

A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITY PROFESSIONALS  
WORKING IN THE ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRIES

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A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITY PROFESSIONALS  
WORKING IN THE ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRIES

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# A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

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# A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
Intersections of Race, Class and Gender.....	6
Negotiation of Identity.....	9
Media Portrayals of Race .....	15
Racial Microaggressions.....	16
3. METHODS.....	23
Research Questions and Analysis Overview .....	23
Discourse, Context and Qualitative Research.....	23
The Study Design .....	24
The Data Collection Process.....	25
Approaches to Data Analysis .....	29
4. ANALYSIS/RESULTS .....	31
Sources of Influence .....	33
Background and First Impressions.....	40
Negotiation of Identity.....	46

# A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Presentation of Self and Co-Cultural Communication Theory .....	53
Intersections of Race, Class and Gender and Colorblind Ideology .....	60
Racial Microaggressions .....	63
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	75
Introduction.....	75
Conclusions.....	77
Limitations .....	87
Recommendations and Further Research .....	89
Summary .....	94
REFERENCES .....	98
APPENDIXES .....	103
Appendix A: Discussion Guide .....	103
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .....	106
Appendix C: Email Recruitment Script .....	107
Appendix D: Sign Up and Activity Email .....	108
Appendix E: Pre-Interview Activity.....	109

# A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

## LIST OF TABLES

Figure	Page
1. Participant Information .....	29

# A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITY PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN THE ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine how racial minority professionals in the advertising and public relations industries construct their racial identities through the use of semi-structured interviews. Social identity theory serves as the theoretical framework for the study. The research questions include: How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries? and more. This research seeks to fill a gap in existing literature about the racial identity formation of racial minority professionals in the advertising and public relations industries. This research is important in understanding the recruitment and retention of racial minorities in these industries, along with the broader element of the impact on the future shaping of these industries. By seeking out professionals who are racial minorities and are currently working or have had experience working in these fields, the research will better understand how these professionals construct their racial identities through the framework of social identity theory.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Many studies have focused on the media's role in representations of racial minorities (Mastro, 2000; Fujioka, 1999), or how to target racial minorities with cultural cues in advertising Appiah and Liu (2009). The main focus of these studies has concentrated on the portrayals of racial minorities in advertisements. However, few studies have focused on how racial minority professionals construct their identities as racial minorities in communication industries such as advertising and public relations through the framework of social identity theory. Studying racial minority professionals in the advertising and public relations industries is important because according to USNews.com, "the minority population is expected to rise to 56 percent of the total population in 2060" (Wazwaz, 2015).

Social identity theory is a social psychology theory that studies behavior within and between groups of people in social situations (University of Twente, 2010). This current study will focus on how racial minority professionals construct and form their own identities in the social setting of an advertising or public relations workplace.

In this study, advertising is defined as a paid form of communication that answers a question or meets a need to persuade the receiver to take some sort of action, keeping in mind an ethical responsibility to its receivers (O'Barr, 2005). According to the Public Relations Society of America, public relations is defined as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, 2016). Race is defined as a social construction created by humans that intersects with other social constructions, such as class and gender, to create and maintain

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

an overall system of inequality (Fujioka, 1999; Paek & Shah, 2004; Boylorn, 2008). A racial minority refers to a population of a certain race that is numerically in the minority in comparison to the rest of the population. Racial groups include African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders and Non-Hispanic Whites (US Census Bureau, 2012). A racial microaggression, a term first introduced by Chester Pierce in the 1970s, refers to “everyday insults, indignities and demeaning messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being sent to them” according to psychologist Derald Sue (DeAngelis, 2009).

