

**Perceptions of Internal Organizational Diversity Efforts of Black, Indigenous, and Women  
of Color Working in Public Relations**

by

Ashley Mayer

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
May 7, 2022

Approved by

Elizabeth Wilhoit Larson, Chair, Associate Professor of Communication  
Brigitta Brunner-Johnson, Professor of Public Relations  
Virginia Sánchez Sánchez, Assistant Professor of Communication

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how Black, Indigenous, and women of color (BIWOC) working in public relations perceive their workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. Some perceptions of workplace diversity and inclusion efforts were based on participants' identities and experiences, while others were based in ways that the public relations industry can improve workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. This project seeks to understand how BIWOC's unique standpoint makes their experiences as public relations professionals different from the experiences of others. To do so, 11 interviews were conducted with BIWOC who currently work in public relations. Then, a thematic analysis of those interviews was completed. This thesis explains how BIWOC's identities influence their experiences in the public relations industry in relation to workplace diversity and inclusion efforts.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am very fortunate to have a fabulous group of women as my support system. First, I would like to thank my grandmother. Unfortunately, she is no longer here to learn about my thesis, but I could not have gotten here if it wasn't for her teaching me the value of an education.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Larson for all her help in every step of the research and writing process. Not only has she helped guide this project, but she has also provided great emotional support. I would also like to thank my committee for providing resources and feedback to improve this research. Additionally, I would not have become interested in issues surrounding diversity and public relations if it were not for Dr. Debra Worthington suggesting I explore similar topics. At the time, I did not realize how much excitement and pride I would gain from this research.

Lastly, I want to thank all the amazing BIWOC who work in public relations. Without their hard work, I may not have ever been able to imagine a career in the industry. It has been an honor to hear about some of their experiences and I hope to one day have such an influential career.

This study is for every girl and woman who has ever looked around to see that no one else in the room looks like them and for everyone who has rolled their eyes after reading an insincere social media statement from a billion-dollar corporation. I know it is exhausting, but I am rooting for you.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Workplace Diversity and Inclusion.....	9
Diversity and Inclusion Statements.....	13
Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations.....	16
Unique Experiences of BIWOC.....	20
Feminist Standpoint Theory.....	21
Chapter 3: Methods.....	25
Positionality Statement.....	25
Participants.....	26
Sampling.....	26
Procedures.....	27
Chapter 4: Results.....	28
BIWOC Identities and Experiences.....	30
Unique Perspectives.....	30
Pride.....	33
Conflicting Emotions.....	36
Public Relations Agencies and Corporations.....	37
Internal Diversity and Inclusion Efforts.....	38

Multiple Dimensions of Diversity.....	41
Systemic Racism and Discrimination.....	44
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	47
Workplace Diversity and Inclusion.....	47
Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations .....	49
Unique Standpoints of BIWOC.....	50
Practical Implications.....	52
Limitations and Future Research.....	54
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	54
References.....	56
Appendix A: Recruitment Message.....	67
Appendix B: Information Letter.....	68
Appendix C: Interview Protocol.....	70

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Many organizations have taken a recent stance on diversity and inclusion in light of the murder of George Floyd, who died by police force on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis (Hill et al., 2020). Derek Chauvin, a former police officer, was seen in video footage kneeling on Floyd's neck for a minimum of eight minutes and fifteen seconds. Although the officers involved were all fired and Chauvin was arrested, George Floyd's death was a catalyst for protests and social media activism. Following George Floyd's murder, many organizations took efforts and made statements in support of social justice. Although organizations have taken both internal and external diversity and inclusion efforts in order to acknowledge the need for justice reform, it is unclear whether these efforts are sincere. It is also unknown how Black, Indigenous, and women of color (BIWOC) who work within these organizations perceive these efforts, suggesting that it is important to better understand organizational diversity and inclusion efforts.

Many industries face criticism for lacking in representation of historically disadvantaged groups and public relations is no different. While the public relations industry is female dominated, it is dominated by White women. This lack of racial and ethnic diversity is concerning because often times, the diversity statements released by organizations are written by public relations teams. While initiatives related to diversity have often been seen as a function of human resources, "there is growing recognition that diversity is a key public relations issue" (Hon & Brunner, 2000, p. 312), which demonstrates the relevance of studying diversity as it relates to public relations. In this study, I look at the internal aspect of diversity, which "corresponds to employee or workforce issues" (Hon & Brunner, 2000, p. 312), but with the purpose of gaining insight related to diversity efforts.

Organizational diversity has been defined as “the variation of social and cultural identities among people existing together” (Cox, 2001, p.3 as cited in Wilson et al., 2012). In public relations scholarship, diversity usually refers to differences among gender, race, and ethnicity (Gröschl, 2017). Although diversity and inclusion are different, they are often used interchangeably. While there is no agreed upon definition of inclusion within communication scholarship, Pless and Mak (2004) point out that diversity and inclusion are closely related, and that organizational diversity is often dependent on inclusion. To have both a diverse and inclusive workplace the environment must be “free from any kind of harassment and is based upon respect for all individuals (inside and outside the corporation) regardless of sex, gender, race, class, social or cultural origin, religion, disability, lifestyle, organizational level, circumstances, etc” (p. 137). It is also necessary to incorporate “different perspectives to decision-making and problem-solving processes, by listening to and trying to understand different opinions, by valuing contrary opinions and arguing positions fairly, and by looking for the better argument among the validation claims” (Pless & Mak, 2004, p. 137). According to Winters (2014), it is more difficult for organizations to achieve inclusion than diversity. Based on this scholarship, it can be gathered that diversity is dependent upon having people with differing identities within the same organization while inclusion is only reached when everyone feels comfortable and equally treated within that organization.

For the purposes of this paper, I define BIWOC as women who are members of Black, Indigenous American, Hispanic, or Asian communities. In the past, “people of color” (POC) has been used to describe people who are not White. Likewise, “women of color” (WOC) has been used to describe women who are not White. Recently “Black, Indigenous, and people of color” (BIPOC) has been used instead of POC because this term accounts for the hardships that Black

and Indigenous people experience that other nonwhite people may not (Garcia, 2020). For this reason, I use the term BIWOC.

In this project, I explore how BIWOC who work in public relations perceive the diversity efforts in their organizations. To establish knowledge on how diversity and inclusion is applied in organizations, I look at past research on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Then, I discuss past literature on statements and other public actions that organizations have taken to show their support for social justice reform. I also look at literature that provides information on diversity and inclusion as it relates to the public relations industry. After this, I discuss the challenges that BIWOC face that White women, White men, and minorities who are men do not experience. To gain insight into BIWOC's thoughts and feelings on organizational diversity efforts, individual interviews were conducted with BIWOC who currently work in public relations. The data collected in this study is looked at through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, specifically in relation to BIWOC.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The following review of past research will help illustrate the relevance of looking at diversity and inclusion efforts from BIWOC's perspectives. This section begins with a broad overview of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This is followed by research on organizational diversity statements and efforts. Next, I discuss literature on diversity and inclusion within public relations. After this, the distinctive experiences that BIWOC may encounter are discussed. Lastly, feminist standpoint theory is discussed, which establishes the theoretical approach that I take.



## **Workplace Diversity and Inclusion**

When discussing organizations, diversity and inclusion efforts often arise. According to Anand & Winters (2008), corporate diversity programs became more prevalent in the 1970s. These policies usually stemmed from “social justice policy, civil rights legislation, and more recently, business strategy” (Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 356). At the federal level, equal employment opportunity laws strive to create diverse workplace environments. One of the most notable equal opportunity policies is affirmative action, which was used by President John F. Kennedy to urge employers not to discriminate against employees based on “race, color, religion, and national origin” (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). This was followed by various equal employment opportunity laws: the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission n.d.). These laws “protect minorities and women from discriminatory treatment regarding hiring, promoting, and working conditions” (Ortega et al., 2011, p. 32). However, not all laws effectively do so. For instance, the Family and Medical Leave Act allows parents to take up to 12 weeks off work after a child is born or adopted (United States Department of Labor n.d.). However, this time is usually unpaid, so many mothers are forced to return to work in less than 12 weeks (Vahratian & Johnson, 2009). This policy is especially harmful to BIWOC, who are more at risk for pregnancy complications than White women (Howell, 2018). These laws are important to BIWOC because both women and racial minorities have been discriminated against historically.

While there are laws that are intended to combat discrimination in the workplace, these laws do not always provide equal opportunity and protection to women and minorities (Mor Barak, 2005), so organizations often implement additional diversity and inclusion efforts. One example is unconscious bias trainings, which often require that both managers and employees take “online tests that almost invariably prove they are all biased and are then required to discuss how they can manage this bias to prevent it having a negative effect on workplace social interactions and decisions” (Noon et al., 2018, p. 198). Although many organizations rely on these trainings, unconscious bias trainings have been criticized for their effectiveness. Onvador et al. (2021) argues that these trainings do not increase workplace diversity and that organizations should implement other strategies instead. It is also suggested that trainings be used as a preventative measure rather than only being used after an incident (Onvador et al. (2021). Based on previous research, it can be seen that while it is important for employees to be aware of their unconscious biases, trainings do not increase diversity.

As noted above, some diversity and inclusion efforts have been seen as less effective than others. Although many efforts do not successfully acknowledge or create diversity and inclusion, these efforts are still necessary. Plaut et al. (2009) conducted a quantitative study to assess whether color blindness or addressing the differences among race within organizations was best for minority employees’ psychological engagement at work. To do so, Plaut et al. (2009) used surveys among a sample of 4,915 participants who identified as either White or minorities. Plaut et al. (2009) found that colorblindness as a diversity belief increases marginalization among minorities and that acknowledging multicultural differences among minority and White employees is beneficial to minority employees’ psychological engagement. Likewise, Kalev et al. (2006) conducted a fixed-effects analysis using surveys that assessed workplace practices

from 1971-2002 within 708 organizations. It was found that although other research suggested there was no longer a need for antidiscrimination regulation since diversity programs exist, this is not true. These findings demonstrate the need for diversity and inclusion efforts within organizations. Similarly, Cox Edmondson et al. (2008) suggests that managers should become more involved with learning about the problems that employees of color face in order to help employees feel more comfortable to participate in research related to creating a better workplace experience. According to Offermann et al. (2014), racial group membership influences the way employees perceive events in the workplace. It was found that participants who supported diversity policies were more likely to perceive subtle forms of discrimination. Racial minorities were more likely than White participants to perceive discrimination and racial issues. Offermann et al. (2014) suggest that organizations can become more inclusive by "incorporating information on microaggressions<sup>1</sup> and worldviews into their training and development programs to help employees better understand the impact of their own belief systems" (p. 506).

Various recent studies on workplace discrimination have focused on subtle discrimination. Sue et al. (2007) points out that subtle forms of discrimination are not always taken seriously and may not be addressed because they cannot be handled with legal action like overt discrimination can. Instances of subtle discrimination may even cause minorities to question whether an act of discrimination actually occurred (Sue et al., 2007). According to Van Laer and Janssens (2011), obvious discrimination is no longer acceptable, but subtle discrimination allows majority group members to maintain a position of power in the workplace and in everyday situations. Based on this, Van Laer and Janssens (2011) mention that a change in organizational structure may be necessary to completely end workplace discrimination. Rattan

---

<sup>1</sup> Past literature uses microaggressions, microinequities, and subtle discrimination interchangeably.

and Dweck (2018) suggested that although organizations may take efforts to prevent discrimination, it is inevitable. According to Rattan and Dweck (2018), people who do experience discrimination can have a positive outlook on the "perpetrator of bias" (p. 683) by having a growth mindset when confronting the person who treated them unfairly.

