked me ‘Are you intimidated?’ I was the only female in the room and his question made me feel like an outcast.”
- “I am one of the only black females in my company that is in a management position. I am in an all-black space which is great because I should feel right at home with my culture. Instead, I feel like I am walking on eggshells and have to ask permission for everything even though I’m in a management position.”
- “I think my cultural background and my being a woman has taught me to be kind, soft-spoken and not cause trouble. I’m not a pushover and I usually end up doing what I want, but I make sure I don’t draw attention to myself when doing it.”
- “Women who speak out in the workplace are aggressive and emotional, but men are actually acknowledged.”

Managers need to become aware of the differences that gender can present when solving conflict with employees. This finding was not necessarily the direction intended for this research project, but it represents an outlier that is important to consider when understanding a person’s individual response to conflict in the workplace.

Theme Two: Imbalances of power by employee status and position

The second theme regarded an imbalance of power as it applies to an employee's status and position. Many of the applicants have experienced managers who exercised improper power over them because they did not have a high-power position in the company. Some experienced unfair treatment from their boss and deliberately decided to leave their employment to find somewhere they could be treated fairly, regardless of their position in the company. Some examples include:

- “When I was a receptionist at a surgeon's office, I was seen as disposable and the lowest level of worker. Management told me I was easy to replace and not worth the effort of pleasing because they could find someone else. That made me not care as much about how hard I worked.”
- “Now I know to be loyal to other people within my job, but never loyal to a company because a company's goal is to make money, not be loyal to those who are in it.”
- “I was in a brand-new position right after graduation and was asked to speak up in team meetings, but my thoughts were disregarded, so I stopped participating in meetings. My boss asked me to speak up but when I tried again my team ignored me.”

Balancing power in the workplace, regardless of current or former position, can foster teams that are cohesive, encourage more employees to speak up in meetings, allow team members to feel like a valued team member, and help with employee retention. Managers who use RICE can better understand and manage power currencies as they are introduced. Employees who are given chances to showcase the resources they have to offer grow into more capable and balanced team members. This was another unintended outlier that feeds well into the topic of power balances and an individual's personal response. This theme provided rich data provided

information on whether a personal response outweighs cultural distinctions especially since participants in this focus group were a mix of different cultures. This finding suggests that balances of power occur for everyone regardless of cultural background.

Part IV: Conflict Management styles

To better understand the ways that people solve conflict in the workplace, participants were asked how they personally approach conflict, how they would like to solve conflict in the future, and what they would do to solve workplace disputes if they were in a management position. I additionally asked them to provide an example of a time they had to solve a dispute and what they did to solve the problem.

The results for each applicant varied in many insightful ways. Charts 2, 3, 4, and 5 showcase findings discovered while analyzing the conflict styles of the participants by group and the conflict styles of the participants in all three groups. These charts were created using the Rahim (2011) Model or dual concern model that classifies the five conflict styles that people use during conflict situations.

For participants of Focus Group 1, participants displayed examples of avoiding, compromising, dominating, and integrating styles of conflict. While this chart does not directly tell us if there is a dominating style for group one, it does show that participants in this group tend to integrate others (such as a boss, coworker, etc.) into conflict situations while one participant avoids conflict and one other approaches conflict using dominating tactics. While participants feel that they work harder than others and their voice is silenced, they prefer to address conflict in an open and direct way while speaking with the person one on one. They will involve management only if they cannot solve the issue themselves. Data for this focus group is shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2: Conflict Styles Group 1



Chart 3: Conflict Styles Group 2



Chart 4: Conflict Styles Group 3



Chart 5: Conflict Styles for all participants



As shown in the Chart 3, participants in Focus Group 2 displayed examples of obliging, compromising, and integrating styles of conflict with most participants following an integrative approach. Participants in this group tend to prefer to focus on the needs of the conflicted party while having a low concern for themselves. Some participants displayed compromising styles during the discussion as they showed a moderate level of concern for themselves and the other party involved. In conjunction with “The Angry Black Man/Woman” and the discussion about

feeling silenced and segregated, the resulting conflict management styles fit well with the discussion regarding these two themes as participants would rather please the offended party to ensure that no one else is offended.

Participants from Focus Group 3 showcased examples of avoiding, integrating, dominating, and compromising styles of conflict with most participants following avoiding and compromising approaches. As this group had a mix of Latin, African, and White Americans, results indicated in Chart 4 showed a healthy mix of both Chart 1 and Chart 2 with potential outliers. The obliging style was not represented in this focus group as some participants were of African American descent and the obliging style was represented in Focus Group Two. Coupling this data with the two themes found in my notes for this group regarding gender inequalities and imbalances of power, the resulting conflict management styles of these participants conclude that they would either avoid solving the problem by avoiding it or they would prefer to work with the offended party to find solutions that work for everyone involved.

Data for conflict styles displayed by all 14 participants is found in Chart 5. Results show that all 14 participants displayed examples of all five conflict styles with most responses following integrating and compromising styles. According to the Rahim (2011) Model or dual concern model, integrating and compromising styles are the best styles to use when handling conflict in any situation. Of the two, the integrating style is the best option as it inspires all parties involved to come up with the best solution collectively. This data suggests that of the 14 participants, the majority want to solve conflict in constructive and communicative ways when handling issues in their workplace.

Representatives from both integrative and compromising styles are from Latin, African, and White American descent. This finding shows that on an individual level, the participants

solve conflict using the best methods. Due to the small sample size, however, this conclusion is not representative of entire populations. Further research should be done to support this conclusion. On a cultural level, these styles may not affect the outcomes of the conflict, but participants want to constructively solve conflict instead of displaying dominating or avoiding styles.

Part V: Results Summary

By combining the results of each of these sections, findings suggest that understanding an individual's personal response to conflict is an important factor to consider when solving conflict in the workplace. Cultural distinctions are a major part of understanding the ways that individuals respond to conflict, but it cannot be the only indicator to consider when managing conflict. Even though the world is becoming more integrative, participants in this study discussed a need by management for equality, understanding, and fairness for all people. A focus on the personal needs of an individual when solving workplace conflict is an idea that needs to be implemented in the workplace. Further research regarding this topic still needs to be done to fully understand how managers can better meet the needs of their team members individually and culturally.

Additionally, there are some significant similarities between the Latin American and African American demographics. The most significant similarities are in their ability to use their voice, feel respect from their coworkers, and feel part of the teams they work with. All 11 participants of Latin and African American descent discussed challenges they face every day with positions of power even when they are not in conflict. A significant finding in this study regarding positions of power is that many managers may not allow open displays of racism and bigotry in the office but do however lessen the influence that Latin and African Americans have

in their jobs and in their teams. Significant research still needs to be done to support this finding as limitations of time and participants in this study could potentially alter findings done by future researchers.

DISCUSSION

Although the importance of culture in managing workplace conflict is not new, it is important for future research to be done surrounding this topic as it is constantly changing. This paper provides new information that can benefit future managers and companies as they hire employees of different cultural backgrounds. Due to the increasing popularity of social media and the internet, many people of different countries, religions, and philosophies are integrating and adopting cultural practices of other countries. As more and more people integrate other cultures into their personal lives, the discussion of culture (although important and vital to understanding an individual) will need to be altered to focus more on the individual desires and thoughts of every employee.