On a theoretical level, this research is significant because it seeks to provide new interpretations and uncover new meanings from the data studied through the lens of social identity theory. As it explores the interaction between social identity theory and racial minority advertising and public relations professionals, it can work to unveil truths about how racial minority professionals construct and maintain their racial identities. This research will provide some means of identifying and understanding the present knowledge of this research topic and provide an analysis for future research.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the advertising field is 6.6 percent African American, 5.7 percent Asian and 10.5 percent Hispanic (“Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” 2015) and in 2012, Adweek featured a study that found 74 percent of racial minorities in the advertising industry feel that their experience “as an employee from a multicultural background is different” from their colleagues (Wheaton, 2012). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015 Report, 9.8 percent of public relations specialists are African American, 4.8 percent are Asian and 7.7 percent

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

are Latino (“Household Data Annual Averages”, 2015). All of these statistics and information is important because it affects the advertising and public relations industries and the racial minority professionals within them closely.

Understanding the viewpoint and mindset of racial minorities working in the advertising and public relations industries will help in future recruitment efforts toward racial minorities, will aid retention rates of racial minorities, and ultimately, may change the communication products made by the industries. Changing the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of racial minorities in the media may only be possible by nurturing the viewpoints of racial minority advertising and public relations professionals, perhaps positively influencing future generations and reversing negative stereotypes.

Understanding how racial minorities perceive this underrepresentation in the advertising and public relation industries and how racial minorities construct their own identities in these fields will provide a unique viewpoint that this researcher believes is missing in current research.

The researcher comes to this study seeking to learn further about how racial minorities in advertising and public relations build their identities. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to learn how racial minority advertising and public relations practitioners and professionals construct their identities as racial minorities in their respective fields through the use of semi-structured interviews.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Developed by British social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, social identity theory suggests that part of a person’s concept of self originates from the groups that the person belongs to and associates with (Interpersonal Communication and

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Relations: Social Identity Theory, 2010). A person may belong to several groups and identify different selves in relation to different groups. Social identity theory also suggests that membership in groups leads to an in-group vs. out-group, or us vs. them mentality, and in seeking positive self-esteem, members of one in-group will intentionally differentiate themselves from a selected out-group to reinforce self-categorization (Interpersonal Communication and Relations: Social Identity Theory, 2010).

This theory applies to this research in a number of ways. According to Deborah Frable, (1997) race refers to a group of people with similar and distinctive physical characteristics. Racial categories correspond with certain biological traits to some degree, however race is also a social construct created through social reality and categorization (Frable, 1997). The formation of racial identity also “involves one’s psychological interpretation of the meaning of his or her race and the race of others” (Carter, 1996, p. 195). This research seeks to explore how racial minorities in advertising and public relations may consider themselves as part of one group or another within their workplace identities, why and how they identify with those groups, and how their behaviors or racial identities may fluctuate based on their settings or which groups they choose to associate themselves with. Examples may include racial minorities choosing to associate with other racial minority coworkers in their workplaces over White coworkers, or racial minority employees negotiating their race while relating to one group over another.

Sik Hung Ng (2005) used social identity theory and intergroup behavior in her analysis of ethnicity and ethnic groups. Ng (2005) chose this model because social identity theory provided a framework for her to research interpersonal behavior and

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

intergroup behavior within different groups. Her analysis focused on uncovering a link between an individual person and the social structure of their group in order to better understand intergroup behavior, as this study hopes to do as well (2005).

Another study using social identity theory as a framework researched the effects of in-groups and out-groups on children's ethnic attitudes. Drew Nesdale et al. (2003) studied children's mindsets toward an out-group in relation to the ethnic composition of both groups. The researcher focused on the children's perception of the physical characteristics of other children, and the children's attitudes toward others with different physical characteristics than themselves. This study intends to uncover how racial minority advertising employees perceive themselves as racial minorities and how their own constructions of identity influences both how they form their own identities and how they perceive the identities of others within their workplaces.

Because social identity theory suggests that identity is fluid and every person has several constructed selves, this literature will focus on different aspects of identity and identity formation such intersectionality, the negotiation of racial identity, communication and racial microaggressions, and the impact that these elements have on the identity formation of racial minorities who work in the advertising and public relations industries.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Intersections of Race, Class and Gender**

Race, class and gender are social constructions that work together to create and sustain overall systems of inequality. These systems all intersect to maintain inequality; there is no construction of race or class without gender, no construction of class and gender without race, and one construction cannot be studied without taking the other two into account (Anderson & Collins, 2015).