Multiple studies have looked at ways that organizations can create nondiscriminatory environments for employees who identify as BIPOC after they are hired. McKay and Avery (2005) suggest that diversity audits, diversity trainings, recruitment planning, and recruitment evaluation are effective ways for organizations to achieve diversity. According to Andrews and Ashworth (2015), one of the most effective ways to avoid discrimination within the workplace is to recruit a diverse staff. Shore et al. (2018) provide a model for organizational inclusion. Psychological safety, involvement in the work group, feeling respected and valued, influence on decision-making, authenticity, recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity lead to perceived inclusion, retention, and expansion of talent and inclusion climate. The model also suggests that management should take microinequities and subtle discrimination seriously. Similarly, Mor Barak (2005) asserts that there are not always laws to protect people from discrimination when it comes to opportunities such as jobs, promotions, information networks, decision making, and human resource involvement. There is also little known about how employees who have marginalized social identities are being treated after being hired. This demonstrates the importance of learning more about BIWOC's lived experiences within their workplaces.

While there are various ways to work toward organizational diversity and inclusion, it is important to be mindful of how these efforts are perceived by women and minorities. Mor Barak et al. (1998) found that White men tend to perceive workplaces as being more inclusive than

White women and nonwhite employees. White women and nonwhite employees reported feeling that they missed out of certain work opportunities due to their racial and/or gender identities. However, White men reported that minorities and women had access to all job opportunities. Overall, women and minority participants felt that their workplaces needed to put more effort into the creating inclusive environments. Similarly, Banjeree (2008) found that racial and ethnic minorities may be more likely to perceive workplace discrimination based on their identification with a particular minority group. For example, BIWOC may be more perceptive of discrimination against themselves or other BIWOC than White women. In relation to this finding, Plaut et al. (2011) suggest that one reason some organizational diversity efforts fail is because White employees may resist them. Plaut et al. (2011) argue that policies should be appealing to White employees to be successful. Overall, it is important for organizations to create diverse and inclusive spaces because this impacts factors such as job satisfaction and retention among minority employees (Mor Barak et al., 2001). The above literature demonstrates that topics related to organizational diversity and inclusion have received a great amount of attention from scholars. However, much of this research groups all minorities together without focusing on certain groups that may have different needs and challenges. The discussion of background information on organizational diversity and inclusion provides the opportunity to look further into organizational efforts. The following section focuses on statements that relate to racial and ethnic diversity.

### **Diversity and Inclusion Statements**

In light of the murder of George Floyd, many organizations released statements that focused on diversity and inclusion (Ballard et al., 2020). It is unknown whether these statements have an impact and scholars argue such statements can be performative (Ballard et al. 2020).

Despite this criticism, we often see organizations releasing these statements. Ciszek and Logan (2018) analyzed how Ben & Jerry's support Black Lives Matter and how the company navigates the disapproval from consumers on social media. Ciszek and Logan (2018) applied critical discourse analysis (CDA) to do so. Ciszek and Logan (2018) found that Ben & Jerry's acknowledge racism as a problem and that the company committed to fighting against social injustice. While this example demonstrates that some organizations may use diversity statements to come across being committed to justice reform, other organizational statements have been perceived as less sincere.

Rugg (2020) brings attention to the fact some organizations' actions and statements on BLM do not always align. Rugg (2020) looked at the NFL's "Inspire Change" campaign and how some of actions taken by the league contradict the campaign. Rugg (2020) briefly summarizes that the "Inspire Change" campaign was promoted through a video, which focused on promoting racial equality. However, the goal of the video contrasted with some actions taken by NFL shortly after the campaign's launch, such as banning players from kneeling during the National Anthem (Rugg, 2020). While briefly going over the NFL's history, Rugg (2020) points out that the NFL has faced multiple crises, such as the risk of chronic traumatic encephalopathy among players. Rugg (2020) argues that the NFL's corporate social responsibility initiatives are ways of capitalizing from players rather than being altruistic. Based on this, it can be concluded that diversity statements are not always sincere.

Likewise, some companies have been accused of attempting to capitalize from important conversations related to social issues. Novak and Richmond (2019) analyzed how Twitter users engaged with Starbucks and with other users in response to Starbucks' #RaceTogether campaign in 2015. While this campaign does not necessarily qualify as a diversity statement, it is a relevant

example because many Twitter users shared their perceptions of this campaign. The #RaceTogether campaign led users to discuss who should facilitate national conversations about race, instead of meeting the campaign's goal, which was to encourage users to have conversations about race. Many users critiqued Starbucks for starting the campaign. In relation to this, many users did not think Starbucks is a proper space for conversations about race due to brand perception. For example, many users discussed that Starbucks is usually associated with middle and upper class, White people. Some users accused Starbucks of not being an appropriate place to discuss race because only some people have access to visiting and buying from its locations.

Singh and Point (2009) analyzed diversity statements on corporate websites of 174 organizations in Europe. They found that online diversity statements contained pragmatic and moral legitimacy-enhancing messages, which relate to the business case for diversity. Singh and Point (2009) also determined the components of diversity statements that add to legitimacy enhancement. For example, moral legitimacy was enhanced by transparency, which could be achieved by disclosing specific diversity policies. Likewise, Carnes et al. (2019) provided guidelines for organizations to follow when crafting diversity statements. For instance, diversity statements should be aspirational, "emphasize personal autonomy to promote diversity" (p. 7), acknowledge multicultural differences, and clearly define diversity. Less effective organizational diversity statements suggest that diversity has already been achieved, contain forceful messaging, or use colorblind messaging (Carnes et al., 2019).

Wilton et al. (2014) conducted a study on colorblind messaging and multicultural messaging in diversity statements with participants who identify as White men, men of color, White women, and women of color. It was found that participants within in each group

responded most negatively to colorblind messaging. However, women of color had the greatest level of negative expectations compared to all other groups, which was attributed to their “dually stigmatized race and gender identities” (Wilton et al., 2014, p. 317). According to Wilton et al. (2014) BIWOC have been included as participants in research on diversity statements, but little research has been done to explore specifically how BIWOC perceive these statements.

### **Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations**

Before looking at recent diversity and inclusion research as it relates to public relations, it is important to touch on the historical background of public relations. According to Aldoory and Toth (2002), the public relations industry has been female dominated since the 1980s. The increase in female practitioners led to the argument that public relations was feminized due to affirmative action (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). At this time, public relations was often referred to as a “Velvet Ghetto,” which was a term coined to suggest that certain fields were becoming dominated by women (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). During this time, men were worried that they would not be hired within the public relations industry. Also, because women were applying for technician positions, not managerial positions, they were being paid less than men. The low pay for women caused various practitioners and scholars to worry that, overall, public relations professionals would begin getting paid less. Low pay among practitioners who are women is still a concern today. Dozier et al. (2013) found that women earn around \$8,305 less than practitioners who are men. It is unclear whether BIWOC in public relations make less than White women.

According to Mundy (2016), research on diversity and public relations tends to fall into one of three categories: "diverse representations in the public relations workplace; how organizations are leveraging public relations to reach and engage diverse stakeholders; and the



growing call for better connection between diversity and daily public relations practice through a multicultural perspective" (p. 4). Despite the rise in diversity and inclusion efforts within organizations, there is a lack of diversity among public relations professionals. This lack of diversity has been criticized because it is difficult to cater to diverse stakeholder groups without diversity among the teams responsible for the strategies (Ramaswami, 2018). This argument is based on the business case for diversity, which posits that having a diverse group of employees is beneficial to the success of the organization (Cox, 1993).

Furthermore, racial and ethnic minority populations in the U.S. are growing, which means that diversity within workplaces and the marketplace should also be increasing (Qui & Muturi, 2016). In light of the changing demographics in the U.S., there has been a call for more diversity among public relations professionals. According to Ramaswami (2018), "minority candidates see the world differently, can often pull from their diverse backgrounds, and provide unique insights into what drives customer behavior, purchasing decisions, and brand loyalty among key audiences." Women hold 73% of jobs in public relations management (Qui & Muturi, 2016). Black people hold 10.7% of public relations management jobs, while Asian and Latinx people each hold only 3% of those positions (Qui & Muturi, 2016). The percentage of these positions held by nonwhite women is unknown (Qui & Muturi, 2016). Although public relations is dominated by women, there are very few BIWOC working as practitioners, which illustrates a need for more research on the experiences of nonwhite women in public relations. Past research demonstrates that representation of Black and Latinx practitioners is increasing, but that there are still very few nonwhite practitioners in leadership positions (Ford & Brown, 2015; PR Council, 2016). The PR Council (2016) argued that research related to diversity in public relations should focus on the experiences of Black and Latinx practitioners. Similarly, Mundy

(2016) states that there is a need "for a better understanding regarding the intersections of diverse identities, and how those intersections inform the practitioner lens" (p. 7).

Tindall (2009) conducted interviews with nine Black women who work as public relations professors. Although my research does not focus on BIWOC faculty who work in public relations, their experiences are still relevant to the present research because it further showcases the lack of diversity in public relations. It was found that the participants felt that they were "isolated" (Tindall, 2009, p. 13) from other Black female public relations professors, which makes it difficult to find support and mentorship. It was also found that the participants tended to take on work responsibilities that went beyond what was required "because they want to add their voice and want themselves and their people to be included in the academic mainstream" (Tindall, 2009, p. 12). Likewise, Hon and Brunner (2000) point out that diversity can relate to public relations both through internal and external functions. Hon and Brunner (2000) mention that one motivation for focusing on diversity is that some practitioners believe it will allow certain initiatives to reach diverse audiences more effectively and that it may promote a positive image of the organization. In this study, Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that public relations practitioners should work on diversity initiatives. However, it was found that overall, practitioners did not perceive their organizations as having a strong commitment to diversity (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Other participants mentioned that their organizations seemed to be getting closer a strong commitment to diversity (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Similarly, Brunner (2008) acknowledges that there is a lack of understanding and appreciation for diversity among public relations practitioners. Some practitioners mentioned that diversity is important in public relations, but others said that it was not (Brunner, 2008).

Pompper (2004, 2007, 2012) looked at the experiences that Black women and Latinas who work in public relations. It was found that race and/or ethnicity and gender make it difficult for Black women and Latinas who work in public relations to build relationships. Likewise, Applebaum et al. (2015) found that four out of 10 nonwhite practitioners felt that they received less respect and opportunities than White practitioners. The intersection of race and/or ethnicity and gender illustrates what Tindall (2009) refers to as a double bind. Pompper (2012) suggests that one way these issues can be dealt with is by using internal public relations to try to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Similarly, Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that public relations has the opportunity to increase the value of diversity. Applebaum et al. (2015) supported the argument that public relations departments have a responsibility to do diversity and inclusion work, similar to that of human resources departments.