Some scholarly research has been done on an individual's personal response to conflict in the workplace but more needs to be done surrounding this issue. One research method mentioned in this study includes the term "imagined interaction" coined by McCann et al (2010) that focuses on an individual's values, beliefs, and socio-cultural structures that frame a person's sense of self. Another research method discussed in this project was a study from Nisbett (2003) and Cohen (2010) that found that every society develops its own definition of cultural value orientations." While a focus on individual societies has provided rich information for managers as they mitigate conflict in their teams, future research that focuses on an individual's personal response will be necessary to solve conflict in the future.

Some research has been done regarding positions of power in the workplace. Using the many research examples found, framing for the second research questions was centered around positions of power in the workplace for Latin Americans and African Americans. The second question is intended to provide a strong foundation that would add context to the solution for the

first research question. Findings suggest that both the Latin and African American populations are growing at an accelerated pace in the United States. Companies need to have a better understanding of the individual and cultural responses of African and Latin Americans as their populations continue to grow in the United States. To adequately discuss the findings of this project, this section will be divided into four parts: RQ1 findings, RQ2 findings, future research and limitations.

Part I: Research Question 1 Findings

Many respondents talked about a desire they have for equality and inclusion in their workplace no matter where they go. Other's discussed frustrations they have experienced with older generation coworkers and managers who say and do racially inappropriate things, sometimes intentionally. While discussion regarding present-day circumstances revolved around cultural disparities, segregation, and inequalities, all the participants talked about what they would like to have happen when handling conflict. Some of the responses include the following:

- "Be respectful of everyone on the team and everyone needs to have respect for everyone and their individual background. Listen and hear people out."
- "With conflict, there's always two sides to every story. I don't think there's only one way to approach conflict. Everyone is different and everyone likes to be approached in different ways."
- "I believe workplace conflict usually stems from biases and emotions, and if we can resolve or bring light to those feelings or unlearn those biases there will be less conflict."

These responses, and others, suggest that participants in this study may not currently see equality when resolving conflict, but they want to create a world where conflict is managed by focusing on how the individual handles conflict rather than focusing on cultural background.

Participants agreed that cultural background is still an issue that deserves more recognition and understanding, but when it comes to workplace conflict, a focus on an individual's response to conflict is the solution for the future.

Results for the first research question suggest that even though companies are becoming more integrative, there are still cultural disparities that overshadow an individual's personal response in conflict. Findings also suggest that future managers will need to be more open-minded and willing to accept a person's cultural background to better understand their individual response to conflict as it occurs.

Part II: Research Question 2 Findings

Both focus group one and focus group two provided rich information regarding positions of power and power currencies in the workplace for people of Latin and African American descent. Discussion in both focus group tended to center around workplace discrimination and injustices regarding cultural background. Additionally, by reviewing the conflict styles of each focus group and the conflict styles of all the participants, results found that participants of Latin and African American descent tend to follow either integrating or compromising styles. This would suggest that Latin and African Americans in this study tend to distinguish positions of power where they have less power than others especially if the other person is of Caucasian descent. Some responses from both focus groups that support these findings include the following:

- “Being able to have one on one conversations would be an ideal way to resolve conflict but a lot of people aren't receptive. If we could make a place where I'm not judged for speaking out that would be ideal.”

- “Whenever there is a conflict. If I know that person then I address it with that person but if I’m uncomfortable then I go to management for my protection because I don’t want others to get the story twisted.”
- “I go to management first for protection so that nothing is misconstrued. You have to protect yourself. Who else is going to protect you unless you do? No one.”

The outlier of focus group three provided some interesting information. When the participants were in groups of mixed culture, discussion centered more on gender roles and imbalances of power due to employee status/position. On the other hand, both groups one and two mostly discussed power imbalances associated with cultural identities and misunderstandings. Seeing this outlier suggested that positions of power for Latin and African American groups change when they are in discussion groups with other cultural demographics.

Part III: Future Research

While there is a lack of research regarding an individual’s personal response, the responses given during each focus groups have shed some light on the importance of the first research question. While much research has been conducted, there is still so much that needs to be done to understand how personal responses coincide with cultural distinctions when solving workplace conflict. Additionally, understanding how positions of power play a role in determining a person’s individual response, findings suggest that when we combine power distinctions and cultural differences when solving conflict, managers can better understand why their employees are acting in a certain way, and they are more equipped to find a solution that is mutually beneficial for every party involved. More questions and topics of study need to be addressed in the future to add to this research. Three suggestions are mentioned below:

Suggestion One: The fluctuating nature of conflict styles

While cultural distinctions are a vital part of assessing why a person reacts the way they do, they do not accurately represent how an individual will react in every circumstance. Participants in this study discussed fluctuating conflict styles as they have moved to different locations or different jobs. There are many factors that influence the ways that people respond to conflict. Everyone involved in the conflict must be willing to work on a solution or a solution will not be found. Most of the participants in this study felt like their voice was silenced because of the responses of the other party.

Future research needs to be done that determines whether the five conflict styles used in the Rahim (2011) model can help mitigate conflict for those of different color and cultural background. Is there another conflict management style that has not been discovered that can better mitigate conflict for those who face racism in the workplace? Regardless, future research regarding affective conflict styles for different cultural backgrounds could help managers help team members find equality in among their coworkers. After reviewing the literature surrounding this topic, there is a great need for future research regarding this suggestion.

Suggestion Two: Negative cultural stereotypes in the workplace

Many participants of both the Latin and African American groups related experiences that they had with unhealthy stereotypes. Many Latin participants in this study discussed experiences where coworkers and others assume they are there to clean the building because there is an unhealthy stereotype that Latin American women are usually house cleaners. Many of the African American participants related experiences where coworkers said that they did something wrong even when evidence shows the opposite.

Results from this study suggest that the negative stereotypes that we attach to racial groups affects the ways they handle conflict with their supervisors and coworkers. Future research should analyze the conflict styles of study participants to determine whether cultural background affects the ways that a person interacts with others who have more power. Additional study will need to be done to determine whether there is a connection between race and conflict resolution styles. After reviewing scholarly research surrounding cultural stereotypes, there is a great need for more evidence that centers on how negative stereotypes can directly affect an employee's performance.

Suggestion Three: How the internet has impacted the integration of culture in the United States

Social media and the internet have opened a world of possibilities for businesses to outsource their products and services to potential customers worldwide. Technology will continue to create opportunities for businesses to connect with people all around the world. It will be vital for companies to learn effective mitigation and global communication skills to meet the challenges of the future. As people continue to immigrate to other locations all around the world, opportunities for the integration of ideas and culture will also continue to grow, expand, and change communication in the workplace. While this topic is too broad for the scope of this paper, it is a topic worth considering for future research study.

