"Do You Comb Your Hair?”: Detangling First-Generation Black Student Experiences in Internships

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the growing literature on the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion efforts in organizations. Previous studies focus on D&I efforts for full-time staff and employees. This qualitative and intersectional study examined first-generation black students in corporatized organizations that are predominantly white through interviews where they could share their experiences with organizational structures and cultures to determine the impact that it has on the performance and identity of black interns. This study assessed organizational cultures of three kinds: exclusive, transitional, and inclusive. Using these organizational cultures, the study determined the way that racism and whiteness culture affects the intern experience. The participants had various relationships to recruitment strategies, diversity discussions, navigating professional and personal networking, negotiating working identity and imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, microaggressions, and professional development. Overall, organizations are engaging in practices that alienate and suppress black student interns while encouraging assimilation. In inclusive organizations, black interns feel like they can be their authentic selves and progress more successfully because of the acceptance of their identity and their ability to share their experiences with that identity.

INTRODUCTION

Picture this: A first-generation black women sitting at her loosely assigned desk towards the end of her internship, staring at one of the many excel spreadsheets that have passed her laptop screens throughout her time at her company. A senior employee approaches her, and she assumes that it is going to be a part of the typical morning banter. The intern looks up and greets the senior employee. The senior employee, a Ghanaian woman with straight relaxed hair, asks the intern, an African-American woman with natural coily hair, if she likes her hair. The intern indulges her, telling her that she really likes it (and she truly does!). The senior employee reaches her hand out to touch the intern's coils and says, "Do you comb your hair?" The intern replies no. The senior employee asks, "Do you think you ever will?" The intern says, "That's not really how my hair works." The senior employee gives her a sympathetic look and walks away. The intern keeps working on her spreadsheet, and ten minutes later, she realizes that she just experienced a racial microaggression.

That intern was me. This story is central to the trajectory of this study. I wanted to know how many other interns of my positionality had experiences like me despite the growing discourse among business leaders that diversity of the workforce and an inclusive organizational culture is important. In the spirit of black feminism, this study's starting point comes from my own embodied knowledge as a first-generation black woman (Christian 2000; Collins 2000; Cooper 2017; Crenshaw 1989; Washington 1994)[1]. This study actively works to combat traditional Western conceptions of black people's realities in workspaces by connecting previously developed frameworks to the everyday lived experience of African descended people in

[1] It is important to note that these women's contributions to black feminism are not purely anecdotal and should be critically engaged with outside of this study.

predominantly white spaces in order to dismantle oppressive frameworks and mechanisms of oppression. It ultimately seeks to propel subjugated narratives of those whose identities lie at the intersections of racism, capitalism, sexism, and more into popular organizational discourse.

The business landscape has increasingly emphasized the importance of diversifying organizational workforces because it is a commodity needed to increase connection with clients, productivity in workers, and ultimately profit (Amadeo 2019; Ortlieb and Sieben 2013). For instance, Hunt, et.al., (2015) has shown that companies in the "top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity" within their workforces perform better financially. Recent literature that is centered around diversity in management describes diversity as a "multitude of cultural groups not only within a certain applicant pool or workforce" but also as being inclusive of "gender and sexual orientation, disability/ability status, religious affiliation, and age" (Nkomo and Hoobler 2014). Yet, many organizations in industries such as finance and technology remain predominately white, particularly employees in management positions. Although black students are earning degrees in the STEM fields at increasingly higher rates (12%), black representation in Silicon Valley companies like Google remains at an average of 3.3% and only 2.6% in leadership positions (de Brey et al. 2019; Parker 2019). In the financial services industry where racial diversity has been increasing, black representation at various management levels actually decreased while representation of other people of color increased (United States Government Accountability Office 2017).

Despite the pervasiveness and normalization of whiteness that justifies why organizations and its leaders remain white, companies are beginning to increase representation through recruiting people from outside of their normative culture, and also address inclusion by creating initiatives to encourage quality relations within their company, as well as publicly demonstrate a

commitment to fulfilling both of those goals through transparency reporting. These 'diversity' initiatives are primarily rooted in recruitment policies that require open advertising and selection for positions, but also many organizations are engaging in other egalitarian practices within the workplace that go beyond increasing representation and aim to cultivate inclusive cultures that value diversity (Acker 2006; Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands 2004; Thorpe-Moscon 2014).

Universities have also been working to increase racial and class diversity and inclusion in terms of representation. Despite being accepted and qualified to attend predominantly white institutions (PWIs), research has shown that the experiences of black college students tend to differ from their white peers. Black students at PWIs are less confident and identify less with their college culture thus ultimately effecting their college success (Brower and Ketterhagen 2004; Fries-Britt and Turner 2002; Schwitzer et al. 1999). Although black students are *allowed* to be in the space, the dominant culture of whiteness, which is often colored with a perspective embedded in race, class, and gender, creates a barrier that prevents them from fully being included into the monoculture and subjects them to discrimination. This is especially true when elite institutions privilege those with the most economic and cultural capital as well as those who ascribe to the dominant norms of whiteness (Rivera 2015). When black students enter those spaces, they may not be equipped with the same skills that the monocultural space rewards based on their academic, cultural, and economic backgrounds (Rivera 2015). These intersections prevent many black students from truly taking advantage of the opportunities that their university has to offer (Brower and Ketterhagen 2004). Black students who attend these monocultural institutions then may have to select jobs that have similar environments to their undergraduate experience. Yet, some scholars argue that being educated within a PWI actually prepares black students for a potentially hostile organizational culture (Carbado and Gulati 2013).

Despite these strides in the organizational and educational fields, there is limited existing literature about how the pipeline between higher education institutions and organizations potentially exclude minoritized groups of people, specifically those who are black and the first in their families to attend college. Internship experiences during college are an important part of that pipeline, as they contribute to fostering post-graduate full-time job opportunities (Gault, Leach, and Duey 2010). However, when black students do gain access to and take internships in predominantly white organizations, it may be difficult for them to perform well or access the social and professional networks that exist in those spaces because of the lack of effective diversity and inclusion practices within organizations. Effective practices around diversity and inclusion would acknowledge the ways racial and class privilege influence the culture of an organization. This can later affect one's ability to participate in the labor market, contributing to discouragement and feeling as though one is not equipped to compete in the growing business and technical fields (Thorpe-Moscon 2014). This can also affect their mental health, as black students struggle with finding ways to navigate their authentic racial and ethnic identities within and outside of the workspace (Carbado and Gulati 2013). Ultimately, this can create a disparity between black and white college graduates in their post-graduation experiences when it comes to accessing essential economic, cultural and social capital. Thus, organizations can be a key factor in addressing and remedying the inequalities that may exist for first-generation black students, particularly those students coming from predominately white college institutions, as they seek to navigate a more corporate and technical world that remains predominantly white.

In examining first-generation black student experience in internships within corporatized[2] organizations that are predominately white, this inductive, interview-based study employed a lens of intersectionality to learn more about the ways in which organizational structures and cultures may impact the performance and identity of its student interns within that space, their ability to build social/professional networks, as well as their access to post-graduate marketability.

In determining whether there is a link between black student experience in internships, and identity, networking, and post-graduate marketability, this study addressed the ways that organizational culture can be adjusted to create an environment where all employees can succeed, not just those who fit into the monocultural standards of a workspace. In examining black student experience in these settings, organizations can learn more about the ways that they may be potentially mistreating people from marginalized communities. From an organization's standpoint, this can affect their inclusion tactics, internship programs, employee interactions and reputation. More importantly, these links can help analyze the ways that inclusive tactics in organizations can create economic and social mobility for people who are dramatically impacted by oppressive institutions due to their intersecting identities. These intersections typically occur at the intersection of oppressive forces such as racism, sexism, and classism, as will be demonstrated through participant narratives.

[2] meaning they were hierarchical and formal, predominately white, and interns had similar levels of responsibility across all fields.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whiteness, Privilege, & Its Pervasive Invisibility

Race & Whiteness and Relationship with Social Class

Race as a form of categorical difference has not been around forever. Rather, capitalism needed race in order to maintain the class and power hierarchy that was beginning to build. The planter elite specifically perpetuated this ideology to "exploit black labor" for the gains of the white masses and "eliminate or neutralize black competition," specifically in the realm of economics (Wilson 1980). Hence, those who had political and financial power wrote the "one-drop rule" into law, signaling that one drop of black blood makes one black. This rule ensured that the planter elite would be able to own the capital and produce from enslaved mothers in colonial America. This rule would come to divide the American population into two categories, black and non-black (Michaels 2006). In assigning a negative ascriptive status to people of African descent, people of European descent within the colonies were able to access economic capital under the guise of whiteness.

Whiteness and the privilege associated with it is more than just 'being white.' Whiteness is the "normative and superior standard by which judgements" about various socially constructed categories are made (Sue 2016). In an American context, being classified as White or exhibiting characteristics (physical or behavioral) closest to whiteness such as skin-color (Harrison, 2010) is based on outward appearance and ancestry, typically this means having white skin as well as European heritage (Wellman 2003). When being socialized into this system, white people are encouraged to adopt racial biases, norms, and rules that create a divide between themselves and people outside of their group (Sue 2016). White people are not the only ones adopted into this

social system; even those outside of the category of white learn about the norms of whiteness and are encouraged to adapt to whiteness in order to access mobility that white people are afforded because of their inclusion in the category. These practices of constructing and maintaining whiteness, leads to racism and various justifications of racial inequality.

Structurally, this manifests by sustaining racialized social systems that "involve some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations among the races" (Bonilla-Silva 2007). Within a racialized social system, once meanings are attached to a socially constructed racial group, a hierarchy forms based on the connotations and histories that are attached. Due to the hierarchal nature of racialized social systems, whiteness and the characteristics associated with it are privileged while other subordinated races have lower levels of success in life. Within the system, economic, political, social and psychological rewards are distributed based on the way that groups are organized upon these socially constructed lines. A racialized social system is also influenced by the intersections of gender and class, thus effecting the ways that people within a race are organized hierarchically. These factors further effect people within groups based on their positionality. Hence, despite an organization's desire to racially diversify, it may find the recruitment pool limited due to the historical and contemporary nature of racism.

Racism & Invisibility

Racism is the practice of applying "a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry" (Fields and Fields 2012). Race is the core concept of racism and it is the belief that "nature produced humankind in distinct groups" and the members of those groups share inborn traits (Fields and Fields 2012). Although race creates fantastical categories, such as "white" these categories are used to distract people from the true reality of racism, people are socialized into believing that it is real and can be disproven. Bonilla-Silva (2013) identifies several frameworks

of colorblind racism that reinforces racism and keeps whiteness privilege invisible. These forces have transformed American discourse around the concept of race, making it harder for people to see the systemic effects of racism and class (Rothenberg 2016). Organizations will draw on these colorblind justifications, contributing lack of racial diversity to mythical cultural differences associated with one's race. Racism operates under the guise of whiteness in order to invisibly control individuals, institutions, and cultures while ensuring that those who are not included in the category of white are disenfranchised due to their assumed biological and social inferiority (Wellman 2003). In the process of dominating those who are not included in the category of white, white people are able to access white privilege or "the unearned advantages and beliefs that accrues to white folks by virtue of a system normed on the experiences, values, and perceptions of their group" (Rothenberg 2016, Sue 2016). While white people gain access to privilege, racism is hiding in plain sight and allows white people to access forms of capital that allow them mobility within American society.

Assessing Racial Awareness

In order to effectively examine the way that my participants were perceiving the racism that is occurring within their intern environments, I used Trepagnier's (2016) assessments of racial awareness. In her analysis, she outlines five stages of racial awareness corresponding to either a low, moderate or high racial awareness on a continuum: (1) understanding historical racism and its role in creating a racialized social structure; (2) recognizing how contemporary racism works and how it is used to sustain and justify racism through racial ideologies; (3) interrogating our own beliefs about whiteness and race and how they have been shaped; (4) unlearning our own racist attitudes/behaviors; and (5) critically analyzing social institutions to identify how whiteness shapes practices and policies.

Low Racial Awareness:

Someone with a low level of racial awareness is not aware of their own relationship to racism and race nor of the relationship between race and racism. Additionally, they feel little personal accountability for the racial status quo or addressing their own racism. Additionally, they are disassociated from issues about race and racism (Trepagnier 2016).

Moderate Racial Awareness:

Someone with a moderate level of racial awareness has more of an inward perspective on race and racism. They consider and are aware of their own privileged position in relation to racial inequality. They are concerned about making a mistake about those outside of their own identity. They draw tenuous connections between race and racism. They also have definitive responses to racism around themselves (Trepagnier 2016).

High Racial Awareness:

Those with high levels of racial awareness focus on what can be done to make a difference in terms of racism, therefore having an outward outlook on racism. They are dedicated to being an antiracist. They are less likely to perpetuate racism and colorblind racism. They are able to link the history of racism to the present moment. They are aware of institutional and systemic racism as well as white privilege. Lastly, they are aware of their own racism (Trepagnier 2016).