Qiu and Muturi (2016) conducted interviews to gain insight on how Asian American public relations practitioners perceive diversity in the industry and to learn about the factors that may prevent Asian Americans from pursuing careers in public relations (Qui & Muturi, 2016). It was found that the absence of inclusiveness, a lack of preparation for young Asian Americans, and family expectations are factors that prevent Asian Americans from seeking careers in public relations (Qui & Muturi, 2016). Similarly, Vardeman-Winter and Place (2017) conducted an analysis of research, surveys, studies, and reports on women in public relations from 2005 to 2016. This study supports the argument that the public relations field needs more gender, racial, and ethnic diversity. Furthermore, Vardeman-Winter and Place (2017) call for future research to be done to explore how practitioners perceive diversity as it relates to corporate social responsibility. Past research demonstrates the expectation for public relations professionals to work on diversity and inclusion efforts and a need for public relations teams to become more

diverse. Based on this, organizations must hire diverse public relations teams who will create effective diversity and inclusion efforts.

Moving on to talk about the ways that diversity and inclusion can be seen in public relations practices and strategies, culturally significant messaging is often used to persuade publics (Dutta, 2007). According to Tindall and Vardeman-Winter (2011), public relations campaigns have relied on various ideas of culture which include: “gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, geography, class, religion, sexuality, age, generation, use of a common language, holding common moral systems, technology use, and occupation” (p. 283). Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) argue that publics’ identities should be studied through an intersectional lens, because only focusing on one identity at a time does not provide complete “stories about how they influence information seeking” (p. 282). As demonstrated in this section, diversity and inclusion within public relations have been studied. The experiences of BIWOC have been looked at, but not as they relate to specific diversity and inclusion efforts. This indicates that there is opportunity for future research to explore how BIWOC perceive public relations efforts related to diversity and inclusion.

### **Unique Experiences of BIWOC**

BIWOC face various challenges in their work lives. Ashcraft and Allen (2003) argue that organizations are both gendered and raced, which means that BIWOC have unique experiences at work that White women and men who identify as BIPOC may not have. For instance, BIWOC experience a significant wage gap compared to non-Hispanic, White men. According to the National Women’s Law Center (2020), for every dollar White men earn, Asian women typically earn 85 cents. Black women typically earn 63 cents. Latinas earn only 55 cents and Native American women earn 60 cents. Buttner and Lowe (2017) conducted a quantitative study to

measure how perceived pay equity and inequity impact organizational commitment among employees of color. They found that perceived pay equity positively impacted organizational commitment among employees of color. Furthermore, the most productive participants who perceived pay equity were most committed, while the most productive participants who perceived pay inequity were the least committed (Buttner & Lowe, 2017).

Another phenomenon that BIWOC experience uniquely is job loss. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women, Asian women, and Latinas have been disproportionately affected in terms of unemployment. In December 2020, 40.8% of Black women, 38.3% of Latinas, and 44.0% of Asian women had been unemployed for at least six months (National Women's Law Center, 2021). Black women and Latinas are also more likely to be single heads of households and have the responsibility of being the sole financial provider for their families than other women (Frye, 2020), so job loss can be devastating. Furthermore, BIWOC receive less support for advancement than men and White women at work (Washington & Roberts, 2019).

Ashcraft and Allen (2003) propose that organizational communication be studied through the lens that organizations are gendered and raced and that doing so will help understand how race impacts people within organizations and society. Similarly, Rosette et al. (2018) assert that White, Black, and Asian women experience the workplace differently based on the intersection of their race and gender.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

In this study, feminist standpoint theory is used as the theoretical approach. In the past, feminist standpoint theory has been applied to public relations research and to organizational research, so it is an appropriate framework for the present study. According to Wood (2005), feminist standpoint theory has two goals: "(1) to develop an epistemology, or method, for

constructing knowledge, that is based on insights arising from women's experiences; (2) to learn from knowledge that arises from women's social locations” (p. 63). Similarly, Allen (1996) states that using feminist standpoint theory can “affect individual, organizational, and societal change” (p. 257). Another goal of the theory is to “emancipate” (Allen, 1996, p. 259) those who are oppressed and to display “acts of resistance” (Allen, 1996, p. 259).

Feminist standpoint theory suggests that knowledge is dependent on one’s social position and that women have unique experiences (Allen, 1996). According to Collins (1986), White men have been “the dominant group” (p. 526), so their knowledge is often reflected in “dominant knowledge” (Allen, 1996, p. 258). Also, “knowledge claims tend to depict women and members of other marginalized groups as ‘others’ or outsiders” (Allen, 1996, p. 258-259). Members of dominant groups are not able to access the knowledge of those who are marginalized (Allen, 1996). According to Collins (1997) feminist standpoint theory focuses on the “social conditions that construct” (p. 375) the experiences of women as a group, rather than focusing on individual experiences of women, which means that standpoint theory also takes historical factors into account by focusing on similar experiences that people within a specific group have had. For instance, while all BIWOC may not have the same experiences, feminist standpoint theory asserts that their experiences will resemble the experiences of other BIWOC (Collins, 1997). Individuals can have multiple standpoints (Wood, 2005). For instance, Black feminist standpoint and Latina feminist standpoint have received attention in previous research.

Allen (1996) argues that it is especially important to listen to the experiences of BIWOC. Race and gender both influence how individuals organize (Allen, 1996). Furthermore, research on women in organizations tends to generalize the experiences of women while ignoring that the experiences of BIWOC are different from that of White women. Additionally, BIWOC

“often experience dual or multiple oppression” (Allen, 1996, p. 258) based on their intersecting identities. Also, statistics demonstrate that BIWOC face unique adversities in relation to work and income, but “they do not begin to reveal the daily injustices and discomfort – or the complexities” (Allen, 1996, p. 258) that come with those quantifiable hardships. The issues faced by BIWOC may also be challenging to illustrate without hearing about those challenges directly from those who experience them (Allen, 1996). Collins (1997) argues that it is important to consider power relations when using feminist standpoint theory and provides an example of Black women and White women working within the same organization. Collins (1997) suggests that while these women may share the same physical space, they “occupy fundamentally different locations in hierarchical power relations” (p. 379). Collins (1986) suggests that Black women and other minorities are “outsiders within” groups that have dominant members. According to Collins (1986), “Outsiders within occupy a special place – they become different people, and their difference sensitizes them to patterns that may be more difficult for established sociological insider” (p. 529). Outsiders also have the opportunity to embrace the creative potential that comes with being a minority.

Allen (1996) argues that our understanding of organizational communication is insufficient if we do not account for the significance of gender in the workplace. Feminist standpoint theory has been applied to organizational communication in past research (Allen, 1996). Based in feminist standpoint theory, Allen (1996) points out that race and gender can influence workplace interactions for women. Likewise, Ashcraft and Allen (2003) conducted a study to understand the intersection of race and gender. It was argued that organizations are gendered and raced. Previous research has shown that women of different races have different experiences within organizations (Rosette et al., 2018; Richardson & Taylor, 2009).

Since individuals can have multiple standpoints, their experiences can be studied through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality suggests that individuals have various identities that work together to shape one's experiences (Crenshaw, 2006). Intersectionality theory started as a framework to analyze the intersection of gender, race, and class among Black women in light of their exclusion from feminist movements (Crenshaw, 2006). However, it is now used to understand many intersecting identities and is applicable to help analyze various groups. Individuals can simultaneously belong to some groups that are marginalized and some groups that are privileged (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013).

Feminism has also been applied to public relations research. Aldoory (2003) notes that feminism in public relations has been studied from the perspective of liberal feminism and radical feminism. According to Aldoory (2003), liberal feminists assume that women in public relations will gain equality by putting more women in management positions and by advocating for equal pay and treatment, while radical feminists believe that current oppressive social structures must be reformed before women in public relations can reach equality. These works demonstrate that issues that relate to all women, such as equal pay, have received attention. However, there is an overall lack of research that focuses specifically on BIWOC and the additional issues that they may face that White women do not.

The above literature review demonstrates that there is a lack of research on BIWOC within organizations. There is also a lack of research that specifically focuses on BIWOC in public relations. Furthermore, little research has been done that applies intersectionality to public relations. To my knowledge, there has been no research done on how BIWOC perceive diversity efforts. Additionally, there has been no research done on how BIWOC perceive their intersectional identities in relation to their identities as public relations professionals. Likewise,



no previous research has explored how BIWOC in public relations may feel about their work as it relates to workplace diversity efforts.

Based on this, I propose the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do BIWOC working in public relations perceive their workplace diversity efforts?

**RQ2:** What emotions do BIWOC working in public relations feel when working on workplace diversity efforts?

**RQ3:** How do BIWOC working in public relations deal with workplace discrimination?

## **Chapter 4: Methods**

This section explains the method used to answer the research questions. First, I illustrate my positionality as a researcher. Next, I discuss the characteristics of participants in this study. Then, I discuss how these participants were recruited. Lastly, I illustrate the procedures taken to collect and analyze data.

### **Positionality Statement**

As a woman who identifies as both Black and White, I consider my standpoint to be a Black feminist standpoint due my experiences that most align with that of other Black women. I have explored this research using the critical paradigm. This paradigm asserts that power relations influence thought (Tracy, 2020). The goal of critical research is to disrupt power relations and to improve current issues. I wanted to gain insight into how BIWOC in public relations perceive workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. I also wanted to find ways to improve any issues that participants discussed. Feminism is also often seen in critical research. I believe that, in terms of power relations, women are disadvantaged compared to men and that BIWOC are disadvantaged compared to White women. I believe that the most effective way to learn more about the experiences of BIWOC is to speak to people who share that identity. I

believe that it is appropriate for me to speak to BIWOC about their experiences because I share their experiences in my own professional and academic life. According to Tracy (2020), much research in communication is done using the critical paradigm, which makes this study a relevant addition to communication scholarship.

## **Participants**

The sample for this study were BIWOC who were 19 years of age or older who work full time positions in public relations. Participants who worked in agency, corporate, and higher education sectors were interviewed, which allowed for insight into more than one sector of public relations (Brunner, 2008).

## **Sampling**

Participants were recruited on LinkedIn using the messaging feature. In the LinkedIn search bar, I searched the following terms: “public relations,” “public relations professional,” “pr professional,” and “communications professional.” I scrolled through the results and sent a recruitment message (see Appendix A) to each user who visibly appeared to be a BIWOC. I also recruited participants using snowball sampling by relying on recommendations from other participants. Using these sampling methods, 11 participants were recruited. Of the participants, three identify as Black, three identify as Asian Americans, one identifies as Indian American, one identifies as Brown, two identify as Mexican American, and one identifies as Hawaiian. Two participants identify as immigrants and one participant identifies as legally blind. No participants identify as Indigenous. A table listing each participant is provided below:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Industry</b>
Mya	Mexican American	Communications & Marketing Specialist	Higher Education
Joslyn	Mexican American	Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging Senior Specialist	Technology
Nicole	Black (immigrant)	Founder/Chief Executive Officer	Biotechnology/Healthcare
Anna	Brown (immigrant)	Account Director	Technology
Nina	Asian American	Associate Account Executive	Unspecified
Zoe	Black	Communications Specialist	Technology
Alexis	Black	Chief Communications Officer	E-Commerce/Technology
Laila	Hawaiian	Managing Director	Technology
Sarah	Indian American	Junior Associate	Unspecified
Brooke	Asian American	Director of Communications	Healthcare
Cara	Asian American	Associate Director	Technology

## **Procedures**

Nine interviews were completed via Zoom and two interviews were completed over phone calls. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed me to use an interview protocol that outlined questions that I planned to ask. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information letter that outlined their rights as participants (see Appendix B). I read the information letter to participants at the start of each interview. Then, I provided information about myself and my interest in the current research. After this, I asked each participant for consent to record. Once consent was given, I began asking the interview questions. Most interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Two interviews lasted between 25 and 30 minutes.