Part IV: Limitations

While the results of this study yielded many important findings that can help managers and employees handle conflict in the workplace, there are, however, a couple of important limitations to discuss.

Increased amount number of focus groups

While all three of the focus groups conducted in this study provided a wealth of qualitative data, the data gleaned from 14 participants will only offer a couple of results. Future researchers should conduct 10-15 focus groups of 6-8 participants each. It would also be beneficial for researchers to include the mock survey questionnaire found in the appendix as part of the demographic information given to participants before the focus group occurs. This increase of focus groups would also provide the researcher with more opportunities to mix and match participants in different groups, finding more interesting ways for participants to respond to the focus group questions. Adding the mock survey would also help the researcher cross-reference responses in the focus group and provide more valuable context to the discussion. If the researcher would rather find quantitative solutions, the mock survey questionnaire found in the appendix could also be used in a survey of 100-200 participants.

Additional Cultural Comparatives

While the Latin and African American populations continue to grow in the United States, there are other cultural groups that also continue to grow. Some examples include the Native American population and Asian American population. Additional research that includes the opinions and experiences of multiple cultures would provide a richer result. Comparing multiple cultures can also provide the researcher with a wealth of understanding regarding racism,

inclusion, and positions of power in the workplace as the world continues to connect and integrate.

Time Constraints

The expansive nature of this study topic deserves at least a year of study and research. However, this project was limited to an eight-week timeframe. A longer selection time for focus groups and a survey of 100-200 participants would provide a deeper understanding of an individual's personal response to conflict and the positions of power that affect cultural background. Data collection should take at least five to six months to complete providing a true ethnographic approach that would provide enough data to find conclusive results for this study.

Geographical constraints

The geographical location of participants may also impact positions of power in the workplace. For example, according to the *World Population Review* (2021), a Latin American in Miami or Los Angeles (locations where the Hispanic ethnicity is a high percentage of the population) differ from those in states such as North Dakota (3.74%) and South Dakota (3.79%) where those of Hispanic decent are in the minority. Similarly, *Black City Population* (2020) stated that African American populations are highest in large cities in the South (Atlanta, GA, 34%, New Orleans, 35%) and lowest in several large cities (Seattle, WA, 6%, and Pittsburgh, PA, 8%) (2020). Further research in this area may provide conclusions to support the second research question in this study. Additionally, an understanding of the impact of geographical location will add context to whether an individual's personal response to conflict outweighs cultural distinctions in workplace environments across the United States.

CONCLUSION

As shown in this research paper, many employees of the Latin, African, and Caucasian American populations are still having experiences where their cultural background affects their positions of power in the workplace. Cultural background should no longer be an obstacle for employees who want to succeed and grow in their jobs. Rather, culture should be celebrated as a vital part of understanding how an individual reacts to conflict. Coupled with a better understanding of the cultural practices of their employees, managers should strive to focus on the individual needs of their employees and avoid cultural stereotypes and racial segregation to build effective teams.

This study reveals that as managers improve their understanding of the cultural backgrounds of their team members, they will understand the individuals involved in the conflict and be more equipped to find solutions that are mutually beneficial.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Questions and Discussion Guide

Welcome and Overview

Welcome and thank you for taking some time out to participate in the focus group today. My name is Lindsey LeBaron and I'm a student at Florida International University conducting research regarding conflict within the workplace as it applies to a person's background and culture.

First, I want to explain what a focus group is, why I am doing this focus group and what I hope to learn from today's session. A focus group is a planned discussion that gathers detailed information about a certain topic. There are no right or wrong answers, so I want you to feel comfortable in responding to the questions I will ask you. As the world becomes more integrative, the ways businesses need to interact with their employees will change due to cultural background, personal preferences, and country of residence. The purpose of this research is to see how important culture and an individual's personal response is to solving workplace conflict. I will ask some questions in order to start the discussion; however, I will remain a passive participant in this process.. I would like you to have a free-flowing and open discussion so I can glean the best information possible for my study.

Are there any questions?

Let's Get Started...

In the zoom chat, please fill out the sign in sheet which records your demographic information. Please be sure to send these answers using the private chat so your answers can remain anonymous for the research.

Your name will **not** be attached to your comments. Any notes that I take will also be deidentified. All responses and information provided for these focus groups will be used only for academic purposes needed to conduct this study.

Are there any questions at this point in time?

Demographics Sign-in Sheet

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your current age?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your current income?
5. Are you currently in school?
 - If so, which University do you go to and what do you study?
6. Have you visited other countries? If so, where?
7. Did you grow up in a bi-lingual household? If so, what language was spoken at home?

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at 801.420.5815

Focus Group Questions, Responses and Notes

1. Tell me about a time at work when you felt like your opinions were not valued because of your background?

[Probe: I would like to see how they handled situations where others used their “power” to discriminate against them because of their background. This question will help me see if situations like this have continued to influence the way they handle conflict in the workplace. A follow up question would be “How did it make you feel in subsequent interactions with the person who did not value your opinion?”]

2. Do you feel like this experience has continued to influence the way you respond to conflict?”

[Probe: I would like to gauge whether there is any potential tension associated with their managers so I can ask questions about their positions of power and what they feel they bring to the table. If this question is not answered robustly, ask “How does your interactions with this person affect your work?]

3. How do you personally approach conflict in the workplace?

[Probe: I would like to see whether different groups approach conflict using collaborative, argumentative, or avoidant means. A follow up question would be “How do you think this approach benefits or hurts your ability to solve problems with your boss? or “How do you personally approach that conflict, by addressing the problem with the person, seeking advice from others, talking to that person’s supervisor, or something else?”]

4. “How would you like to approach conflict in the workplace? What’s holding you back from approaching conflict this way?

[Probe: I would like to see whether cultural distinctions or power plays are a factor in the ways that these individuals handle conflict in the workplace and see whether culture impacts the way they interact with their managers. A follow up question would be “Do you feel like your cultural background stops you from reaching the way you would like?”]

5. Recount a time where there was a conflict in your workplace? How did you handle the conflict and how did others around you respond to your efforts?

[Probe: I would like the participants to tell me an authentic story of how they handled conflict in the workplace. I want to ask this question to ensure that I have good data to support my finding as it is more difficult for participants to lie about a personal experience they have had in the past. A follow up question would be “Do you think your response was fueled by what you thought others would think or say about you?”]

6. If you were a manager, how would you like to handle conflict with your team members?

[Probe: I would like to see if they would rather approach conflict using the same tools with each of their team members or would prefer to use tactics based on the individual person. A follow up question would be “Do you think there is only one way to approach conflict?”]

7. Do you have a favorite coworker? What makes them a good coworker for you?

[Probe: I would like to see if the relationships they have in the workplace are good in their eyes because of the positions of power they have over that individual or if the interactions they have with others help them feel like they have more power in the workplace than they would have if they did not have that relationship. A follow up question would be “Do you think your position on your team would change if that coworker was no longer working there?”

8. Do you have any final comments that you would like to discuss?

Closing

Thank you so much for your time and participation. Again, feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My contact information is listed on the sign in sheet you received.