Intersectionality & the Reality of Socially Constructed Experience

For years, black feminist thinkers have been theorizing about the ways that identities contribute to an individual's oppression and experience in the world. Their interventions were derived from their lived experiences as raced, classed, and gendered beings who experienced domination due to the intersections of those aspects of their identity. Although many before her discussed intersectionality, black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 in order to demonstrate the ways that people experience oppression as interrelated and the ways in which tools of domination display themselves in various degrees of intensity (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality attempts to communicate the ways in which various aspects of one's identity determines the way that they experience privilege or oppression. It also demonstrates that oppressions are not additive rather, they are multiplicative therefore one's reality cannot be analyzed by putting identity components in isolation (King 1988). This is because the multiplicative facets of our identity experiences create individualized experiences for every person within the larger structure. In terms of privilege and oppression, there is a matrix of domination which refers to the ways in which interacting forces are organized within structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels of power in order to oppress people at different degrees and grant people privilege at various degrees (Collins 2000). When black employees have to navigate these monocultural organizations, the intersections of their identities effect the way that they experience the corporate space. Specifically for black employees, these experiences are most influenced by the gendered, racialized, and classed components of their identities and the workspace. These aspects of their identity determine their power, privilege, and marginalization thus contributing to factors that they experience within their work environments (Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto 2015). For example, black women may be seen as aggressive

and hypersexual based on the way that they dress because of the narratives that have been constructed by white people in order to ensure their hyper-visibility and perceived sexual availability (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Ford 2008). Black men when displaying their emotions may also be seen as aggressive, unintelligent, and cocky because of narratives constructed about them in line with the black rage narrative and images of the "coon" (Ford 2008).

Whiteness as a Cultural Norm and Organizational Studies

Defining Monocultural Organizations

Historically, organizations have operated monoculturally through prioritizing one group perspective and allowing that perspective to be the dominant cultural ideology within the organization (Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands 2004). When an organization is operating monoculturally, it engages in practices of exclusion and passivity to ensure that the dominant group's models, rules, and systems are upheld (Holvino, et al. 2004). Due to the influence of whiteness, the dominant models, rules, and systems that are celebrated within organizations are those that are typically associated with Eurocentric ideals. These ideals include things such as the way someone speaks, dresses, and networks but these are not the only ways that it can manifest (Sue 2016).

Monocultural organizations encourage people from minoritized communities to interact with the organizational structures and practices in a certain way. These interactions are based on the way that individuals from those communities experience their identities and the oppression that accompanies them. The structure of a monocultural organization is an essential frame to interrogating the ways that institutions view and oppress minoritized populations as they navigate the space based on the intersections of their identities. In using this lens, organizations

can be better analyzed and deconstructed to effectively actualize and validate the experiences of people of color and their interlocking identities as they navigate organizational institutions.

In American society, people are socialized into a "racial curriculum that imbues in them biases, prejudices, and misinformation related to race" (Sue 2016). This racial curriculum encourages society to believe that whiteness is the cultural norm by insisting that a white worldview is the preferred. In a US context, this allows white Americans to "control and define the existence of persons of color" throughout place and time (Sue 2016). In institutions such as workspaces and colleges or universities, policies, practices, and structures are defined by this monocultural code. While rewarding those who adhere to the monocultural code, people of color who fall outside of it are punished.

Whiteness operates rather invisibly in workplace settings, as monocultural organizations are not explicitly racist. Rather through whiteness' invisibility in the space, those who create and enforce the rules tend to believe that their practices are egalitarian and therefore apply equally to every group and individual. However, this denies the reality that those practices are created using unfair disparities that subordinate people based on the intersections of their identity (Sue 2016).

Inequality Regimes

The intersectionality of privilege creates inequality regimes or "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (Acker 2006). These regimes show up in a variety of organizations and their fluid intensity is a way to control resources and monetary rewards (Acker 2006). Inequality regimes rely on the intersections of a person's race, class, gender, etc. in order to reproduce inequalities and enforce the matrix of domination, which includes a variety of

oppressions such as racism, sexism, and classism. Hence, organizational practices that attempt to address single-identity privileges are limited in creating truly inclusive organizations. For example, if a company is strictly hiring for women based on the belief that they will "accept orders and low wages" they may not be aware that they are also perpetuating racial stereotypes about women of color, thus reproducing inequality along raced, classed, and gendered lines (Acker 2006). This demonstrates the importance of expanding the way that we talk about identity differences. Rather than ignoring the intersections, as inequality regimes encourage us to do, we have to acknowledge that individuals have many points of diversity within their identities and that the only way to ensure that they are included in an organization is to acknowledge all of the intricate parts of that identity (Kelly and Smith 2014).

Inequality Regimes & Discrimination

Inequality regimes manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Specifically, they produce discrimination in the form of microaggressions, stereotype threat, exclusion, and alienation from one's authentic identity thus creating mechanisms for control and compliance that adversely affect people of color. This distracts from making the workplace an environment where all employees can succeed. A number of research studies have illuminated how inequality regimes perpetuate privilege and impact the daily lives of black people in and outside of the workspace. The following sections outline some of the most common outcomes.

Microaggressions, Stereotype Threat, and the Invisibility Syndrome

Microaggressions are defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color." (Sue et al. 2007).

Although these instances can become common and overlooked, their pervasiveness sends a message to those who are affected by them that they are not meant to be a part of the space. In their study with black women who had worked as senior-level corporate professionals, Holder, et.al. (2015) found that they were experiencing racial microaggressions to various degrees. For example, these senior-level professional women felt they were excessively being questioned on their authority despite holding positions of power; continuously having to validate their decisions; and not being invited to certain social gatherings where decision-making processes occurred and working relationships developed. This experience is not unfamiliar to other black people in the workspace. Other research suggests that black student interns are being inundated with a variety of different microaggressions such as being questioned about their capabilities and experiencing exclusion by either direct supervisor, colleague, or someone at a management level (Marshall 2016).

Holder et.al., (2015) also found that these experiences can render 'invisibility'—being hyper visible while simultaneously being invisible. Invisibility can manifest itself through different ways such as avoiding eye contact as well as purposefully ignoring someone's voice or physical presence. This typically occurs while ensuring that the person who is being ignored narratives' are being misrepresented or are missing from the space they are in as a subtle mechanism of discrimination (Franklin 1999; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). Invisibility syndrome develops in black people when they make an adjustment in their behavior under the assumption that they will receive greater acceptance, yet they are "rejected nonetheless because undesired group attributes are judged more salient" (Franklin 1999). This creates confusion about the path to acceptance and identity development as black people seek to navigate if they should assimilate into the dominant culture or maintain their "minority" culture (Franklin 1999).

In compounding the different ways that discrimination can manifest within a workspace, another to observe is stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the fear of "being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group" (Steele and Aronson 1995). Organizational spaces tend to rely on stereotypes to produce control and compliance among people of color (Acker 2006). Because the space has excluded narratives of people outside of the realm of whiteness, it relies on the ways that whiteness has constructed minoritized people's realities to understand them. This creates stereotype threat among people of color who are in monocultural spaces (Roberson and Kulik 2007). When in the workplace, people of color feel as though they need to work harder to dispel those stereotypes and assimilate into the values that the white space rewards (Roberson and Kulik 2007). In a study conducted about black interns at a New York City advertising firm, Boulton (2016) found that stereotype threat "puts pressure on minorities to avoid individual behaviors that might reflect badly on their race as a whole." The black interns in this scenario, felt that if they had associated too closely with the other black interns or staff members then they would fulfill the stereotype of being "socially exclusive" thus, they exhibit behaviors such as limiting their conversations with other black people in the agency (Boulton 2016). As people continue in their professional careers, this scenario does not simply disappear. In a different study about black women, similar themes were found as they coped with the "minority status burden" of being the spokesperson for the black race (Hall, Everett, and Hamilton-Mason 2012). In another study conducted about black women middle managers, stereotype threat resulted in a diminishment of self-worth, of work performance, and daily stress over attempting to prove one's worth (Ashley 2019). This demonstrates that the stressors of things such as stereotype can dangerously affect the way one experiences their identity and their workspace.

In-group Exclusion, Networking, and Mentorship Opportunities

In examining the way that the matrix of domination adversely effects economic and social mobility for black people, in-group bias can also create negative behaviors that prevent white people from rewarding, acknowledging, and interacting positively with black people (Schnake, Beal, and Ruscher 2006). In-group theory says that when one is more favorable to someone who looks like us or who acts like us we are more likely to be attracted to them and see them more positively (Stangor, Rajiv, and Hammond 2014). What this framework does not consider is the way that social constructed ideas create the in-group.

In-group bias ensures that resources needed for mobility are given to those within the dominant cultural group, or in this case those who are white or who ascribe to whiteness. In favoring those who fall into the category of white or practice the ideals of whiteness, discrimination occurs against the members of the outgroup, thus negatively affecting their interactions and preventing resources to be allocated towards that group (Schnake et al. 2006). This ensures that those who are white or who ascribe to the norms of whiteness are more likely to receive rewards and gain access to social and economic resources, while those who fall outside of that are subjected to further dejection, discrimination, and oppression. It also ensures that our racialized, gendered, and classed assumptions of others determine who is falling outside of a group. This creates a sense of alienation and exclusion for those who are perpetually placed within the out-group.

When someone seeks to network within their workspace, this ensures that those who are fitting into the monocultural code are being rewarded. In Boulton's (2016) study of black interns in advertising, she observed that informal guidance and mentoring was "freely bestowed by older Whites upon younger versions of themselves." This type of networking is essential for

advancement in various industries, such as advertising. At the same time, the black interns struggled to make those connections with older black peers because of the way that they already stood out and white resentment of their presence in the workspace (Boulton 2016). As I mentioned above, the experiences of black interns are not isolated, rather as they continue in the workspace they may still experience struggles such as these. In a study of black men and their experiences at work, they similarly felt that in struggling to cultivate social relationships with coworkers, they were missing out making the necessary steps for career success and advancement (Pitcan, Park-Taylor, and Hayslett 2018). In missing important networks and connections, black employees experience further alienation and exclusion in their respective organizations.

Coping and the Burden of Working One's Identity

Experiences of alienation and exclusion encourage black people in corporate settings to seek out coping methods to help them feel more support and acceptance. This sometimes means seeking out black social networks that already exist, creating them with black members of the organization who they work with, or relying on people outside of the workspace (Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015; Pitcan et al. 2018). Black women in Holder et al.'s (2015) study spoke about the importance of having a network of trusted advisors who "could provide strategies and guidance for addressing racial microaggressions." In addition, the mentors or sponsors in these women's networks made them feel empowered and validated within the workplace. This empowerment, validation, and advice encouraged them to seek out and achieve career advancement (Holder et al. 2015). This was a similar experience for black men in Pitcan et al.'s study (2018). These men sought out their black social networks and mentors for "venting frustration and identifying strategies for success." These networks provided encouragement and

tips as well as a more comforting experience. Further, in a study done about black professionals in higher education workplaces, this theme held firm as others found that the support they received from professionals in similar positions helped them to more successfully navigate the space (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2019). The support networks outside of the workspace are also important, as "individuals in support systems become mentors and serve as life coaches and confidants" for the group of black woman in a different study (Hall et al. 2012). In thwarting negative workspace experiences, building community with those who are around you and can understand your experience proves to be essential to navigating the space and regaining a sense of comfort.

Coping can also manifest in changing one's identities so that it aligns more with whiteness. Thus, they create what Carbado (2013) calls a 'working identity'. Due to the way that whiteness is rewarded, black people in spaces ruled by the ideology feel pressure to shift or work their identity to demonstrate how closely their identity can be attributed to whiteness. The proximity to whiteness is what gains social and economic capital in these spaces, and therefore black people must attempt to appear palatable. One's working identity is determined by "a range of racially associated ways of being" and it both refers to refers both to "the perceived choices people make about their self-presentation" and "to the perceived identity that emerges from those choices (how black we determine a person to be)" (Carbado and Gulati 2013). This phenomena forces black people in monocultural spaces to distance himself or herself from blackness and assimilate into whiteness while still attempting to understand and navigate their identities. The process of shifting or working identity comes in a variety of different forms. It is used by black people as a coping mechanism but also as a way to attempt to gain career success and advancement (Dickens and Chavez 2018). In Holder et al.'s (2015) study, the team found that

black women shift through their speech, deemphasizing racial differences, and ensuring that their corporate and personal lives do not intersect. Similarly, in Pitcan et al.'s (2018) study done about black men at work, they similarly described behavior of not being themselves at work through avoiding topics, using humor, and restricting identity self-expression. Despite shifting one's ability to help a black employee navigate a space, it can be alienating from self as black employees never feel as though their authentic self is truly being embedded within their environment (Dickens and Chavez 2018).

Measuring Organizational Inclusiveness: Assessing Exclusion and Inclusion

In order to appropriately determine if an organization is participating in exclusive and inclusive practices, this study relies on elements of diversity and inclusion as outlined in Holvino et al.'s (2004) research and Shore et al.'s research (2018). Their contributions demonstrate that "diversity of a workforce only provides the opportunity for greater innovation, but without inclusion such a benefit is unlikely" (Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez 2018). Additionally, their contributions to the literature help to determine what constitutes an exclusive/monocultural, transitional, or inclusive/multicultural organization. This model (see Table 1 below) is used later on in the study to determine which type of organization a participant was a part of during their internship in order to better understand the interpretation of their experience within that context.

Exclusive/Monocultural Organizations:

Exclusive organizations broadly only value the "dominant perspective of one group, culture, or style." Thus, they are active in excluding in its "mission and practices those who are not members of the dominant group" (Holvino et al. 2004). In this study, the dominant group within these organizations are those who are white and follow standards of whiteness. In an

exclusive organization, those who fall outside of those constraints are actively or passively excluded. Exclusive organizations isolate the efforts of diversity and inclusion under one department, like human resources, or under one person (Holvino et al. 2004). Additionally, they do not differentiate between good intentions that are contained within their verbal expressions of diversity support and the impact of "specific institutional actions that go against diversity" (Holvino et al. 2004). Thus, they struggle to follow through on their verbal commitments to diversity and inclusion. Lastly, an organization is exclusive if people from "historically excluded identity groups" are not allowed to be their authentic selves, to express their perspectives, be heard, or be respected for their differences (Shore et al. 2018).