During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their experiences as public relations professionals, perceptions of their workplace diversity and inclusion efforts, and their racial and/or ethnic identities in relation to their professional experiences. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was created to learn about participants' experiences as BIWOC in public relations as it relates to workplace diversity statements. Originally, I planned for the conversations to focus on diversity statements, but each interview focused on diversity efforts more broadly. No participant was asked every question listed in the interview protocol and when participants mentioned something unexpected, I asked questions that are not listed on the protocol.

After completing seven interviews, I began transcribing the audio recordings and removed any identifying information. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Similarly, any names of organizations were also given pseudonyms. After this, I began first level coding. During the process of first level coding, I continued conducting and transcribing interviews. The initial coding led to a list of 127 codes. Examples of codes included microaggressions, mentorship, imposter syndrome, pride, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) councils. After this, I began a second level of analysis where a total of six themes were found. These themes were divided into two groups. In the following section, the themes are discussed in detail.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

In this section, I illustrate the recurring themes found throughout the interview data. These themes demonstrate how participants experience working in public relations in relation to diversity and inclusion statements and issues. These themes also demonstrate ways that participants indicated that agencies and corporations can improve as it relates to diversity and inclusion statements and issues.

The first group of themes focus on how BIWOC experience working in public relations. In this group, the first theme found is that BIWOC bring a unique perspective to public relations. This theme illustrates that BIWOC hold a perspective based on their social location that others do not have. The second theme is that BIWOC take pride in helping to further workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. This theme displays that BIWOC may feel proud to have opportunities to improve diversity and inclusion statements and other initiatives in the workplace. The third theme is that BIWOC experience conflicting emotions and thoughts related to workplace diversity and inclusion statements and efforts. This theme shows that BIWOC are proud of some workplace diversity statements and efforts that seem sincere, while still being critical of others that are insincere.

The second group of themes displays demonstrate ways that participants indicated that agencies and corporations can improve as it relates to diversity efforts and issues. The first theme in this category is organizations can provide internal diversity and inclusion resources to make BIWOC feel more supported. This theme demonstrates that BIWOC may perceive current internal diversity and inclusion efforts as not being enough to provide a comfortable work environment for themselves and other underrepresented groups. The second theme is that organizations can focus on multiple dimensions of diversity, rather than only focusing on race and ethnicity. This theme illustrates that BIWOC may perceive current diversity and inclusion efforts as not being inclusive of all historically disadvantaged groups, such as employees with disabilities or who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. The third theme is that the public relations industry upholds inequalities that harm BIWOC. This theme displays that despite many organizations taking a stance on issues related to diversity and inclusion, BIWOC still perceive certain instances of racism and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. In analyzing

these themes, I answer the earlier mentioned research questions. The following sections will provide further detail into each theme through an analysis of quotes from participants.

## **BIWOC Identities and Experiences**

This section illustrates aspects of participants' identities that make their experiences as public relations professionals unique.

### ***Unique Perspectives***

When asked to describe what BIWOC bring to public relations, all participants mentioned that BIWOC bring unique perspective to the industry. In public relations, employees are constantly producing work that public audiences see. Sometimes, these public facing efforts are perceived as being offensive and can cause a crisis. Brooke described her thoughts on this issue:

Still to this day, it's not necessarily for PR, but like marketing, advertising, communications, you see those moments where a company is in trouble because you're just like did they not have a single person in the room to just flag it? Like get that outside perspective so like perspective is still so key. And it's crazy that, like those moments still happen, but like they do, and I was talking about and I was like it isn't that hard to get other people in the room. I don't think it is.

In this comment, Brooke expresses disappointment in seeing that companies still release insensitive content despite all the diversity and inclusion efforts that have been taken to help combat such instances. Brooke emphasizes the importance of having people who can point out potentially problematic work, particularly, BIWOC. Brooke feels that it can be easier for BIWOC to point out potentially problematic work due to their lived experiences. Others may not

be able to flag such issues because they do not have the same knowledge that BIWOC have.

Brooke expressed similar insights:

Your own experience will shape creatively, how you look at different things, so I think the perspective of your approach when you're thinking about building plans, building a content strategy developing copy, you know for women of color it's just a very special and unique perspective. And I think depending on your experience your life like what you've been surrounded with things you've endured the challenges you've overcome the barriers you've had to kind of breakthrough. It allows you to think about things from different perspectives... You do that when you're trying to problem solve and actually go into crisis PR branch. Everything is on fire since yesterday so working under pressure, tight deadlines, multitasking — you've done that your whole life, and I think those strings really play into you being really good at your job.

Brooke explained her belief that the challenges that BIWOC face in everyday help them work through challenges in their professional lives. Brooke specifically relates her thoughts to the public relations industry by mentioning creativity and crisis communication. She believes that BIWOC are especially talented public relations professionals because they have had experiences that taught them to effectively manage problems. Due to being historically underserved, BIWOC possess knowledge on navigating issues that those from other groups do not have. An example of an issue that BIWOC may have a unique perspective on comes from Anna who said:

When you're a female PR person, it's an easy win for a lot of clients if you have a female executive. We can talk about women in tech and that's really easy, but I think like it's important to look at the other angles. Like what makes the whole person? And, especially

when you have a person of color, you sort of have that shared experience and you can kind of tell their story better.

In this example, Anna explains that diverse teams may be able to better serve clients that come from similar backgrounds due to their shared experiences. In this case, Anna argues that stories can be more successful when public relations professionals focus on details about clients that others may not consider. Anna discusses how common it is to see stories about female CEOs, but that it is less common to see stories about other aspects of their identities because professionals who do not have similar experiences may not know that certain identities could be discussed in potential media coverage. Due to their standpoint, practitioners from dominant groups and who do not share the same identities as their clients are not able to bring the creative insight that BIWOC can.

While participants do believe that BIWOC have shared experiences, they also clarified that no groups should be viewed as a monolith. Anna mentioned:

Even though we've got three or four Brown people at the organization, we have very different experiences across the board. We've got two immigrants that are from India. I'm an immigrant... Even though we're the same color, our experiences are very different.

In this example, Anna explains that it is important to acknowledge that even though several employees may have similar cultural experiences, they are still different people that likely have differing insights. Due to being historically disadvantaged, BIWOC may have experiences that resemble the experiences of those with the same identities, but not every BIWOC has the same experiences. Based on these examples, it is evident participants believe that BIWOC bring a unique perspective that is valuable to work in public relations based on their standpoints.



## *Pride*

Participants discussed feeling a great sense of pride in their identities as BIWOC working in public relations. Mya explained, “the older that I’ve gotten, the more proud I’ve become about being a woman of color.” Similarly to other participants, Mya discussed becoming more proud of being a part of the BIWOC community as she got older and further into her career. This statement is interesting because Mya also mentioned having work experiences related to identity as a BIWOC that she had never had prior to beginning her career. Mya explained that she is responsible for creating marketing materials for her workplace. A piece of feedback that she commonly receives from her supervisor before these materials can be approved is that she needs to find photos that demonstrate more diversity. Mya said:

A brochure where 77% of the students that go to this institution are White and almost 100% of the time you're asking me to find a more diverse photo it's just ridiculous and so I have started to just kind of ignore those comments or, not necessarily make something up, but just be like that was the best photo that I could find... so I have definitely started to kind of like fight it a little bit more. But I didn't at first... And it didn't even occur to me, until recently, and this is probably because I'm so like I feel like culturally assimilated. I'm like does she realize that she's a White woman telling me, who is a person of color to go and find our diverse photo?

In this example, Mya mentions that she had not thought much about her supervisor’s requests to find more “diverse photos” until recently. Mya also explains that she is proud to now acknowledge and push back against her supervisor’s suggestions. Mya’s awareness also allows her to be more sensitive to her supervisor’s feedback. Her supervisor may not notice an issue in

giving this feedback because she is a member of the dominant group and cannot access the same knowledge that BIWOC can.

Each participant acknowledged that BIPOC may experience pressure and other negative feelings when tasked with participating in and leading workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. However, no participants mentioned that they have experienced these feelings of pressure. Everyone reflected on the pride they feel in having the opportunity to help expand and improve diversity and inclusion efforts in their workplaces. The feeling of having a responsibility to help in these efforts was also discussed. This feeling was explained by Joslyn. She said:

I love having a seat at the table and feeling like my opinions and my thoughts are making an impact so I'm all about getting involved, but I also recognize that, for some people you know, we have faced too much, a lot of oppression already. We just want to do our daily job... You're not getting paid extra. It's not contributing to a lot to your performance reviews, so a lot of people just want to stay in where their job description lies and not do anything beyond. That's completely valid depending on people's comfortability with being involved.

Joslyn discussed that working on diversity and inclusion efforts usually does not come with any additional pay or other direct benefits yet might add to one's emotional burden or become a job expectation for BIWOC. Despite this potential burden, she still loves to take on the extra responsibilities in order to improve workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. This example is interesting because it demonstrates that BIWOC may want to work on diversity and inclusion efforts due to the value that their standpoints bring. While it can be fulfilling to help with these efforts, Nicole was questioned about her intentions in doing diversity and inclusion work. She said:

The more I started to do this diversity work, the more you start to see people's discomfort with it or their perceptions of it. I was once told me doing this was going to be career suicide and not to do that. There was another person who questioned my authenticity in doing it because going back to the stereotypes point... you have this Canadian citizenship, you speak French. you go to Europe. I'm probably like an Oreo and I'm completely unreliable and have too much privilege. It was the most bizarre thing ever. Nicole mentioned that she was encouraged not to do diversity and inclusion work by another employee. This example is interesting because Nicole's coworker attempted to police her identity. Even though Nicole identifies as Black and expressed an interest in working diversity and inclusion efforts, one of her coworkers perceived this as inappropriate due to Nicole's experiences that may deviate from the experiences that other Black women have. Although Nicole can use her standpoint as a Black woman to provide insight for improving her workplace's diversity and inclusion efforts, she was told by another coworker that her experiences would not be valuable.

Furthermore, while participants shared that they are proud to help further diversity and inclusion efforts, Nicole mentioned that it is important to set boundaries for what public relations professionals should be tasked with as it relates to diversity and inclusion. She said:

There was an instance with an employee who thankfully left the company because he was absolutely hated us and had committed all kinds of HR fractions and hey were looking to us to solve it. No, this is an HR thing, but they were wanting us to move beyond that... I even saw it actually with the client work when someone needed a message written for an interview. I thought they just needed me to review it and it turned out know they wanted me to write it and I was like nope you can do that. They were like well we're not Black.