Team Building (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fair Treatment (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender Equality (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Handling Conflict (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you feel valued at work?

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Somewhat Often
- ☐ Not very Often
- ☐ Not at all

What do you like most about your current job?

- ☐ Coworkers
- ☐ Boss
- ☐ Company Benefits
- ☐ Free food/other benefits
- ☐ Other: _____

Have you ever been in a position where you felt like your opinions were not valued because of your background?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What is your current career field (select all that apply)

- ☐ Education
- ☐ Medicine
- ☐ Government/NGO
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Entertainment
- ☐ Physical Fitness
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Public Service (i.e. Police officer, Firefighter, etc)
- ☐ Other _____

In the last few days, how often have you heard people speaking about Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace?

- ☐ Very Often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ A few times
- ☐ Once or twice
- ☐ I haven't heard people talking about Diversity and Inclusion

How likely are you to recommend your current company?

- ☐ Very Likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Someone what Likely
- ☐ Not Likely

How likely are you to switch to a competing company?

- ☐ Very Likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Someone what Likely
- ☐ Not Likely

This next section will give you examples of some common workplace problems and ask you to answer each question in the way you would handle the situation.

When a coworker refuses to work on their tasks even after your manager talks to them, how do you react to the situation?

- ☐ I would avoid conflict and focus only on my work
- ☐ I would tell them to stop being lazy and take care of their work. you already have a lot to do and it's not fair of them to be lazy.
- ☐ I would tell my supervisor about the issue and let them handle it
- ☐ I would reach out to them and see if there is a way we could work together to change everyone's workload so everyone on the team could get their work done on time.
- ☐ I would see if there was a way we could compromise on some of their tasks.

Your boss invites you into their office and tells you that one of your coworkers is angry with the way you handle tasks. How do you handle this situation?

- ☐ I would sit down with the coworker to see if we could find a better way to complete our tasks in the future.
- ☐ I would avoid that coworker and try to do my best with the future tasks I'm given by that coworker
- ☐ I would reach out to the coworker and see if we could come to an agreement on how we could work together on tasks in the future
- ☐ I would ask my supervisor to reach out to the coworker and tell them that I will try harder. I don't want to cause a scene or cause any trouble.
- ☐ I would confront the coworker and tell them to focus on their work and stop criticizing mine.

You are currently overloaded with work and your boss asked if you could take on another time sensitive project. You are already stressed with tasks already on your plate and are worried about taking on more projects, but you don't want to let your boss down. How do you handle this situation?

- o I would take on the extra work but tell my boss that I already have a lot of tasks on my plate so it might not get done by the deadline they are hoping for.
- o I would tell my boss my current situation and see if there was some way we could push some of the tasks to a different deadline or work with them to find a solution that works for both of us.
- o I would take on the new time sensitive project and stay later to get all my assignments done. I want to please my boss even if I have to work longer hours. .
- o I would tell my boss about my current situation and see if we could rework the due dates for some of my other assignments so I can get everything done in a timely and professional manner.
- o I would take on the task but ask another coworker that I trust for added help without telling my boss.

You forgot about an important project that was due yesterday. Today you got a call from your boss who angrily asks you when you plan on getting the assignment done. How do you handle this situation?

- o I would send an email to my boss apologizing for the late assignment. I would also assure them that I would get it done today even if I need to stay late.
- o I would reassign all my tasks for the day to another day and spend the entire day getting it done so my boss isn't too mad at me.
- o I would sit down with my boss and apologize to them. I would also tell them my current work situation so they know my workload and the reasons why the assignment wasn't completed. I would then work with my boss to come up with a new plan for this project that works for both of us.
- o I would complain to my coworkers about the amount of stress I'm under and tell them how awful of a boss we have.
- o I would directly apologize to my boss and ask them if we could find a compromising way to solve the problem.

Please rate how strongly you may feel negative when encountering the following events.

1) HR decides to put up Mexican decorations for Cinco de Mayo

Not At All Negative	Somewhat Negative	Moderately Negative	Negative	Very Negative
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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2) Your coworker tells your boss lies about you and your workflow

Not At All Negative	Somewhat Negative	Moderately Negative	Negative	Very Negative
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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3) Your boss asks you to take on more work than other members of your team

Not At All Negative	Somewhat Negative	Moderately Negative	Negative	Very Negative
---------------------------	----------------------	------------------------	----------	------------------

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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4) You find out that other coworkers have different political views than you

Not At All Negative	Somewhat Negative	Moderately Negative	Negative	Very Negative
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Please rate how strongly you may feel positive about your current company when encountering the following events.

- 1) You have opportunities outside of one-on-ones to talk with your boss about your concerns

Not At All Positive	Somewhat Positive	Moderately Positive	Positive	Very Positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- 2) You get a giftcard from your boss for doing a good job

Not At All Positive	Somewhat Positive	Moderately Positive	Positive	Very Positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- 3) Your coworkers come to you directly if they have an issue with your work

Not At All Positive	Somewhat Positive	Moderately Positive	Positive	Very Positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- 4) Your boss asks you about your cultural background to better understand you as a person and how you handle tasks and conflict

Not At All Positive	Somewhat Positive	Moderately Positive	Positive	Very Positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thinking back to your overall experience with your current company, which of the following emotions do you feel when reflecting about your job as a whole? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Excitement
- ☐ Joy
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Comfort
- ☐ Worry
- ☐ Relaxed
- ☐ Restless
- ☐ Angry

Demographics

We are almost done today. This last section of the questionnaire simply asks demographic information so we can have a sense of who participated in our study.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Other (3)

Which of the following categories do you identify with?

- ☐ White (1)
- ☐ Hispanic / Latino (2)
- ☐ Black / African American (3)
- ☐ Native American / American Indian (4)
- ☐ Asian / Pacific Islander (5)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (6) _____

Do you have children?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Yes (2)

Are you:

- ☐ Married (1)
- ☐ Single (2)
- ☐ Divorced (3)
- ☐ Widowed (4)

If you have children, are you the sole provider?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Yes (2)
- ☐ Not applicable (3)

Which of the following choices best describes your political views?

- ☐ Extremely conservative (1)
- ☐ Moderately conservative (2)
- ☐ Slightly conservative (3)
- ☐ Neutral (4)
- ☐ Slightly liberal (5)
- ☐ Moderately liberal (6)
- ☐ Extremely liberal (7)

[illegible]

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

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NOTES

Focus Group One

1. Tell me about a time at work when you felt like your opinions were not valued because of your background?

[Probe: I would like to see how they handled situations where others used their “power” to discriminate against them because of their background. This question will help me see if situations like this have continued to influence the way they handle conflict in the workplace. A follow up question would be “How did it make you feel in subsequent interactions with the person who did not value your opinion?”]