In relation to intersectionality, Brooks and Hebert (2006) suggest that narrow representations of race force racial minorities to be pushed into media-constructed portrayals, even when they fit into and identified with none. The researchers also found that the media tends to portray White masculinity as the social norm, which positions Black masculinity as deviant. These researchers suggest that the systems of race, class and gender share a relationship that cannot be separated or studied alone. Anderson & Collins (2015) also suggest that the intersections of race, class and gender are important in the identity formation of racial minorities; for example, a Black female advertising professional will have a very different identity construction than an Asian male advertising professional, even in the same workplace.

As Brooks and Hebert (2006) understand the intersections of race, class and gender as necessary constructions to study together and Anderson & Collins suggest that identity formation is largely influenced by the intersections of race, class and gender, this study also seeks to explore what role these intersections play in the lives and constructions of identity in racial minority advertising and public relations professionals.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

**Colorblind ideology.** Colorblind ideology suggests that the best way to end racism is to treat all individuals as equals, regardless of race, culture or ethnicity (Williams, 2011). This ideology directly affects the way racial identity is formed by racial minorities, as it directly interferes with intersectionality of race, class and gender.

Lewis, Chesler and Forman (2000) performed a qualitative study to learn about intergroup relations between White students and students of color at a predominantly White university. The researcher's results found various levels of stereotyping of the racial minority students by the White students, from White students telling a light skinned Native American student that her light skin tone makes her White, to a girl telling her Black roommate that she is just her "friend who has a natural suntan" (Lewis, Chesler & Forman, p. 79), the White students didn't seem to understand why their language was offensive. The researcher's (2000) findings inspire and influence this research, as this researcher seeks to explore the intergroup relations between White advertising professionals and advertising professionals of color.

**Enlightened racism.** Enlightened racism is a colorblind ideology that can be seen manifesting in media portrayals of race. When *The Cosby Show* debuted, it portrayed the Huxtable family through a "colorblind" lens, deemphasizing the family's race and intentionally positioning them as comparable to a middle class White family (Crooks, 2014, p. 4). Like Lewis, Chesler and Forman (2000) discovered, colorblind ideology is more harmful than hurtful in that it mediates a "denial of structural racism and a lack of recognition of differences and/or group-level discrimination" (p. 82). Crooks (2014) suggested that by deemphasizing the family's race, the show failed to address prejudices encountered by Black families and induced enlightened racism. Enlightened racism

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

“represents the belief that an example of a successful Black individual or individuals suggest that the majority of African Americans who are working class have failed in comparison” (Crooks, p. 5). Crooks (2014) explained that by ignoring the intersections of race and class, *The Cosby Show* caused viewers to see African Americans as facing no additional obstacles because of race, and attributed any apparent inequalities of other African Americans to an inherent racial laziness or incompetence.

Studies have also shown that even when presented with information that counteracts a stereotype of a certain intersection of race, class and gender, prejudices and perceptions formed from stereotypes still hold firm (Dubriel, 2006). When subjects were presented with a video of a White male and a Black male, both of the same social class, researchers found that the message was more positively received from the White male, even though the script used by both speakers was exactly the same. Based on this quantitative survey-based study, it can be inferred that the intersections of race, class and gender and the ideology of enlightened racism have an effect on how a media message is perceived and how negative stereotypes about racial minorities are reinforced.

This study seeks to research how an advertising employee’s race, class and gender affects their professional role in their workplace, and how those social constructions help the participants shape their racial and social identities. Acknowledging intersectionality will help this researcher gain more insight into the way racial identities are formed, maintained and may vary based on different circumstances. Uncovering and studying these intersections will also reveal the manners in which identities may be negotiated, depending on the professional’s race, class and gender and their responses in various situations.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

### **Negotiation of Identity**

William Swann first introduced the term identity negotiation in 1987. Swann (1987) suggests that in an attempt to form and verify their identities, people may take different steps such as displaying identity cues, using interaction strategies and engaging in routine self-verification. Visible identity cues, like a Muslim woman choosing to wear a veil, will have a different cultural symbolism to the woman than someone who is not familiar with her culture (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). Wearing a veil is a conscious interpretation and negotiation of identity for this Muslim woman. Identity negotiation in a social situation influences the development of racial identities, and this researcher would like to explore how the negotiation of identity might affect racial minority advertising and public relations professionals.