There was some inherent laziness and I was like what makes you think that you can't do this. Thankfully, when we were reporting into our company president we flagged it and we're like one, we need a consultant to come on and help us and two, someone needs to start telling all of our peers that we don't exist to do the work for that.

Nicole's statement is interesting because she is passionate about diversity and inclusion work, but states that there are limits to what public relations professionals should be expected to do. Based on her examples, these boundaries need to be clearly stated to coworkers and to clients. Although BIWOC have a unique standpoint that should be valued by their coworkers, they should not be expected to contribute to all workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. Based on this data, it is evident that participants have a great sense of pride in participating in workplace diversity and inclusion efforts, even though it can sometimes come with unwanted burdens.

### ***Conflicting Emotions***

While participants reflected on being proud of participating in diversity and inclusion work, they also spoke about conflicting emotions of frustration with the progress on diversity and inclusion efforts in their workplaces and within the public relations industry. Many BIWOC may be hyper alert of insensitivities. Zoe explained:

I feel like as a Black person you're always kind of waiting for a White person to say something stupid when they're talking about DEI. I'm like are you going to listen to me when I say something, are you going to like laugh it off?

Zoe feels that she has to always be alert in case one of her White colleagues says something that may be offensive. This statement is interesting because while Zoe has an overall comfortable work environment and is pleased with the current diversity and inclusion efforts in her workplace, she is still prepared for the possibility that someone at work may say or do

something offensive. Zoe is also unsure of how coworkers would respond if she ever did point out an insensitive remark. Due to the unique social position that BIWOC have, they may be more sensitive to certain issues that those within dominant groups do not notice. This example shows that it may be difficult for BIWOC to feel comfortable at work if while they are working on diversity and inclusion efforts, they must also be hyperalert to any potentially problematic instances.

Mya brought up that it can be especially difficult for public relations professionals to feel completely satisfied because one of the functions of public relations is to make organizations look admirable. She said:

Policies and statements, which are all written documents, are important, but I do think that, at least in my experience, those very much differ from like the lived experience of working in that organization... The organization is putting their best foot forward with these statements and these policies, but that doesn't mean that it's actually happening in reality.

Mya's statement is interesting because it illustrates that even though she does not think her organization meets the diversity and inclusion standards that are presented in written policies and statements, she is still willing to help the organization appear positively to its audiences. This statement shows that some BIWOC working in public relations may not feel that their work efforts may not align with their work experiences. This example also indicates that BIWOC may not feel that the diversity and inclusion statements they help create for their workplaces are sincere due to their lived experiences as underserved individuals. These examples show that BIWOC may experience conflicting emotions in relation to their workplace diversity statements and other efforts due to their personal experiences within their workplaces.

## **Public Relations Agencies and Corporations**

This section displays participants' insights on their workplaces in relation to diversity and inclusion efforts and issues.

### ***Internal Diversity and Inclusion Efforts***

When asked about their feelings toward workplace diversity and inclusion efforts, all participants said that they were overall pleased with their organizations, but that there is room for improvement. Alexis said, "I think everyone is doing good, but no one is doing great" when asked about how she thinks her workplace can improve its diversity and inclusion efforts. This observation is interesting because even though Alexis has a role in diversity and inclusion at her workplace and is proud of the work she does, she still feels that her workplace needs to do more.

In the public relations industry, it is very important that professionals are aware of any widespread news. This awareness is especially necessary when it comes to maintaining relationships with clients and journalists. It is also important to be mindful of what coworkers may be experiencing in relation to current events. Alexis said:

It is crucial for organizations to aware of how the news may be impacting everyone. For example, some people may have been triggered by the murder of George Floyd. Some employees may be triggered by the war in the Ukraine. Even though our focus tends to be the public, we need to also be aware of what coworkers are going through and give them the option to step away from work for a little while if needed.

This statement is interesting because Alexis points out the importance of supporting employees and giving them the opportunity to take a break from work before expecting them to strategize ways to engage with external publics on any current social matters. Although it is often important for public relations professionals to respond to social issues and events, it is also

important for BIWOC to have additional support within their organizations based on their lived experiences that may relate to current social matters. This statement also demonstrates that due to BIWOC's experiences, they may be more sensitive to social issues than others, allowing them to understand how to best support other employees in such instances.

Several participants also discussed specific efforts that they would like to see in their workplaces. Examples included creating Slack<sup>2</sup> channels for BIWOC to use speak with other during work. This example is interesting because while participants do want to feel supported by their White coworkers, they may feel most comfortable speaking with each other due to having shared experiences. A second way that organizations can support BIWOC is by making monetary donations to organizations that advocate for BIWOC and other underserved groups. Alexis stated that an effective rule for her workplace to follow is to put "their money where their mouth is." This statement is interesting because while it is helpful for companies to make external monetary donations, it is also crucial to allocate a proper budget for internal diversity and inclusion initiatives. To support this example of monetary budgeting, Joslyn said, "our DEI council has these big dreams, but not the budget to make them happen." This statement is interesting because even when corporations and agencies are using money to support diversity and inclusion efforts externally, they may not be properly funding internal efforts. Furthermore, while Joslyn recognizes the limitations of what can be achieved due to the budget, her coworkers who do not share her identities may not. Due to BIWOC's lived realities, they may have a better understanding than others of how effective diversity and inclusion efforts can be achieved. This example leads to another internal diversity and inclusion effort, which is to create DEI councils. Participants noted that it is not sufficient to simply create these groups. It is important that DEI

---

<sup>2</sup> Slack is social platform often used for members of organizations to communicate during work.

councils actively engage in making workplaces more diverse and inclusive. Joslyn noted that, ideally, the DEI councils will eventually encourage employees to become advocates, as opposed to simply being aware of social issues. She said:

Over the next year we're really hoping to move into that more activist mindset, where people not only, are aware and informed but also willing and able to step in when needed.

When one of your one of your colleagues experiencing discomfort or racism or bias.

This statement is interesting because Joslyn acknowledged that employees may not feel comfortable engaging in activism after only a short period of time. While others may think that it is effective to simply create DEI councils, Joslyn understands that these councils must work to make actionable change within her workplace in order to make the organization more diverse and inclusive. It is also important for organizations to provide adequate budgets and other forms of support to allow DEI councils to effectively make change within organizations. Likewise, it is important to value input from BIWOC in how to make organizations more diverse and inclusive.

Additionally, several participants brought up the value of mentorship. Some participants specifically stated that they would like to see formal mentorship programs created for BIWOC.

Nina said:

Maybe we do happy hours or one-on-one mentorship with different women of color within the organization. Maybe someone at my level meeting up with someone who's in a senior role and just asking them about their upbringing in the industry. I would love that.

I know that I could like actively pursue that myself, but of course it would be nice to just you know have that implemented and to be supported.

Nina's statement is interesting because while she can ask a BIWOC in her workplace to be her mentor, she would feel more supported if her organization created this opportunity for her. This



statement demonstrates the importance of listening to BIWOC on how to create efforts that will best support them. Similarly, while some participants mentioned that they have received effective mentorship from people who do share their racial and/or ethnic identities, several participants noted that they would prefer to be mentored by BIWOC. Zoe said:

I think anybody can be a good mentor and I don't think they have to be the same race or gender as you, but I definitely think it helps because when you're having these experiences, I think it helps if your mentor is a woman or a person color and they're in these rooms that you're not quite yet allowed in, because of their status their rank or whatever. I think that they can advocate to get you in those rooms or get you in the spaces that you want to be in.

Zoe's statement is interesting because she believes that not only can mentors who are BIWOC help employees feel supported, but they can also help employees move up within their organizations. Zoe also noted that it is important for BIWOC to see themselves represented in mentors who are in executive positions because "if you can see it, you can be it." Although BIWOC may benefit from mentorship from employees who are not BIWOC, it may be more beneficial fulfilling to have the opportunity to be mentored by people who share similar life experiences. These examples demonstrate that companies can implement more internal diversity and inclusion efforts to help BIWOC feel more supported at work.

### ***Multiple Dimensions of Diversity***

Participants discussed that many organizations only focus on race and ethnicity when discussing diversity. Several participants argue that other identities should also be emphasized in these discussions. While Sarah, who is legally blind, feels that her workplace is very

accommodating, she pointed out that some of the tools public relations industry were not designed to be accessible to everyone. She said:

Diversity beyond race is often overlooked, which is crazy because a large portion of the disabled community are BIPOC. I think the industry needs to reassess tools to make them more accessible to practitioners who are disabled. For example, are these documents able to be read using a screen reader?

Sarah's statement is interesting because she points that BIPOC may have several identities that impact their experiences. She also points out that failing to discuss other identities can make the public relations industry inaccessible to certain groups. In her example, Sarah states that not all tools typically used by public relations professionals are accessible to her. While others may not have noticed that certain tools are inaccessible, Sarah notices these limitations due to her unique standpoint. This example further demonstrates the value in listening to the experiences of BIWOC and other disadvantaged groups. Their input can allow for their coworkers to learn how to best serve them in the future.

It is also important for companies to acknowledge the experiences of all disadvantaged groups. Brooke explains this matter by going into detail about her perceptions of discussions on diversity and inclusion about Asian Americans. She said:

When the stop Asian hate initiative had come out, there was a lot of conversation around Asians are the model minority. They don't really count as minorities...I also think it's interesting it with some companies where they don't count certain minorities, and so you know you'll hear people on the sideline will say you know when we think about minority and building a diverse workforce. We're not thinking about the Asians, and the

Indigenous people or the Southeast Indians. We're talking about just Latinx and Black and I definitely think there needs to be a balance of initiatives that support both.

Brooke's statement is interesting because although she is considered a BIWOC, she does not feel that as an Asian American woman, her experiences are valued as much as those of Black and Latinx women. Based on Brooke's standpoint, she notices that there are limitations in how certain groups are served.

While it is important to focus on various aspects of diversity, it is also important to assess which groups may have the most need at the time. Anna explains this matter by discussing that her workplace hires a lot of people within certain underserved groups, while not hiring enough employees from other groups. She said:

They would come and talk about how we really need to like ramp up like how much we do on LGBTQ, which was not really where we needed to be because we were lacking so much on the people of color perspective. Whereas our founder is gay, so I think we hire a lot of gay people... When people don't have a perception of minorities or what it means to be a person of color or what they bring to the fold you're kind of blinded to everything else.

Anna's example is interesting because she thinks, based on the current lack of BIPOC employees, her employer should make an effort to hire more BIPOC rather than continuing to make an active effort to recruit members of the LGBTQ+ community. Anna points out that, right now, there is a more urgent need for more perspectives from BIPOC than from other groups. Due to Anna's standpoint as a BIWOC, she feels that current diversity and inclusion efforts should focus on BIPOC rather than other groups who may already be more widely represented in the

company. Each of these examples demonstrate that it is important for corporations and agencies to value all dimensions of diversity.