- Operations in New York. A lot of people in India worked there. She was the only female Latina manager. There were a lot of times where my opinions weren’t valued. A perceived mistake led to a blow up (yelled at in front of others.) The men didn’t get much done and looks lazy. She talked to one of the bosses and was told “ that’s in his nature but you need to stay on top of it all.” She already had a lot to do and didn’t need to do extra work for someone who wouldn’t do their part. She got yelled at for not doing enough. They realized the quality of the work but didn’t do anything to help. Management brushes things aside and don’t listen.
- She is a teacher. Her profession is female dominate. Out of all the high school teachers there’s about 15-16 teachers and there’s an equal amount of male and female. She has given ideas but was brushed over but no one was willing to acknowledge her or see her.
- She is a newer teacher (5 years) Brought on to share ideas but there seem to be cliques of teachers who get what they want and others don’t. The principal told her that she works really hard and if A. feels unsupported she can come to her but didn’t give her a chance to speak up. When you ask for things and they constantly say no, it’s hard to want to speak up. She spends her own money to support her kids but the admin never acknowledges her efforts.

2. Do you feel like this experience has continued to influence the way you respond to conflict?”

[Probe: I would like to gauge whether there is any potential tension associated with their managers so I can ask questions about their positions of power and what they feel they bring to the table. If this question is not answered robustly, ask “How does your interactions with this person affect your work?”]

- Working in food service at a University. Haven’t had a lot of issues with background. It’s more with interactions with other co-workers. There’s a lot of talk about changing the name of the school (George Washington and Robert E. Lee) Anyone who isn’t part of the area shouldn’t have a say in the discussion for if they should change the name or not. I don’t voice my opinion because I know they don’t care about my opinion regarding politics.

- It has made me more patient. I used to be more reactive. I've learned to tolerate a lot but not to the point where I use my voice. The experiences I have have shown me what I like and what I don't like. I know how I want to treat others and how I want to be treated. I brush things under the rug. I can't change it so I move on.
- I control what's in my control. I've pulled back the emotional aspect with my co-workers and admin. I stay to myself a little more and don't participate in gossip. I'll send an email as opposed to in-person. I try to stay out of the conflict. Other's think I'm passive-aggressive. I'm there for the kids not for my co-workers.

3. How do you personally approach conflict in the workplace?

[Probe: I would like to see whether different groups approach conflict using collaborative, argumentative, or avoidant means. A follow up question would be "How do you think this approach benefits or hurts your ability to solve problems with your boss? or "How do you personally approach that conflict, by addressing the problem with the person, seeking advice from others, talking to that person's supervisor, or something else?"]

- If there's something involving me and one other person I'll speak to them directly to solve the problem. I don't like to sweep things under the rug. I'm confrontational to an appropriate degree. If something is more involved I'll go through admin and ask for help.
- I am very avoidant for conflict at work. There are some supervisors that I don't get along with so I try to avoid them and try to find coworkers I trust and get along with to get help from them instead of from someone who doesn't want to hear from me.

4. "How would you like to approach conflict in the workplace? What's holding you back from approaching conflict this way?

[Probe: I would like to see whether cultural distinctions or power plays are a factor in the ways that these individuals handle conflict in the workplace and see whether culture impacts the way they interact with their managers. A follow up question would be "Do you feel like your cultural background stops you from reaching the way you would like?"]

- Stand my ground and be confident. I've lost some of that while living in Utah. I need to get to a point where I don't care what people think. I want to be more free to voice my opinion without caring what others might think. I don't want to come off problematic. I want to be kind and generous but I want to learn how to set better boundaries.
- As a colored woman there is a stigma that we are aggressive and mean but I'm just passionate about what I do. Being able to have one on one conversations would be an ideal way to resolve conflict but a lot of people aren't receptive. If we could make a place where I'm not judged for speaking out that would be ideal.

5. Recount a time where there was a conflict in your workplace? How did you handle the conflict and how did others around you respond to your efforts?

[Probe: I would like the participants to tell me an authentic story of how they handled conflict in the workplace. I want to ask this question to ensure that I have good data to support my finding as it is more difficult for participants to lie about a personal experience they have had in the past. A follow up question would be “Do you think your response was fueled by what you thought others would think or say about you?”]

- I learned from the experience above that everyone is trying their best. Even if you don't think they are. Being open and understanding and seeing coworkers as people with their own goals and dreams and backgrounds and ideas makes a team grow in many ways. I would hope that I could be an example and show others that through respect and connection, other people's projects become just as important as your own.
- Other people's successes feel just as great as your own when you have people to share them with. I am sure there are many ways to implement this idea or goal, but they essentially all boil down to respect and understanding.

6. If you were a manager, how would you like to handle conflict with your team members?

[Probe: I would like to see if they would rather approach conflict using the same tools with each of their team members or would prefer to use tactics based on the individual person. A follow up question would be “Do you think there is only one way to approach conflict?”]

- I like to make sure that I listen to all parties that are involved. With conflict, there's always two sides to every story. I don't think there's only one way to approach conflict. Everyone is different and everyone likes to be approached in different ways.
- When I was an RA in undergrad, we took various trainings on conflict resolution and mediation. I think it's helped me see things differently than that of my coworkers. When become an administrator I'd like to also incorporate trainings on giving/receiving feedback, mediations, and conflict resolution. I think it starts with understanding to be open minded and be willing to receiving new information. There is no one way to approach conflict, I think it's situational. I believe work place conflict usually stems from biases and emotions, and if we can resolve or bring light to those feelings or unlearn those biases there will be less conflict.
- Definitely depends on the conflict, but for sure it needs to be addressed. I learned as a manager in NY how to deescalate situations. My approach was sitting one on one with whomever in order to gain insight and understanding. Once I'd spoken to all involved, I would address all employees about the importance of certain things and attitudes in the workplace. There are so many ways to approach conflict. Mostly though I seek to understand before reacting.
- If I were a manager, I would give team members a way to submit anonymous feedback. That way they wouldn't have to worry about negative judgements or

results, like being denied a raise. I would also ask my team members for suggestions about what could streamline their work. Often, issues are caused by someone in upper management having a "good idea" that doesn't work well in real life. I think there are many ways to approach conflict. I don't think I will ever be a manager because I avoid conflict too much.

7. Do you have a favorite coworker? What makes them a good coworker for you?

[Probe: I would like to see if the relationships they have in the workplace are good in their eyes because of the positions of power they have over that individual or if the interactions they have with others help them feel like they have more power in the workplace than they would have if they did not have that relationship. A follow up question would be "Do you think your position on your team would change if that coworker was no longer working there?"