Transitional Organizations:

Transitional organizations are those companies who are working towards diversity and inclusion but are doing so within the exclusive boundaries they have created, thus seeking to "integrate others into systems created under dominant norms" (Holvino et al. 2004). Their practices included passively including a few members of non-dominant groups "without making major changes" to the organization itself. Eventually, they move towards positive action, where they tolerate the differences of others and make special efforts to include others in specific target groups (Holvino et al. 2004).

Inclusive/Multicultural Organizations:

An inclusive organization is one that is actively valuing and integrating "the perspectives of diverse identities, cultures, styles, and groups into the organization's work and systems" (Holvino et al. 2004). Organizations likes these actively work to expand definitions of inclusion and diversity thus examining and changing practices that are potential barriers to members of

non-dominant groups. Additionally, they actively seek to continuously learn and act to make systemic change that value and include all people (Holvino et al. 2004). People within an inclusive organization feel comfortable sharing ideas, opinions, and discussion diversity issues. They feel valued and encouraged to be themselves by others, especially those in leadership positions who encourage the sharing of cultural traditions and respect the differences among employees (Shore et al. 2018). Employees also have access to leadership and officer positions, this translates to the "elimination of impediments to upward mobility, including equitable salary and advancement opportunities for members of historically marginalized identity groups" (Shore et al. 2018). Inclusive organizations consistently show at every level that they are manifesting inclusion and moving away from prioritizing a dominant group's perspective by allowing that perspective to be the dominant cultural ideology within the organization (Holvino et al. 2004).

Table 1

	Exclusive	Transitional	Inclusive
Involvement of leadership	None	Commitment may remain symbolic	Leadership is held accountable and role modelling
Recruitment	Looking for those who are similar or closely related to the dominant group	Passively looking to include those in the non-dominant group	Actively looking for people with a variety of different backgrounds and experiences
Internal Advocacy/Reporting	Little to no meaningful avenues to advocate within organization	Those outside of the non-dominant group struggle to advocate within organization	Those with differences have equal access to power and decision-making
Diversity discussions	Emphasis on assimilation and compliance	Emphasis on celebrating difference and tolerance	Emphasis on how power shapes different experiences, acceptance, and valuing difference

Support networks/ERGS	People in the "non-dominant" group feel alienated from the space/struggle to cultivate social relationships	People from the non-dominant group are tolerated and struggle to make institutional change through organizational avenues	Everyone is integrated into the organization at both group and individual levels
Formal Mentoring	One-size fits all mentoring models that benefit those who fit the dominant cultural code	Mentoring models that attempt to address diverse backgrounds within the boundaries of dominant group	Advising and mentoring programs to help career development and career paths for employees of all different backgrounds
Professional Development	Little to no avenues for upward mobility without assimilation	Little avenues for upward mobility without assimilation	Avenues for skill advancement and upward mobility are a result of institutional efforts to ensure equality for employees of historically disadvantaged backgrounds

METHODOLOGY

This study fills a gap in the existing literature about diversity and inclusion due to its focus on not just black employees' experiences, but black internship experiences. In each student's internship, essentially a trial run of the company, they are experiencing the company differently because of the "significant benefits" students receive in terms of "career preparation and income" (Gault et al. 2010). Additionally, students in internship settings get the first glimpse of how willing companies are to dedicate time to diversity and inclusion efforts, the workload, the norms and rules of the organization, and more. If organizations wish to woo their interns into full time positions, it is vital that they are attentive to creating an inclusive culture where these black prospective employees can flourish. To assess these initial experiences with companies, this study employed an intersectional lens in order to deconstruct traditional frameworks of whiteness that confine the truth of those that may be oppressed. This framework ensured that the black participants in this study did not have their narratives distorted. It also ensured that their perspectives are in dialogue with one another in order to produce a more holistic picture of their experiences and oppressions within organizational culture (Collins 2000).

Research Questions

- How do first-generation black undergraduate students from predominantly white colleges or universities navigate monocultural internship settings?
- How do they interpret their ability to create social and professional networks in those settings? What do those networks look like? And what purpose do they serve?
- How do they describe their feelings of inclusion or exclusion within the organizational culture?

- Can the participants describe how equipped they feel to successfully participate in the job market after graduation?

Sampling

Recruitment

In order to recruit the participants, I used forms of convenience sampling. First, I reached out to black first-generation students, male or female, who I knew had interned over the summer. From those initial contacts, I was able to use a passive snowball technique and reach out to other students who were also of the same demographic and in similar fields. Additionally, I posted messages on my personal LinkedIn feed asking if any black first generation students between 18 and 22 would be interested in participating in the study. Recruitment was ended with 7 participants.

Sample Characteristics

The sampling characteristics that were relevant to my study were race and first-generation status to a lesser degree[3]; racialized experience was most salient. The age and gender backgrounds of the participants were not as relevant in determining whether or not the participants would be able to successfully reflect on their experiences and the gender of the participant did not greatly influence the overall work experience. However, gender did have an effect on experiences such as microaggressions which will be discussed subsequently. Next to race and first-generation status, I originally believed that it would be important to interview people in certain business sectors such as technical or corporate roles. Upon developing my

[3] Although I aimed to investigate how first-generation college status influenced the intern experience, race was the most salient for the participants and their first-generation status was mentioned to a significantly lesser degree.

participant pool and conducting interviews I found that the intern role of the participant did not matter nor did the industry as many structures were corporatized (meaning they were hierarchical and formal), predominately white, and interns had similar levels of responsibility across all fields.

Participants

Participant Name	Age	Gender	Internship Field	Type of Organization	Level of Racial Awareness	Post-Grad Employed
Lauren	21	Female	Fundraising	Transitional	High	No
Daniella	21	Female	Tech Marketing	Inclusive	Moderate	Yes
Mike	26	Male	Law	Inclusive	Moderate	Yes
Jordan	21	Male	Tech/Public Health	Exclusive	High	Yes*
Jasmine	20	Female	Academic Department	Transitional	Moderate	No
Calvin	21	Male	Banking	Exclusive	High	Yes
Chelsey	21	Female	Tech Consulting	Exclusive	Moderate	Yes*

**employed but not at internship site*

The participant pool included four black women and three black men. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26 years old. Six of the participants are black, first-generation college students who are currently attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in the northeast. One participant is a black, first-generation college student who has graduated from a predominantly white institution in the northeast. The participants' internship experiences span a variety of different corporatized professions. All participants were fluent in English. All participants had moderate to high levels of racial awareness that was revealed in their transcripts demonstrating that they had at least a minimum an understanding and awareness of whiteness norms. The social class of the interns varied and they were all first-generation.

Data Collection

Sources of Data

In order to collect data, the participants first completed a brief demographic survey via Qualtrics about their background. Once this was completed, each participant completed a semi-structured interview that was developed based on the main research questions. These research questions sought to assess first-generation black undergraduate students networking skills, experiences with inclusion or exclusion, as well as their post-graduate marketability. Consistent with the discovery-oriented constructivist process, the questions and prompts were reshaped throughout the data collection process based on participants' responses.

Process

The study was conducted in compliance with IRB stipulations. Written informed consent was voluntarily obtained from all participants without compensation. After this was collected, the participants completed a brief demographic survey that was used by the primary investigator to assess that they fit the sampling criteria. It was also used to collect data about the socioeconomic backgrounds, the racial makeup of their educational backgrounds, their definitions of blackness, and their American generational status. I conducted in-person, audiotaped, semi-structured interviews in participant comfortable spaced or via phone. They were recorded on a digital recorder and ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. In these interviews, I used an interview guide that centered on themes emphasized in the four main interview questions as well as the literature, such as networking and company culture. This guide allowed me to exhaust a variety of themes within the conversation but I allowed the students' experiences to guide the conversation in order to ensure that they would share their detailed

personal experiences and thoughts. This also ensured that their perspectives were primary in the interviews rather than my own thoughts. This bolsters the inductive nature of the study because it allowed me to use the data from the interviews to identify the prevalent themes. I later transcribed the digital recordings and identifying information regarding the participants' university or internship organization was redacted to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

Researchers' Background and Experiences

I am a black first-generation college student completing an undergraduate degree in in Sociology and African & African Diaspora Studies. As a part of this curriculum, I have studied the development of racism, race, and whiteness in America and its ramifications on perpetuating inequality. Moreover, I have reflected on my own racial identity, racialized experiences and subconscious biases. I have also completed multiple internships in predominantly white corporate settings in the northeastern U.S. My positionality as a black first-generation female influenced my choice of topic and the development of my interview questions. Hence, throughout the process, I was attentive to how my lived experiences might bias the data collection and analysis process. I practiced reflexivity throughout the entire process by not asking leading questions and asking for examples from the participants as opposed to making assumptions or suggestions throughout the interviews. My participants may have been more willing to be more honest about their experience because of the similarities that we shared in terms of college background, first-generation status, and internship experience. I have had many similar experiences to that of the participants, such as microaggressions in personal and professional interactions, difficulties/advantages of networking in the workspace, and more. I believe that all participants were comfortable sharing their experiences with me because of our similarities.

Data Analysis

The purpose of these student intern interviews was to provide information on how their experiences within predominantly white corporatized organizations can be used to learn more about organizational structures and cultures as well as the impacts that these have on the student intern's ability to network, access post-graduate marketability, build their identity, and deal with exclusive experiences. I first listened to each individual interview, transcribed them, and then took notes on the transcribed interview. Once I had taken notes on the transcribed interview, I analyzed these notes in several ways: first through open coding and then moving to thematic coding for the participants' workplace experiences; then utilizing analytic induction to assess participants' racial awareness levels and organizational cultures (Hesse-Biber 2017). I created individual participant code maps. These code maps were divided into three headings: "Corporate Culture", "Racial Awareness" and "Experiences within the Workplace."

The "Corporate Culture" heading was used to determine the company practices and how it influences the experience of the individual. I did this using analytic induction where I took Holvino et. al's (2004) and Shore et. al's (2018) theories of exclusivity and inclusivity and used them to assess how the participant talked about their organizational culture to determine where the organization fit on the continuum described in my literature review. This scale helped me to determine which students were apart of inclusive, transitional, or exclusive organizations: 2 participants were apart of inclusive organizations, 2 participants were apart of transitional organizations, and 3 participants were apart of exclusive organizations.

The "Racial Awareness" heading used analytic induction to assess each participant's racial awareness level and to see how it might be shaping their interpretation of experience by listening for ways in which they explained how racism and whiteness privilege might influence their

organizational culture and/or society at large. Additionally, this category helped me to assess if the participants drew upon colorblind discourse in explaining racial inequality. All participants had moderate to high levels of racial awareness.

The "Experiences within the Workplace" heading was used to examine the specific experiences that resulted in several themes: desire to be authentic, working identity, stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, microaggressions, networking, mentoring, as well as post-graduate marketability. These themes were determined through an open/thematic coding of actual experience.

Once I coded under these three headings, I analyzed individual code maps and compiled similarities and noted differences across the various headings and subheadings.

Limitations

This study is limited because it is not generalizable due to the small sample size. Although there is no statistical generalizability, there may be analytical generalizability due to the variety of different internship environments that are represented in this study and the commonality of experience within organizational climates, but also across them in some instances. Another limitation of this study was that the racial awareness of the participants was relatively high; it would be helpful to interview and analyze participants who have lower levels of racial awareness to see if they still recognize ways in which the organizational climate may be excluding them. If I had more time, I would want to do repeat interviews with the participants in order to learn more and get more specifics from the initial interview. Additionally, I would ask more direct questions about their first-generation status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Levels of Organizational Inclusiveness

Exclusive Organizations: Chelsey, Calvin, Jordan

There were three participants working within organizational cultures that match the level of exclusivity as defined by Holvino et al. (2004). This means that the organization prioritizes adherence to the dominant cultural perspective and excluding as well as alienating those who fall outside of it. This manifests through exclusive networking models, lack of avenues for advocating for self, and emphasis on assimilation/compliance. Chelsey and Calvin interned at prestigious companies within the investment banking and analyst/consulting fields while Jordan interned at a public health office where he worked with his team to build an app and database. All of their organizations fall into the exclusive category but have very different elements.

Despite Calvin's organization being more diverse than he expected it to be, it was still overwhelmingly white and segregated. The company seemed to be the most corporatized of the three exclusive organizations based on their expectations for clothing such as "full suit" days and their emphasis on work being important even when developing personal relationships, which I will discuss more in the networking section. Because corporate standards are influenced by standards of racism and whiteness, this would indicate that this organization would be especially monocultural and exclusive of people outside of the monocultural code (Holvino et al. 2004; Sue 2016).

Chelsey's organization was predominantly white and a place where people of color held a lot of resentment towards the company; specifically remembering employees saying "I'm here for two years and I'm gonna build my resume and I'm gonna get out." Although her client site

was diverse and inclusive, the company overall lacked commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I), shied away from being authentic about their issues around D&I, and continually tokenized people of color within the organization in an attempt to demonstrate their commitment to diversity. Her company seemed less concerned with corporatized culture than Calvin's, as she described a more casual environment around dress, conversation, and accomplishment of tasks.

Jordan worked at a public health organization that worked within his community to develop an app that would give "low-cost and free health resources to those who lack health insurance." He also described his organization as unorganized. Despite their mission around public health access, the company was not fully dedicated to the communities that they served due to the lack of awareness about racism, socioeconomic status, and lack of care towards non-English speakers. This demonstrates that the organization was so dedicated to their monocultural code, that they were exclusive of the people that they were meant to serve because they felt outside of whiteness. These practices also became embedded within the internal practices of the organization manifesting through microaggressions, leadership, and development of programs.