### ***Systemic Racism and Discrimination***

Several participants mentioned that they have experienced racism or another form of discrimination at some point in their career. All participants noted that the public relations industry is dominated by White practitioners, which makes it difficult for BIPOC to find opportunities. Nicole summed up this issue by saying, “the problem is you're running an industry like a White sorority where you have a bunch of people who are mean girls and they have queen bee syndrome.” Despite the numerous efforts taken by public relations professionals to help companies appear more diverse and inclusive, the public relations industry is not effectively recruiting diverse groups of employees. While other practitioners may view the industry as being diverse and inclusive, BIWOC may perceive it differently based on their unique experiences of often being underrepresented.

An example poor hiring practices can be seen in an example from Nicole. She has experienced both racism and immigration discrimination. Nicole explained one her experiences in applying for an entry level job:

I was interviewing for a job went into this one agency dressed well because my mother had given me a suit for graduation. I thought I looked really great and presentable and buttoned up for the work. The woman I interviewed with could not quite comprehend, one, why I spoke the way I did because she was like you don't sound like you're from the islands and you sound awfully proper. I'm like well, this is what people from Trinidad sound like right, so there was that. Then she was like well how did you manage to go to

Monroe and how did you manage to go to USF and she asked me how I could afford the suit I was wearing and all of this, and so, when I went back home and told my grandmother she goes, welcome to the United States of America... and, needless to say, I didn't get that job.

In this example, Nicole explained the microaggressions that she faced during an interview. She also noted that, at the time, she was not aware that she could report this woman and attempt to advocate for herself. Nina had a similar experience. She said:

There was another Asian woman at this office and people would get us confused even though we were, one, remote and, two, totally different... It's horrible. I was so annoyed, but I didn't go to HR anything because I felt like I couldn't say anything. It's just so much harder to have your voice heard in a bigger agency like that, even though they have more structure and those employee resourced groups.

In both cases, it may have been difficult for Nicole and Nina to report these microaggressions and see effective action taken because it can be hard to prove that such instances occurred. It can be especially difficult for BIWOC to feel comfortable reporting an incident related to racial or ethnic discrimination because human resources departments may not be representative. Anna points out that “HR is probably also someone who doesn't have a shared experience for the most part...they may be a White female.” Anna’s statement is interesting because it indicates that while it may seem easy to speak to human resources about an incident, BIWOC may be hesitant because the human resources employees in their organizations may not understand certain issues or take them seriously due to their lack of similar experiences.

Furthermore, some participants brought up that because the public relations industry is dominated by White women, the metrics and standards of success in the industry are usually set

by White women. This lack of representation can make difficult for BIWOC to become as successful as their White counterparts in the industry. Anna said:

When we look at career growth or any sort of career tracking and mapping and the KPIs<sup>3</sup> for how you do your job, they're very much tied to what White females see as a successful... It made me feel like I wasn't great at my job it really like made me question whether I belonged in PR honestly and it really hurt when a lot of people who had started way after me in the company were getting promoted ahead of me. And then I would get a call from a VP and just like hey just a heads up we're promoting this person to account supervisor... They knew I should have been promoted. It was my time, but because I didn't meet these criteria points that are again very White female based, I never got that promotion.

This statement is interesting because even if companies do effectively recruit BIWOC, it is not guaranteed that these employees will be supported and treated fairly once they are hired. While White women may face obstacles on the basis of gender, BIWOC face dual oppression based on gender and their racial and/or ethnic identities. Furthermore, while White women and BIWOC may work within the same organizations, White women have a higher social hierarchy than BIWOC, making it possible for White women to set the standards that BIWOC are expected to meet. Several participants brought up that there are many BIWOC in junior roles, but that there are not many in executive roles. While this observation may indicate that BIWOC are not being given promotions, Zoe sees this a differently. She said, “it makes me wonder why people of color are leaving at the junior level.” Based on Zoe’s statement, it can be gathered that BIWOC may not be supported in junior roles and decide to leave organizations before they are considered

---

<sup>3</sup> Key performance indicators

for promotions. This statement points to issues of retention within the public relations industry, which is an problem that BIWOC may notice based on their unique social positions. In the following section, I relate my findings to previous literature, illustrate practical implications for the public relations industry, and reflect on the limitations of the present study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This study explored the experiences and emotions that BIWOC have while working in public relations. It was found that BIWOC feel that they bring unique perspectives to the public relations industry. Additionally, the results indicate that BIWOC may feel proud to help further their workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. It was also found that BIWOC may experience conflicting emotions in relation to their workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. Furthermore, this research found that BIWOC may feel that their workplaces can make improvements to internal diversity and inclusion efforts to allow underserved groups to feel more supported. It was also found that BIWOC may feel that organizations can make improvements to focus on multiple dimensions of diversity, rather than only focusing on race and ethnicity. Lastly, the results demonstrate that systemic racism and other forms of discrimination are currently present in the public relations industry. The findings of this study relate to that of past research and illustrate new insights into the experiences of BIWOC working in public relations.

### **Workplace Diversity and Inclusion**

Previous research argues that workplace diversity efforts were often the result of policies targeting social justice (Anand & Winters, 2008). This observation was supported by the current study. Each participant reflected on acts of social injustice, such as the murder of George Floyd and the increase hate crimes against Asian Americans. For example, Joslyn mentioned that prior to George Floyd's death, the DEI council at her job had very little structure and was not taken

seriously by most employees. Similarly, Nicole explained that one of the primary reasons she left her former job to begin her own agency was that her job was matching its reactionary diversity and inclusion statements with actions.

Furthermore, previous research demonstrates that workplace discrimination is not always handled effectively. Microaggressions and other forms of subtle discrimination tend not to be taken as seriously as blatant discrimination (Sue et al., 2007). Several participants in the present study provided examples of workplace microaggressions that they did not report. Nicole explained that at the beginning of her career, she was not aware that she could report such instances, so she did not. Similarly, Nina pointed out that she chose not to stop reporting instances of subtle discrimination because her earlier reports were ignored by management. The present study supports past research that suggests organizations do not effectively handle microaggressions.

Past research also suggests that in order for workplace diversity and inclusion efforts to be successful, they may need to be based in what is appealing to the dominant group (Plaut et al., 2011). However, the present study argues that because BIWOC have unique knowledge, their perspectives should be prioritized on matters related to diversity and inclusion. Otherwise, there may be a disconnect between the intentions of any diversity and inclusion efforts and the lived realities of BIWOC within that organization. All participants indicated that while they are overall pleased with the progress that organizations are making in relation to diversity and inclusion, all organizations can continue to make improvements. For example, Brooke mentioned that her workplace is making improvements in hiring diverse talent. However, the company's corporate workforce does not reflect its customers, which Brooke views as an issue. In this case, Brooke pointed out the limitations of hiring practices that her White coworkers may not notice. This



study demonstrates that BIWOC have valuable insight for improving workplace diversity and inclusion efforts.

Additionally, past research has pointed out issues with many organizational diversity statements. Various statements released in light on George Floyd's death were perceived as performative (Ballard et al., 2020). For a statement to be successful, previous literature suggests that those statements be aspirational and outline specific actions, rather than assuming that diversity has already been achieved or failing to clarify any actionable changes (Carnes et al., 2019). Similarly, Mya pointed out that her workplace has two different diversity and inclusion statements available online. One of those statements uses passive messaging that does clarify specific diversity and inclusion efforts, while the other statement is action oriented. She mentioned that prefers the action-oriented statement, but that it is alarming that there are two different statements available. These connections to previous literature further support the argument that BIWOC may have different experiences and perceptions than others.

### **Diversity and Inclusion in Public Relations**

Previous literature points out that, historically, women in public relations make less money than men and that men hold most executive positions in the industry (Dozier et al., 2013). While this research does demonstrate a problem within the industry, it ignores that BIWOC working in public relations are at an even greater disadvantage than White women. The present study shows that BIWOC face systemic racism in addition to discrimination based on being women.

The lack of diversity among public relations professionals has been criticized in past research due to arguments rooted in the business case for diversity (Ramaswami, 2018; Cox, 1993). While participants in the present study did point out that BIWOC have unique insights

that are beneficial to the success of their work, they also pointed out that their insights are often ignored by clients and coworkers. For example, Laila said that while she was a junior employee, she was often ignored by clients who did not take her seriously. Similarly, Nicole pointed out that a man who worked at another branch of her workplace once ignored her and asked her to bring him coffee and breakfast despite her being the vice president of the U.S. branch.

Furthermore, past literature argues that the perspectives of practitioners should be studied through feminist and intersectional lenses (Mundy, 2016; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013; Tindall, 2009). The present study does explore the perspectives of BIWOC working in public relations using feminist, intersectional lens. Additionally, past research demonstrates that there has been a lack of agreement among practitioners on the relevance of diversity in the public relations industry (Brunner, 2008). However, all participants in the current study agreed that it is important to discuss diversity and inclusion in the industry, which was likely due to their standpoints as BIWOC. These connections to past literature support the argument that BIWOC working in public relations have insights on diversity and inclusion that other practitioners do not have.

### **Unique Standpoints of BIWOC**

This study was analyzed through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, which asserts that women have unique social location which allows them to have perspectives that others do not have (Allen, 1996). Past research tends to apply feminist standpoint theory to all women, which ignores that BIWOC have different experiences than White women. Feminist standpoint theory has also been applied to one group of women, such as Black (Tindall, 2009). In the current study, the experiences of BIWOC were studied as all being different than the experiences of White women. The assertions of feminist standpoint theory were supported by all participants, who

stated that BIWOC bring a unique perspective to public relations. Likewise, feminist standpoint theory suggests that knowledge from the dominant group tends to be considered “dominant knowledge” (Allen, 1996, 258). In previous literature, White men are considered the dominant group. However, White women were considered the dominant group in the present research due to the public relations industry being dominated by White women. Participants also tended to reflect on their experiences with White women in the industry more often than on their experiences with men. For instance, Anna discussed that the standards set in public relations agencies are often set by White women and perceived as best practices.

Feminist standpoint theory also tends to use an intersectional lens, which suggests that everyone has several identities that work together to shape their experiences (Crenshaw, 2006). Furthermore, some identities may be more salient than others. This was supported by the present study. For example, Sarah identifies as Indian American, but she did not know whether her ethnic identity shaped her career experiences because she is also legally blind, which shapes her experiences in obvious ways. In relation to her career, Sarah’s identity as someone who is legally blind is most salient. Similarly, feminist standpoint theory suggests that BIWOC “often experience dual or multiple oppression” (Allen, 1996, p. 258). Nicole mentioned having experiences where her status as an immigrant caused people to question her experiences. Nicole has faced multiple oppression on the basis of her gender, race, and immigration status. Also, individuals can simultaneously belong to groups that are oppressed and privileged without making their experiences of oppression any less valid (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). These connections to past research demonstrate that BIWOC working in public relations have a unique standpoint that allows them to access knowledge that others cannot.