- I guess I do have a favorite co-worker. I think I like them because we formed a friendship early on in our work together. If my coworker left, I don't see anything changing for me. I think I would just be sad hah.
- Yes, I have become best friends with two of my co-workers. They are good co-workers because we are honest to one another, we support each other, we have our priorities aligned in what's best for our students, we separate the personal from the professional, and help each other when needed. We call ourselves the step-children at work because we are often the ones who face inequitable treatment and distribution of resources. We are adaptable, and stick together to make things work even without help from administration. It saddens me that they are both considering leaving next year, but I can't because it's taboo to leave before getting tenure (I have one more year). Would my position change when they leave, I'm not sure. I think there are two possibilities: one would be my administration waking up and seeing how much the three of us hold the school together like glue, so they might treat me better in fear that I would leave next. Or I could be treated worse in repercussion of them leaving for not warning my admin of their decision to go.
- I don't have a favorite coworker - but an ideal coworker would be someone who kept healthy boundaries and didn't try sharing gossip. When I'm working I am focused on just that - I am kind, but maintain healthy boundaries and don't participate in getting to know coworkers more deeply. I have a similar attitude when I'm in class/school. I actually remember a lab partner of mine becoming surprised one day when I was chatty and laughing - she mentioned how usually I was more focused and serious.
- I don't have a favorite coworker right now since I only work with one other person. In my last position, my favorite coworker was the one that I had a lot in common with. We worked well as a team, but we also just enjoyed each other's company and sometimes hung out outside of work. She left that job before I did, and I think my position did change a bit. She was moved into a manager position in a different dining location, which made some other coworkers jealous. I think I was left out of some workplace gossip because some people thought I would be a snitch to management.

8. Do you have any final comments that you would like to discuss?
- I think it's so important to recognize that women everywhere in different fields and settings aren't being heard. Even though we are more than capable, strong, educated, and take on so many roles throughout our lifetime. Ethnicity adds an additional layer to this not many recognize. Even on Long Island, I experienced this. I once was denied living in a decent safe community because they did not believe my income was real. The same occurred when I went to the dealership on Long Island. Paystubs/all manner of proof from me wasn't enough. They requested the company's phone number to verify my income. In Utah, I've had too many experiences to count. From being told by strangers that they needed "one of me" to clean their home, to coming off as aggressive and dramatic for communicating firmly, or sharing truths. Where others not of my background are seen as having good intentions, my intentions have raised eyebrows. My confidence was broken in Utah. And sometimes, these types of experiences lead people to stunt their growth and lose faith in their potential.
 - I think that one of the major factors that has influenced how I deal with workplace conflict is the kind of workplaces I have been in. In some jobs, like being a TA in college, I got along well with my boss and didn't have any real issues to bring up. In other jobs, I have had significant issues but never felt like my supervisors or managers cared. Too many times I have heard, "Well, there's nothing we can do about that." If talking to my supervisor won't help fix the situation, then I don't see the point in bringing it up. I just don't have evidence that I can tell a manager about an issue and get results from it.

Focus Group Two

9. Tell me about a time at work when you felt like your opinions were not valued because of your background?

[Probe: I would like to see how they handled situations where others used their "power" to discriminate against them because of their background. This question will help me see if situations like this have continued to influence the way they handle conflict in the workplace. A follow up question would be "How did it make you feel in subsequent interactions with the person who did not value your opinion?"]

- Helping in an after school presentation. Felt devalued and unappreciated because she was the only female and only black participant in the entire conference. When she mentioned where she was from they made assumptions about her country and then moved on from her.
- Diversity and Inclusion seminar: she was the only colored person. There were certain things. When she raised her hand to share her experiences and she wasn't called on for her opinion. She was super frustrated. "I have something important

to say to add to the conversation. Can I please share it?" And they told her no. She was the only person in that group that looked different and she wasn't able to share what she wanted to. Her contributions weren't acknowledged in an environment where inclusivity was the topic. Why not take the experiences from those that come from different backgrounds.

- I asked the company to get rid of the word segregation and a program named shackles which at the beginning they refused. I met with the head of HR, then the president of the subsidiary company then I met with the CEO of the parent company because of the issues I had dealt with in getting them to remove the words. We didn't have any subsequent meetings because I got fired right after all this happened.
- Because I'm an immigrant (especially one of color), I've had several interactions that obviously were not right. I remember in meetings my points being completely ignored or dismissed with a condescending remark. Some of those meetings even included topics that gravitated around my own culture and language while I was the only person with my background present. Other interactions with these people I kept everything as professional as I could and kept it to myself.

10. Do you feel like this experience has continued to influence the way you respond to conflict?"

[Probe: I would like to gauge whether there is any potential tension associated with their managers so I can ask questions about their positions of power and what they feel they bring to the table. If this question is not answered robustly, ask "How does your interactions with this person affect your work?"]

- I do have something important to say to people and I should be heard. She feels like she backs off because of what she's experienced but it has made her want to express herself more. She doesn't want to feel like she's "the angry black woman" It makes her conscious about what she says and how she reacts. She grew up in a diverse area. When she went to college she interacted with more international people and she loves to interact and learn from other people's perspectives on different things. She's grateful for this experience.. People have said to her "You're not one of us. We are all human. We shouldn't be judging one another by appearance or where we are from." I love culture because you can learn anything from anyone.
- It made me prouder and stronger as a black woman but she also takes notice of her location and the people she's around. What's the function so I know what to say and how to say it. If the majority is mixed or from the North she will say less about herself and her background so she doesn't say anything too personal or anything they can laugh about or make assumptions. She feels more comfortable around diverse people and internationally minded individuals. Around people of different cultures all the time. There was racism but you could hardly see it because everyone was integrative. When she went to college she found out that not everyone is willing to open up to you. Being African or Black is different than being Black American. There shouldn't be a division. "We are all people breathing the same air. What's the big deal."

- No, it hasn't changed the way the way I respond to conflict because I come at it straight on especially if I'm in the right I will fight until the conflict is resolved and both sides can settle on an agreement.
- It took me a long time to start being confident in myself and my opinions. After all, there is always a doubt that I would get slighted simply because I wasn't good at my job. But after working in the same field and meeting new people who did value me, it changed. Now, I'm not afraid to take a more direct approach that is much more productive. Thankfully, I don't work with that person anymore but it was hard to have her as my supervisor because I felt trapped.

11. How do you personally approach conflict in the workplace?

[Probe: I would like to see whether different groups approach conflict using collaborative, argumentative, or avoidant means. A follow up question would be “How do you think this approach benefits or hurts your ability to solve problems with your boss? or “How do you personally approach that conflict, by addressing the problem with the person, seeking advice from others, talking to that person’s supervisor, or something else?”]

- Mostly done international internships. She lets people say what they want to say and is professional about it. If there is a problem she goes to her boss. She won't let people get away with things that aren't right.
- One coworker is so rude and toxic. She spoke directly to this individual about what she was feeling. If it needs to go further, she'll talk to her supervisor. You can't solve anything unless to address it head on but if it continues to be a problem, then she consults her boss or management.
- I talk to the person I have an issue with directly there is no need to involve others until it is absolutely necessary because a solution can't be reached.
- I will always turn to someone I trust in the workplace (usually someone in a similar situation than me) to see if there is indeed a problem in my situation. If there is, I will directly approach the person and use classic tools such as the "I feel statements"

12. “How would you like to approach conflict in the workplace? What’s holding you back from approaching conflict this way?

[Probe: I would like to see whether cultural distinctions or power plays are a factor in the ways that these individuals handle conflict in the workplace and see whether culture impacts the way they interact with their managers. A follow up question would be “Do you feel like your cultural background stops you from reaching the way you would like?”]

