

HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES IN THE WORKPLACE: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS ON THE PERCEPTION OF FEMALE AFRICAN
IMMIGRANTS AND FEMALE U.S BORN WORKERS

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Human Resource Policies in the Workplace: A Comparative Analysis on the Perception of Female African Immigrants and Female U.S. Born Workers

A qualitative research design served to explore the effects of human resource policies in the workplace with narratives developed from a group of 15 women comprising African immigrants and their U.S counterparts in Oregon through analysis and interpretation of data from one-on-one interviews. The findings suggest that human resource policies in the workplace greatly impact women's work experiences.

This study explored major factors such as pay difference, language and communication proficiency, cultural/religious differences, skill transferability and employment skill prejudice and discrimination and working conditions. Despite women's qualifications, competence and belief that equal skill mean equal opportunity, the strictures of human resource work policies makes it harder to excel in the workplace. Work experience and policies in Africa and America differ, and life circumstances of African women are distinctively different from those of their U.S counterparts. The analysis concludes with recommendations and implication for employers, managers, and human resource personnel.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

African women have always been on the move, crossing national and international borders with most of them landing in the United States. Scholars have examined the experiences of African women immigrants to decipher reasons they migrate, how they adapt after migration, family dynamics and cultural transformation. Most African women move to the U.S for many reasons. Arthur (2009) discussed diverse reasons for the cause of West African women migration to the United States. Stated in order of frequency, these include, 35 percent of these women want to reunify with family members, who are already living in the U.S, 22 percent want to pursue postsecondary or postgraduate education, 18 percent move in search of refugee status as a result of wars, civil strife and political instability, 15 percent move in search of employment and 2 percent move for other reasons. Although a number population of African women migrates for job opportunities, the bulk of immigrant research provides little study on the work experience of female African immigrants in the U.S especially with respect to human resource policies.

On one hand, there are human resource policies that affect immigrant workers directly. On the other hand, there are aspects of African immigrant worker experience that may not be policy driven but are in some ways linked to human resource policies or other policies that indirectly affect African immigrant women. Both aspects form an important part of this research. While this research focuses primarily on impacts of human resource policies on immigrant African women, there are some aspects of this study that may be intertwined or connected with immigrant experience that may not be policy driven but

still affects workers' productivity, satisfaction, performance and progress in the workplace. For this study, a robust investigation of structural factors and systems of oppression and discrimination instituted through some human resource policies and ways they are interpreted in U.S workplace is a necessity to understanding the experiences of African female immigrant workers.

African Immigrant Women in the U. S Workforce

Current estimation of immigrants in the U.S showed that there are 37 million immigrants living in the U.S. (Martin, 2006). Approximately half of all U.S immigrants are women (U.S Census Bureau, 2005). With more than 20 million immigrants working in the U.S, the share of immigrants in the U.S workforce is approximately 15 percent (U.S Census Bureau, 2005). U.S Census data for 1990, 2000 and for inter-census years of 2001 through 2006 provides a general description of African immigrant women in the U.S. The data shows demographic characteristics as well as profiles of these African women in the U.S. The top tier immigrant-sending countries are Nigeria (43 percent), Ghana (21.2 percent), Liberia (16.4 percent), and Sierra Leone (7.5 percent). In terms of workforce participation, more than one-half (54.2 percent) of the African immigrant women work full-time while one-quarter (26 percent) are not in the labor force and 6 percent are unemployed. Most of these women settle in immigrant rich regions of the U.S especially the middle and Southern parts including Virginia, Maryland, Georgia and Washington D.C. The next highest population of African women that settle in the north eastern and south central region with some settling in the north western region. In 2010, a U.S Census estimate indicates that 1,551 out of the 3,156 African immigrants to the U.S

were women. A majority of them were from Ethiopia (1,247), Nigeria (109), Ghana (55) and Liberia (20). In 2012, a report from the Immigration Policy Center revealed that from 2000 to 2010, the population of African females rose from 396,510 to 761,677 with a majority living in Texas (111 percent), Virginia (110 percent) and Maryland. With a dramatic increase in the population of African women in the U.S, one would expect an extensive study on the lives and experiences of these women.

Significance of the Study

However, a review of relevant literature reveals the lack of detailed studies of the workplace experiences of African women immigrants, human resource policies that affect their success, retention and advancement in the workplace, including the influence of religious, cultural and family dynamics that interfere with their adaptation to the American workplace culture. Most studies do little to move beyond reductionist approaches that view African women in the context of the home, failing to critically and fully analyze the lives of African women in the context of work.

Moving beyond studies that focus on familial roles of African women, the research of this study examines various types of experiences and human resource policies that affect African women such as pay difference, language and communication proficiency, cultural/religious differences, skill transferability and employment skill (qualifications/promotion), prejudice and discrimination, and working conditions.

Very few scholars have examined the workplace experience of African women, who are discriminated against irrespective of their productivity level, qualifications, skills and motivation (Nwabah & Heitner, 2009). In their research of Nigerian immigrant women in

Texas, Nwabah and Heitner (2009) findings suggest that Nigerian women encounter rough experiences adapting to American society and work environments. Twenty-two participants in the research expressed that they had to adapt and assimilate into the American work culture despite the fact that they possess equal skills to perform their job, and they still do not have access to equal opportunities to advance. In spite of their high skills, qualifications, motivation, and productivity levels many of these women are willing to take jobs with less pay and benefits compared to native-born counterparts.

In addition, Arthur (2009) discussed the various exploitative outcomes of the work situation of African women immigrants that affects them in the workplace. He provided insight in to the lives of migrant women who do tedious farm work, exposed to occupational and safety risks, low pay and poor working conditions. Women in the study described unfair and exploitative situations they go through in their jobs as well as issues confronting them as women, foreign born, black and mothers. A participant narrated how farm management at her place of work had become selective in the hiring and number of shifts they give African women. Managers preferred to give long working hours to Hispanics who are willing to take less pay. The findings of these studies may replicate themselves in other parts of the U.S including Oregon.

African Immigrant Women in Oregon

With the ban of slavery in 1843, most blacks were banned from taking residency in Oregon and anti-black sentiment was prominent in the 1850's (Ette, 2012). In 1859, when Oregon became a state, blacks were banned from taking residency, seeking employment, holding property or voting (Ette, 2012). Thus, life in Oregon was difficult for people of

the black race as discrimination became the order of the day. African Americans broke through these forms of discrimination by setting up businesses and employing their kind. Shipyards in Portland mandated that blacks, who arrived from the south, be employed by shipyards during World War II. A transformation in the state was recorded as more blacks migrated to Oregon leading to the removal of racial barriers, however, residue of these discrimination still exists and is experienced by the African population.

Although the eastern part of the United States has recorded high population of African immigrants, also an increased number of Africans have settled on the West coast. These African immigrants may be experiencing difficulties faced by the existing black population on the West coast. The Immigration Policy Center, in its May 2013 reports showed that one in ten Oregonians are immigrants (foreign born) who comprise of about 12.4 per cent of the state's workforce while unauthorized immigrants constitute roughly 5.3 per cent of the state's workforce. Despite the fact that the Policy institute reports that immigrants contribute 12 percent of total economic output in Portland alone, they still face enormous challenges in the labor force. Reviews from research and analysis of University of Oregon Scholars on Immigrants suggests that in recent years numerous new refugees and immigrants from Africa settle in Oregon (Aguila, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). In 2000, there were about 5,033 Africans in Oregon while a study by the Coalition of Communities of Color reveal the estimated of Africans in Oregon to be 9,335 as of 2011. About 1,480 East Africans were recorded as part of the population in Multnomah County in 2005. Data from this research suggests that despite the contribution of the immigrant population to Oregon's economy, women immigrants are underemployed, they have the lowest income, and more likely to be laid off compared to native-born women (Aguila,

Bussel & Skinner, 2008). In addition, they encounter substandard work conditions and get employed disproportionately in nonstandard and informal work arrangements (day labor, temporary and part time work, and contracted work). While these women strive to succeed career-wise, different factors related to human resource policy affect these women at different stages in their labor force experience.

Factors Related to Human Resource Policies Affecting African Women

Diverse factors linked to human resource policies affect female African women, who experience differential treatment compared to American counterparts. For the purpose of this study, factors studied include: pay difference, language and communication proficiency, cultural/religious differences, skill transferability and employment skill (qualifications/promotion), prejudice and discrimination and working conditions.

1. Language and Communication Proficiency

Duleep & Sanders (1993) assert that acquisition of U.S specific skills such as English proficiency, the development of job contacts and job training is related to the immigrant women's earnings. In 2010 the Immigration Policy Center released results from a study, which indicates that 21.8 percent of African foreign-born population have been shown to speak English only, 49.1 percent speak English very well and 29.1 percent speak English less than very well. One factor that impacts African female immigrant workers is English language proficiency and accent. One of the most valuable feature that ranked top on employers job selection list and is most sought by managers is oral communication skill (Atkins & Kent, 1989). Even immigrants with top technical skill may not be hired without a good oral English competence. In Oregon, English

proficiency has been shown to be a major determinant of access to higher skills, better paying jobs such as professional occupations where 30 percent of immigrants who speak English fluently are employed compared to 6 percent to those who speak English poorly (Aguilera, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). Female African immigrants come from different countries and represent distinct cultures (Djamba, 2012). Based on countries of origin, they have different English proficiency since languages such as French, Portuguese, and other national languages are prominent. Mak (1991) points that even when immigrants possess appropriate credentials and licensure, they still had great difficulty competing with locals for positions in counseling, law and teaching because these professions require a near-native proficiency in English. An immigrant is hired is when the position serves a group of people in a language that an immigrant is fluent in.

Accent is a strong barrier to African immigrants who speak differently and may not get favorable response from nonimmigrant colleagues, who may treat them unequally because of their difference (Nwabah & Heitner, 2009). Immigrants undergo psychological effects as a result of language and communication barriers. Westwood and Ishiyama (1991) report that non native English speakers undergo “second language anxiety” resulting to self doubt and anxiety about making linguistic mistakes, not comprehending others accurately, being perceived negatively or embarrassing themselves publicly. Negative reactions African women experienced from their colleagues further exacerbate difficulties for the participants to adapt in a foreign land. For many immigrants, second language anxiety contributes to their poor self-presentation and, as a result, employers make negative assumptions as well as underestimate their abilities. Because of second language anxiety, immigrants try as much as possible to avoid social

contact with natives and withdraw from anxiety-provoking situations that may be professionally rewarding. The entry of African women immigrants to the labor market, whether they are self-employed or work for others is facilitated by their English fluency, good work ethic and education.

Employers are more likely to give jobs to natives and legal residents with permits but are reluctant or less likely to take to African immigrants. Most Africans have difficulty understanding the American accent since they have been raised to speak British English (Official language in Nigeria) or other national languages (Ette, 2012). Since there is a relationship between English proficiency and finding/maintaining a job in the United States, men are more likely to learn English and master it quickly than women especially if they stay at home coupled with little or no opportunity to interact with the outside world (Ette, 2012).

2. Prejudices and Discrimination

Although work policies are put in place to promote equality, structurally, some human resource policies promote discrimination as white employers favor native blacks at the recruitment stage (Bean & Bell-Rose, 1999). In their writings, Alexander and Mohanty depict that immigrant women of color in the U.S sometimes occupy a specific social location, making their experience of racism distinct from African American women (2005). Most times, the preference of most White native-born American employers for foreign black immigrants versus native blacks in the workplace is as a result of structural reasons—their willingness to do odd jobs and what has to be done. Flexibility, loyalty to the organization, acceptance of low pay, and obedience to managers and supervisors authorities are key features that managers look for in employees at the recruitment stage

(Mohanty, 2005). There is tendency for white and native-born African Americans to bargain and question the authority of the employers more than foreign-born blacks, who endure ill treatments. As a result of these structural differences in their perception on job worth and treatment received by workers on job sites, African women are willing to accept less desirable jobs from employers. Even though there are underlining structural causes for the preference of foreign-born blacks, white employers in workplaces use the hardworking and upward striving characteristics of foreign-black women as a way to trap them into accepting and remaining in low-paying jobs with unequal treatment. Through established human resource policies that emphasize loyalty and flexibility, white employers make foreign black immigrants feel good about their ability to work hard despite bad working conditions and stereotype American blacks (Bean & Bell-Rose, 1999). By so doing, American employers keep these foreign black immigrants, making them feel contented about their low-status jobs.