Transitional Organizations: Jasmine and Lauren

Jasmine and Lauren are the two participants who interned in transitional organizations; these organizations are working towards inclusivity but are doing so by integrating employees under dominant norms rather than excluding as in the above organizational model. This means they are passively looking to recruit people from the non-dominant group, emphasize tolerance versus acceptance as in a more inclusive model, and interns/employees from the non-dominant group struggle to determine the authenticity of their networks (Holvino et al. 2004). Jasmine and Lauren worked in two different fields. Jasmine worked in an academic office on her college campus and Lauren worked for a large corporation's foundation/philanthropy side doing

fundraising. Both of their organizations were working towards diversity and inclusion by making *symbolic* promises about change externally and attempting to concentrate on these topics internally, but falling short of their stated promises.

Lauren's organization was more corporate due to her organization's prestige as well as the main donor's status. Her company was also in a very high-class area, which she described as "extremely boujee" with "a Louis Vuitton store like two feet away." She mentioned that although she was doing foundational social service work, she was still participating in administrative work where she felt that she would be doing the same work as the business side of her corporation. Additionally, the staff at her company were about 70% white and 30% people of color. She said that there were about 10 black employees. In terms of class status, she considered them to be upper-middle class. These demographics were not reflective of the intern class who consisted of lower-middle class students of color who attended PWIs. Because of the prestige and the demographic makeup, Lauren felt lucky to be a part of this organization because people from her background were not a typical part of the workspace, thus demonstrating that her organization was working towards including more diversity in terms of race and class, as reflected in the intern pool.[4] However, it still had an exclusive culture that made people from diverse backgrounds feel grateful to be included.

Jasmine's academic office was less corporate than Lauren's in that it was located in her university and was focused on student leadership. Universities are ever-growing corporate enterprises, so her experience here still fits within the framework of my thesis. She describes it as "a very diverse place" where everyone is "very welcoming." However, she emphasizes that the

[4] Lauren's reflections on her experience were unique because of her reflections on social class, other participants focused solely on race.

diversity does not exclude her from experiencing microaggression and ignorant comments. Additionally, she feels that in her office, she was never able to express her discomfort and experiences of racism to anyone. This demonstrates that Jasmine's office is in a transitional stage because they are still focused on the symbolic nature of diversity as opposed to changing the structure to include the diverse voices that they are hiring (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018).

Inclusive Organizations: Daniella and Mike

There were two participants working in organizational cultures that most closely matched that of inclusivity as defined by Holvino et al. (2004). Their organizations are actively working towards making inclusivity important at all levels within the company through meaningful mentoring, making easier avenues for advancement for people of a variety of different backgrounds, and valuing the contributions of those from different backgrounds. Daniella and Mike both interned at prestigious organizations within their industries. Daniella worked at one of the oldest tech companies and Mike worked at a top 100-law firm that operates both within the U.S. and on a global scale. The demographic makeup of their respective organizations was predominantly white and with a corporate culture. Because these two aspects are typically signs of the way that racism and whiteness can operate invisibly and effect workplace practices, it would be expected that their organizations were exclusive of people who are outside of the main cultural code, especially those historically victims of systemic oppression. Despite this, their organizations were still working towards including, accepting, welcoming, and valuing those with different backgrounds and experiences. They were also working to identify the issues around diversity and inclusion within their fields and organizations and address them across a variety of different levels within the organization as well as through a variety of different efforts.

Additionally, both of their companies pledged valuable resources towards growing their diversity and inclusion programs and not just relying on increasing representation through recruitment.

Recruitment

Exclusive Organizations: Recruitment without Intention (Chelsey and Jordan)

Chelsey and Jordan discussed that their organizations did some forms of recruiting, but these forms are especially reflective of their exclusive natures. Chelsey's organization came to her college and used a panel of students to answer questions about their experiences:

> "Based upon what the students talked about it seemed like a place of community, growth, and just like discovery… It made me excited to go there … because it was rotational, I felt I could choose things I wanted to do and just do it. Turns out that was not the case."

On the surface, this recruiting strategy seemed appealing to Chelsey because she was hearing from those who had experienced the program and it made her feel like she would be a part of a community that valued her opinion however, this proved to be the opposite of her experience. In her first two weeks, she was ignored by her manager and went out of her way to look for opportunities to feel more closely connected to the space. This demonstrates that her company was recruiting without intentionality because they were not specifically trying to recruit students of color. Moreover, when they were recruiting students of color, the expectation was that they would assimilate into the community like the other interns. They were using the student experiences as tokens that the company could represent to appeal to people like Chelsey who were looking for both professional/personal growth and a community. These experiences were not representative of the experience that everyone has within the organization but rather, snippets

that made the organization look good without accessing their internal cultural problems. Jordan's experience also demonstrates that his organization did not think about their internal problems when promoting it to others.

Throughout his interview, Jordan comments on the ways in which his organization struggles to connect with low-income people of color in the communities they serve, and this is apparent in their recruiting strategy. His organization is affiliated with his university so they recruit through the university. However, it seems as if both the organization and university barely promote the program. Second, they are not affiliated with organizations that serve low-income students or students of color. Like Chelsey's organization, they are not intentionally seeking out students of color or low-income students. The organization is missing viewpoints from potential interns who could provide insight on the communities that they are serving because they are a part of them. However, because of the exclusive nature of the organization, it sticks within the monocultural boundaries and continues to include voices that they believe will fit into their current organizational model as opposed to pushing for different viewpoints to be included. This demonstrates that in both Chelsey and Jordan's organizations, they end up interviewing/hiring those who are "the best fit" or the "best qualified" for the space based on their exclusive standards.

Transitional Organizations: Recruitment Alongside False Promises (Jasmine and Lauren)

Jasmine and Lauren both mentioned their recruiting processes. Jasmine mentioned it briefly in speaking about the perceptions of her organization and the type of students they were attempting to attract towards the positions. She perceived it as a place where leaders would be able to take challenging roles in these challenging times and be a great leader. However, the experiences of exclusion that she experienced demonstrated that despite the advertisement and

external reflection of the space, internally, students from diverse backgrounds had to face the burden of exclusion as well as working with the office to solve external campus problems.

Lauren's office had a very hectic recruiting system. She did not expect this because of the prestige that her organization had as well as what the foundation that she was going to be working towards represented. It seems unclear if they were attempting to attract diverse talent, however as mentioned above, the intern class did end up being diverse in terms of race and class. Despite this, she had a complex recruitment process that was confusing and difficult to navigate. She got her offer to work at the office a week before the internship started. Additionally, they sent her about 20 forms that they expected to be returned the next day. Lauren acknowledged that she did not have a printer and that the one-day orientation was haphazard. This demonstrates that Lauren's organization is operating transitionally because they have class expectations of their interns. Due to the last minute nature of things, they expected that their interns would have access to make last minute accommodations for things like housing as well as access to forms. This is something that typically students from privileged economic backgrounds would have more access to because of the funds available to them as well as secure home environments (Rivera 2015). Lauren mentioned that the interns who ended up working alongside her were students of color from low-income backgrounds. This lack of attention to detail shows how the class culture of the environment heavily influenced the organization's inability to recognize class differences between the organization, staff, and the interns that they were hiring. This exclusivity made it especially difficult for a student from a low-income background, such as Lauren, to navigate.

Inclusive Organizations: Recruitment With Intent to Racially Diversify the Workforce (Daniella and Mike)

Daniella's organization was actively looking to recruit interns that were students of color by collaborating with a program that connects students of color with various business companies. In recognizing that the organization was predominantly white, the company reached out to the program in order to increase their level of racial diversity and representation. This was to fulfill their mission towards accomplishing "a rebirth" around racial diversity and inclusion. This was important to Daniella because she felt that it was important for her to "see diversity" demonstrating how for some, seeing a variety of representation can make a difference. Mike's organization also recognized that there were a limited amount of diverse candidates going into law school and even a smaller amount graduating from law school. To combat this, they pledged themselves to a five-year goal along with over 30 different companies and five other law firms demonstrating their commitment to diversity, they promised to put money on this line to reach this goal. More specifically, they were able to pinpoint where they were lacking in terms of diversity, saying that they wanted the leadership at the partner level of the firm to match the same number of diverse students leaving law school.

For both organizations, this resulted in a large number of interns of color. However, there were still small numbers of *black* interns within the organization. This can be explained by the different negative perceptions that the standards of whiteness perpetuate about black people, especially around professionalism, body, and aggression that differs from other racial groups (e.g., model minority and the Asian population). Additionally, black first-gen students are often not able to make it into elite fields such as Mike and Daniella's because of the elite academic and professional pipeline that emphasizes both cultural and economic capital (Rivera 2015). Mike noticed that overall there were six black interns and in his specific office there were three. Daniella said that the intern class was diverse and in terms of people of color generally but,

within her own group three of the seven interns were black women. She said that this was "really nice" because "most of the time it's just you." Because of the recruitment efforts demonstrated by their organizations, Mike and Daniella did not feel alone and they often felt as though they were able to be their authentic selves, which will be discussed within the networking and working identity sections later on. This effort prevented the harmful effect of being tokenized and hyper visible. Daniella and Mike did not adopt invisibility syndrome because they did not have to adjust their behaviors to feel acceptance thus preserving their authentic identities and feelings of self (Franklin 1999; Holder et al. 2015; Solorzano et al. 2000). Therefore, they were able to preserve themselves and contribute that authenticity to the workspace.

Conclusions & Comparisons

Recruitment is the first point of contact that a potential candidate has with their potential company. When a company's "diversity" initiatives are rooted primarily in recruitment strategies to only increase representation, it can make it difficult for students who are from historically subjugated backgrounds to authentically be themselves within the workspace and feel valued because of their difference (Acker 2006; Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). In exclusive organizations, because of the little acknowledgement that there is around racism, sexism, and classism, they hire those who are "the best fit" or "best qualified" but those standards are heavily influenced by the exclusive culture that permeates the workspace. This leads to a variety of problems for black interns down the line, as they may be surrounded by other black interns/staff and marginalized interns/staff but still have to assimilate further into the exclusive culture as opposed to being accepted as self. Transitional organizations have similar issues, except on the surface they advertise and represent themselves as places where differences will be highlighted and accepted as a part of the organization but this representation and advertisement is symbolic.

This is demonstrated by Lauren's experience with an onboarding process that did not account for intern's class background.

Inclusive organizations such as Daniella and Mike are doing the best in terms of recruitment because of their efforts to acknowledge the inequities within their respective fields and to address them by specifically hiring those from historically marginalized backgrounds. Their efforts drastically differ from the transitional and exclusive organizations because of their effort to reach out to those from historically marginalized backgrounds and grant them with the skills and resources to perform well in their industry and in their organizations.

These findings confirm the literature in terms how organizational climates reflect the implementation and outcomes of recruitment efforts, the reflections on transitional organizational climates highlight the problems with relying solely on an "intention to diversity" rather than instituting accountability measures that ensure efforts are not merely symbolic.

Networking, Mentorship, and Advocacy

Exclusive Organizations: Seeking Networks for Advancement and Support in a Monolithic Culture with White Norms (Chelsey, Jordan, and Calvin)

Professional Networking: Career Support & Mentorship

All of the interns within the exclusive organizations had a different connection to networking. Jordan felt that he was not able to connect within his organization or to his white advisor because of her lack of awareness around racism and socio-economic status. He acknowledged that he would be able to build a better relationship with someone if they had a higher level of racial consciousness or socio-economic status. He also acknowledged that he would prefer to connect with someone who "comes from a similar background as himself." At

Chelsey's internship, there were institutional measures in place that connected her with someone within the company.

> "He was just some [college] guy who was like 'we just get drunk on Friday and I'm doing this for only two years, I'm working my way up to do private equity. My dad works on Wall Street and told me not to work on Wall Street. In my neighborhood people's parents got arrested for white collar crime.' So, he was not a good mentor."

Struggling to cultivate relationships with those around you at work can cause people to miss out on necessary steps for career success and advancement (Pitcan et al. 2018). Additionally, if the organization builds in a networking program that connects people randomly it can be particularly harmful within a space where most employees adhere to the standards of exclusivity and whiteness, especially to those who need networking experiences to advance themselves within the organization because they fall outside of the dominant norms. While institutionalizing mentoring programs is a plus and might signal a transitional organization, because her organization lacked recognizing the importance of people connecting across similar experiences, she had to do extra work to make professional connections with someone who was not assigned to her and could assist her in advancing professionally. For her this person was a white, older male partner who helped her figure out what she wanted from her experience and because of his professional support, she came back for a second year in order to be able to apply what she learned in class as well as her interests. Outside of that, she did not consider anyone else to be a mentor because "they seemed so much busier and settled into their lives that they didn't really care about" her. This demonstrates that the exclusivity of the organization hindered the organization's ability to see the ways in which those outside of the cultural norms of whiteness struggled to find people to connect with because it was a less open environment.

Calvin also speaks to this experience of exclusivity. He felt like he could not fit in because of his leftist ideology as well as his aversion to alpha males. Additionally, he spoke about being passed up for networking opportunities:

> "…Nobody grouped together more than the white guys did with each other. Um, often times they would get invited to go out with other analysts… a lot of these senior people they have been doing this for a long time but…are just like really awkward and they kind of just look for the person they would be most familiar with and that's just like a white dude."

Calvin's experience reflects that of in-group bias, where white people reward and acknowledge other white people because of the presumption that someone who is white will be more favorable because of similar looks (Schnake et al. 2006; Stangor et al. 2014). This in-group creates mobility for those who are within the dominant cultural group or ascribe to those ideologies, thus those who are outside of this group are alienated, dejected, and miss out on important networking opportunities (Pitcan et al. 2018). Calvin noticed that although black senior managers and employees were often not treated well, so in order to make valuable connections they meshed with the alpha-male capitalist corporate culture.