- It depends on the type of person you're working with. If they come from a similar background she approaches them first. If it's someone from a different background she's more willing to talk to management first to let them handle it. It's the safest option because you don't know how people will react. If you know the person well even if they are a different culture then I'll reach out to them first. I go to management first for protection so that nothing is misconstrued. "You have to protect yourself. Who else is going to protect you unless you do. No one."
- If I know the person well then I'll reach out directly but if not I'd rather go to management.
- Yes, being black I have to be very careful how I address problems because I don't want to be seen as the angry black man so I have to take the roundabout passive way until it doesn't work then address the problem or conflict directly.
- While I like the way I approach conflicts in the workplace, there is a tiny bit of myself that feels like this would just be easier if I could express myself better in my native language. I have a great grasp of English but expressing feelings just doesn't feel the same.

13. Recount a time where there was a conflict in your workplace? How did you handle the conflict and how did others around you respond to your efforts?

[Probe: I would like the participants to tell me an authentic story of how they handled conflict in the workplace. I want to ask this question to ensure that I have good data to support my finding as it is more difficult for participants to lie about a personal experience they have had in the past. A follow up question would be "Do you think your response was fueled by what you thought others would think or say about you?"]

- Whenever there is a conflict. If I know that person then I address it with that person but if I'm uncomfortable then I go to management for my protection because I don't want others to get the story twisted. They might make up some other thing. I don't think of the other employees. If I'm uncomfortable I'd rather address it and do something.
- When I asked a company to get rid of the word segregation and they said no. Me coming out to my coworkers and showing them what I have been dealing helped a lot I believe in made them gain respect for what I was trying to do and repeatedly being denied.
- We just were not communicating well with each other and the work was just not getting done as well as it should. It all broke down one weekend. We got on a call and faced the facts that working together was just not the best. I felt like my side of the story was falling on deaf ears with upper management and I was the only person on her team at the time. I was afraid to be seen negatively by other supervisors because I was always about not making too much noise (that's just how you become when you immigrate).

14. If you were a manager, how would you like to handle conflict with your team members?

[Probe: I would like to see if they would rather approach conflict using the same tools with each of their team members or would prefer to use tactics based on the individual person. A follow up question would be “Do you think there is only one way to approach conflict?”]

- “All parties should be heard and then after you hear both parties that’s when a decision should be made.” A person’s background for how they handle conflict should be taken into account. It’s important to not side with one person because you are more familiar with them or their culture. You should see where both parties are coming from. If you’re a manager you should abide by the company policy and you want to have the company’s culture be cohesive on all fronts and how you handle the situation.
- Be respectful of everyone on the team and everyone needs to have respect for everyone and their individual background. Listen and hear people out.
- There are multiple ways to approach conflict but I like to address the problem at hand in a respectful manner that way problems can actually be fixed for a long term instead of short term fixes.
- I don't believe there is one way to approach conflict. Personally, If I were a manager, I'd prefer to maintain open channels of communications and foster an environment where people feel safe to resolve conflict in.

15. Do you have a favorite coworker? What makes them a good coworker for you?

[Probe: I would like to see if the relationships they have in the workplace are good in their eyes because of the positions of power they have over that individual or if the interactions they have with others help them feel like they have more power in the workplace than they would have if they did not have that relationship. A follow up question would be “Do you think your position on your team would change if that coworker was no longer working there?”]

- The one is from Nigeria. She is sweet, kind, and understanding. We are around the same age so we get each other. I love talking to her about things I’m reading and cultural things. The other lady is old enough to be my mom. She’s down to earth and understanding. I value these women. She is white. I would hope my value on the team wouldn’t change but my enjoyment on the team would change. The enjoyment for what you’re doing on the team would change and maybe you wouldn’t stay as a result.
- I do have a favorite coworker! She is awesome because I know there is a certain level of confidentiality when I chat with her. I know she won't judge me and she knows I won't judge her. And yes I do believe things would be different

16. Do you have any final comments that you would like to discuss?

- It's hard to be of a diverse background in the workforce

Focus Group Three

17. Tell me about a time at work when you felt like your opinions were not valued because of your background?

[Probe: I would like to see how they handled situations where others used their “power” to discriminate against them because of their background. This question will help me see if situations like this have continued to influence the way they handle conflict in the workplace. A follow up question would be “How did it make you feel in subsequent interactions with the person who did not value your opinion?”]

- homeless shelter. May 5th Cinco de Mayo Minions were at the front desk and they had some fun Mexican clothes on. She thought this was racist and felt uncomfortable with what was at the front desk. HR said that the person who put it up was fine to put it up. She stopped going to her boss and HR after that because she felt like she didn’t have a voice and her opinion didn’t matter.
- Laser measurement. Mostly male dominated. A lot of management are over 50. Youth and being female is an anomaly in the field. Old guy said “Kristen are you intimidated.” She was the only female in the room and she was made to feel like an outcast. She told him that gender shouldn’t be a factor and it calmed him down.
- recent grad. I was asked to speak up in team meetings but my thoughts were disregarded so I stopped participating in meetings. Her boss said to speak up but even when she tried again it didn’t work
- When I was a receptionist at a surgeons office, I was seen as the disposable and lowest level of worker. However, everything that I did was to help make the nurses, hospitals, doctors, billers, and management and even patients lives easier. Each thing I collected and made note of was for the benefit of the company. But our management told us we were “easy to replace” and not worth the effort of pleasing because they could find someone else. That made me not care as much about how hard I worked. I got to a point past burnout that made me feel like anything I did wouldn’t make a difference or prove my worth, so I stopped giving 110%.

18. Do you feel like this experience has continued to influence the way you respond to conflict?”

[Probe: I would like to gauge whether there is any potential tension associated with their managers so I can ask questions about their positions of power and what they feel they bring to the table. If this question is not answered robustly, ask “How does your interactions with this person affect your work?”]

- In all my jobs I’ve been the minority guy. The only male staff and everyone asked his opinion about his experience in a women dominated field. He is in Cali and it

is dominated with Minorities so he hasn't felt discriminated against. Other friends of his have felt this way. Discrimination is a foreign concept.

- In an all-black space but she has to ask permissions for everything. She feels like she is constantly on eggshells. Very gaslighty because of who she is and what she knows. In her new job she still feels like she has to ask for permissions even though she has power and influence in her new management roles.
- It lit a fire. It's driven a lot of motivation to succeed. It's made her more assertive in her work. She is willing to vocalize her opinion. Not only a voice for me but a voice for others.
- He works in areas where he is in the majority. His coworkers are also hispanic. He works in a position where there is diversity and everyone is willing to jump in on the discussion. Jobs sometimes function on the hierarchy race falls under that and it can sometimes feel like culture and diversity doesn't exist. It falls under the work environment you're in.
- Yes. I now feel like I do my best for those that respect me. I feel very strongly that every person in a business or company has an equally important role, but just different responsibilities. Now I know to be loyal to other people within my job, but never loyal to a company. Because a company's goal is to make money (obviously and that's fine) but not to be loyal to those who are in it. I look for ways to love my job and devote myself to it but only to a point where I still feel appreciated.