Even among professional African women who possess graduate and postgraduate qualifications, subtle discrimination in terms of human resource policies are prevalent as their skills and experiences are viewed as being substandard by their employers and colleagues. Studies by Lee and Westwood (1996) suggest that immigrants tend to be perceived as less popular and less respected among fellow employees, thereby causing employers to be less likely to promote immigrant workers to positions of power such as management or administration. In a similar research, Shin and Chang (1988) report that with regard to job responsibilities, immigrants are disproportionately represented in peripheral areas of their profession despite their perceived image of success. The study demonstrated that immigrant physicians in the U.S are more likely than the native

counterparts and nonimmigrant colleagues in their country of origin to practice in periphery specialties. In his studies, Arthur (2009) discusses the experience of African women in the professional scene whose jobs as a matter of policy are cross-examined by their colleagues who belittle their abilities and skills in the U.S. Narrating her experience of poor treatment in the workplace, Clara, a Physician at the East St. Louis Hospital reports that despite her high educational and professional achievements, she still faces racial and ethnic discrimination on her job. She attests to the fact that the bad treatment she receives was as a result of her gender and racial status. She laments that her patients and colleagues always second-guess her decisions, thus making her feel substandard as though she does not know how to perform her duties. She still remains segregated and detached from her colleagues despite her professional accomplishments. Thus, being educationally and professionally accomplished does not protect or insulate these women from realities of racism and anti-Black feelings within and outside their workplace. Workplaces condone these behaviors by lack of enforcement of human resource policies to curb these behaviors. These studies suggest that foreign-trained immigrant professionals seem to carry a continuing stigma of a stranger in an alien professional world and consistently remain “the second choice” despite their competency.

3. Earning Difference/Working Conditions

Additionally, earning difference is correlated with some human resource policies that discriminate against African women immigrants. Across many studies of the experience of immigrant women in the labor market, vulnerability of these women to exploitation has been documented (Boyd, 1992; Brettell & Simon, 1986). These researchers indicate that a sizable group of immigrant women are not progressing in the U.S labor market

since they receive low income and limited opportunities for advancement (Boyd, 1992; Pedraza, 1991). When compared to similar non-Hispanic white women, black women have lower weekly wages. African women's wage earnings are 10.1% less than their U.S. born white women counterpart (Mason & Austin, 2011). Although the research study shows that African immigrants have high educational attainment, however, they have an unemployment rate of 7.9, which is substantially high (Mason & Austin, 2011). With the origin and prominence of employment in domestic services during the era of slavery, and most women working as domestic servants, low paying domestic service jobs recently has claimed an unequally high share of black women labor force in the U.S. There has been only marginal success recorded in an effort to raise wages and increase security as well as upgrade the status of domestic service jobs. Despite the fact that federal legislation and affirmative action have tried to bridge the gap between annual earnings of black and white women, however, part of the narrowed earning difference has resulted from longer work hours by black women as increasing numbers have shifted from part-to full-time jobs (Stromberg & Harkess, 1988). White women are less likely than their black counterparts to interrupt their jobs to raise children. Because race and ethnicity have been shown to shape the labor market, occupational distribution reveal that immigrant women end up in lower paying jobs (mostly minimum wage jobs), and low-status jobs range from those that account for individual's attainment in terms of time they put in obtaining general or specific training (Stromberg & Harkess, 1988). Female African immigrants are not only confronted by low pay but also the lack of paid benefits such as health care and retirement benefits. The powerlessness and inability of these immigrant women to rally for collective actions to salvage their poor working conditions was cited as the main

cause of exploitative job conditions (Arthur, 2009). Arthur (2009) in his studies cited the example of Abila, an immigrant woman from Gambia who when approached by her colleagues to form a labor union to protest for more pay, better working conditions, and increased benefits, declined to participate because she was scared that doing so would jeopardize her working relationship with the supervisor and eventually lead to loss of her job. An hourly wage of \$12 was more than Abila had ever anticipated of earning in her life. Although she lives in the U.S, she converts her wage to her country's currency and observes that she was earning far more than she would if she was in Gambia. To Abila, the opportunity to earn more than hundred times what she would earn in Gambia is something she needs to protect and not what she can play with. For these African women immigrants having any form of job irrespective of compensation offered is gainful compared to what is obtainable in their country of origin (Simon & DeLey, 1984).

Additionally, unauthorized populations (undocumented immigrants) are vulnerable to wage and hour violations from employers. Studies reveal that in Oregon, the extent of violations is impossible to quantify as state agencies do not keep wage-and-hour data on the basis of immigrant status. In the Portland area survey of seventy-five immigrant workers revealed they were not paid for work they had performed and similar complaints were tendered by day laborers (Aguilera, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). The drawbacks in community solidarity among workers results from the lack of unions who can lobby in organizations for the interest African women. Thus, the management utilizes the weak union relationship as a means to exploit women and crack down on union support.

Vernez (1999) reports that immigrant women have been consistently been paid lower wages than the native-born despite their educational attainment in the industry in which

they work. University of Oregon scholars report the disparity between immigrant women's income, which is lower compared to men's income at each educational level, with the gap being greatest for those with a college degree (especially those with a college degree) (Aguilera, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). Additionally University of Oregon's scholars review of the relationship between years in the U.S and yearly income of immigrants in Oregon shows that time is associated with social confidence, increased language fluency and familiarity with American customs that promotes success in the labor force (Aguilera, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). However, the returns are lower for some group such as women. Earning differential ranges from a few percentage points to as high as 22 percent points in the textile and apparel industry. Pay difference is exacerbated by human resource policies in workplaces that narrow the applicant pool (absolute reliance on network recruitment services) who can supply workers who accept meager wages. African immigrant women have to compete with other immigrant women (Hispanic, Asian or Carribean) who are willing to accept far lower wages. Arthur (2009) in his studies confirmed this reality in the story of two women (Femi and Joyce) from Ivory Coast who worked at a meat processing plant in Worthington, Ohio. After dropping from school due to their inability to pay their tuition, they took a job with an hourly wage of \$11.50. However, with the influx of Hispanics in Worthington, the work hours of these two African women were reduced and the unallocated portion of their time was given to the Hispanic migrants who were willing to work for a wage far less than \$11.50 per hour. The competition between African and Hispanic women immigrants leads to depression of wages on the farms and food processing plants. Being selective on individuals they hire, the farm management failed not only to consider the working experience of these African

women immigrants but also treated them unfairly. Despite the low pay, poor working conditions, safety risk, lack of fringe benefits and tedious nature of their work, African women immigrants still stay to make ends meet. Djimet Dogo, the Program Manager for Africa House, an organization that deals with refugee and immigrant issues in Portland, laments of the poor treatment that African immigrants experience in the workplace when he said, "They will never quit their jobs," and many employers, once they have worked with refugees and immigrants, come back to Dogo's organization looking for more workers from the same country (Stimson, 2008). Immigrants are less likely to report workplace injuries due to the language barrier, lack of training, lack of adequate knowledge about their legal rights and fear of reprisal. The prevalence of unsafe working conditions has been documented from Congregational hearings in 2006 among reforestation workers in the northwest. A raid at a Portland plant in 2007 by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) led to the discovery of unsafe conditions (Aguilera, Bussel & Skinner, 2008). Workers report poor conditions such as extremely cold temperatures, limited provision of protective gear, no safety training and electrical cords submerged in water at production areas.

4. Cultural/Religious Differences

Although U.S workplaces policies emphasize diversity (cultural) on the surface, in reality this may not be the case. Stimson (2008) asserts that cultural understanding in the workplace for employers and employees plays a major role promoting inclusive working environment and reducing cultural conflicts. He found that African immigrants face similar challenges as Hispanics in adapting to foreign culture as well as in the struggle to learn a new language, new customs and new ways of earning wages. However, the

greatest challenge for Africans is that employers largely misunderstand cultural differences that are characteristic of African immigrants. Many problems are created out of a misunderstanding or a lack of sympathy from the employer. Dogo Djemit laments about this occurrence when he said, "Someone got fired for missing two or three days of work to take care of a sick relative." Such a thing wouldn't happen in many African countries. "Where's the humanity?" (Stimson, 2008). Additionally, most African immigrants are unaware of the cultural norms of the United States and can be penalized for little things they see as normal in the African tradition. For example holding hands, hugs or touching are normal African practice but can be interpreted as sexual harassment in the workplace. There are also a lot of things that are new to Africans on arrival to the U.S such as paying payroll taxes, contributing to a retirement account, benefit deductions. Having experienced isolation, alienation and dealing with clients who feel their knowledge base is substandard to their other colleagues, these immigrant women feel that hidden and subtle forms of racism in their work environment are not adequately dealt with.

Most African women immigrants feel that their work place policies create a false haven for handling issues of ethnicity, race, gender and class (Arthur, 2009). Although difference may be respected in some cases in the workplace, there is lack of respect for issues confronting people belonging to minority groups. The reality of lack of acceptance and insecurities they face as black women confine their social circles to only colleagues from international backgrounds. Additionally, human resource policies seldom address issues of cultural difference, race, gender in pre-recruitment trainings to help white and non-white employees to safely and respectfully navigate and build respectful

relationships. Human resource policies and employers may also fail to address and accommodate religious differences in the workplace including distinction in dressing (in their dress code), and religious/cultural holidays celebrated by African immigrants, which are not part of the American calendar. Arthur (2008) discussed the experience of Muslim refugees of African descent who are discriminated against in the workplace. In the author's narration of the experience of two Muslim women refugees (Kendra and Lois from Sierra Leone), he points out that most of these women feel unaccepted and view their identity as blacks as being burdensome to them. Having been treated with disdain and condescending attitude because they are black, these women feel that U.S environment link blackness with negative images. Kendra and Lois dress in traditional Muslim attire, wearing hijab and long loose clothing when they go to work. However, they receive negative responses and are shunned when they go to find jobs or even in the park with their children. They have been insulted, threatened with shouts to return back to their country of origin. Their manner of dressing in traditional attire creates social distance, separates and restricts them from interactions with others. Although these women have multiple identities including work, family, religious, family life and gendered role, singling out their religious identity and dealing with that aspect of their identity with contempt dismays the women.

The lack of cultural understanding and competence in human resource policies in the workplace manifests when it comes to religious/cultural festivities celebrated by African women immigrants and conflict resolution strategies rarely accommodate cultural differences (Green, 2003). Green (2003) in his study of the experience of Somali immigrants who worked at Jennie-O, a processing plant that specializes in turkey

products located in Willmar and West Central Minnesota found that human resource policies and employers hardly address or educate other white employers/employees about these issues. At the firm, Somali immigrants who are mostly Muslims celebrate holidays that are not recorded in the U.S calendar and employers have a hard time dealing with those issues. In Jennie-O, there was a conflict in 1998 around the celebration of Ramadan, a Muslim holiday. Workers had to choose whether to obey their white manager and employers who refused to give them an excuse from work without a vacation day. Because they are not knowledgeable about their rights and do not speak English, most of the workers thought they would be fired and had to work during the holiday. The conflict raised an issue of how to address the needs of Somalis in Willmar as well as ensure that employees are educated on how their human resource policies can accommodate religious holidays. Also, human resource policies use of the American conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflict involving African women rarely accommodate difference in the workplace as it imposes resolution styles that may not be culturally appropriate for the African employees. Thus, there is a need for employers to build culturally suitable methods of conflict resolution into their human resource policies. This would require training and understanding of the lives of these women.

African women are products of cultures and they are expected to assume sex roles that are inflexible in the African context. Lack of spousal support coupled with limitation to decision making in the family interferes with their ability to balance the stress that comes with work culture and family responsibilities (Nwabah & Heitner, 2009). This puts them at a disadvantage in their jobs since not all employers would understand the importance of cultural difference in an expanding U.S workforce. There is a need for organizational

leaders, who have skills for managing employees to understand that immigrant women bring their culture with them to the workplace and it is vital to ensure that these diverse employees deserve equal attention that is required for an organization to succeed and the immigrant worker to feel accepted.

5. Skill Transferability and Employment Skill (qualifications/promotion)

African women come from societies where educational attainment is a determinant of social status. Some of these immigrant women with graduate and postgraduate credentials undergo a long struggle to be part of the United State's black professional and middle class. In data from the decennial census and population survey, Vernez (1999) examined the work experience of immigrant women in the U.S. from 1960 to 1997. Based on his studies of the characteristics of recent female immigrants he discovered that compared to native born women, immigrant women are two times more likely to have fewer than 12 years of education. A significant percentage of African women join diverse lines of occupations such law enforcement, retail sales, electricians, assembly line workers and small business proprietors. Although education raises the likelihood that an immigrant woman will enter labor force, however, jobs held by these women rarely match their educational attainment and women with lower than average educational levels face very restricted labor market opportunities (Stromberg & Harkess, 1988). Mostly new African women immigrants on arrival to the U.S get employed in the service sector, taking jobs in hospitals, meat packaging, and janitorial sectors. These educated women compete for domestic and service jobs with women with secondary qualification. Native whites, who used to perform these domestic jobs were moved to middle and intermediate leadership roles giving way for new women immigrants to take their former positions. While the

jobs often begin at apprentice and lower levels, wages are meager, benefits are hard to come by and promotion rarely achievable. In addition, these jobs offer limited or no protection for the labor rights of immigrants women. Structured to reinforce social and economic subordination of migrant and immigrant women, the job expectations rarely offer immigrant women the access to institutionalized mechanisms to address job related grievances and unfair labor practice targeting immigrant women. Thus, these African women immigrants, protesting for better work conditions, agitating for better terms of employment and tendering complains is an abomination. In their research of Nigerian immigrant women in Texas, Nwabah and Heitner (2009) discovered that African immigrant women who believe that their employers based compensation and promotion on years of experience within the U.S without accounting prior years of experience in Nigeria. Most of the participants felt they would have advanced to occupy higher position than they currently hold if they were in Nigeria. With their prior qualification and credentials devalued, most African women rarely get promoted and even natives they train advance in their career, leaving these women behind. Nwabah and Heitner (2009) cited an example of an African woman immigrant who, after training an American employee was fired by her after the American employee became her boss. Thus, it is not uncommon to see American subordinates getting promoted ahead of African women despite their qualifications.