Personal Networking: Support and Connection

The personal connections that were being made in these exclusive organizations, when available, presented opportunities for the interns to cope with their situations. In Chelsey's situation, she developed connections with a diverse group of fellow interns that were mostly personal where they were able to "talk a lot about how we grew up, navigating the job process, or college process as a person of color." These connections were important to analyzing various

experiences she had within the company, especially when the diversity discussions fell short. Similarly, Jordan found it important to connect with a fellow Asian intern:

> "…at first we were a bit shy because we didn't know if we could find any commonalities like with each other. Um, I think quickly we realized, after hearing our advisor speak that um, we needed…someone to talk to and like work out any problems, we had. But, um, especially when it came to some of the more problematic issues."

His connection with the intern helped him to cope with the various negative and exclusive experiences that they both had because of their minoritized identities. Calvin had a different experience, because of the corporatized nature of his company; personal connections were also saturated with work expectations of connectivity. He was able to connect with them on some level but noted:

> "Work is mostly social stuff. You have to try to connect with the people you're working with because it will make the work better… It kind of naturally happened but it was also like, you guys need to get along because you're working on teams and the work needs to be done and it's better with chemistry."

Because Calvin struggled to connect with anyone due to his leftist status and lack of identification with assimilation and alpha-maleness, it was certainly important that he was able to build some connections within the space even if they were expected because of the work standards. However, these connections did not necessarily seem to help him negotiate his experiences with racism or sexism within the space, rather they just served as a way for him to connect about some of his personality.

Transitional Organizations: Networking for Support and Mentorship Among Increased Racial Representation (Jasmine and Lauren)

Professional Networking: Career Support & Mentorship

Jasmine had a different time connecting with anyone in her office, professional or personal because of the prevalence of microaggressions as well as the people in her office who adhered to the exclusive elements of the organization in order to advance. In order to navigate the space, she explains that she had to connect with a mentor outside of the space who was a white woman that was "always looking out for me, even with jobs or networking and also giving me advice." Although this mentor was not within the space, the literature suggests that finding a mentor that can coach black interns throughout their experience is helpful in mediating the negative aspects of their time as well as helping them with career advancement (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2019; Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015; Pitcan et al. 2018).

In contrast, Lauren had connections with a variety of different networks. She connected with her team members, who were of a variety of different racial backgrounds but were all women. She stays in connection with them to this day to ask about job opportunities. She also connected with two black women who had recently begun working there right out of undergrad that she would ask about upward mobility within the company. On the foundation side, she also made bonds with:

> "…black men and women that work there because like in taking with them we had like really good bonds and stuff like that based on being there and our own history experience and living in New York… [On the corporate side] I only connected with people of color."

Lauren strategically networked with a variety of people from a variety of different backgrounds to ask generally about job opportunities and upward mobility. In making more substantive professional connections, she looked to black employees as well as employees of color to get a more holistic view of the process.

Personal Networking: Support and Connection

Jasmine did not mention having many personal connections and connections built up in her work environment but she did mention that she does have a few peers at work that she asks about experiencing microaggressions from a variety of different racial backgrounds. Because of the exclusive elements of the organization, Jasmine did not feel like she could have meaningful connections with her peers and others because of their lower levels of racial awareness as well as the hurtful comments that they had also said to her. This demonstrates that although there were diverse interns at her job, because of the pervasiveness of the exclusive culture, Jasmine felt alienated from making meaningful connections that would help with coping (Hall et al. 2012).

Lauren discusses having a core group of personal support connections with black women interns at her intern site. They would talk at lengths about not knowing how navigate the workspace or about defending themselves from microaggressions and negative experiences. She describes her conversations with one of those interns as "the venting session of life." Because Lauren was able to make personal connections with these women who had similar levels of racial awareness, she was able to have a space and support group where she could analyze the situation alongside others. The culture was not a place where they could express their authentic feelings or share their problems, so they took advantage of the opportunities that they had to create a space for support. In this network, Lauren and the fellow black women were able to

combat alienation and receive validation from other women who had similar experiences (Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015).

Lauren and Jasmine's experiences demonstrate the importance of personal connections in battling alienation within a workspace because of difference. Because they were in transitional workspaces, they were still experiencing microaggressions and feeling excluded because their presence was being tolerated as opposed to fully accepted into the space (Holvino et al. 2004). Because of this, they still had to seek out personal connections to navigate the exclusiveness of the workspace and to look for substantive support networks that would help them in the space.

Inclusive Organizations: Professional Networking for Support, Mentorship, and Advocacy as Institutional Practices (Daniella and Mike)

Within both organizations, Daniella and Mike felt that they had access to sponsorship because of their ability to network with people in senior positions. The literature demonstrates that support and mentorship by the organizations and those within it is essential to making sure that interns and staff members from diverse backgrounds are included and feel valued within the space as well as important to making sure that those members are able to advance professionally within the organization (Boulton 2016; Pitcan et al. 2018).

Mike said that full time staff members "definitely went above and beyond to sort of accommodate me and counsel me and show me where I could go and what I could do." Mike said that one partner at his firm "took him under his wing" and got him an opportunity to work at the firm during the time he was working to complete his MBA. By having these mentoring experiences, Mike was able to advance within the organization and ensure that people who were in higher positions were advocating for that advancement. Additionally, Mike connected with a

black female employee who mentored him and the other black interns as well as encouraged them to connect with each other. He still keeps in contact with her to this day, even though she is at a different company.

Daniella also had a similar experience to Mike in that she was able to make professional connections and receive mentorship. She connected with the head of talent who was a Middle-Eastern women that "was really helpful" to her by making sure that she was okay and getting the most out of her internship, saying "she really mentored me and gave me life advice." Another woman that she connected with was a woman within the diversity program that the company was collaborating with. She was a black woman who worked in a different department but they "did practice interviews together." She also gave Daniella tips and told her what to look for. Daniella also said that throughout her internship she was able to ask questions, be inquisitive and contribute to conversations with people in senior positions, which made her feel more confident that she would get the job. Both mentors that Daniella connected with had high visibility within the company, which is a key component in creating a more inclusive environment for those with different backgrounds than those within the workspace (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2019; Holder et al. 2015; Pitcan et al. 2018).

These professional networks and connections were a result of individual effort but bolstered by institutionalized practices around the importance of growing diversity and inclusion. Daniella and Mike seem to speak of them as just sort of forming naturally, with that said only the connection between Daniella and the woman from the SEO was formed through an institutional practice. However, once these connections formed, the organization respected these connections by allowing them to grow and ultimately allowing them to affect the decision to hire these interns as full-time staff. This relation between individual effort and institutional support for

professional networks can promote these practices to continue within the organizations at all levels (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). Both Daniella and Mike acknowledge that these networks were essential to their growth as interns and in the future as full-time staff because of the encouragement and support that they provided them. They both want to be able to serve as connections to those who are incoming into the organization as new staff and as interns.

Personal Networking: Support and Connection

Also important to growing as an intern and as a person as well as feeling supported and comfortable within the organization were the personal connections that Mike and Daniella felt to other interns, particularly with interns who were black.

The personal connections that Daniella made were with the other black women interns in her marketing group. She describes their connection as "definitely friendship":

> "I think immediately we were just happy that we were with each other. We hung out outside of work, we also all lived around the same area. Me and one of the girls, we were renting out rooms in NYU dorms that were close to work. And another girl goes to school in New York so she lives around there as well. So we would hang out there and get dinners and go clubbing together."

Similarly, Mike had personal connections with the two other black interns in his office that more closely resembled friendship. He knew one of the them from college and the other attended another college in the Boston area. They would go to diversity events together and the black female mentor he described earlier got the three of them tickets to the company box for a Kendrick Lamar concert.

These personal connections allowed them to build relationships with others who potentially experienced the world in a similar way because of their proximity to racism. In addition, Daniella specifically describes that because of the personal connections she could be herself:

> "I felt like I could express myself fully. I could be silly sometimes, not take things too seriously and no one was really judging me for that. I tend not to take anything seriously but I still get my work done! So, I like that I was able to do that, at least with the internship team. I don't know what it would be like if I were out in the open with everyone else."

These sentiments as expressed by Mike and strongly by Daniella, reflect what is mentioned in the literature in that personal connections are just as important as professional connections when operating within a workspace (Boulton 2016; Pitcan et al. 2018). With these connections, black interns are more able to be their authentic themselves and feel valued as well as supported within the organization thus leading them to more success and positivity about their experience (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2019; Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015; Pitcan et al. 2018).

Conclusions & Comparisons

Because the inclusive organizations supported networking practices and valued those relationships, Mike and Daniella had a more positive relationship to networking and were able to make connections that are more authentic. In the exclusive organizations that focused less on making meaningful professional connections or where the cultures were less accepting of difference, it was harder to make professional connections thus making the interns have to work harder to make meaningful connections that could contribute to their advancement and to their

professional growth. This demonstrates that organizations need to be aware that mentors have to fill various roles. A point that often is not mentioned in the literature. A company that has a one-size fits all mentoring model can lead to exclusive results.

Not all interns had mentors and networked with people who were black. Some felt that it did not matter if their mentor were black or not but they were able to connect more deeply with black employees. Daniella was not able to connect with many black senior female staff because of the low level of diversity within the organization and the strained relationship that the company allegedly has with black women. However, she did not mind that her most personal relationship was with a woman who was outside of her identity category. However, this could have been heightened by the inclusive nature of organization, making it so that professional connections across race and identity were still just as important for upward mobility. Jasmine explicitly said that her mentor was not a person of color but:

> "…just because someone is a person of color their mentor doesn't have to be a person of color they just have to like, be like, able to understand and get it."

I think that Jasmine's comment is really important because it highlights that black people do not naturally gravitate towards each other. First, people from different backgrounds should be able to grasp racism, even if it is not by firsthand experience, because we are all effected by it and because of how it shapes our society. Secondly, black people do bond but, it is important to note that this bond is built on their perceived shared African ancestry, their experiences within the workplace and America in general as well as their build to connections based on similarity of experience and proximity to racism (Fields and Fields 2012).

In the cases where interns connected with other black people at their internships, it was typically because they had similar levels of racial awareness and the way that racism affected them in the space. For example, in the inclusive organizations, Mike and Daniella connected with other black interns in order to feel less alone, and more supported in the space. Lauren, of a transitional organization, felt less alone when connecting with other black women interns about their experiences of racism (covert and overt) within the workspace. The interns that Lauren, Mike, and Daniella connected with on a personal level had similar levels of racial awareness as them and were able to converse about how they were being affected by the exclusive elements of their organizational cultures. Trepagnier's (2016) work informs the literature that advocates for same race matching mentors in that the mentor's degree of racial awareness is key in providing needed support.

In the exclusive organizations, there was less of an ability to connect with black interns because they were either not there, in Jordan's case, or they did not have similar levels of racial awareness, like in Calvin's case. This stifled their ability to process their experience with fellow interns who were in the organization.

Diversity Discussions, Trainings, and Groups (ERGs)

Exclusive Organizations: Wanting More from Diversity Discussions (Chelsey, Calvin, and Jordan)

Jordan's organization did not make a pledge towards diversity and inclusion nor did they acknowledge the way that attentiveness to diversity and inclusion efforts could help them provide the communities they serve with adequate healthcare information and access. He was shocked to learn that even his manager had little "awareness when it came to racial identity or

socio-economic status" considering the populations that his organization was serving. In terms of language and communication with those communities, the organization relied on an intern who was Asian to communicate with community members of Asian descent, because they assumed she could speak different languages. So, rather than focusing on increasing representation within the organization to match that of the community and understanding the barriers from getting the community their needs, this organization was actively avoiding addressing issues externally and internally despite their awareness that the communities that they were serving were diverse.

In contrast, Chelsey and Calvin's organizations did make efforts to address diversity and inclusion but those efforts fell short. Their organizations were more focused on demonstrating diversity by tokenizing members who were people of color within the organization. Chelsey's organization used:

> "…those one liners that are like 'oh we're like so diverse!' and 'look at this picture of a first year staff.' That's what they did during our training, they brought in like 2-3 people of color and they talked about their experience and they were like 'see we're diverse!'"

They were making verbal and visual commitments to diversity but not acknowledging the importance of inclusion going alongside of that. Therefore, the people from "historically excluded identity groups" were not being encouraged to be themselves, they were still be encouraged to assimilate into the culture and avoid addressing institutional problems that were working against diversity and inclusion within the organization (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). For example, during one of the diversity and inclusion events:

> "We went around and someone from South Africa was like 'I don't see color, I don't see why this is a huge debate'… You could cut the tension with a knife. And they didn't ever address… You know when they make that blanketed statement; it was not the way to go about it. They brought in a person of color who works there and…he was just like 'I love my team and I'm included' and we just wanted him to be real and have an honest conversation with us about diversity and inclusion."

Even though the company was hosting diversity and inclusion discussions, because they did not have a full understanding of diversity and inclusion issues that exist and could arise in conversation, they often were not adequately addressed. This left Chelsey feeling defeated saying she was "done with the look it up and look at these two people who are black in our workspace!" She was frustrated and looking for "less of a PR situation, sit there and have a conversation about it." The company's lack of attention to diversity and inclusion outside of appearance left her feeling frustrated with the company and feeling like another way to increase diversity as opposed to an important member of the workspace.

Calvin had a similar perspective on the lack of diversity and inclusion within the workspace and mentioned that it was "clearly mandatory and not genuine." The diversity and inclusion events at his organization were typically hosted by black members of the organizations demonstrating that this was not a fully integrated effort and the task was mostly left to those who were already facing exclusion because of their identity. When discussing issues around exclusion because of identity senior staff members would say:

> "…just kind of comes with the job… a lot of the senior black people are not really invested in changing it they just do their jobs really well and help other black people do their jobs really well. And they don't try to address, evaluate, and critique the

environment they just kind of hope change happens organically with more black people in the space."