19. How do you personally approach conflict in the workplace?

[Probe: I would like to see whether different groups approach conflict using collaborative, argumentative, or avoidant means. A follow up question would be "How do you think this approach benefits or hurts your ability to solve problems with your boss? or "How do you personally approach that conflict, by addressing the problem with the person, seeking advice from others, talking to that person's supervisor, or something else?"]

- working at a preschool. Called to the office for his cleaning because it wasn't as good as it should have been. You're great with the kids but not on the cleaning. He likes to be direct but the co-teacher thought he was too direct. "My feelings won't get hurt if you have a problem" Got it figured out. With conflict I am more upfront and straightforward.
- She is straight and upfront in her connections with her supervisors. "Can you give me examples of the problem so I can correct it?" They usually don't have anything to offer for correction.
- wait for a one-on-one with my manager. I feel more avoidant but when there is a time and space then I will talk about it. Women who speak out in the workplace are aggressive and emotional but men are actually acknowledged. If it's not going to be productive I'll discuss it with my manager.
- I usually don't address it. I hate conflict because I understand that every person has different backgrounds and opinions. And to them, their opinion is 100% valid and me trying to change it by force or annoyance isn't going to work. So I do my best, prove my hard work, do what I think is best for the company, but when

conflict comes up I try to downplay it. I don't want to be considered part of the problem, but no ones perfect, so I know I can do better so I do. Just don't draw attention to it. When I do have to address it, I talk it through with my peers at work in a tactical and unemotional way so that I can find the best route to understanding and resolution. Then I present my solution or opinion in a way that reflects respect and empathy, but doesn't downplay my own experience

20. "How would you like to approach conflict in the workplace? What's holding you back from approaching conflict this way?

[Probe: I would like to see whether cultural distinctions or power plays are a factor in the ways that these individuals handle conflict in the workplace and see whether culture impacts the way they interact with their managers. A follow up question would be "Do you feel like your cultural background stops you from reaching the way you would like?"]

- Conflict is highly dependent on the understanding of what the other party offers. You can handle conflict well but others may not be willing to handle conflict in the same way. Conflict can be diffused quickly or may not ever be resolved. The way others respond is usually how he responds but he tries to solve it as quickly as possible. Communication is key.
- His wife works in food industry. You may want to do it right but others may not want to. Sometimes it's not possible to fix the problem with people who make it more difficult. If both parties are not calm then it's difficult to solve the problem.
- I wish that every position knew what other positions do. That way no one thinks they are better than the other. I have tried to be curious of others and their jobs so that I can offer understanding and support. I don't push this opinion of how the company can grow because I haven't had experiences where my position is one in which the large decisions are made. I think my cultural background of being LDS and a woman has told me to be kind and soft spoken and not cause trouble. So I do exactly that. I'm not a pushover and I usually end up doing what I want, but i just make sure I don't draw attention to myself when doing it.

21. Recount a time where there was a conflict in your workplace? How did you handle the conflict and how did others around you respond to your efforts?

[Probe: I would like the participants to tell me an authentic story of how they handled conflict in the workplace. I want to ask this question to ensure that I have good data to support my finding as it is more difficult for participants to lie about a personal experience they have had in the past. A follow up question would be "Do you think your response was fueled by what you thought others would think or say about you?"]

- When everyone is calm everyone can talk in working with clients. Her coworkers know that they can't talk to her if they are upset because she made it clear they can't talk to her unless they are calm. "I can't be the angry black woman in the

workplace.” It’s hard to work in a white environment. I’d lose my job in a heartbeat.

- Handle conflict as a manager. Most of the time you allow people to solve conflict by themselves if possible. Some wanted to punch each other and she broke up the fight and told them that they have to discuss things in a calm manner and they can’t address it unless everyone is in a calm space.
- I wish that every position knew what other positions do. That way no one thinks they are better than the other. I have tried to be curious of others and their jobs so that I can offer understanding and support. I don’t push this opinion of how the company can grow because I haven’t had experiences where my position is one in which the large decisions are made. I think my cultural background of being LDS and a woman has told me to be kind and soft spoken and not cause trouble. So I do exactly that. I’m not a pushover and I usually end up doing what I want, but I just make sure I don’t draw attention to myself when doing it.

22. If you were a manager, how would you like to handle conflict with your team members?

[Probe: I would like to see if they would rather approach conflict using the same tools with each of their team members or would prefer to use tactics based on the individual person. A follow up question would be “Do you think there is only one way to approach conflict?”]

- If I were a manager, I would want to handle conflict personally with my team members. I would want to create a culture of safety, so I would want them to feel safe confiding in me about what their conflicts are and then handle them privately. I don’t believe that public confrontations are healthy for the workplace unless they are actively affecting all members of the office. There are certainly several approaches to resolving conflict.
- As a manager, I believe managing conflict is a process of chemistry and communication. There is no set way to handle all conflicts since everybody reacts differently to various methods, so it’s definitely important to analyze the situation and the person before beginning the conflict management process. I am an easy going person with a ton of patience, and I believe that’s what would help me manage conflict in a smooth fashion. As long as there is clear communication and understanding, there isn’t a conflict that can’t be managed.
- I would like to handle conflicts for the most part in a direct and professional way. By that I mean to get to the point and try to resolve it directly and see the best possible solution. of course it can vary depending on the person and their personality. Also I don’t think there is just one way to solve a conflict but there are many ways and styles which may be better or worse depending on the situation.

23. Do you have a favorite coworker? What makes them a good coworker for you?

[Probe: I would like to see if the relationships they have in the workplace are good in their eyes because of the positions of power they have over that individual or if the interactions they have with others help them feel like they have more power in the workplace than they would have if they did not have that relationship. A follow up

question would be “Do you think your position on your team would change if that coworker was no longer working there?”

- I do have a favorite coworker and she is my favorite because she and I work really well together (we ideate and find create solutions to problems together) and we are also friends outside of the workplace. We spend personal time together and have gotten to know each other personally. My position didn't change when she left the company, but I feel much less motivated or creative without her.
- On this job I don't have a favorite coworker but on my last job I did. What made her good was not only our shared interest but also how she talked to me and tone of voice. If there ever was something that we needed to work on she brought in on in a more natural way since we are both equals and built that sense of trust. And while it was sad when I left cause she made the job more enjoyable my position would have remained the same
- My favorite type of coworker is one who provides criticism by explaining why they are providing it. I do not like to be micromanaged or disrespected for no reason when criticism can be provided in a much more controlled fashion. Chemistry is also very important to me, and it makes everything smoother in the workplace.
- I do have a favorite coworker. She makes me feel heard. She is creative and pushes me to be better. She notices when I need help and jumps in without me having to admit that I'm drowning. And I do the same for her. We see each other as more than employees and are invested in each other's success. I feel more emotionally and personally connected to my job because she is there. If I didn't have her, I would feel less supported and understood and heard.

24. Do you have any final comments that you would like to discuss?

- I have been working in places that look more into the character than race, religion, gender and that's how it should be.