Additionally apart from professional jobs such as nursing, medicine, law etc, that provide professional exams that immigrants with educational backgrounds from their native countries can take to become professionals, there is little opportunity for credentials in other fields to be accepted in the U.S workplace. Studies suggest that

foreign degrees and work experiences of immigrants are not fully recognized and these immigrant professionals are required to begin afresh and retrain (Ben-Sira, 1997; Man, 1997). In their study, the Coalition of Communities of Color (2013) mentioned that the devaluation of African credentials was partly due to outright rejection African degrees and to promote economic benefit for the U.S. education system. African credentials are rejected based on the assumption that foreign credentials are not a good match to that obtained in the U.S. Additionally, the lack of recognition of foreign credentials means that Africans are expected to spend more money towards education (approximately \$157,000 for a 4 year degree), further enriching U.S education system. Thus, transferability of employment skills that coincided with these immigrants education and work experience becomes difficult (Mak, 1991; Man, 1997). Because of this reality, immigrants report that they encounter problems during job search as employers fail to recognize their foreign earned expertise, resulting in high unemployment and underemployment rates among immigrants. With the requirement of an “American experience” perpetuated through employment practices and human resource policies, and the lack of recognition and calibration of an immigrant’s previous job experience and qualifications, this reality becomes more institutionalized against non-English speakers. This confines many immigrant professionals to the same position even if they qualify for promotion.

Structure of the Study

This thesis includes an introduction to my study, it states the research methodology and explains the limitations I faced. Chapter II discusses my approach to the project. Chapter

III describes and analyzes my findings. Chapter IV concludes my thesis and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the experiences and views of African women immigrants and their female U.S counterparts on the influence of human resource policies in their work environment. With a growing body of literature on immigrant women, little is written about African women immigrants' work experiences. To date, research on varied experiences of African women linked to human resource policies in Oregon has been rarely available. This work helped fill this gap in the literature. This study used in-depth personal interviews to obtain information about women's experiences and processes. Qualitative research method best suits this present study as it provided an opportunity for women in the two groups to share their own experience from their perspectives. The emphasis is on voicing their story, contextual consideration, and individual meaning making. This research methodology was informed by my personal experience as a woman and my reflection, as well as discrimination against women in the workplace by employers (mostly men). My views stemmed, in part, from Woolf (1938) and Beauvoir (1961) who assert that women's experiences are distinct from men's, their realities and truths differ. There is a propensity across disciplines to omit or distort women's experiences with many studies generalizing the experience of a male sample of the whole population (Picher & Coffey, 1996). Acknowledging impacts of human resource policies in women's lives needs to be studied based on women's perspectives to correct this fundamental bias. Thus, the selection of African women immigrants and their female U.S born colleagues as a research topic served as an effective avenue to empower these

women and reduce the stereotypes that exist in this population. The research process was designed with an intention of empowering the women I interviewed both through how I treated the data gathered and by how I use myself as a research instrument in the interview interaction. The use of a qualitative method aims to echo these women's experiences from their own perspective, allowing their voices to be heard by directly quoting their narratives and anecdotes in their findings.

As a research instrument during the interview process, I positioned myself more like the participant's sister with similar background and experiences instead of a knowledgeable researcher. Preston in his research asserts that as an insider interviewer one can access resources to make the research process empowering and validating the participant's experience (1994). Participants were more willing to share and reveal vital information that outsiders find difficult to understand. Interviewing people of similar race, class and ethnic backgrounds can be difficult as interviewees assumed that interviewers know and understood what they mean, thus they did not want to explain and presumed taking meanings for granted in a manner they would do while interviewed by an outsider (Rubin, 1995). Thus, I had in my arsenal my cross-cultural competencies to counter these pitfalls and identified these areas during interviews by asking participants to fully illustrate their experiences as they would to an outsider. Additionally, I solicited the services of a narrative analyst from non-African background to review the transcript and provide an outsider's perspective in order to clarify meanings of narratives.

Narrative analysis is the specific method I used to guide the procedure of data collection and analysis. Since researchers do not have direct access to another person's

experience instead the representation of primary experience such as talk, text, interactions and interpretation, all these were selective, partial and incomplete. Thus narrative analysis involves decisions on which of the five levels of representation is to be used in the research process—attending to experience, telling/listening, transcribing, analysis and reading.

Procedure for Data collection

Population Sample

A total of 15 women were interviewed for this study. Participants were comprised of 8 female African immigrants and 7 U.S born women who lived in Eugene, Portland and Salem. Most of the women have different academic, skills, and cultural backgrounds. Additionally the women interviewed emigrated to the U.S at various time periods (1984-2013), which accounts for variation in the narration of their experiences. The women interviewed belonged to different age groups (28-50). But overall, most of the women interviewed were a young group. All of the American women were in their early 30's to mid 40's. Among the African women interviewed, one came to the U.S in the early 80's while four came 10 years ago and three have been in the U.S for 5 years or less. In the two groups, most of the women are married with children with exception of few single mothers and two who had no kids.

Recruitment Process

I recruited some women I knew personally and those I have met in Eugene, Salem

and Portland as well as those I have had one-on-one discussion about the workplace human resource policies through my network within the African community. None of these women worked as human resource personnel. Some women I interviewed also referred their friends and colleagues for me to interview. Furthermore, I belonged to a group of African women, known as Women of Distinction who meet monthly for meetings and fellowship. I met with the group leader, explained my research and requested that information about my research be included in the monthly emails to get women to participate in my research. Through email responses, I was able to contact women who indicated an interest to participate in the study. Also, I made a quick presentation about my research during the monthly meetings as a means to recruit more women as well as get women to pass the information along to their friends who might be willing to participate in the research. In addition, I recruited more women from Africa House, an organization that deals with refugee and immigrant issues in Portland using one of my professors as a contact point. In the beginning, the women both African and American recruits were required to read an informed consent that describes participants' rights and the benefits and risks of participating in the study.

Before obtaining consent, I introduced myself to a potential participant, provided an explanation and full disclosure of the nature of the research--explaining what the research was about, its importance/benefits to the participants involved and its relevance to the workplace. I used simple language to promote adequate comprehension on the part of the potential participant as well as emphasized the participant's voluntary choice to participate or withdraw from the study and participants rights in the research process. I discussed the mode of the interview

process (particularly the time it will take, protection of tapes and participant's confidential information).

Interview Process/Guide

The interview guide stated the interview process and procedures as well as asked questions to get useful information for the research question. The interview guide consisted of three sections: the first section focused on the participant's educational/occupational history/previous job and experience. This was intended for participants to tell their stories in a chronological manner. By sharing their educational/occupational history, they integrate many human resource policies (related to pay, language proficiency, promotion etc) that affect them in the U.S with their ideas emerging from a developmental perspective.

The second section focused on impacts of human resource policies from pre-recruitment, and recruitment stages on both groups. Factors such as pay difference, promotion, language proficiency (accent), qualifications and cultural differences and how such are incorporated into human resource policies that affect both groups was examined in the interview. Broad questions such as, "Tell me about your experience with job searching in the U.S," was asked to give participants more opportunity to account for their experiences as well as elicited the long discussion that narrative inquiry requires. The specific areas impacted by human resource policies are: 1) pay difference/working conditions, 2) language and communication proficiency 3) cultural/religious 4) skill transferability and employment skill (qualifications/promotion) 5) prejudice and discrimination.

The third group of interview questions was designed to facilitate the process of story telling. For example, a participant can be asked to tell parts of their stories that were hard to tell. Especially parts they were hesitant to talk about. This provided the space for participants to think about, reflect and share experiences that were silenced due to painful incidences that included such experiences as shame, pain, or confusion. These questions were intended to get participants to speak. Questions such as: is there a book, an image, a film or music that captures your experience of the impacts of human resource policies? This type of question was intended to offer the participant multiple avenues to describe feelings about their work experience in the U.S. Another question was, “What was like for you to be interviewed?” This will allow the participant to share thoughts and feelings about the interview process and thus reflect on what it means to be a participant of the study.

Once a woman agreed to meet with me, I spend about an hour with her to tape record the interview. In each session, the interview lasted an hour and half except for women, who live in distant location (Salem and Portland) and are willing to be interviewed the whole time. Women on expired visas or working without proper permits were concerned about sharing details of their stories, but I assured them of complete anonymity in the interview process. I changed their specific names, workplaces and organizations in my reports.

The interviews were conducted in the women’s home with their permission or a place of convenience for both parties such as public places, parks, or coffee shop. Also, I secured their consent to contact them through phone in order to clarify a

particular comment or piece of information after interview.

In depth semi-structure interviews were conducted using an interview guide to obtain specific information to the research question. Using the guide and questions as a framework, I engaged in guided conversation with each woman, an approach that allowed me to probe for details and expand my own ideas. The interviewer's guide was designed to ensure consistency in the sense of asking for similar kinds of information from the interviewees.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the time constraint due to the amount of work involved, time for narrative analysis and finding a schedule that worked for both the researcher and the participants for interviews. Finding time in which to do interviews could be difficult since most of the women I interviewed often work and attend school full time. Thus, I broke the interviews into two or in some cases three meeting periods. I believed one-hour sessions were less strenuous, resulting to greater clarity. This study was limited by small number of participants due to the amount of work and time I put in for narrative analysis. I got the views of women in a variety of occupations as well as different immigration statuses to ensure broader population representation. Since my research was solely based on my interaction as a researcher with these women with the exclusion of information from media sources, it is more likely that the study will be limited by my biases.

Second, the participants for the current study resided in the Western part of the U.S

particularly in Eugene, Portland and Salem. As Oregon is unique in its cultural, economic, and social environment, the findings in the study may differ from those in other regions of the U.S.

Third, some women were afraid of the repercussions of participating in these interviews, which may have hampered this study. Some created excuses for cancelling different interviews or refused to name a time and place of interview or afraid for their jobs. It was even difficult for women who performed full time informal work without permit or those with invalid visas. I believe such women's work situations affected their confidence in speaking with me. However, I believe that despite these women's visible fears about sharing their information about visas, work permits and job situation, I still obtained valuable information.

Finally, in this study I was faced with the challenge of whether I gave these women "voice." Since no one had documented their narratives in the past, I wanted to write a piece that would allow their experiences to be exposed and somehow recognized. Yet, I was confronted with the question of how this research will speak for these women. As an African I wondered how I can speak for both American and African women. As Banerjee & Minh-ha reported that writing as a researcher can be difficult when racial difference is involved, which can be limiting and deceiving. However for me, this meant seeing these women not as "special" cases that needed be spoken for but as women with stories, life histories that could be documented, which allowed me to view their lives and experiences contextually and specifically instead of solely from a cultural difference framework. Thus, a study in which both research and participants

worked together on all phases of the investigation can address the limitation about “giving voice.”

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

Based on the experiences of African and U.S born colleagues, various themes emerged from this study, which are divided into two categories. First, general themes that reflect the experiences of both groups in relation to human resource policies and second, specific themes that arise from the five identified factors.

General themes:

Lack of Priority for Married Women and Women with Children

A sizable number of participants expressed the fact that human resource policies in their workplace rarely pay close attention nor give priority to issues confronting them in the workplace or gave them the flexibility they need when family or emergency issues arise with children or husband. Sandra, an African woman articulates this problem when she said, “There should be human resource policies on how married women or women with kids should be treated and given more priorities. Once in a while when we have events at night, I have to come home late. Sometimes I work overtime but I don’t get paid overtime. Sometimes we have to work after hours and my husband doesn’t like that as much and he’s not happy about that either.” An American single mother of three, Kenny voiced the same concern when she said, “My brother would be the one to baby sit but he has a lot of problems and I don’t want my kids to spend too much time with him. It would be nice if people with children or special circumstances will have preference over day shifts. I know they have day care on campus but my kids are 10 and 12 and I couldn’t afford daycare anyways. But it would be nice if there would be more options for

mothers”. Being a single mother, Kenny who was assigned to work night shifts finds it hard to care for her children. One of the children was sick and needed special attention but human resource policies at her workplace hardly considers her case nor gave her a preference for a day shift.