Because of the burden that was placed on the black employees to facilitate diversity and inclusion discussions, they were more focused on preserving themselves and coping as opposed to changing the environment. When educating younger members of the company on this, they continued to emphasize coping through assimilation into whiteness as opposed to being your authentic self within the environment (Carbado and Gulati 2013). This is another sign that being one's authentic self is not supported within the space, thus contributing to the exclusive nature. The exclusive nature of an organization like Calvin's demonstrates that because the standards of whiteness are so influential upon the space, the mission, practices, and culture are inherently exclusive of those who are not members of the dominant group or willing to conform to this standards (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). This stifles conversations and efforts around diversity and inclusion and makes the environment more draining and hostile for those who are outside the dominant group's ideals.

Transitional Organizations: Symbolic Diversity and Inclusion (Lauren and Jasmine)

Jasmine described her organization's diversity and inclusion as being similar to going to church on Christmas and there are more people there who do not typically attend. To her this meant that there was a lot of talk surrounding diversity when there was an event but never in conversations that carry on every day. She also said that these conversations were more about diversity through representation of different and less about including those different backgrounds. Additionally in her office:

> "We have different programs that teach us about diversity. Sometimes I wish those conversations would carry ore out and be better for some people because like, to stop microaggressions things like that have to happen."

Jasmine's organization is transitional because they are attempting to have conversations that are centered on diversity but they only occur around certain events and are missing the element of inclusion. This means that they are tolerating these diversity conversations because of the diversity of the office but also because they pertain to the events that the office hosts. However, once those events are over, diversity and inclusion is not carried into the everyday experiences and mission of the office (Holvino et al. 2004). Hence, the reason that people from historically oppressed backgrounds such as Jasmine experience things like microaggressions by people who she thought cared about diversity & inclusion efforts and lack connection to the space (Shore et al. 2018).

Lauren had a similar experience in terms of D&I efforts within her company. Because the foundation side of her organization was focused on issues that specifically focused on people of color, they felt that they did not need to have a D&I division. The transitional nature of this is evident here because the organization did not feel that diversity and inclusion did not need to be explicitly included at all levels, rather they emphasized the importance of it being passively implied through their programs (Holvino et al. 2004). The diversity and inclusion efforts were concentrated under the D&I division through the HR program on the business side but it was "kind of a hot mess" because it was in the beginning stages and the lack of alignment on a global scale around D&I. However, the company was working to develop it by:

> "…doing research and then working with actual employees and working with retention and like, seeing how the employees are being supported and stuff like that um, so I would say that is something that is very actively being thought about."

Lauren's company's commitment to diversity on the business side feels less symbolic than in Jasmine's organization because although the team was disorganized, they were still working towards communicating with employees about their issues with diversity and inclusion efforts. This gives employees from different backgrounds, especially those from historically excluded backgrounds, some level of institutional and systemic power because they are getting an actual say in how the organization handles diversity and inclusion. Despite this important step towards inclusivity, this is still being done within a somewhat exclusive framework (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). This will be exemplified in later sections when I demonstrate how Lauren's company worked to uphold white standards in other ways.

Inclusive Organizations: Proactively Addressing Anticipated Inequality (Mike and Daniella)

Daniella's company pledged to:

> "…reimagining and rebirth. They really had to push themselves to get that new and different/diverse talent. That would be what would propel them."

They did so by collaborating with an organization that specialized in connecting diverse intern candidates with companies. The literature suggests that it is not just enough to point out and publicly pledge your commitment to diversity, the organization also has to work to find the problems and increase inclusion at all levels internally for success (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). Based on Mike and Daniella's description, this is what is being done at their organizations.

In terms of internal diversity and inclusion efforts, those were mostly channeled into diversity events that staff and interns were invited to. At Mike's organization, he mentions and the organization website confirms that there is a committee on racial and ethnic diversity that staff are encouraged to participate in order to create a path for attorneys and law students of color to advance within their careers and build meaningful fellowship in order to attract better talent and better serve their clients. This is similar to Daniella's organization, except that she described more Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that represent more specific identity categories such as women, LGBTQ+, and black employees. Within these ERGs, employees spoke about the struggles that they had experienced along their way to success without explicitly saying something like "'I have experienced racism.'" They also addressed intersectionality, when the black ERG acknowledged that "the women's group wouldn't be intersectional because it is mostly white women so black women wouldn't feel as comfortable in that space." Both Mike and Daniella's organization had groups where discussions could be had about diversity and inclusion as well as how certain identity groups struggle within monocultural organizations to achieve success. However, it seems as though within those conversations there was a lack of acknowledgement of the actual structures in place that contributed to their domination such as racism or sexism. So, although they were providing a space for conversation and motivation for diverse employees, there was still a lack of outward acknowledgement of how structural inequalities are creating these situations of different oppressed groups. Thus, the organizations have an okay analysis of diversity issues and what serve as barriers to inclusion but this analysis seems unwilling to call out the actual structure by name, which is important to making a truly inclusive organization (Holvino et al. 2004). Despite this, Mike and Daniella still felt that these

efforts were adequate in creating a more positive space for their growth and development as interns as well as bringing people from diverse backgrounds together around issues.

Conclusions & Comparisons

Daniella expressed that she enjoyed her company's internal efforts to create spaces where people could have conversations about their identities and the intersections of them. Even though she acknowledges that people did not necessarily say, "'I have experienced racism'" by "being professional about it and dancing around major issues" she still felt they were being honest about their path and that it helped her relate to the space. In contrast, some interns felt as though these veiled conversations about racism were not enough and made them feel more disconnected. Unlike Daniella, Chelsey and Calvin did not have a positive space where they could flesh out the extent of challenges that people outside of the dominant narrative face within the organization. In her company's spaces, Chelsey often felt those conversations were just moments that boosted the external appearance of the organization as opposed to made changes within the organizations. The dishonesty and veiled nature around the diversity and inclusion aspects within her company really made her feel more disconnected to the space and its efforts to include diverse voices. To Calvin, it also seems that these veiled conversations contributed to a feeling of assimilation as opposed to acceptance. Like Calvin and Chelsey, Jasmine's experience in a transitional organization shows that she was experiencing diversity discussions but only when they pertained to diversity events within her organization. They were also veiled and did not carry into the day-to-day experiences of the organization, thus demonstrating their symbolic nature. They were discussions that were meant to boost the appearance of diversity to outside actors without enacting them to internal interns and employees.

In taking Calvin, Chelsey, Jasmine and Daniella's thoughts on the substance of their diversity and inclusion conversations into account how can companies truly find a balance in talking about diversity and inclusion? A structure like Daniella's makes it easier to talk about diversity and inclusion but not so easy to talk about power and structural change. However, Chelsey acknowledged that diversity, inclusion, power, and structures can be difficult for people to talk about and can make people uncomfortable. When simply alluding to the structures, it puts less pressure on individual actors as well as the company itself to call out racism and sexism and other intersecting forms of oppression. However, is it enough to have employees talk about their challenges without calling out the structural inequities that created those challenges? Calvin, Chelsey, Jasmine and the literature would suggest that it's not, but taking Daniella's experience into account it seems that it is more important to have a safe space where those things can be discussed, even if it is not in great detail (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). Based on the participant responses, it seems that although inclusive organizations may not be facilitating conversations that tackle power structures or even make structural change, they succeed at making employees feel more included because of the space for discussions around diversity and inclusion. In contrast, exclusive organizations are failing to tackle power structures but also at what may be more important, providing safe spaces for employees and interns to share their authentic thoughts about anything related to diversity and inclusion. Transitional organizations are somewhat in the middle of that paradigm, providing safe spaces for employees and interns to share thoughts about diversity and inclusion but in a veiled and scarce manner that does not carry into day-to-day strategies and initiatives.

Microaggressions/Stereotype Threat

Exclusive Organizations: Inability to Be Self and Battling Incorrect Perceptions of Self (Chelsey, Calvin, and Jordan)

Because of the exclusive nature of Jordan and Calvin's organizations, there were more microaggressions than there were in the other interns' experiences. Because of the hypervisibility of people within Jordan's organization due to the racial demographics but also because of the way that those outside of the dominant cultural code were treated, people like Jordan and a fellow Asian intern were especially visible. An Asian intern was assumed to speak multiple languages just because she was Asian. After disclosing this to me, Jordan disclosed a microaggression that occurred against him when he showed a presentation he had worked on to his colleagues and another student said:

> "'Oh I'm surprised this is very neat and articulate.' And I was like okay what did you expect it to be? She was like 'no I just mean that it was better than I thought it was going to be, I'm proud of you.' It felt very much like I'm better than you but here you are. So that kind of made me feel horrible."

It is important to note that when speaking to me Jordan did not know if this incident classified as a microaggression, demonstrating how even those with high racial awareness struggle with the invisibility of racism and their explicit as well as their subtle manifestations (Sue et al. 2007). This is an instance of a microaggression where a colleague, sending a message to him that he and his perceived work ethic were not meant to be a part of that particular workspace, questioned Jordan about his capabilities and experiences around exclusion (Marshall 2016). This experience made Jordan feel particularly alone because he knew there was no one he

could even talk to about this within the organization and that his skills were being questioned because of his identity. Calvin also spoke about microaggressions as a daily experience.

Chelsey, Jordan and Calvin all mentioned their apprehension to be themselves because of stereotype threat. Jordan said that the:

> "…older adults that worked within the organization kind of assume based off of how you speak if you are capable of doing some of the projects, um, which is a little bit frustrating."

In order to get the projects that he wanted, he felt that he had to code his speech (see working identity below for more on this phenomenon) in order to sound more competent and to appease the senior staff members in order to get a chance at projects. This demonstrates that the exclusive nature bolsters the need for interns outside of the dominant group to analyze the situation for stereotype threats and alter their behavior to better fit the standards in order to achieve advancement within the organization (Roberson and Kulik 2007). Because exclusive organizations do not attempt to interrogate the ways that their standards and employees are saturated with racism, racist standards are placed upon black employees and interns and they are encouraged to dispel them in order to not be perceived negatively (Roberson and Kulik 2007; Steele and Aronson 1995). Calvin also acknowledges this saying:

> "…as a black person like can't be as expressive especially with negative emotions, people see you as more of a walking liability, um, in some people confidence is really resect but kind of less so if you're black. I don't know you're seen as more cocky and outside of racial boundary."

Here, Calvin clearly acknowledges that because he is a black person, he is aware of the stereotypes that exist about his actions and expressions and is aware that he cannot act in that way because he does not want to be negatively perceived within the space. Calvin and Jordan felt the need to act in a way that would display the negative ideals placed upon them because of racism and sexism. Black men are especially seen as more hyper-visible aggressive because of historical stereotypes centered around black rage (Ford 2008). The intersection of Calvin's and Jordan's identities as black and male heightens their experiences with perceived aggression within the workspace, demonstrating how oppressive forces work together in order to create this specific Chelsey also acknowledges her experiences with stereotype but they are more about physical dress and appearance:

> "…I was like okay I can't walk in, like you know how you do like box braids, and so when I went in I would make sure my hair is combed and looked okay. And by the end I realized they didn't care. And maybe it was because we were at our client site and our clients were government employees. It was a majority black office."

At first, in order to draw less attention to her hair she made sure that it was combed but her experience with stereotype threat was mediated by having a majority black office client site where Chelsey assumed the staff had higher levels of racial awareness. Chelsey's experience also speaks to the intersection between racism and sexism as she had felt more pressure upon her appearance. Black women are often hyper-visible because of aspects that are related to their physical appearances (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Ford 2008). The only thing mediating that stereotype threat and hypervisibility was working at a client site that was majority black and more inclusive than her actual organization.

Transitional Organizations: Minimization of Microaggressions in a Climate of Low Racial Awareness (Lauren and Jasmine)

Jasmine felt less included in her office space and less of an ability to be authentic because of the microaggressions that she experienced throughout her time there. She mentioned that because:

> "The office is so diverse you would think like, we are all connected like we would kind of have this understanding of like, in a way of like what it's like to be different. And sometime when the comments are mean it…causes some distance with some people."

Because of the organization's commitment to symbolic diversity and inclusion, the office hired other students who were people of color yet, they were students who assimilated into the exclusive aspects of the culture by contributing in punishing those who were different from the mainstream culture in order to gain success (Holvino et al. 2004; Roberson and Kulik 2007). Jasmine also experienced a microaggression with a staff member in a position of power on Halloween.

> "I was wearing like a black hoodie, like that was a stressful day. I had my hood on and one of the staff came up to me she was like you look like a thug but you look comfortable though. And she just walked away…without even noticing like what she said of…how, me being a person of color, what that could mean for me."

The person who said this to Jasmine was "the same person who was preaching 'oh this is such a diverse and important space or whatever.'" This made Jasmine feel less comfortable addressing the microaggression with her. She felt as though the staff member would say "…I'm

sorry that you felt that way" as opposed to "I'm sorry that I made you feel that way." This demonstrates that the organization has leaders who appear to be committed to diversity but have low levels of racial awareness and are unaware of the way that their own subtle and invisible racism makes the space more exclusive for black interns like Jasmine (Sue et al. 2007; Trepagnier 2016). Instances like these make it difficult for black interns to advocate for themselves because they feel like the superiors in the organization would not understand nor would they know how to address their feelings of discomfort.

Lauren had a similar experience with people in power perpetuating racism, where white women got praise for small things like creating PowerPoint slides and were not spoken to about inappropriate dress. In contrast, black women felt they needed to be more guarded and work harder around superiors and were spoken to more often about appearance.