## **Practical Implications**

This study provides various practical implications that corporations and public relations agencies can consider. One action that these organizations can take is to hire more diverse staff, especially for executive positions. Recruiting more diverse staff will not only help BIWOC feel more supported, but will also bring unique perspectives to public relations efforts and help to improve those efforts. To support and retain diverse groups of employees, corporations and agencies can implement initiatives that provide BIWOC opportunities to build relationships with each other. For example, mentorship programs may be beneficial. These mentorship programs should be specifically for BIWOC, as opposed to being for all employees. For example, a senior level employee may be paired with a junior level employee and each employee could be given the opportunity to meet with their mentor during work hours. This is not to say that people who are not BIWOC cannot be effective mentors, but that based on the current research, BIWOC feel most supported by each other. Furthermore, organizations should take actions that reflect the external diversity and inclusion statements that are released. There is often an incongruency between organization actions and statements, both internally and externally. This may be especially troubling for BIWOC working in public relations, who are familiar with best practices of public relations and with the lived experiences of being disadvantaged. Additionally, BIWOC should be included in what these diversity and inclusion efforts look like. Their insights and ideas should be prioritized when creating new efforts. For example, when strategizing these efforts, BIWOC and other employees from disadvantaged groups should be in the room to help improve the strategy and to flag anything that is potentially problematic.

Organizations can also make changes related to their human resources departments. First, organizations should take action against microaggressions. Many BIWOC may hesitate to report

microaggressions because this subtle discrimination can be difficult to prove. If organizations and their human resources departments create clear policies against microaggressions, BIWOC may feel more comfortable reporting these instances and these instances may happen less often. This can be done by stating policies against microaggressions in the employee handbook. If an employee does report a microaggression, the employee should be believed, as opposed to being asked to prove that it happened. Then, the actions listed in the employee handbook should be taken. Similarly, organizations should recruit more diverse human resource employees. In many cases, human resources employees are White. BIWOC may not feel comfortable reporting issues to human resources because their concerns may not be taken seriously due to the lack of similar experiences between themselves and human resource professionals. Human resources departments should make a clear effort to show they will be supportive of BIWOC by providing resources and information outlining how they specifically support BIWOC and other employees from underserved groups.

Lastly, many of the standards and tools for success in public relations have not evolved to fit the needs of BIWOC. When creating standards for best practices, the viewpoints and experiences of various practitioners should be accounted for. For example, organizations can allow BIWOC and other members of disadvantaged groups to lead internal trainings on best practices in the industry. This will allow for BIWOC to share their unique perspective on best practices. BIWOC should also have opportunities to lead efforts, as this will also allow for their unique voices to be heard. Likewise, public relations tools can be made more accessible by implementing the ability to use screen readers and other accessibility software to make certain that people with different abilities are able to work in the industry.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study expanded our knowledges of the experiences of BIWOC, it also had its limitations. One limitation of this research is that there were no Indigenous participants, so the perspectives of Indigenous women working in public relations are not represented. To my knowledge, there has also been no past research to learn about the experiences that Indigenous women working in public relations may have. Future research can be done to learn more about this group's unique experiences.

A second limitation to this study is that I only focus on gender, race, and ethnicity as dimensions of diversity. While this focus on gender, race, and ethnicity does align with past research in public relations, other dimensions of diversity are ignored. Future research can be done to explore how other historically disadvantaged groups perceive workplace diversity efforts based on their unique standpoints. A third limitation is in the lack of variety in the demographics. Out of the eleven participants, eight work in California. Seven of those participants work at agencies or corporations that focus on technology. Due to the nature of snowball sampling, many participants suggested participants who work in the same region and in similar facets of public relations. This could have influenced how participants discussed their perceptions and experiences.

Going forward, additional research could be done to examine how corporations can better recruit and retain practitioners who identify as BIWOC. This could illustrate further ways to solve the diversity and inclusion issues in the public relations industry.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Due to recent, widely publicized acts of social injustice, many organizations are realizing the importance of implementing internal and external diversity and inclusion efforts. While many

of these efforts are effective, it is important to understand how those who are most impacted by these efforts, specifically BIWOC, perceive them. This is especially important in the public relations industry considering that practitioners often have a role in creating diversity and inclusion messaging and strategy. Also, while the public relations industry is female dominated, it is dominated by White women. Despite current diversity and inclusion efforts taken in the industry, there is still very little diversity.

These research findings demonstrate how BIWOC who work in public relations may feel about their internal workplace diversity and inclusion efforts based on their standpoints. These findings also provide insight everyday work experiences of BIWOC who work in public relations. This study used feminist standpoint theory to demonstrate how the unique social position of BIWOC working in public relations may influence their perceptions of their professional experiences and organizational diversity and inclusion efforts.

## References

- Aldoory, L. (2003). The empowerment of feminist scholarship in public relations and the building of a feminist paradigm. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 27(1), 221–255. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2003.11679027>
- Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. (2002). Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession: A developing theory for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(2), 103–126. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1402\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1402_2)
- Allen, B. (1996). Feminist standpoint theory: A black woman's (re)view of organizational socialization. *Communication Studies*, 47, 257-271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979609368482>
- Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., & Tod, A. M. (2009). Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: Literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics*, 5(2), 48–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/174701610900500203>
- Anand, R., & Winters, M.-F. (2008). A retrospective view of corporate diversity training from 1964 to the present. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 7(3), 356–372. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMLE.2008.34251673>
- Andrews, R., & Ashworth, R. (2015). Representation and inclusion in public organizations: Evidence from the U.K. civil service. *Public Administration Review*, 75(2), 279–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12308>
- Appelbaum, S. H., Degbe, M. C., Macdonald, O., & Nguyen-Quang, T.-S.. (2015). Organizational outcomes of leadership style and resistance to change (Part One). *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 47(2), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ict-07-2013-0044>



- Ashcraft, L.K., & Allen, B. J. (2003). The racial foundation of organizational communication. *Communication Theory*, 13(1), 5–38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2003.tb00280.x>
- Ashcraft, K, L., & Pacanowsky, M, E. (1996) “A woman's worst enemy”: Reflections on a narrative of organizational life and female identity, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 24(3), 217-239, DOI: 10.1080/00909889609365452
- A year of strength & loss: The pandemic, the economy, & the value of women’s work* (2021, March 2). National Women’s Law Center. [https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final\\_NWLC\\_Press\\_CovidStats.pdf](https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final_NWLC_Press_CovidStats.pdf)
- Ballard, D., Allen, B., Ashcraft, K. L., Ganesh, S., Mcleod, P., & Zoller, H. (2020). When words do not matter: Identifying actions to effect diversity, equity, and inclusion in the academy. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 34(4), 590–616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318920951643>
- Banerjee, R. (2008). An examination of factors affecting perception of workplace discrimination. *Journal of Labor Research*, 29(4), 380–401. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-008-9047-0>
- Brunner, B. R. (2008). Defining public relations relationships and diversity’s part in the process: Practitioners’ perspectives. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 14(3–4), 153–167. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496490802623820>
- Buttner, E. H., & Lowe, K. B. (2017). The relationship between perceived pay equity, productivity, and organizational commitment for US professionals of color. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 36(1), 73–89. DOI: 10.1108/EDI-02-2016-0016

- Carnes, M., Fine, E., & Sheridan, J. (2019). Promises and pitfalls of diversity statements: Proceed with caution. *Academic Medicine : Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 94(1), 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002388>
- Castle Bell, G., Hopson, M., Weathers, M., & Ross, K. (2015). From “laying the foundations” to building the house: Extending Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural theory to include “rationalization” as a formal strategy. *Communication Studies*, 66(1), 1–26. DOI: 10.1080/10510974.2013.858053
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs*, 38(4), 785-810. DOI:10.1086/669608
- Ciszek, E., & Logan, N. (2018). Challenging the dialogic promise: How Ben & Jerry’s support for Black Lives Matter fosters dissensus on social media. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30(3), 115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2018.1498342>
- Crenshaw, K., 2006. Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*. 2-3. DOI:10.7146/kkf.v0i2-3.28090
- Collins, P. H. (1997). Comment on Hekman’s “Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited”: Where’s the power?. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22(2), 375-381.
- Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, 33(6), S14–S32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/800672>
- Cox Edmondson, V., Suh, W.S. and Munchus, G. (2008), Exceeding government-mandated social programs: Minority supplier development programs, *Management Research News*, 31(2), 111-124. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170810846830>

- Dozier, D. M., Sha, B.-L., & Shen, H. (2013). Why women earn less than men: The cost of gender discrimination in U.S. public relations. *Public Relations Journal*, 7(1), 1-21
- Dutta, M. J.. (2007). Communicating about culture and health: Theorizing culture-centered and cultural sensitivity approaches. *Communication Theory*, 17(3), 304–328.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00297.x>
- Family and Medical Leave Act*. (n.d.). United States Department of Labor  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla>
- Ford, R., & Brown, C. (2015). State of the pr industry: Defining & delivering on the promise of diversity. *National Black Public Relations Society, Inc*
- Frye, J. (2020, April 23). *On the frontlines at work and at home: The disproportionate economic effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on women of color*.  
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/frontlines-work-home/>
- Garcia, S. E. (2020, June 15). *Where did BIPOC come from?*  
<https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-bipoc.html>
- Gist-Mackey, A. N., & Kingsford, A. N. (2020). Linguistic inclusion: Challenging implicit classed communication bias in interview methods. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 34(3), 402–425. DOI: 10.1177/0893318920934128
- Gröschl, S. (2011). *Diversity in the workplace: Multi-disciplinary and international perspectives*. Gower Publishing, Ltd.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-280.
- Hill, E., Tiefenthäler, A., Triebert, C., Jordan, D., Willis, H., & Stein, R. (2020). *How*

*George Floyd was killed in police custody.*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

*History of Executive Order 11246.* (n.d.). United States Department of Labor

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/about/executive-order-11246-history>

Hon, L. C., & Brunner, B. (2000). Diversity issues and public relations. *International Journal of Phytoremediation*, 21(1), 309–340. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1204\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1204_2)

Howell, E. A.. (2018). Reducing disparities in severe maternal morbidity and mortality. *Clinical Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 61(2), 387–399.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/grf.0000000000000349>

Kalev, A., Dobbin, F., & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review*, 71(4), 589–617. DOI: 10.1177/000312240607100404

Logan, N. (2019). Corporate Personhood and the Corporate Responsibility to Race. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 154(4), 977–988. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3893-3>

Mckay, P. F., & Avery, D. R. (2005). Warning! Diversity recruitment could backfire. In *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 14(4), 330–336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492605280239>

Mor Barak, M. E., & Cherin, D. A. (1998). A tool to expand organizational understanding of workforce diversity. *Administration in Social Work*, 22, 47–64.

Mor Barak, M. E., Findler, L., & Wind, L. (2001). International dimensions of diversity, inclusion, and commitment in work organizations. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 2(2), 72–91

Mor Barak, M. E. (2005). Diversity management: paradigms, rationale and key elements. *Managing Diversity. London: Sage publications*, 207-223.