Poor consideration of women’s circumstances adds undue pressure on women especially single mothers who are sole breadwinners in their families. Kenny further reiterated this point when she said, “It is pretty hard having kids and being a waitress. I always ended up working night shift and it is really hard to get a baby sitter especially at night. Like now I worked 40 hours a week but now I had them cut it down to 20 hours because I don’t want to work weekends because I don’t have a baby sitter since it is hard to find a good one.” Poor consideration of women’s circumstances by human resource departments makes it even harder for these women to cope and balance work and family life.

Lack of Diversity in Human Resource Personnel /Poor Consideration of Diversity Issues at Workplaces

While more than half of both African and American women discussed the fact that cultural and diversity issues are rarely included in their human resource policies, other women expressed the fact that human resource personnel at their job sites were majority white. Farida, an African woman from Cameroon and a social worker with a nonprofit organization, expressed her concerns when she said, “At my workplace, they don’t have any policy around how diversity issues should be addressed. And now they have formed what they call the multicultural and diversity competency team which I am part of. I also saw the discrimination against women who were black in the shelter. I saw that treatment,

so I was stepping up to try to bring that balance back. But I was the only one there because the office never had a black advocate. But I felt that need that sometimes some of the white women accuse women who are nonwhite or their kids of things they did not do until someone would say that is not right, this cannot be corrected. Now I push for the Diversity competency team in the office and I am part of the team. And now we are working on a project to have human resource policies for the shelter. So these are the reasons I am working hard on the team to ensure that it goes into solid policies. There should be consequences for actions that would follow through human resource policy guidelines.” Most workplaces still do not have work policies around issues of diversity in the workplace as they still maintain a majority white staff (Cunningham & Green, 2007). As the workplace is fast becoming diverse, there is need for integration of diversity issues in human resource policies in these areas.

Another American woman, Nadia, raised similar concerns with regard to lack of attention to diversity issues in the workplace when she said, "In the last job I had, I've seen a colleague of a different nationality who was used and taken undue advantage of as far as they would make the person do a hard labor of cleaning, putting the chairs together and vacuuming. She does all the other stuff that is behind the scene, the really hard physical labor. I have also heard of it from other employees. I brought it up a lot of times and there were times I made three complains to the human resource section and the C.E.O but till this day nothing was done about it or even acknowledge complains made.” Because employers and the human resource section manage a majority white staff, they tend to pay less attention to issues confronting workers who do not fall into that category.

Sandra raised a similar concern when she pointed out that, “I wish that the people that work with human resource are more diverse so we can have all kinds of population represented so that there would be a fair kind of policy that goes with everybody. Not just the white dominating the human resource circle. I want to see that happen in the future”. Anna, an African woman restated the same concerns when she mentioned that, “Whether you like it or not Corporate America is majority white and though there may be human resource policies put in place, but a majority of those policies have been controlled and influenced by the Caucasian mind set, mentality, and way of thinking”. Poor diversity in the sphere of human resource personnel and poor attention to diversity issues at different work places has resulted in many African women feeling less represented by human resource policies in their workplace. Farida re-emphasized this point when she said, “American employers in their human resource policies will not care about your culture because what they care most about is what you bring to their company. Here is not a place where they will give you that chance, it is either you fit in to their model or you are out. So there won’t be that flexibility about your culture.”

Strict human resource policies affect maternity leave/delay child bearing/bringing kids to work.

Both African and American participants raised a concern that human resource policies linked to maternity leave puts an undue pressure on them especially because they do not get paid at that time. Most women complained that they had to rely on using their sick and vacation leave, which may have already been used in other family emergencies. Asamau, an African woman from Mali expressed her frustration with the policy when she said, “Even when you have a baby, it is ok to give maternity leave and full pay. I think

this is the way it should be because family is family. I was just talking to someone about maternity leave in the U.S, that as a woman you have to use your sick days if not you wouldn't be paid. This is terrible, so I understand why American women don't want to have many kids. Because if you can't have maternity leave for three months to stay with your baby on full pay and you have to use your sick leave. So what if you have only one-month sick leave, after one month what will happen to your baby? Who would take care of your baby? I think this is something that affects women in the U.S. This policy should change and they should allow women to have full maternity leave on full pay. I was just talking to one of my classmates, she just graduated from my department, She told me she was pregnant and I asked her when is she taking her maternity leave? She said she is not actually having maternity leave because she is not going to be paid if she goes on maternity leave. I asked how she would cope. She told me that she has 45 days sick leave, so she would use that and stay a full month and half with her baby. So she wouldn't be paid for a month and half. This is not a good policy for women because it won't encourage women to have more children”.

Another American woman, Lizzy expressed similar concern when she said, “I don't know if we are gonna ever have kids. May be eventually and that's when I for see a problem coming because its hard and human resource policies in place are discouraging towards that. It's much harder for mothers than for wives. I anticipate that it would be harder when I have kids. There is a perception that to get ahead in the world, you have to work over 40 hours a week and if you have kids, you have to think of whether or not this is good for them.”

Other women indicated that the workplace should be family oriented, however, human resource policies affect their ability to bring children to work, putting undue stress on them. Marisa, an American woman who works with the university expressed her dislike for the policy when she said, “I feel very affected by that. The only kind of event that comes to mind for me is that around the university and their policies/ideas of not having children around in the workplace. I feel confused on how they are making those decisions. In the past, our office has had children coming to the office with their mom. And I appreciate that aspect of our office because it helped take the stress away, made us look less bureaucratic to people visiting our office and gave us a personal face, which was positive. Our leadership changed and I felt that when I was looking into that, the leadership of our office wasn’t supportive of that anymore. But also I talked to human resource section about it and I felt it was unclear as far as what they were saying. I felt that they really asked of that not to happen very strongly, saying that there was a policy on it”. Some women also point out that it can be uncomfortable to bring their children to work, knowing that they would be separated from their children and they may not be able to have their children in the same room with them. Nadia raised the same concern when she said, “At one time I brought my son in the office but he had to stay in a different room. It was a pain and was very difficult”. For most women, white and African alike, restrictions set by human resource section on not being paid while on maternity leave and not having children at work especially in case of emergency is burdening, heaping great pressure on them and their career.

Specific Themes

Specific themes have emerged based on the five identified factors from this study such as pay difference, language and communication proficiency, cultural/religious differences, skill transferability and employment skill (qualifications/promotion), prejudice and discrimination and working conditions.

1. Language and Communication Proficiency: African and American women have different experiences with regards to the use of English at work. Since communication between colleagues is important in maintaining a thriving and successful relationship in the workplace, language proficiency/communication ranks top in qualities recruiters look for when hiring employees. Most employees mentioned that their ability to be successful in their workplace centers on their ability to communicate proficiently in the language used in the workplace. Lizzy reckons with this point when she said, “90% of my skills and success at my job rely on my ability to speak English language fluently. I can speak Japanese but not in a business environment. So much of it is language and how you relate with people and what you understand”. Some themes that have emerged from the experience of African women on the impacts of human resource policies on language proficiency and communication in the workplace includes:

- **Limited English Language Proficiency/Accent Puts African Women at a Disadvantage:** Most African women who were interviewed expressed the fact that employers’ strong emphasis on human resource policies that focus more on English language proficiency has resulted in the loss of many job opportunities, which they are qualified to take. Most women recount that

most times during interviews, they feel they are being judged by their accent and not by their knowledge or their ability to perform their job. Abisa, a coordinator who works with African refugees and immigrants at Africa House reinstated similar concerns when she says, “African women always come to talk to us and we hear that discrimination is very obvious. Especially when the women start to speak and there is an accent, it’s something that puts them in a disadvantage. For example, I have a friend, who is very smart and has a masters degree but she would say that for interviews when she goes in or even when she gets the job, she tells her employers that she sees her accent as a disadvantage for her. So, it’s tough”. Asamau, a woman from Mali shared her ordeal with job search for over a year in the U.S when she said, “Because of language barrier even when I am competent in my field of study but because I speak English with an accent, it is more harder for me to get a job in the U.S”. Additionally, some African women, who were interviewed shared that having English as a second language coupled with their accents pose greater challenge as their colleagues/supervisors do not understand them when they talk, which results in their colleagues belittling their performance ability in the workplace. Marie, a registered nurse shares this sentiment when she said, “My ability to speak better English and communicate well will be helpful. Up till now I have communication problems because not all the words come out in time when I want to say something. So I still have communication barriers that prevail and keep me from accomplishing many things I would

have loved to do. I wish I could use another language but I have to use English mostly because I have to make myself understood and I have to understand others”. Marie goes on to explain that her limited English language proficiency makes her colleagues and supervisors doubt her capability to perform her duties as a nurse. She shared her experience with this example at work: “Honestly sometimes I don’t understand my supervisors and colleagues, like the doctors most times they talk really fast and sometimes I just say yes. But I did not really understand. I don’t know if it is hard for them to understand me or just easy for them to talk to someone who speaks like them. For example, the other night our supervisor came and we were giving him the report of a patient whom I assessed at night. I was telling him what happened and the other white nurse with me on that floor told him what happened. Later he called on phone to talk to the other white nurse specifically about the patient. The nurse wasn’t there at the time he called. Instead of talking to me as the second nurse on that floor, he preferred to talk to the C.N.A who was there and the C.N.A doesn’t know much about the patient. I had to take the phone and tell him that I am the person who made a report about the patient. It wasn’t very comfortable because I am a nurse like the other one, if the other nurse is not there why doesn’t he ask to talk to me?” Vickie, an African woman from Zimbabwe raised similar point when she said, “When I talk to some colleagues they say they don’t understand what I am saying. I have learnt to talk slower when talking to people not loud. Lower my tone so they can pay

attention to what I am saying”. Raina who has been in the U.S for over ten years shares the same experience when she says, “Up till now communication is very challenging. I find it difficult to communicate or even understand what my colleagues are asking me to do”. American colleagues of these African women expressed the fact that communication with their African co-workers can be a bit challenging but they enjoy the international perspective brought into their workplace. Lizzy recounts that “The language barrier can sometimes be a problem. But, I love working with an international perspective. So I find it really rewarding personally”. Kenny shared a similar view when she said, “It is a little challenging I wish I knew their language so we can communicate better. My first waitressing job was at a Chinese restaurant with diverse immigrant colleagues (African, Chinese and Hispanics) where they barely spoke English but they were really nice and I still go back to see them sometimes. It is a little slow talking and I feel that I have gotten better at it because I can omit some words that are less important so we can understand each other.”

While African women are faced with numerous challenges with the use of English language at the workplace, most American women interviewed in this study expressed the fact that language is not something they worry about during interviews or when at work since English language comes to them naturally and being part of the dominant culture makes things easier for them. Lizzy raised this point when she said, “Coming from the dominant culture here is probably helpful. At least when I talk to African

immigrants, they struggle with many things. I think its an unseen advantage to be part of the native dominant culture because there are things I don't have to think about that an immigrant has to think about. Also language, Oh my gosh if I have to do my job in a second language, I don't even know. I mean if you speak it well enough but I don't speak other languages well enough to do that.”

- **Lack of Language Guidance in Learning Work-related Terminologies/Instructions**

In this study, some African women have expressed the fact that the enforcement of human resource policies that can guide the learning of work-related terminologies, functions, and instructions needs to be instituted. Most of these African women struggle with the use and application of work related terminologies especially because of their non-American background and language proficiency. Asamau raised this concern when she said, “Language is always a challenge because most times when supervisors/employers are explaining our duties, there are terms that you have to be an American to understand. I couldn't understand all that because I didn't grow up in that culture. So language is a problem”. Sandra shares similar experience when she points that, “With my first job, I wasn't completely fluent but I understood when my supervisors give directions. My struggle was being in a new job and learning different terms used in the job and the codes.” Thus, most of the African women feel that it is important for employers to encourage and develop programs/trainings

ted to their human resource policies that would help and support immigrant workers to learn work-related language/instructions as they transition into the American workplace.