> "Sometimes like my friend, she was larger, she was a black woman, and she had a larger body…larger backside and like if she would wear …a professional black dress but it was tighter, she was spoken to…while this woman would literally just wear like a flower dress and like extremely short, saw multiple times on the clear stair case things people didn't want to see…and like she was never talked to."

Her superiors perpetuated the difference in acceptable behavior between black and white women thus demonstrating that they also had invisible and explicit understandings about the black female body that were racist and hypersexualizing (Collins 2000; Ford 2008; Sue et al. 2007). Thus, in the space, white women were protected from experiencing that and black women were hyper visible and overly exposed to exclusive behavior. In order to protect themselves from treatment like that, the black women in Lauren's workspace attempted to thwart off stereotype threat by self-censoring and "being that overachiever just to stand out a little bit more" in a

positive way by staying at work longer and doing more work. This was done in hopes that it would help protect them from receiving negative feedback by superiors and to be seen more positively as opposed to being seen as negative because of their black and female status (Roberson and Kulik 2007; Steele and Aronson 1995). The black female interns at this organization were praised for their work but only when they were working harder than their fellow white female interns were. Lauren's workspace is transitional because her superiors perpetuated stereotypes about black women by praising their overachiever status and punishing them for their bodies while praising white women for the minimum and allowing them to dress the way they wanted to. So while black women were being praised, they were still being praised within the context of white standards and expectations as opposed to allowing the black women to be themselves and understand the different ways that racism and sexism intersect to effect their experience (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Ford 2008; Holvino et al. 2004)

Inclusive Organizations: Ability to "Be Authentic" and "Feel Valued" (Daniella and Mike)

Both Daniella and Mike felt as though their organizations really supported their authentic selves and felt like they did not experience excluding experiences. When asking Daniella about exclusive experiences she replied:

> "No I don't think so. I just really felt natural in that space. Sometimes more natural than I even do at college, which is crazy. It was definitely really freeing."

In asking Mike this question, he said something very similar:

> "To today, I have never experienced things like that at the firm, granted big law has like a reputation for being a toxic culture. This firm for anyone from any background who I have spoke to have said it is inclusive and accepting,

> welcoming sort of form even though you are expected to work ridiculous hours. With that said, knowing what the lifestyle would have been I think that is why I like sought out this form because I knew it had a great reputation for the people there and how they treat you. So, I have not had any experiences like that but I can't necessarily say it is the same for the big law culture in general across other big firms."

Although I felt Daniella and Mike had moderate levels of racial awareness and were not operating color blindly, there could be a few explanations for why they did not feel they had exclusive experiences. The first could be that they both did not recognize when exclusive experiences were occurring because of how easy it is for racist comments or actions to occur covertly and invisibly (Rothenberg 2016; Sue 2016; Wellman 2003). Mike specifically cites that his industry's culture is toxic and that he has to adhere to an "unspoken rule" around appearance in order to avoid stereotype threat yet feels as though he has not seen it in the variety of time he has worked there. Earlier on in the interview, Daniella mentioned that black women and her company "don't mix" yet, her as a black woman also seems to think she has not experienced this not mixing. Additionally, because they felt so accepted and free in throughout their experiences, they could have easily dismissed subtle microaggressive actions or exclusive experiences as a way to cope with those few negative experiences and preserve the positive experience they had. Clearly, people within their organizations are feeling some type of exclusion, which would explain the need for ERGs to serve as a space for meaningful support, connection, and acceptance. The existence of these ERGs would help with the interns' ability to cope with subtle microaggressive or exclusive experiences. Additionally, because Daniella and Mike attended PWIs, they may have learned coping skills that help them deal with or ignore subtle racism.

Lastly, perhaps their organizations are doing such a great job at increasing the awareness around inclusion at the company that the employees around them were more conscious of racism and sexism and how that may affect interns, fellow employees, and the overall work dynamic. Although, I seem to think that this last explanation is less of a reason because of the pervasiveness of racism and sexism within organizations and their ability to operate covertly (Rothenberg 2016; Sue 2016; Wellman 2003).

Conclusions & Comparisons

Jordan and Jasmine had the most explicit experiences with microaggressions but that does not mean that they were not happening on a daily basis to them or others, as is evident from Calvin's experience. This demonstrates that across all types of organizations, exclusion can be present in subtle ways.

It seems that what most successfully is able to combat microaggressive and other exclusive experiences in the workspace is having higher racial awareness among employees and interns. For example, in Chelsey's experience, being around people with perceived higher levels of racial awareness seem to quell negative comments or microaggressions from being expressed. In the inclusive organizations, this also seemed to be true. Because the participants respective companies acknowledged recognized the various exclusive elements of their respective industries, the participants felt that those around them had higher levels of racial awareness and therefore acceptance of their true selves.

The way that exclusion seemed to be the most prevalent in these experiences, especially in the transitional and inclusive organizations, was through stereotype threat. All participants felt the initial pressure to conform to various standards and "unspoken rules" about appearance and

behavior. These standards were heavily influenced by the intersections of race and gender. In the exclusive and transitional organizations, the women's feelings of stereotype threat were guided by standards of appearance, whether than meant hair or dress. This demonstrates that their organizations have explicit and invisible understandings about the black female body and hair that are racist and hypersexualizing (Collins 2000; Ford 2008; Sue et al. 2007). The stereotype threat that effected the black men were also grounded in historically perpetuated narratives about black masculinity that are related to their personalities, specifically perceived aggression and arrogance (Ford 2008). These occurrences demonstrate that organization's standards do not only rely on racism but on the way that racism intersects with sexism to create specific oppressive scripts that black men and women are expected to follow based on their identities. In order for organizations to combat exclusivity in their organizations, they have to acknowledge the ways that oppression intersects in order to create higher levels of inclusiveness and ensure that they are not combatting racism and sexism separately because of the way that they intertwine (Acker 2006; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989).

Working Identity/Imposter Syndrome

Exclusive Organizations: Presenting Acceptable Versions of Blackness to Gain Acceptance and Advancement (Chelsey, Calvin, Jordan)

Outside of physical appearance, Chelsey felt like she could be herself throughout her internship experience, but this was specifically because her client site was inclusive and predominantly black. She expressed that if she we were in the organization's office that was "heavily, heavily white" she wouldn't have felt as comfortable being herself. However because she worked across from the clients who were:

> "…5 black women and everything was in earshot. So I think that if someone said something, I knew I was in a safe community...if someone had [exclusive] attitudes it would be really difficult for it to be voiced and someone would pick up very easily."

Because her client site was so diverse and inclusive, over time she was more easily able to be herself and feel like her work was professionally valued. In contrast, Jordan and Calvin did not have a space where they could be themselves. Specifically, Jordan said he was constantly filtering what he was saying and that meant "a lot of code switching and like always just thinking of Goffman's presentation of self." He felt like he had to code switch to present a certain version of himself within the workspace that could adhere to the professional standards of whiteness that exist. Like Jordan, Calvin really felt as though he had to be a different version of himself. Specifically, he would do this in order to make himself seem more palatable towards other staff members and interns. For example, he likes to meditate but when someone would ask him about what he did over the weekend he would say:

> "Oh, I went skiing and things like that. You kind of have to like fit into that box because um, you can have technical skills but when the other bosses want to hire you, it's like can you walk the walk and talk the talk…can you fit into that environment? And it's not an environment for us. So you have to kind of mold yourself to it."

Calvin recognized that he could not be himself if he wanted to advance within the organization so, he had to be an alternate version of himself to create connections and advance professionally. In developing this working identity, Calvin recognized that identities that were closely attributed to whiteness gained social and economic capital within the workspace

(Carbado and Gulati 2013). By distancing himself from their identity and authentic self and assimilating into whiteness through restricting identity expression he was more able to navigate the workspace but also more alienated from himself because his authentic identity could not be fully embedded in the environment (Dickens and Chavez 2018). This distancing causes imposter syndrome because although Calvin was qualified to be within the space as his authentic self, he had feelings of self-doubt about that authentic self, thus he molded himself into the environment to cope with that. This is a phenomena that both Jordan and Calvin had to experience in their everyday environments in order to preserve their workplace position at the expense of their own identities.

Transitional Organizations: Walking the Line of Authenticity and Assimilation (Lauren and Jasmine)

Both Lauren and Jasmine acknowledged that professionalism comes differently for people of color and it is something that you have to learn in the job itself. In the process of learning about professionalism within a workspace that is transitional, Lauren and Jasmine felt as though they could only be authentic to an extent.

Jasmine acknowledged this around the standards of professionalism, speech, and dress.

> "…when it's something like with the physical appearance when I'm going to an event… I feel like I need to dress up. I need to know that I look right or like [change] the way I talk. I hate to say but sometimes…I will talk to my friends who are also people of color differently than like when I'm meeting people at a networking event in the office or when I'm talking to people in higher positions."

Jasmine feels like she needs to change herself in order to match her surroundings. She felt that she had to change her speech and the way that she looked in order to match the professional standards of whiteness that exist within her workspace. She felt that she had to be a different version of herself to be presentable in networking and professional situations, thus seeming more acceptable to them.

Similarly, Lauren felt that she had to present a different version of herself in various work situations through self-censoring in order to make other people "feel just so, comfortable in their white space." Firstly, Lauren worked in an open office and the staff told her on the first day "people are actually watching what you do" signaling to her that this job was all about appearance. She knew that in order to get a job and good references that she would have to play into what people wanted. Lauren would often be the only black person in political conversations in her area and she felt that she could participate but only to a certain extent.

> "Because you can't actually be your authentic self. You can't like speak. And that's like stuff I care about. And that's something I'm really passionate about. I could like have these conversations all day if I could, so that like kind of just like bothered me that those moments are when I explicitly felt like I couldn't do that."

Lauren never felt that she could fully share her opinion in open political conversations only partially because she didn't want people to cast judgement on her for always bringing up the black point of view nor did she feel comfortable calling out her superiors for saying things that were offensive within those conversations. In some ways, Lauren's work environment is working towards inclusivity because they are able to hold conversations about people from different backgrounds and the way that certain political structures affect them. However, because in those conversations Lauren felt she could not fully address structural problems with her colleagues, she

was not able to be herself or fully flesh out oppression with her colleagues. This is another way that whiteness is still operating invisibly in the workplace because the black person is being silenced and controlled at the expense of their own self while well-meaning white people are having "progressive" conversations about political disadvantages for various groups (Acker 2006; Kelly and Smith 2014). Lauren said the times where she really felt included were the times when the foundation was discussing the different causes that they wanted to contribute to and she could bring in the way racism effects that discussion.

Inclusive Organizations: Navigating The 'Unspoken Rule' (Daniella and Mike)

Both Daniella and Mike repeatedly emphasized that they felt very comfortable being themselves within the work environment for a variety of different reasons but most specifically because of their support networks, both professionally and personally. They both noted that they felt valued by this network and never that they had to be someone else within that network. This affected their experiences with working identity and imposter syndrome. Interns who experience oppression can feel like they are entering unknown territory, a "war zone" as Daniella referred to it. When there are people within that unknown space who allow you to feel comfortable, it becomes easier for everyone to navigate that space and be your own self but this is especially important to people who experience oppression (Boulton 2016; Pitcan et al. 2018). When asking Daniella if she had to change her appearance or the way she spoke, she said no. When asking Mike the same question, he spoke of the "unspoken rule":

> "I know that if I were to go in there with long hair or something I know that I would be looking different than someone else with long hair…it wasn't like anyone pressured me but it was like the unspoken rule where I knew that I would be looked

at different… I kept it as I normally would wear it in school like I would never grow out my hair or anything like that."

Despite Mike's adamancy that he is comfortable in his environment, he is still aware that as someone who is subject to racist standards if he presented himself a certain way outwardly, he would be looked at hyper visibly because of his black male appearance and he would potentially be perceived as less professional (Carbado and Gulati 2013). Because of his racialized and gendered identity, he is at the intersection of experiencing racism and sexism. By complying with a certain standard of his physical appearance, he is attempting to protect himself from potential oppression that he could experience because of the cultural code that is guarded by white masculine standards of appearance (Collins 2000; Ford 2008).

Crossing Organizational Cultures: The Intern/Black Duality Problem

In developing a separate work identity to help gain mobility and cope with the effects of racism within their organization, interns like Lauren (transitional) and Jordan (exclusive) felt that their black identity intersected with their intern status. Jordan said that he recognized that when he was experiencing exclusion while also experiencing praise he thought:

"…maybe it isn't about my actual skin color because I have like privilege of being light-skinned but then other times where I really think about it and I'm like there is no other way for me to think about why I would be treated differently. So I still kind of battle with that."

Lauren had similar thoughts, saying:

"…I do wonder if sometimes people saying things that I did were so great is just because I was a black woman… and like you have to give me that pat on the back

> to make me feel great about myself or if it's genuinely just because of work, yanno? … like I would stay late sometimes and finish projects… I don't know if it's like authentic… Like I feel like they said, 'oh my gosh, we love you' but I feel like I've gotten that from my other internships too so it's just like is it actually authentic?"

These two interns, as stating above in their respective organization sections, often change their identities so that they align with the whiteness standards in place in their companies. This is because of the exclusive elements that their organizations had which prevented them from being their authentic selves within the space. They were aware by portraying a form of blackness that was accepted by the predominantly white space, they would be able to achieve more social and economic mobility (Carbado and Gulati 2013). This creates a double consciousness within the interns, as they struggle to conform to the way that their professional peers viewed them but also with how "black" they were allowed to be in that same space (Du Bois 2008). Jordan and Lauren were both positively acknowledged within their workspaces and throughout their internships. However, because they had constructed working identities that were more closely aligned with acceptable versions of blackness and with the standards of professionalism, when they were being praised they were unsure if it was because of their "acceptable blackness" or if it was because of their hard work? It caused them to question if leveraging more palatable versions of blackness took away from their work ethic because people were more focused on them being the "exceptional black" intern (Carbado and Gulati 2013; Du Bois 2008). This caused Lauren and Jordan to question their value within the workspace because they were unsure if they were being praised because of their work or because of their ability to satisfy the gaze of their coworkers who valued whiteness and use it as a guide for evaluation of success.