- Mundy, D. E. (2016). Bridging the divide: A multidisciplinary analysis of diversity research and the implications for public relations. *Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations* 3(1), 1-28
- Novak, A. N., & Richmond, J. C. (2019). E-Racing together: How Starbucks reshaped and deflected racial conversations on social media. *Public Relations Review*, 45(3), DOI: 101773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.006>
- Offermann, L. R., Basford, T. E., Graebner, R., Jaffer, S., de Graaf, S. B., & Kaminsky, S. E. (2014). See no evil: Color blindness and perceptions of subtle racial discrimination in the workplace. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(4), 499–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037237>
- Ortega, R., Plagens, G. K., Stephens, P., & Berry-James, R. M. (2012). Mexican American public sector professionals. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 32(1), 24–44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371x11408705>
- Onyeador, I. N., Hudson, S.-K. T. J., & Lewis, N. A. (2021). Moving beyond implicit bias training: Policy insights for increasing organizational diversity. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(1), 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220983840>
- Plaut, V. C., Garnett, F. G., Buffardi, L. E., & Sanchez-Burks, J. (2011). “What about me?” Perceptions of exclusion and whites’ reactions to multiculturalism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022832>
- Plaut, V. C., Thomas, K. M., & Goren, M. J. (2009). Is multiculturalism or color blindness better for minorities? *Psychological Science*, 20(4), 444–446. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02318.x>

- Pless, N., & Maak, T. (2004). Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(2), 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-004-9465-8>
- Pompper, D. (2004). Linking ethnic diversity & two-way symmetry: Modeling female African American practitioners' roles. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 16(3), 269–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1532-754X.2004.11925130>
- Pompper, D. (2005). Multiculturalism in the public relations curriculum: Female African American practitioners' perceptions of effects. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 16(4), 295–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170500326582>
- Pompper, D. (2007). The gender-ethnicity construct in public relations organizations: Using feminist standpoint theory to discover Latinas' realities. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 18(4), 291–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170701653669>
- Pompper, D. (2012). On social capital and diversity in a feminized industry: Further developing a theory of internal public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(1), 86–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2012.626137>
- Qiu, J., & Muturi, N. (2016). Asian American public relations practitioners' perspectives on diversity. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 27(3), 236–249. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2016.1172527>
- Rattan, A., & Dweck, C. S. (2018). What happens after prejudice is confronted in the workplace? How mindsets affect minorities' and women's outlook on future social relations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(6), 676–687. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000287>

- Ramaswami, R. C. (2019, May 31). *Diversity and inclusion in the pr profession: The case for change*. PR Week. <https://www.prweek.com/article/1494228/diversity-inclusion-pr-profession-case-change>
- Richardson, B. K., & Taylor, J. (2009). Sexual harassment at the intersection of race and gender: A theoretical model of the sexual harassment experiences of women of color. *Western Journal of Communication*, 73(3), 248–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310903082065>
- Rosette, A. S., Ponce de Leon, R., Koval, C. Z., & Harrison, D. A. (2018). Intersectionality: Connecting experiences of gender with race at work. In *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 38, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2018.12.002>
- Rugg, A. (2020). Incorporating the protests: The NFL, social justice, and the constrained activism of the “Inspire Change” campaign. *Communication and Sport*, 8(4–5), 611–628. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519896325>
- Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. (2018). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2), 176–189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.003>
- Singh, V., & Point, S. (2009). Diversity statements for leveraging organizational legitimacy. *Management International*, 13(2), 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.7202/029777ar>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>

*The wage gap: The who, how, why, and what to do: Fact sheet.* (2020, October 20). National Women's Law Center. <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-to-do/>

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (p. 153-169). Sage. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>

Tindall, N. T. (2009). The Double Bind of Race and Gender: Understanding the Roles and Perceptions of Black Female Public Relations Faculty. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, 25(1).

Tindall, N. T. J., & Vardeman-Winter, J. (2011). Complications in segmenting campaign publics: Women of color explain their problems, involvement, and constraints in reading heart disease communication. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 22(3), 280–301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2011.590407>

Tracy, S. K. (2020). Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact. *Wiley-Blackwell*.

Tracy, S. J., & Hinrichs, M. M. (2017). Big Tent Criteria for Qualitative Quality. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0016>

Van Laer, K., & Janssens, M.. (2011). Ethnic minority professionals' experiences with subtle discrimination in the workplace. *Human Relations*, 64(9), 1203–1227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711409263>

Vardeman-Winter, J. (2011). Confronting whiteness in public relations campaigns and research with women. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(4), 412–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2011.605973>



- Vardeman-Winter, J., & Place, K. R. (2017). Still a lily-white field of women: The state of workforce diversity in public relations practice and research. *Public Relations Review*, 43(2), 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.01.004>
- Vardeman-Winter, J., Tindall, N., & Jiang, H. (2013). Intersectionality and publics: How exploring publics' multiple identities questions basic public relations concepts. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2(3), 279–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x13491564>
- Vahratian, A., & Johnson, T. R. B. (2009). Maternity leave benefits in the United States: Today's economic climate underlines deficiencies. *Birth*, 36(3), 177–179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-536x.2009.00330.x>
- Washington, Z., & Roberts, M. (2019, March 4). *Women of color get less support at work. Here's how managers can change that.* <https://hbr.org/2019/03/women-of-color-get-less-support-at-work-heres-how-managers-can-change-that>
- Way, A. K., Zwier, R. K., & Tracy, S. J. (2015). Dialogic interviewing and flickers of transformation: An examination and delineation of interactional strategies that promote participant self-reflexivity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21, 720-731. DOI: 10.1177/1077800414566686
- Wilson, J. L., Meyer, K. A., & McNeal, L. (2012). Mission and diversity statements: What they do and do not say. *Innovative Higher Education*, 37(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-011-9194-8>
- Wilton, L. S., Good, J. J., Moss-Racusin, C. A., & Sanchez, D. T. (2015). Communicating more than diversity: The effect of institutional diversity statements on expectations and

- performance as a function of race and gender. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21(3), 315–325. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037883>
- Winters, M.-F. (2013). From diversity to inclusion: An inclusion equation. *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion* (eds B.M. Ferdman and B.R. Deane). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282.ch7>
- Wood, J. T. (2005). Feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory: Commonalities and divergences: WL. *Women and Language*, 28(2), 61-64

## Appendix A: Recruitment Message

Dear (First Name):

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled “*Perceptions of External Organizational Diversity Statements Among Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color Working in Public Relations*.” We are interested in understanding how BIWOC who work in public relations perceive their workplace diversity statements. The study is being conducted by the School of Communication and Journalism at Auburn University. The principal investigator of this study is Ashley Mayer, who is a graduate student within the department. The faculty principal investigator is Dr. Elizabeth Larson, who is an associate professor within the department.

To collect data, we are conducting interviews. The interview will be conducted via Zoom and would last 45-60 minutes. We will audio record the interview, but it will be confidential and the information will not be linked to your name in any way.

Participants must be at least 19 years old, identify as BIWOC, and work in public relations. If you would like to participate, please reply to this message. Please do not feel obligated to participate in this interview—it is strictly voluntary and there are no negative consequences to you if you choose not to participate.

There are no costs to participate in this study. There are no direct benefits or compensation for participating in this study.

Please feel free to pass this message along to anyone else who might be interested in participating.

Regards,  
Ashley Mayer, Graduate Student  
School of Communication and Journalism  
Auburn University  
aam0094@auburn.edu

## Appendix B: Information Letter

SCHOOL OF  
COMMUNICATION  
AND JOURNALISM



AUBURN UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

### INFORMATION LETTER

**for a Research Study entitled “*Perceptions of External Organizational Diversity Statements Among Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color Working in Public Relations*”**

**You are invited to participate in a research study** to understand how Black, Indigenous, and women of color (BIWOC) who work in public relations feel about the diversity statements that their workplaces release. The study is being conducted by Ashley Mayer, a graduate student in the Auburn University School of Communication and Journalism. Dr. Larson, an associate professor in the Auburn University School of Communication and Journalism, is the faculty principal investigator and will oversee the study. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a BIWOC who works in public relations and are age 19 or older.

**What will be involved if you participate?** If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to answer questions about your experience as a public relations, your perceptions of your workplace’s diversity statement, and how your racial and/or ethnic identity relates to your experiences in a video interview via Zoom. Your total time commitment will be approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts will not include any identifying information and will be securely stored.

**Are there any risks or discomforts?** The risks associated with participating in this study are a potential loss of confidentiality. To minimize these risks, we will remove all identifying information from stored data. After your interview, the audio recording will be encrypted and stored on a secure, local computer. When transcribing the audio recording of your interview, your responses will be given a pseudonym and there will be no record that connects your identity to the transcript. After the transcript is created, the audio recording of your interview will be destroyed. The transcript will be encrypted and stored on a secure, local computer.

**Are there any benefits to yourself or others?** If you participate in this study, you cannot expect to receive any direct benefits, although your participation may enable the

generation of knowledge about BIWOC who work in public relations and workplace diversity efforts.

**Will you receive compensation for participating?** You will not receive compensation for participating.

**Are there any costs?** There are no costs to you.

**If you change your mind about participating,** you can withdraw at any time during the study. You can do this by emailing me at [aam0094@auburn.edu](mailto:aam0094@auburn.edu) before or after your interview. You can also choose to tell me that you no longer want to participate during or after your interview. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your data can be withdrawn before it is de-identified; however, once the audio recording is transcribed, the data is de-identified. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the School of Communication and Journalism.

**Your privacy will be protected.** Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be presented at a professional meeting or published in an academic journal.

**If you have questions about this study,** *please ask them now or* contact Ashley Mayer at [aam0094@auburn.edu](mailto:aam0094@auburn.edu) or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Larson at [elarson@auburn.edu](mailto:elarson@auburn.edu). A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

**If you have questions about your rights as a research participant,** you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at [IRBAdmin@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@auburn.edu).

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

## **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

We are studying Black, Indigenous, and women of color who work in public relations. I will be asking you questions about your experiences as public relations professional, particularly as it relates to your workplace's diversity statements. I identify as a Black woman, so I have had many personal experiences that relate to diversity in the workplace. The interview will take about an hour. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed into written form. Any information that could identify you will be removed in the transcripts in order to protect the confidentiality of participants. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, you can ask me to rephrase or skip the question. If at any time you want to end your participation in the interview, let me know and I will stop the tape and the interview.

[Go over information letter]

I will begin recording now

1. Tell me about your job so I can get a sense of what you do.
2. Tell me about life as a BIWOC.
  - a. Tell me about being a BIWOC working in public relations.
3. Does your organization release diversity and inclusion statements?
  - a. If yes, are they released externally or internally?
4. How does your job distribute these diversity statements to employees who can potentially benefit from them?
5. Who normally works on these statements?
6. Tell me about your thoughts on your organization's diversity and inclusion statements.
7. What kind of action does your organization take to support the diversity statements that are released?

8. Do you think the diversity and inclusion efforts at your workplace are effective?
  - a. Why or why not?
9. Have you ever worked on anything related to diversity and inclusion?
10. If you were put in charge of diversity and inclusion at your organization, what would you do?
11. Do you think that diversity and inclusion are important when discussing public relations?
  - a. Why or why not?
12. Think about yesterday. Did you experience any microaggressions at work yesterday?
  - a. If yes, did you tell anyone at work about this?
  - b. If so, was your experience taken seriously?
13. Does your organization provide an environment that makes you feel comfortable?
14. Are there people at work who you feel you can speak to about your unique experiences?
15. Do you feel supported by your coworkers?
16. What do BIWOC bring to public relations?
17. Are there any other challenges that you face at work that you want to discuss?