2. Cultural/Religious Differences

African and American women have very divergent experiences when it comes to impacts of human resource policies on cultural and religious beliefs in the workplace. Themes that emerge include:

- **Strict Human Resource Policies Restrict How Colleagues Relate/Impact their Personality at Work (Dominant vs. Don-dominant Culture):** Because of stringent work policies on how coworkers relate (such as jokes, complements, touch, hugs etc), some African women feel they have to be very cautious in how they relate with their colleagues, which indirectly affects their personality at work. Vickie raised this concern when she said, “There are things I might consider as complimentary in my culture but they could be offending to somebody. Before I talk I have to guard myself before I say anything, whether to say it or not. The personality I have at work is not the same with the one I have at home. I am like an introvert at work but that is not me because I have to guard what I say because of the laws, which consider it as ageism or discrimination against other people. So I try not to offend other people”. Sandra reiterated similar experience when she points “Sometimes, as Africans we joke around. For example, here in my current job I have a Caucasian colleague and sometimes our manager joke around with things.

And we as Africans understand it's a joke but she takes it personally. That is something that if she was one of those people that wanted to report the issue to human resource, she would have done that. But it was a wake up call for us to be careful amongst ourselves on how we talk to and approach each other".

Belonging in the dominant culture, most American women feel that human resource policies have not affected their cultural or religious beliefs in the workplace (such as saying prayers, religious symbols, and dressing). Lizzy shares this sentiment when she recounts, "In terms of policy, I don't think they have to protect me. I am covered by other regular policies. I guess I never really need to think about it. And probably because I never really needed to, it tends to work out since I am part of the dominant group. There is the force of numbers". Also, Marisa tells of similar experience when she said, "I don't feel very affected by culture and religion in the workplace". Similarly, Kenny points out "I am not super religious any way and I don't think my cultural background is affected in any way". In the same manner, Nadia indicates, "I am pretty open to all religions because I think that there is a little bit of each religion that is intriguing to me. So I don't claim one specific religion". For these American women for whom religion is not important, there are no issues, but for African women their religion is important to them and human resource policies impact their expression or freedom of religion. Sandra raised this point when she said, "I am a Christian and my dad is a pastor. Working at my current job was

different and wasn't what I had expected at first because before I worked here, I went to a Christian university and I felt comfortable talking about my religion because everyone was Christian. But then when I started working here, we had people of different religion and the policy here was that one can't talk about their religion to someone else. It was kind of hard for me to deal with because I was used to express what I feel but here I have to know my limits. If someone is a Christian and we can talk about our faith but if the other person is not, one has to know your boundaries on what or what not to bring up certain things." Abisa shared similar reiterate similar issue when she points out, "I am a Muslim, but I couldn't pray at the workplace. I only pray on campus cause they provide Muslim student prayer room on campus but not at work."

- **Presence of Human Resource Policies Does not Guarantee Cultural/Religious Acceptance in the Workplace:** Among the African women interviewed in this study, most indicated that despite the fact that human resource policies were instituted in the workplace to promote cultural and religious understanding, they feel such policies have not adequately accomplished their goal. Raina raised this concern when she points, "It is not easy to be in a dominant culture that doesn't accept you as a person or does not value what you value. They want to impose themselves on you but don't want to take the time to study who you are. It's a big problem. So you cannot flow in such an environment you are restricted, you are tight and held bondage, but because you have to be there to pay your

bills, you have to play the game of pretense”. Sandra share similar experience when she states, “There are colleagues that genuinely want to know more about me but at the same time when they ask me questions and I explain how we do or make certain things culturally, they began distancing themselves from me, making me feel different”. Other African women have expressed concerns that they feel not accepted especially when they choose to dress differently for religious or cultural reasons. Asamau shares this experience when she said, “There was an occasion when I had a very hard time with one of my bosses because he didn’t like my way of dressing. Back home in Mali we wear pants and a long dress to cover. So I wore a pant and a long dress to cover to work but he told me that I wasn’t allowed to wear pants to the office. And I thought he was joking until he called me an hour and half later and insisted that I go home to change my dress. But I told him I wasn’t going home and continued with my duties. The next day I was sent to his office to drop a file and when I stepped into his office, he asked me to leave his office that he doesn’t want to see me or talk to me”. Even when there is a dress code, it was not explicitly stated in the work policy, Asamau felt she was not accepted at her workplace because of her choice of dress style as a Muslim. Because most women feel they are not accepted, it is equally hard to socialize or relate with their colleagues. Farida echoed this point when she said, “Back home my work environment is like my second family, we interact, connect, know their family and get together a lot and have lunch. But here in the U.S the work

environment is very cold and suspicious. People don't connect too much, they are always looking at their shoulders and it hard to have a really open relationship and friendship cause there is a lot of competition and they are always trying to test my knowledge or try to show how limited I am. So when I go to work, I am really careful and ensure things are done right. In my workplace when I do things wrong, my colleagues never come to me but they will always go to my boss.” Most women feel human resource section based on their policies are not doing a great job of helping colleagues connect and relate on a deeper level.

- **Human Resource Policies not very Effective in Handling Cultural Conflict:** Cultural clash is something that occurs frequently in a multicultural work environment. Both African and American women interviewed in this study shared that they had had some form of conflict which they felt was not adequately handled. While some women felt human resource policies are not effectively used to address conflict, others feel that these policies need to improve. Abisa raised this point when she said, “I feel human resource section in my organization needs to work a little bit more and learn how to solve conflict. They are trying but I think conflict resolution is something we need to focus more because we are dealing with people of different religions, cultures and race. Even though we are working around conflict we are long ways from really understanding how to solve conflict. It's something human resource section is working on but I still feel they have a lot to do and improve.”

Some women felt mediation and other conflict resolution strategies were just used to shelve the underlying conflict and not addressing the main issue. Raina shared this sentiment when she said, “I have had a couple of cultural clashes at work. They do mediations, which is perfect and good. They send you to conflict resolution class. But the point is that the managers leave the substance, they don’t wanna address the main thing, they just pursue shadows by sending you to those classes as a pretense. They fail to address the issue so not addressing the main issue is a major problem in human resource policies. And because the main issue hasn’t been address there would continue to be more problems in the office. Sending me to those classes is like a camouflage, its not realistic”. Most managers assume that mediators or facilitators will handle the underlying cultural issue driving conflicts between colleagues but the reality is that sending co-workers to conflict resolution services without adequately addressing the major cultural issue driving the conflict would only cause more conflicts to escalate. Some other women point to the fact that human resource policies do not effectively handle conflict from the outset but let it get out of hand before using conflict resolution services. Lizy raised this point when she said, “My experience hearing other people is that may be there is something lacking in the area of conflict resolution at work. At least that a conflict has to escalate to a point that its kind of unfortunate for human resource policy to be helpful. At my workplace, there are facilitation services and people can get facilitators but I think that what happens is that

people let conflict to escalate so far and no body wants to ask for that until they need it and it is a little bit late. I know there are policies in place to prevent conflict but I don't know that they are really effective because I don't think that people are invoking them until the conflict has escalated quite a bit." When human resource section allows conflict to be overblown, intervention to overturn the conflict will require great effort both within the organization and outside through conflict resolution services.

3. Earning Difference/Work Conditions: Although both U.S and African women raised concern about their salaries, they both have divergent experiences with salary increase. Even with human resource policies that are expected to balance the pay differences in the workplace, some of the women interviewed still see a wide earning gap between African and American women. Common themes that emerge from impact of human resource policies on pay difference include:

- **Little Pay even with More Experience:** Most African women in this study share their plight of being paid less than their qualification deserves. They lament of the fact that human resource policies have not been effective in narrowing pay differences between them and their American colleagues. Marie reiterated her frustration when she said, "Yes, I see difference in earning. When I was working as a C.N.A, there was a colleague of mine who was just hired as a C.N.A. and was earning more than I did. She was a brand new C.N.A and I have been a C.N.A for years. Once we were talking and she talked about earning \$12 and hour and I was earning \$11 an hour even though I have been working with the nursing home for 5years. When I

told her what I was earning she was shocked and said I should go and see the management because I had more working years than her. I found out it was very unfair. I didn't bring it up officially, I was just talking at the background".

Most African women are reluctant to bring up issues of unfair treatment in their workplaces so as not to offend their boss or supervisor. They choose to remain silent and take whatever they are given just as Marie did. Vicky also shared similar experience when she said, "Oh yeah definitely there is huge pay difference, like the other nurse who works with me gets way more pay than me. And I look at people hired straight from college, they are hired and paid more than me who is already working there". Abisa shared the same sentiment when she said, "Definitely, the mainstream Americans are paid more than us especially Africans. We still see earning difference issues and I feel it is very important issue that needs to be worked on. It has not gone and I don't know when it would improve." Most of the women feel that even though they do the most jobs, they are still paid meager salary compared to their American colleagues. Sandra raised this point when she said, "I don't think the salary is fair. I think with the job we do here, I think we deserve to get a better salary. There is definitely that difference in pay rates. I don't think the pay is based on education level, I think it is based on the position of whether one is a manger, supervisor, coordinator etc. We have some coordinators that have Masters degree and are paid at the same rate as those with a Bachelors degree. And there are people who are still

going to college or have an associate degree but they are paid same amount as the person with a Bachelors degree. Also, last year, I was involved in a grant program with an American supervisor. I was going to the Asian family center twice a week and I noticed a lot of difference (with regards to pay) working there with white colleagues.”

While African women complain a lot about earning difference, most of their American counterparts feel they have not been affected by earning difference. This point resonates with Nelly, who said, “ I don’t think there is much difference. They (management) try to make it pretty equal, if you are a supervisor/director, you do get a little bit more. But it’s not like where there’s some CEO in companies where they are making 20 times the amount you get. So, its not really a big gap”. Kelly shared similar view when she said, “I don’t see any earning difference with my colleagues.” Similarly, Sophia shared same experience when she said, “In my organization we do annual review and look at performance and if I deserve a raise. Then we submit a form to human resource section. The group I work with is not multi-layered so I haven’t had to go through a big department to have to deal with that.” The reality of pay difference impacts immigrant women who feel they are being exploited and just donating their time to make ends meet with little or no intervention of human resource policies to mitigate the pay difference.

- **Hard to Negotiate Pay Package (Higher salary):** Unlike their American colleagues, most African women have no familiarity with American work

customs that promote success in the labor force nor are they conversant with how to negotiate better pay. Ability to negotiate pay comes with knowledge of the work culture which most African women lack. Anna, an African woman raised this point when she said, “American women are experienced with the system and they have learned over time how to negotiate their pay package. They have that inside experience be it from parents or relatives that most African women don’t have. African women don’t have the passed down that allow them negotiate their positions and pay better.” In the white community, best-known methods are passed along from generation to generation and when you look at the African community they are only now catching up. It is not only in salary, you look at how they plan their lives, they still have a lot to learn. It is not because they are not intelligent people but because of their background.” Most African women are reluctant to demand high salary package, mostly because they are not aware or educated on how human resource policies around this issue work in the U.S coupled with fear of not wanting to offend their boss so they can keep their jobs. Marie, related to this point when she said, “I know that being African immigrant, some workplaces can under-employ/underpay you. You can be doing the same job with an American but just probably because they know that you don’t know how to claim your right, they will use you unfairly. Like I told you of being paid low in my C.N.A experience, I don’t know if it’s because my colleague’s mom worked at the

organization that she was paid more than me. But it was very unfair and I felt really bad about that”.

In contrast, American women have quite different experiences with negotiating their pay and they are more educated and understand the intricacies of how human resource policies can be effective in negotiating their salary package. Lizzy shared this view when she said, “I guess experience and negotiation is huge to get a good salary package. The ability to go in and ask for a raise for example can enhance your chances of getting a good salary package. Even at my workplace, there are sneaky ways to get around that, so I guess another thing is connections. Because if you know people who know other people they might be able to give you ideas on how to go about it. For example, when I got raised/promoted at my office it was because someone advised me that the only way I can get a raise is if I find another job outside campus and then they can give me an equity increase. So I did that”. Thus for American women, an understanding of the system and devising ways to navigate through it and using human resource policies in ways that would benefit play huge part in their ability to negotiate a good salary package. Lizzy further reiterated this point when she said, “I found another job outside campus that was similar to my job and said I was going to leave unless they raised my salary. So they raised my salary. I wouldn’t have known it if no one had told me about it. So my friend who works in the private sector in Portland, she has gone in to ask for a raise several times and they finally gave it to her but it took forever. If she wouldn’t have

asked, she wouldn't have gotten a raise". Understanding how human resource policies work in this arena and the resilience in asking for pay is something African women can learn to improve their pay package. However, most African women come in not educated on how human resource policies work around negotiating salary package. Marie, an African woman shared that helping immigrant women to understand how these policies works will help narrow the earning difference. This point was raised when she said, "When they (managers) hire African women, it is good to tell them the base payment rate for certain positions. For example if a woman is hired as a nurse, they should tell her the base for a nurse. When the women know it already (may be \$30-35) they can claim their rights. Some workplaces have criteria and can give \$30 for a worker who has less experience or \$35 when they have some experience. It is vital for African women to know how these policies work and when there is a difference, let them know why that difference exist and whether or not they fit into that difference. So that when policies are used on them, they know that it's fair because it was already stated in the policy".