Conclusions & Comparisons

It is apparent that stereotype threat and working identity behaviors are linked. Due to the racist narratives of blackness that influence the participants' experiences of blackness, many of them felt they had to present certain versions of blackness to be accepted in their work environments. This is true across all types of organizations. In the exclusive and transitional organizations, the interns felt that they had to put more distance between their own identity and their working identity in order to present an identity that would lead them to making better connections in their work environments. In the inclusive organizations, although the participants felt that they were being themselves these versions of self were still guided by "unspoken rules" around appearance and acceptability. By making themselves seem more palatable by creating an identity that seems more closely related to whiteness, the interns were rewarded more socially and professionally (Carbado and Gulati 2013). However, this also dangerously effected their sense of self, as they molded themselves into the black person that they were expected to be as opposed to the person that they are. Thus restricting self-expression in smaller ways (such as speech and conversation topics) to larger ways (ensuring personal life and professional life never intersect) (Holder et al. 2015; Pitcan et al. 2018). It is also important to note that the identities that they construct within the workspace heavily intersect with acceptable presentations of class and gender (Collins 2000; Ford 2008). These efforts can be exhausting for anyone to undertake, but especially for interns as they attempt to develop a variety of skills, experiences, and networks within the workspace.

The interns felt most included when they felt validated by their workspace teams. These avenues were most available in the transitional and inclusive organizations. Although Lauren felt she could not fully express her opinions about oppression and society, when she was able to get these opinions in during various team meetings that was when she felt most validated within her

workspace. Similarly, Daniella felt valued by her professional network for being her complete authentic self, making the workspace easier to navigate. This demonstrates that organizations that do the best in terms of ensuring interns from different backgrounds feel comfortable are those who validate those differences and use those differences to influence various organizational decisions (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). This also ensures that people from oppressed backgrounds feel less distanced from self and can feel more comfortable expressing self in all spheres of their lives. These findings build upon Carbado and Gulati (2013) ideas on working identity, and call attention to the complex nature of performing one's identity (Goffman 1959) within a white, corporatized space.

Professional Development

Exclusive Organizations: The Burden of Coping with The Culture of Whiteness (Chelsey, Calvin, Jordan)

Arguably, those who were apart of exclusive organizations experienced more professional development in the realm of racism. Because their organizations were more exclusive, they gained skills such as being able to "work the room" when presenting and networking with white people as well as composing yourself when there are microaggressions. Calvin acknowledged that because he had attended PWIs throughout his entire life, he already had those skills but this work environment helped him expand on his ability to make white people "feel comfortable and make them feel like nothing harms them." The exclusive nature of their environment made it difficult for them to develop skills outside of coping with microaggressions or networking with white people. This is because of the white standards of the organizations were so overwhelming that they had to focus on learning and adhering to them in order to achieve mobility and success throughout their time at their internship.

Transitional Organization: Learning to Navigate Difficult and White Spaces (Lauren and Jasmine)

Lauren felt that her internship helped her to be more comfortable and prepared in spaces where she did not feel entirely comfortable or familiar with. Additionally, she learned how to navigate difficult situations in a team environment. Lastly, she learned how to be able to communicate more openly, especially with her managers in order to learn how to get more out of her work. Jasmine felt that she learned more about the standards of professionalism and how to navigate difficult situations as well, however, she acknowledged that she had to learn those things by herself. She also acknowledged that in learning those things, she felt that she had to learn about them differently because she is a person of color. Similarly, to the participants in the exclusive organizations, the overwhelming culture of whiteness affected Lauren and Jasmine's ability to learn about standards of professionalism objectively and more through the lens of whiteness. For both the exclusive and transitional organization, professional development seems to be focused on building social capital in the realm of whiteness as opposed to gaining technical skills for their careers.

Inclusive Organizations: Building Social and Cultural Capital With Less Distractions (Daniella and Mike)

At the end of their internships, Daniella and Mike said that they appreciated their experience but they both did not feel the same way about the skills they gained. Mike said that he did not gain any skills because the organization was more focused on:

> "…wining and dining you. They give you a taste of the work but not a real good taste of what it's going to be. So you know I got a little exposure to it but I don't

> think it really correlates to what the job really entails and I think their real goal is to wine and dine you to accept the offer."

In contrast, Daniella said that although she expected to get more out of her internship in terms of how marketing experience relates to her Communications major in college, she still gained important skills. Outside of that she said:

> "…I got really good at networking and making connections. I got really good at public speaking. I got really good at planning and organization ideas. Um, it really helped me exercise my idea brain I guess… I was expecting to learn something more practical but those things were more abstract."

Although Daniella gained important networking, public speaking, and organization skills she felt like the things that she learned were more abstract as opposed to practical she still acknowledges later on in her interview that the things that she learned from her internship will help her navigate her full time position at her company.

Conclusions & Comparisons

In inclusive organizations, Mike and Daniella were more easily able to avoid dealing with coping with and combatting negative experiences, providing them with more time to find ways to gain knowledge and skills in other areas. It is clear that Mike's program, at least to him, was less about the skills and more about the organization's ability to keep him and other summer associates at the law firm for full-time positions. However, this was still helpful in learning valuable networking skills at these various events. In all of the organizations, the interns had to focus on learning general networking skills as well as specific skills that would help them analyze and cope with the culture of whiteness as well as building a working identity for the

space. This means that because of the culture of whiteness within these types of organizations, the interns were focused less on learning technical skills and more on skills that would increase their social capital and standing. With that said, all of the interns acknowledged that networking skills were some of the most valuable skills that they learned throughout their time at their organizations. Networking for these interns manifested in the form of advocating for professional advancement, making professional and personal connections that last, and composing self during difficult situations. These findings enhance the organizational literature on networking drawing attention to the myriad of networking skills people of color must master in order to succeed in a culture dominated by whiteness.

Other important skills that were mentioned across interns were presentation skills, advocating for self, learning to conduct yourself professionally, time management and working in a team. The skills that the interns learned are an invaluable part of fostering post-graduate full-time opportunities and often the interns within this study acknowledged that (Gault et al. 2010). Chelsey acknowledged that the skills that she learned throughout her internship were:

> "…not something we're taught to be at college. It's very much like go to the career fair, beg someone to take you and do all of these things to make them like you. Buy when you move beyond that type of recruiting and into the real world… I got here because I told someone what I was interested in… this is what I want and this is why I want it. Like that really helped me in job interviews."

In learning these skills, the interns were able to participate in the labor market and feel more equipped as they go in their careers (Thorpe-Moscon 2014). For these black, first-generation interns, their organizational experiences can be an essential part in navigating a

corporate world that remains predominantly white and relatively exclusive as well as closing a gap related to economic inequality.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Working Towards Inclusion & Combatting Oppression

The participants' narratives demonstrate that companies who are attempting to remedy racism, sexism, and classism organizationally by implementing "diversity and inclusion" efforts are focusing more on increasing representation of diversity and symbolic inclusion. This demonstrates that there is a lot of work to be done to create inclusive environments for racially diverse people and interns. This may begin with recruitment, but ultimately these efforts need to be integrated into every facet of the organization in order for people effected by racism, classism, and sexism to truly be included into a workspace. These integrated efforts can help create an organizational environment and culture where all employees can experience success, not just those who satisfy the monocultural standards of the workspace.

Expand One's Vision from Single Identity Practices to the Intersection of Identity

In this study the participants felt the racial aspect of their identity was the most salient. Often when people think of diversity, they think of racial diversity, however this does not mean that only race and racism can be addressed with attempting to implement diversity and inclusion initiatives. When companies only tackle one aspect of diversity, it ignores the way that other oppressive forces intersect to create unique conditions for each marginalized member of their organization. This was exemplified by the participants as they discussed their feelings of pressure around dress (black women) and attitude (black men). This showed that their experiences with oppression were highly gendered in addition to being highly racialized. To

remedy these experiences, there needs to be a focus on both. Additionally, Lauren's experience in a transitional organization with higher class status demonstrates that socioeconomic class can also impact the experience of interns, and is often overlooked in the literature on diversity and inclusion because it is not a protected category within the Civil Rights Act and in many ways an invisible identity. In addition to being aware of race and gender organizations need to be aware of class because of the way that these modes of oppression intersect.

Don't Ignore 'Isms, Discuss Them Candidly and Compassionately

As some interns noted, talking about diversity and inclusion can be difficult for some organizations and people because it requires them to be able to acknowledge racism, sexism, classism and other modes of oppression as well as their individual and organizational role in perpetuating those systems. Many organizations resist this approach, holding onto the belief that simply talking about racism for example is racist or will create more hostility (Dobbin, Kalev, and Kelly 2007) when in fact studies have shown this is not the case when done correctly (Prime 2012). However, it is still essential that organizations attempt to acknowledge their own oppressive positionality within their industry and within the broader context of their communities (local or global). It is also essential that these organizations encourage their employees to participate in this same process. Talking about diversity and inclusion without acknowledging structural forces may be enough for some (Daniella and Mike) but for others, (Chelsey and Jasmine) it makes their presence feel tokenized and symbolic. There is a need by employees for real diversity and inclusive conversations where people can be authentic as well as educated about the world around them. Additionally, it demonstrates that an organization is satisfied with the status quo, which is understandable considering the benefits an individual organization receives from participating in American capitalism, which is saturated with oppressive forces.

However, an organization that refuses to acknowledge structural and institutional marginalization can never fully be dedicated to dismantling structures that create and perpetuate the need for diversity and inclusion efforts in the first place. Thus, they need to assess their culture and make meaningful changes that will better their culture for staff, interns, and customers who use their services.

Find Creative Ways to Institutionalize and Fulfill Differing Networking Needs

Networking has proved to be an essential part in creating spaces where black interns feel accepted as well as a space where they can achieve success and upward mobility. However, when interns cannot connect and network as their authentic selves, this creates barriers to success and mobility. Organizations need to be aware of their formal mentors and recognize that they fill various roles. They are not just a way for an intern or staff member from a historically disadvantaged background to connect to the environment, they also provide them with important strategies for professional development and upward mobility in the organization. One-size fits all mentoring models are not enough. Mentorship models and mentors need to be able to provide interns from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of different needs ways to connect and succeed. This would mean screening mentors for their level of racial awareness and level of dedication to inclusivity. This would also mean matching mentors to interns and staff based on similar experience backgrounds, this does not simply mean race. It is also important to match based on experience with other things like class, gender, and generational status. However, it is also important to match interns with mentors that are willing to help them and they will get along with and that can be across gender, race, and class boundaries.

Across all types of organizations, the participants felt most validated and comfortable, it was when they were able to connect with other interns with similar levels of racial awareness

about their experiences within the workplace, their black identity, and racism. This is not to say that organizations should only create formal programs that encourage black interns and employees to get together. The organization must hire interns and staff dedicated to fostering an inclusive spirit but also encourage interns and employees to invest in learning about their fellow peers from a variety of different backgrounds. This will help ensure that inclusivity is a part of every facet of the organization because of the individuals who are in make up the organization. This also ensures that staff and interns are building meaningful connections that can help them progress professionally and personally.

Make Interns a Valuable Part of Your Organization

Most importantly, it is important for organizations to ensure that they are paying attention to their interns because one day they may become an integral facet of the company that they are interning at. Three interns, Chelsey, Jordan, and Lauren all acknowledged that at some point throughout their internship process, they were forgotten about or ignored by their own organization. Because companies in the American context are so corporatized and capitalist, they often forget the humanity of the people that are working with them turning them into commodified cogs in the business machine. Just because a company is practicing inclusion, doesn't mean that it is recognizing the important things that each member of their organizations are doing, as I think is most evident in the transitional and exclusive organizations where the interns felt less validated. As is relevant through the participant narratives, it is important that in validating the interns, companies need to be able to effectively address the reality that their intern's identities are at the intersections of race, class, gender, and etc. This means that intern-based programs have to be able to address the different positionalities that various interns have. Thus, they have to be conscious of their race, class, gender, and more as well as dedicated to

learning about those experiences and meeting their needs. This will contribute to a more robust and inclusive culture because interns will feel more empowered to participate in the workspace and share their authentic opinion. Additionally, it ensures that the interns know that their diverse skill set is validated and they do not have to change their identity to match a restrictive and exclusive culture.

All of these suggestions may seem relatively theoretical but there are many tangible ways that the problems that this study highlighted can be addressed by organizations and their employees. The most tangible way to me, is when organizations dedicate their time, money, and money to diversity and inclusion efforts. If organizations are beginning to invest in diversity and inclusion to increase their profitability, then they should use those profits to better address and tackle structural inequalities. This means investing in ERGs, mentoring programs, employees/interns, and other internal bettering programs. However, it also means investing in the communities that they are based in and the communities that have been affected by the inequities that are embedded in American capitalism. This could manifest in creating mentorship programs for historically oppressed K-12 students in surrounding communities in order to provide them with educational and professional skills that can eventually lead them to creating generational wealth and success for their families and neighborhood. This ensures that the organization is sharing their wealth and profits with the communities around them to better the system overall, demonstrating that inclusion does not stop at the ends of the organization, rather it must reach beyond that into our everyday world. Many organizations have invested in a corporate social responsibility agenda addressing these needs and they should be commended for that. However, more work must be done to link these investments to workplace outcomes by creating innovative programs that offer *paid* internships for aspiring high school and college students.

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