With regards to working conditions, the experience of African and American women was not very different. However some women from both groups raised concerns on health issues related to bad working conditions. Kenny, an American woman who works as a dish washer shared, "Two weeks ago, I started getting a tingling on my back and it doesn't happen when I am at work. Sometimes it is numbing and I was scared to say

something because I was afraid that I was new and I don't want them to think I am complaining. There are strenuous duties attached to my job and I don't want to hurt my back because I am too young to have back problems". Abisa, a coordinator with African refugees and Immigrants in Portland share similar issues on bad working condition when she said, "We come through many struggles to make America our new home, and we don't know how to share whatever they tell us that America is a land of milk and honey. We don't see the milk and honey at all because we choose to slave away because when we come here we do manual labor work. There are a lot of African women that I feel for because they come here and they feel they have to provide for their families and they do all these labor jobs. A lot of young African women in their 40's and 50's already have carpal tunnel problems, back problems and they can't lift anything because they have been doing these monotonous jobs for 12 or 15 years. And then when they can't perform they get fired. And since they have no other skills, they can't be productive".

Nadia, an American woman also shared some experiences with bad working conditions especially due to lapses in human resource policies: "There were health hazards such as animal bites that happen all the time. At the animal shelter I worked, the floors were always wet because we are constantly cleaning and workers fall down and hurt themselves. At my recent job, it was almost impossible to get lunch breaks because no one is there to cover the positions since you were left all by yourself. The shifts

were usually 8-9 hours and you were not allowed to leave the crisis line room unless someone was there. Hardly can one leave to use the restroom and when the heaters were up in the room it's so hot". Other than these three complaints, women from both groups especially those who work in the health sector feel that human resource policies around the working conditions in their work sites were adequate. Nelly recounts her experience when she pointed out, "I haven't had experience with bad working condition". Raina, an African woman reiterated same point when she said, "Actually, there is no bad working conditions at my workplace." Asama also shared similar point when she said, "My jobsite is a brand new building, it is safe, environmentally friendly, and it's ok".

4. Skill Transferability and Employment Skill (qualifications/promotion): Most of the African women's academic degrees from their native countries were not recognized in the U.S and the credibility of the training associated with these degrees is often depreciated by American employers due to their limited understanding of education systems in most African countries. Vicky made this point when she said, "I feel they don't appreciate or regard the education we bring here. They didn't even consider anything. They only took me to take a test when I came here. That's all they go by. And the other classes I took here were way below my level and I had to take those dumb classes for two years before I really started working towards my degree. It puts a financial constraint on my family and me, but that's the system. They don't recognize the education from other countries".

With their degrees not regarded by U.S employers coupled with work policies that demand American experience, most African women are unable to transfer skills obtained in their country of origin. Common themes that arise in this regard include:

- **Skills not Transferable due to Language Barrier:** African women are hindered by their limited language proficiency to apply professional skills they have acquired from their native countries. Most women, who pursue culturally specific programs especially those that involved interaction with people such as law, teaching, and social services have limited ability to transfer their skills because of philosophical underpinning and the know-how of these professions. Most of them complained that emphasis by human resource sections on language ability makes it difficult to transfer their skills. Ruthie, a corporate lawyer from Cameroon recounted this experience when she said, “When I first came to the U.S, a woman told me that I need to learn English if not I can’t do law. It made me feel useless because I had to restart again. I just resolve to go forward and not regret because this is part of the game. When you move to a country you lose something. Even the law I learned in school in my country, you have to be very fluent in French. So then I look at myself and say there is no way I can be that fluent in English”. Marie shared a similar plight when she said, “It was very difficult because when I studied in Cameroon, I studied in French. So French was my first language and when I came here everything was in English. My first job was in a law office and I was trying effectively to transfer all my skill using English. It was almost the same law just that here

it was in English, so I had to translate everything. First I needed to understand what I was doing in French to be able to translate in English. My English was very poor”

Contrary to culture-bound professions, fields with strong focus on technology and science focus appear to have some form of skill transferability. In these fields, knowledge and techniques are globalized and the common language is technical terminology rather than English. This explains the tendency for African women to pursue professions in this field. Anna, an industrial engineer from Cameroon was one of the participants in this study who expressed that she had a smooth entry into the U.S job market by virtue of her science background but that is not devoid of sacrifices she had to make. She articulated this point when she said, “I have never needed to go back to school to leverage my degree before I was given a job. I never had to even take a cut when it was set because my skills were not from America. In fact I blended in and was fully integrated”.

- **Sacrificing Income Level to Gain “the American” Experience:** While it is easy for American women to transfer their skills and blend into the work environment, strict work policies are put in place to ensure that African women gain local experience. In order to gain the local experience most African women lamented that they had to sacrifice a significant portion of their income just to get into the labor force, take odd jobs below their qualification or unpaid internship. Anna, recounted this experience when she said, “The first challenge I had when I first moved to the U.S was the

fact that I had no American-related experience or background. Again trade off needs to take place. So I had to sacrifice my level of income as a point of entry. So the first company I worked for in reality was paying me a little bit under two-thirds of what I was worth in the market at the time”. It should be noted that the majority of the participants had advanced education and training in their home countries. Most of the African women have also received some kind of formal education in the U.S. All of them have earned their highest degrees in the U.S including Masters degrees and professional certifications. With their extensive education and training in the U.S, some are still struggling while others in the study are trying to maneuver around the issues of skill transferability by getting local experience and U.S education. In contrast, most of the American women who participated in this study expressed the fact that they have not been affected by human resource policies in transferring skills across jobs. Nelly recounted this point when she said, “I went into the human service field because a lot of them are kind of transferable”.

With regard to promotion, most African women in this study shared that they do not receive any promotion across their numerous job experiences. Abisa captured this point when she said, “I don’t see lots of promotion for African women. That’s a sore subject and that’s not encouraging. Even though Africans are hardworking people, and you would think a promotion would be given to an African for being a hard-worker, multi-tasker,

knowledgeable, and just the best person but you see that that's not happening. This problem is obvious".

In contrast, most of the American women in this study discussed that they have had some form of promotions and opportunity to advance across their job experiences. Sophia captured this point when she said, "I was promoted from a legislative assistant to chief of staff where I only oversee only one person and interns. I still do a lot of stuff that I used to do, I only have a change of title and a little bit of money. When I worked with Corporate Ethics, there was no change of title but I was given a bigger raise because I took on more jobs and projects". Polly shared similar experience when she pointed out, "I have actually been lucky and there have been many opportunities for advancement. There has been adjustment in salaries, which is good. I started out and stuck in the organization and been able to move from Executive Assistant to Program Manager, then from Associate Director to Director. But if people are willing to stick it out, and can have the ability to stay, there are opportunities for promotion".

5. Prejudice and Discrimination: While affirmative action and employment equity are integrated into work policies to promote antidiscrimination sentiments in the U.S workplace, African women professionals still encounter various forms of prejudice and discrimination in the workplace. When African immigrants are hired, prejudice and discrimination can occur in subtle ways. Common themes that arise on the impact of

human resource policies (such as job equality, and diversity) to issues related to prejudice and discrimination include:

- **Marginal Status in spite of Competency:** Most African women in this study noted that they have been perceived as less popular and less respected among fellow employees, thus causing employers to be less likely to promote an immigrant to a position of power such as management and administration. Raina captured this point when she said, “Actually, we see difference in treatment. For instance they hired people in the office recently. They hire a lot of blacks, but they hire them to fill the quota on the pretense that they are doing the job---of fulfilling the hiring based on staff quota stated in recruitment policy. But they hire those blacks as temporary and hire the whites as permanent. I am a leader in my department but I don’t have all the authority other whites in same position have.” Raina further explained that she feels her colleagues are belittling her ability and competence to do her job. She recounted this experience when she said, “So they (management) put me as a leader without power but they put other whites as leaders with much power. I’ll give you instances, when I took this position, I was supposed to be in charge of three areas but instead of that they gave me one. Before I came to take it, they took it and gave it to a person who was subordinate to me. So I am operating as a leader without authority”. Abisa also recounted similar experience when she pointed out, “Once I get a job, they see me am black and an African and I think that has affected me more. There are some areas that I know that my colleagues

didn't accept me because of my color. I am no less than anybody else as far as knowledge and ability to perform my job but because of my color I was treated different". As these women become assimilated into the dominant work culture, their marginal status does not improve. Most African immigrant professionals seemed to carry a continuing stigma of a stranger in an alien professional world and consistently remain "the second choice" in spite of their competency and human resource policies have not done much to salvage the situation.

- **No Structure in place for Human Resource Policies to Address Psychological Discrimination:** Most African women interviewed in this study have shared that they have felt discriminated against even while they can not place their finger on the exact cause. Most of them explained that despite work policies put in place to prevent harassment and discrimination, they still felt discriminated against even though it wasn't physical. In her narrative, Anna shared of how psychological discrimination impacts her in the workplace: "With my present management I ask myself if they have a problem with me. We may tend to say that there are human resource policies in place to stop discrimination. But there are ways in which I have been psychologically discriminated against, which is more difficult than physically being discriminated. There are no structures in the workplace that can well address psychological discrimination today. Sometimes it is suggestive or he/she say. For example, I am dealing with a project leader whom I think has a problem with me and I think he doesn't like my ways.

Because of that he has developed resentment and negative feeling towards me which shows in everything he does that has to relate with me. Stepping back someone will say he is discriminating against me but he is not coming out to point any finger at me. He would just cherry pick everything I do and dissect every project or email that I send and analyze it word by word. What he is doing to me he doesn't do to anyone else. But again it stays within the professional background and he justifies it by saying he is just doing his job. It becomes really difficult at that moment to put a finger on it. I feel that pressure and over stepping of him try to question everything I do. But again he can back himself that he is just making sure that the project is going properly but why can't he make it sure with every other person in the team. Although we had a white woman in the team who was covering for someone on vacation, but she wasn't receiving that same pressure as me".

Marie shared similar experience of being indirectly discriminated against by her supervisor: "I remember once I was working as a C.N.A, a nurse who was my supervisor reports me for every little thing fortunately we didn't have big things. She was writing me off on every single thing and I felt she never liked me. One day I found her talking to other C.N.A's about me in the break room. I was very angry that day and I didn't even go on break and I was just crying". Another African woman Ruthie, shared similar experience when she points, "At work there are some things you feel and you can't put a finger on it. There are some treatments that you know its not

fair. You just sense some things but you can't even describe. You have two things its either you rebel or quit but you definitely feel it because you are not stupid". For these women, human resource policies focus more on physical discrimination but fail to address subtle psychological discrimination that occurs within the workplace.

- **Partiality in Work Policy Implementation/Interpretation/Application:**

While human resource policies in the workplace are instituted to promote equality in the work environment, most African women feel that some level of partiality is displayed in the interpretation/application of these policies. Abisa recounted this issue when she pointed out, "I think working especially in this organization because we come from different places, we have learned to accept each other even though as an African some colleagues always think that you are a little bit less than everybody else. It might be a little better than other places but as a woman of color, it's always challenging. Whatever policies human resource section may have when it actually comes to implementing it, there is always partiality. So it's difficult". Anna in her narration shared similar experience: "Although work policies are put in place to better work relationships, most of these policies have grey areas, which is left for the managers to interpret. However, the challenge is not in the policy but the challenge is more on sometimes how the management are interpreting and utilizing those policies. From one department to another some policies are tweaked". For these women, the mere presence of human resource policies in the work

place doesn't make any difference if they are not interpreted and enforced equally by the management.

With respect to these three themes raised on issues related to prejudice and discrimination, most white women also acknowledge that despite human resource policies in the workplace discrimination still exists. Nelly shared this point when she said, "We are not supposed to discriminate against any race, culture, religion, ethnicity and gender. There are discrimination policies but to say that that doesn't happen is an understatement. Discrimination happens everywhere no matter what, I mean we have our own biases that we should be aware of to make sure we are not discriminatory. But it still happens, I mean I am whiter than white". Naida raised similar issue when she pointed out, "In the last job I had, I've seen a colleague of an African nationality who was used and taken advantage of as far as they would make the person do hard labor of cleaning, putting the chairs together and vacuuming. She does all the other stuff that is behind the scene, the really hard physical labor. I have also heard of it from other employees. I brought it up a lot of times and there were times I made three complaints to the C.E.O until this day nothing was done about it or even acknowledged complaints made. I made a complain because I felt it was wrong since people of color were doing odd jobs that no one wants to do (none wants to clean bathroom and toilets). All of us need to do it and not just people of color. And that was something I reported and within couples of weeks of lodging the complain I was brought into a room by myself and was told they no longer need me as the crisis line coordinator but they want me to be at the front answering phones as receptionist".

As illustrated above, the analysis of women's narratives has delineated major forces that shape the work experience of African women with respect to human resource policies in the workplace. In many ways, these findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the experiences of immigrants in the U.S workplace.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As demonstrated in chapter three, the study provides rich and detailed information for understanding the experience of African female immigrant workers in the U.S. The findings in the study not only illustrate lapses in human resource policies that affect African women immigrants and their U.S counterparts, but also depict an image of strength, resourcefulness, and resilience exhibited by the women in this study. Even though most women in this study seemed to manage the many challenges facing them, there are also concerns and issues emerging from the narratives that deserve careful attention. In the following sections, areas of concerns and needs, implications for human resource practices, and future research directions will be discussed.

Areas of Concerns and Needs

- **Poor Knowledge and Understanding of Human Resource Policies in the Workplace:** Management/employers are tasked with the responsibility of making sure that incoming and current staff members have a grasp and deeper understanding of work policies, but that has not been the case for most women in this study. Lizzy raised this point when she shared, “I fall into the radii (dominant culture) and so I don’t think about human resources too much because I don’t really come into contact with it. Human resource policies are opaque or invincible and not prominent and it’s just like a shadow in the background of all the other things that are really visible. Although human resource policies may be extremely important, but for the fact that I know and think very little about it shows that it is not very

prominent”. Similarly, Kenney raised the same concern when she said, “We have HR policies, but we don’t really talk about the things it entails”.

As articulated above, most women both American and Africans alike have little understanding and contact with their workplace human resource policies. Several factors may have affected their ability to comprehend or even make use of the human resource section in the workplace. First it seems that most of these women get confused on how most policies work. Some women interviewed expressed that they lack an understanding of how policies in their job sites are implemented. Marisa recounted this point when she said, “Although in my workplace there are policies/ideas on having children around in the workplace, but still I feel confused on how they are making those decisions. I talked to HR about it and I felt it was unclear as far as what they were saying. I felt that they really asked me not to bring kids very strongly, saying that there was a policy on it. But there wasn’t really a policy.” In this narrative, Marisa could not fully understand how policies on bringing children around the workplace work. Although she tried to inquire from the human resource section that these guidelines put in place are not really policies, which made her even more confused. For most African, unfamiliarity with the American work culture and systems results in even more confusion on how human resource policies work.

Second, most women in this study feel alienated because human resource policies in their workplace do not reflect nor represent their needs. Also

lack of diversity in human resource personnel is another concern raised by women in this study. Sandra articulated this point when she said, “I wish that the people that work with human resource are more diverse so we can have all kind of population represented so that there would be fair kind of policy that goes with everybody. Not just the white dominating the HR circle. I want to see that happen in the future”. With the domination of human resource sector by mostly Caucasian personnel, most women feel that those policies target only white employees, who fall into that category and therefore such work policies do not represent the needs of other non-white employees. This is an area that managers can pay close attention and restructure so all staff members can feel connected.

- **Limited Social Integration in the Workplace:**

Most African women relied heavily on ethnic based networks as their support system and lament of the difficulty in socializing with their colleagues at the workplace. Although the women’s marginality can be caused by prejudice and discrimination they face in the workplace, their exclusive association with fellow Africans and away from their colleagues may contribute to limit their opportunity to learn more about the American work culture and advance their English skill. Women who maintained meaningful relationships with native-born Americans tend to be acculturated, socially integrated and get desired help in understanding work policies in their professional pursuit. Most of the women in this study raised a concern on the fact that its important for human resource sections to work

on building and strengthening policies on interpersonal relationships between colleagues even beyond the work arena. Asamau captured this point when she pointed out, “Back home in Mali when you have birth, marriage or death in the family, all your colleagues will come to your house to celebrate, if there is a marriage celebration or sympathize with you when you loss a relative. Even if they can’t all come on the same day, at least majority will come and take part in the burial and be with you all the time. They will continue to stay with you. At least one or two people will always come everyday after work to say hi to you. And this helps you to pass the difficult time. And if it is marriage or birthday, your colleagues will come with presents and food to celebrate with you. I don’t really see much of this here because everything is programmed. Its just spontaneous back home, if they hear the news, someone will come. They will bring money to you and help support you financially and emotionally until you get better. The relationship here at my workplace is just within the office, you can work with people for years and not know where they live. This can never happen back home. In my culture, the first sign for you to be considered as being polite is for you to know where your colleague lives. So not knowing where a colleague lives means you are not sociable or outgoing”. Most of the women feel human resource policies do not address social and cultural issues in the lives of their staff. Asamau further reiterated this points when she said, “I think the social events, for example back home in my country, if you lose a relative, there is no way you can come to the office. I was

surprised that one of my professor who teaches at 6pm, came to class and told us that she lost her mom and that her body was in the mortuary. And she came to teach class? I was like wow! Here they don't take into account social and cultural events in workers lives. Here in the U.S, you cannot just miss your work and get paid when you lose a relative. This is very weird to me, when you lose a relative, they should give you time off and still continue to pay you. It shouldn't affect your salary”.

- **Dealing with Prejudice and Discrimination:**

Most African women experienced some form of discrimination and prejudice whether it is directed toward their English abilities, professional competency, race and ethnicity or indirectly through psychological discrimination. Although the intensity of women's experience with discrimination varies with qualification, language proficiency, and communication skills etc, the theme of how women can be empowered to react to these discriminatory practices seems to emerge from their stories as serious concern for them. It should be noted that even though African women are ethnically and religiously diverse, they share similar cultures and ways of life. Thus, being discriminated against based on ethnicity, language skills, and religion or culture is an unfamiliar and bitter experience for these women. As some of them have pointed out, the disillusionment of their idealized vision of the American workplace and the humiliation and anger they experience from discrimination are difficult emotions to cope with. In addition, these experiences have a profound

impact on how they envision their future in terms of career planning and advancement.

It is important to look at how these women handle prejudice and discrimination in order to identify the limitations of these strategies and examine areas of lapses where human resource policies can be strengthened to protect all workers irrespective of race. Some women have developed different forms of internalized racism in an attempt to assimilate into the American work culture and adopt human resource policies at work. Some experience feelings of shame and limitation as a result of their poor English proficiency and accent. Others believe that since they as African immigrants have voluntarily decided to come to the U.S to work, that they should accept unfair treatment (from work policies) and assume responsibility to improve their situation. Although these feelings drive the women to work harder to overcome adversity and pressure, ultimately the underlying approach is devaluation of their self-worth and acceptance of unfair treatment.

Even with their high level of education, most of the African women in this study are willing to accept things and not challenge authority to implement human resource policies. It is not surprising that most of the women report that they do not like to associate with politics of rallying support to combat unfair treatment by invoking human resource policies that would back their action. With very few exceptions, most African women in this study have limited understanding of how to fight for their

rights and get their needs integrated and met through human resource policies in their workplaces. As a result of their cultural upbringing most of them are passive (silent) and lack political awareness to make personal and collective moves to get other women together to be involved in this fight and this has taken a toll on both professional and personal lives of these women. It can be very empowering for these women to see and understand their position within the larger framework of power hierarchy and connect themselves within larger African community to bring attention to those issues.

Implication for Employers, Managers and Human Resource Personnel

First, a lack of diversity in human resource professionals coupled with employers who are often not adequately prepared/trained to work with African immigrant women are things that need to change for effective integration of these women in the workplace. As indicated by the findings of this study, the life circumstances and experiences of these women are different from those of their native born counterparts. It is potentially harmful and ineffective when the human resource section applies the frame of reference of native-born women to their African female immigrant workers without acknowledging and taking into account the distinctive characteristics of the latter's life experiences. For example, it is a challenge for African women to challenge authority even when they are treated unfairly. Therefore, it is imperative for human resource professionals to be highly culturally competent and diverse to be able to capture these experiences and take into consideration such circumstances in order to understand their predicament, offer realistic approaches with regard to integrating policies that would address their needs and

establish collaborative relationship with colleagues and the human resource section. Human resource professionals should be aware that some western-based theories, techniques and work policies may not be appropriate for African female immigrant workers. Human resource professionals and employers who are unfamiliar with African culture and life of immigrants may have difficulty understanding how work policies impact these women. Therefore, to devise and implement policies as well as provide effective services with an increasing diverse work population, employers and human resource professionals must be better equipped with knowledge about the issues that African immigrant women face in their workplaces as well as how religion, culture, language, and gender shape their experiences as an immigrant group.

Second, human resource professionals and employers should be prepared to implement work policies that deal with issues of discrimination and prejudice when working with African female immigrants. The importance of addressing these issues in work policies is indicated in this study, as many women reported numerous experiences of various forms of discrimination and prejudice. It should be noted that even though most women in this study recognized the existence of discrimination, their ability to talk about these experiences and handle these situations differed. Most women immigrants are not versed in the history, legality, and complexity of discrimination and racism in the U.S workplaces. These African immigrants tend to think that by maintaining virtues of hard-work, silence, and keeping a low profile, they will achieve success within their workplace. They are often oblivious to the means of fighting discrimination and working with the system. At the individual level, raising awareness about the psychology of oppression, connecting with people in similar situations, having supportive colleagues,

and consulting with highly effective human resource personnel are some resources to turn to when African women immigrants encounter discrimination. In addition, human resource section can create a grievance room or space where women can feel free to share their feelings of unfair treatment (Ombuds office). Farida articulated this point when she said, “They (employers) should have a safe place for African women to go and express themselves if they feel any threat or discrimination against them in the workplace. They should have that grievance room where they can discuss and express themselves as a way of release and deal with such issues”.

In addition, in an attempt to adapt to the mainstream work environment, some African immigrant women may identify with racist beliefs and practices in U.S workplaces. They may feel ashamed of their immigrant status and believe the legitimacy of Americans to unfairly mistreat them, accepting the supremacy of the dominant or American culture and feeling ashamed of their cultural heritage. Although internalized racism can be a defense mechanism for survival in the workplace, it is harmful to immigrant’s self esteem and mental health. It is therefore pertinent for human resource professionals and employers to be aware of these differences. To help African women to have healthy acculturation into the U.S workplace, human resource sections and managers should seek to evaluate and understand their workers’ home culture and U.S culture, and a sense of integration, considering how policies can be made to accommodate those differences and address immigrant needs. They might allow time for these women to share about their cultures, ensuring other staff and colleagues participate. For example, they might organize potlucks or special get together events to promote relationships among staff, helping them to get to know each other outside work-related environment.

Third, employers and human resource sections can tap into ethnic-based networks and work with them in understanding how they can better improve work policies to address the needs of African female immigrants. Considering the fact that most managers and employers in Oregon have little or no working relationship/contact or experience working with African female immigrants, it is vital they connect with the African community or organizations that work with African immigrants to understand the plight and experiences of workers in this group. Employers intending to hire African women can seek resources from organizations such as African House to get a sense of how their policies can effectively accommodate such group. They should reach out to the African community and not just rely on book information on how to treat African women in the work place because book theories and techniques may not really apply in real life situation when working with this group.

Fourth, employers and human resource professionals should be aware of their own biases and stereotypes and impact the same approach in native white colleagues about African immigrants women in particular. For example, employers, human resource professionals, and white colleagues should not consider an African immigrant woman less intelligent or competent just because of her limited English proficiency, and different ways of doing things. Similarly, the woman's quietness should not be automatically interpreted as submissiveness and lack of confidence or interest. Some employers and human resource professionals may believe in the supremacy of "American culture" and policies that protect white employers and therefore overtly or covertly instruct African immigrants workers to change themselves to adopt the mainstream work values and practice without validating their home culture or experiences. Indeed, managers and

human resource professionals who have not examined their biases in interpreting and implementing work policies can do more harm than good to their African immigrant workers. Additionally, administrators and human resource personnel should be aware of the latest discrimination laws and keep their managers up to date on them by training them on various forms of prejudices to prevent its occurrence. Also, engaging employees through surveys can bring attention to ways discrimination manifest in their jobsite, which will be helpful for managers to determine areas that demand attention or amendment in their work policies to correct such actions.

Since the writing of policies and procedures is crucial, employees should be educated on their corporation's effort to promote a fair and corporative work environment. Requirements for promotion, salary raises and other benefits should be clearly spelled out in human resource policies and be accessible to employees to prevent any subjective notions of judgment being tainted. To reduce certain feelings of inequality in the workplace, there is need for policies to emphasize and provide equal pay for jobs of comparable worth if they necessitate the same level of skills (education and training), effort, responsibility and working environments. Segregation in terms of discrimination where one race is employed or primarily placed in lower positions can be prevented by campaign to hire, pay and treat equally those individuals who are of same productive value to a corporation.

Additionally, employers and human resource department can develop workplace violence, discrimination and harassment prevention plans to produce an all inclusive analysis and review of prior incidents—including the perpetrators, victims, specific settings, influencing factors and extenuating circumstances that may be relevant. An

assessment of vulnerable positions and actions within the corporation should occur, along with determination of effective existing procedures (security or documentation etc) in dealing with prejudices and harassments. Human resource department should provide a platform for continual discourse on issues of discrimination (either in monthly, or quarterly meetings, and/staff retreats) in their trainings.

Fifth, psychological discrimination was found to be the major trigger for workplace violence, which calls for preparedness and proactive action with regards to human resource department to address it from the onset (Hinduja, 2006). It is important that workplaces recognize that discrimination whether psychological or physical and unconstructive outcomes are the first step in reducing harassment in the workplace. Background checks on employees (especially from their previous jobs) to ensure they do not have negative records in their working relationships with their colleagues as well as checks on psychological stability is vital in appraising their work relationships. Such checks can combat and remove legal liability and negligent hiring for the employer, leading to proper precautionary steps. Enforcement of zero tolerance measures (policies) can leave no room for question in the future of an employee who discriminates psychologically at work (Hinduja, 2006). Additionally, corporate security and human resource section can provide training to employees in order to prevent the presence of exploitation and discrimination. Issues to be covered might include ways to identify psychological discrimination, multicultural diversity, diffusion of potentially explosive interactions, types of behavior that warrant conveyance of law, alternative ways of tendering grievances (example, anonymous comment cards in bathrooms or other discrete

places, an ombudsman and staff survey on issues related to psychological discrimination).

Sixth, it is vital for a human resource department to review current policies with regard to religious accommodation and harassment (including dressing/grooming, religious holidays, and religious symbols etc) (Ghumman et al, 2013). Human resource should determine whether existing anti-discriminatory policies are responsive to the current employment environment, the degree to which religion is explicitly discussed in existing policies and identify common religious accommodation needs (example, work schedules, dress code conflicts and job duties that might conflict with religious beliefs or practices). Organizations/HR should consider adding a religion component to anti-discrimination training and not just assume that generic policies cover all aspects of protected class discrimination are enough (Ghumman et al, 2013). Employers have a duty and need to communicate with employees regarding their duty to provide information about religions, otherwise it will be hard for employers to know all aspects of employee religion. Getting to talk about their religion and promoting communication will be helpful in building a more inclusive culture by inviting employees to seek accommodation (Ghumman et al, 2013). Also, managers/HR should be trained in appropriate procedures/standards to handle employee requests for religious accommodation, clarify difference between religious expression and harassment, and inform employees regarding rights and processes for religious accommodation.

Furthermore, it is important to provide an effective and easy access system for recognizing credentials from other countries. A more appropriate, transparent, time saving, concrete, less expense equivalence measuring should be made available for

regulated professions. Additionally, paid skill program that run for a short period specifically targeting African women and preparing them for specific occupations and jobs should be provided. These programs should be designed to focus on local employers needs and technological expectations. In addition to that, in the first month of employment, African female immigrants could be provided with an on-the-job training that subsidizes employer's wages to be paid to workers with a stipulation to refund after the employee successful transition to become a regular employee (Curry-Stevens & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2013)

Finally, in the realm of conflict resolution, employers should assess their workplace to determine whether emphasis on cultural interpersonal relationships between staff is high or low. The degree to which a culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships among members correlates to worker's attitudes to nature of grievance and dispute settlement procedure that exist and extent to which management favors the use of third parties for disagreement settlement (Ahiauzu, 2013). Worker's favorable attitude to the use of third parties (mediation) in settlement can be negatively influenced when interpersonal relationship is high. But, where interpersonal relationships are low, the use of formalized procedures and employment of third parties in grievance settlement and dispute will be favorable for parties. Because of their culture and upbringing, most African women interviewed are inclined more toward interpersonal relationships hence their dissatisfaction with the use of third party mediation. The traditional approach of sending workers to conflict resolution classes and then to mediation may not work for most African female workers, thus human resource policies should explicitly spell out alternative ways grievances and dispute settlement should proceed based on the

relationship (cultural) that exist between workers. Managers and human resource department should not only rely on mediators to handle the dispute while alienating themselves from the substance of the conflict. A positive outcome may not always attainable especially when an employer assumes that by go for mediation a dispute involving an African woman worker is settled. Thus, it is vital to do a follow up to determine if the process was effective in resolving the conflict or not. Engage the women in designing an alternative way to resolve the conflict within organization's standard if they feel the process of mediation is not working for them.

Future Research Direction

The work experience of African women immigrants in the U.S is multifaceted and context-based. The stories shared by the participants in this study reveal that there are many possibilities for future exploration. First, many noticed the structural difference of impacts of work policies between African women living in the East Coast and the West Coast in terms of number of African women residing in the region, the kind of opportunities and ability of African communities to impact work policies by force of numbers. For example, Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, and Washington D.C. are known for having a large African populations. In those areas, African immigrants have ample opportunities to work in fields such as law, education, human services and government than their counterparts on the West coast. However, it is not clear if their large numbers in those professions influences how human resource policies that address immigrant needs are shapes, implemented and reinforced. It is unclear whether there is diversity in their human resource sections and personnel in workplaces. A comparable study that

interviews African women immigrants will help answer these questions and examine how these differences play out. It will also be useful to investigate if there is difference in how human resource sections and personnel are structured in workplaces in the East Coast and West Coast and how the difference affects African women immigrants.

Another area of inquiry is the African women's intra-group difference and how work policies can impact them differently. The tendency to ignore the intra-group difference in the African immigrant population is evident in most immigration literature. Nonetheless, African female immigrants of different nationalities may in fact have diverse experience with human resource sections due to different migration patterns, socio-political structures, languages spoken, and education structures in their country of origin. For example, compared to immigrant women from Libya, immigrant women from Nigeria seem to be ahead in different fields and occupations. In addition, it appears immigrant women from Nigeria are more likely to work outside the home than women from Libya. Comparative studies of the impact of human resource policies on female immigrant from countries such as Ethiopia, Cameroon, Ghana, Somalia, Nigeria, etc will definitely shed some light in understanding the intra-group differences.

In terms of methods used in conducting this research, narrative analysis is a powerful and appropriate research tool for investigating the experiences of immigrant women. Their life stories provide rich information and vivid illustrations of complicated and varied issues they face in the workplace. The narratives aired by these immigrant women portray an authentic picture of an immigrant woman's experience as well as demonstrate how workplace policies and the larger societal forces influence each woman's life. Comparative narrative studies that focus on immigrant women workers from various

parts of the world will further expand an understanding of immigrant women experiences with human resource policies in the U.S workplace. The following is a summary of the key components that are critical to the success of this study and may serve as a guide for future studies:

1. Use an “insider” to conduct interview
2. Conduct the interview in the immigrant’s native language
3. Encourage the use of metaphors/slang/proverbs from the immigrant’s culture
4. Conduct a review of immigration history
5. Review the educational and occupational history of the immigrant
6. Offer opportunities to talk about impacts of human resource policies.

Conclusion

Drawing from the personal narratives of African women immigrants, this attempts study breaks down commonly held stereotypes and misinformation about immigrant women and explores the impacts of human resource policies and the strategies that can be used to adjust to the challenges in the workplace. From adapting to a new work culture, balancing work and family, and fighting discrimination, the women’s candid voices offer multifaceted perspectives to the understanding of the realities recent African female immigrants face in the U.S workplace. The delineation of the women’s coping strategies and implications are useful resources for employers and human resource professionals.

As storytelling is a research tool as well as a therapeutic endeavor, this study also serves as a source of validation, empowerment, connection, and inspiration for all immigrant women in their journey into a new and different country.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello - My name is Blessing Abbah and I am a student from the Public Policy, Planning and Management and Conflict and Dispute Resolution Departments at the University of Oregon. I am working on a research and calling (or writing) to you about participating in my research study. This is a study that examines various types of experiences and human resource policies that affect African women from pay difference, language and communication proficiency, cultural/religious differences, skill transferability and employment skill (qualifications/promotion), prejudice and discrimination and working conditions in the U.S workplace. You're eligible to be in this study because as an African woman (or U.S born woman) you have workplace experiences that will provide needed information for this research as well as provide valuable information that will help employers/managers know more about workplace adjustments that immigrant make with regard to human resource policies to enhance the effectiveness and working relationship between the employer, other employees and African women immigrants in different fields. I obtained your contact information from the Women of Distinction email lists, the Africa House or your friend (name).

If you decide to participate in this study, I will interview you on two occasions, and each interview will last at least forty-five minutes. You will be asked to talk about your experience as an African woman immigrant or U.S born woman with human resource policies in the workplace. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You may also stop participating in the study at any time. I will be audiotaping

interviews so I may be able to study and analyze what you tell me. Tapes will remain in my possession and destroyed after I complete my analyses.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, we can go ahead and schedule a time for me to meet with you to give you more information. If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call or email me with your decision.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at abbah@uoregon.edu or 541-346-7518

Thank you so much.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am Blessing Abbah, a Masters candidate at the University of Oregon. I am doing a research on the experience of African women immigrants and U.S born women and the impacts of human resource policies in the workplace because this group of women is understudied. The study aims to learn about factors related to human resource policies that affect the success of African women in the U.S workplace, and strategies that women use to counter challenges. This study is to fulfill part of the requirement for my Masters degree, supervised by Professor Colleen Chrisinger, a faculty member at the School of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University.

Because you might have interest in sharing your thoughts and experiences as a participant, you are being invited to participate in this study as I try to learn more about the experiences of African and U.S born women and the impacts of human resource policies in the workplace. The results of this study can help employers/managers know more about workplace adjustments that immigrant make with regards to human resource policies to enhance the effectiveness and working relationship between employer, other employees and African women immigrants in different fields under various working conditions as well as other clients in similar situation.

If you agree to participate, I will interview you on two occasions, and each interview will last at least forty-five minutes. You will be asked to talk about your experience as an African woman immigrant or U.S born woman. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You may also stop participating in the study at any time. I will be audio-taping interviews so I may be able to study and analyze what you tell me.

Tapes will remain in my possession and destroyed after I complete my analyses. I may need to contact you again after interview to verify the information you share with me and receive feedback on the analysis of your information. Although some of what you tell me may be included in a written report, under no circumstance will your name be included in the report. Also, personal information may be slightly changed in a way that will protect your identity and research result will not be distorted. All information about you and your family will be kept confidential as I intend not to use identifiable information of my participants to assure them of maximum protection from potential risks.

The potential benefit for you, the participant is that often people being interviewed find new meaning and understanding in telling their personal stories, thus the interviews can be an empowering experience for participants. However no benefit is guaranteed. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and it is up to you whether you want to talk to me. I am grateful that you are considering taking time to participate in my study. I hope the illumination of your story can contribute to the understanding of lives of African women and U.S.- born in the U.S workplace so their needs can be better met. If you have any question about the study, please contact me at abbah@uoregon.edu, Professor Chrisinger at chrising@uoregon.edu or Research Compliance

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am interested in learning about the factors (related to human resource policies) that affect African women immigrants and American born women counterparts in the U.S work place. Your first hand experience will help me understand this phenomenon better. I will be asking you some general questions as well as some personal questions.

1. Tell me about your educational and occupational history?
2. Tell me about things that impede your career advancement in the U.S, if any?
3. What things facilitate your career in the U.S?
4. Tell me about your experience of job searching in the U.S?
5. What is your experience (of native/non-native colleagues) with the use of English at the work?
6. Tell me about your experience socializing with colleagues at the workplace?
7. How does your cultural and religious background affect you at your workplace? What human resource policies impact your cultural and religious backgrounds?
8. How does human resource policies in your workplace handle conflict situation with cultural undertones?
9. Tell me your experience of human resource policies that affect your earnings in your workplace? What factors play into the earning difference (if any) between you and your colleagues?
10. Tell me your experience of promotion (or stagnation or demotion) in the U.S?
11. What things affect your ability to transfer skills from previous job in your native country to the U.S?

12. All of us have parts of our stories that are easy to tell and hard to tell. What are the parts that you are hesitant to talk about the parts that you don't know how to tell?
13. How do others (African and non-African) treat you at the workplace?
14. What other human resource policies empower or affect the working conditions at your job site?
15. How has your role as a wife and mother (if applicable) affect your life as professional in the workplace? What lapses (if any) in human resource policy affects you as an immigrant woman?
16. What advice will you give women in similar situation to yours?
17. How has immigration affected your professional and personal life in the U.S workplace?
18. How do you cope with challenges and changes?
19. What areas of human resource policies should employers of African immigrant women pay close attention to?
20. Sometimes it is difficult to find words that describe our feelings about some experiences. Is there a book, a film, an image or music that captures your feelings about the human resource policies in U.S?
21. What was it like for you to be interviewed? Any questions I have not asked that you wished I asked?

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