Jones and Erving (2015) conducted a quantitative and qualitative study to learn how African-Caribbean people in the United States choose to racially identify, taking into account other factors that might affect their decisions, such as social and structural processes. Consistent with Swann's (1987) suggestion that identity negotiation is "simultaneously how the activities of both perceivers and targets are woven into the fabric of social interaction" (p. 1048), Jones and Erving (2015) found that the identities of the respondents were fluid and dependent upon their location, composition of peer group, and how they "navigated other people's perceptions of them" (Jones and Erving, p. 535). Jones and Erving's (2015) research serves as an inspiration, as these researchers explored how structural processes and social interaction simultaneously influence racial identity, a concept that this researcher would like to explore.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Another deeper look at identity negotiation comes from Robin Boylorn (2008), a Black female scholar, who gave her own personal take on identity negotiation in an auto ethnographic essay. She focused on the limited and stereotypical portrayals of Black women on television and the effects of racial and ethnic misrepresentation. Based on the Jones and Erving (2015) study, it could be suggested that context helps provide a parameter in the negotiation of racial minorities' identities; and that changing context could change someone's identity in a given situation. Boylorn (2008) explained that the "lives and experiences of Black people who do not fit between the extremes are rendered invisible" (p. 418).

**Presentation of self.** According to Goffman (1959), human social interaction is similar to theatre, where individuals are seen as performers that act within "particular 'stages' or social spaces" (p. 1). Goffman explains that within any given social establishment, "familiarity prevails, solidarity is likely to develop, and that secrets that could give the show away are shared and kept" (p.1).

This researcher seeks to explore if and how racial minorities behave differently in different social settings and what factors might generate these different presentations of self. Perhaps different racial minorities choose to perform their identities differently based on the size or location of their agency, their jobs within the agency, or the racial composition of their agencies.

**Co-cultural communication theory.** Mark Orbe (1997) introduced Co-cultural communication theory. This theory explains how "those without societal power communicate with persons who are privileged within dominant structures" (Orbe, p. 4). Co-cultural communication theory explores the power relationships between the co-

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

cultural group members and their dominant social structure, and how co-cultural group members communicate both within their co-culture and with members of the dominant group in power. Those without societal power are referred to as members of the co-culture, in the case of this study, members of the co-culture would be identified as people of color working in the advertising and public relations structures, and the larger social structure would be the predominantly White population within the advertising and public relations industries. “In its most basic form, co-cultural theory lends understanding into the process by which different members of underrepresented groups enact certain communicative practices in contexts where a person’s membership in one or more social groups renders their experiences as marginalized” (Orbe, 2004). This theory suggests that co-cultural group members use different tactics when communicating with members of the dominant social structure.

In a qualitative study by Jungmi Jun (2012), Jun explored the racial discriminations that Asian Americans face and the approaches Asian Americans use in response to those discriminations through co-cultural theory. The researcher uncovered several themes ranging from playground teasing of Asian Americans by other children to professional discrimination, and studied how participants reacted to those instances and negotiated their identities (Jun, 2012).

Cerise Glenn and Dante Johnson (2012) also conducted a study using co-cultural theory as their framework, and focused on the communication strategies engaged by African American male college students at predominantly White institutions. Like Jun (2012), Glenn and Johnson uncovered that in communicating their identities, participants negotiated stereotypes, marginalization and power imbalances by using communication

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

strategies such as code-switching and downplaying their racially differentiating characteristics (2012).

This researcher seeks to explore how racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries perceive their experiences as racial minorities in industries that reinforce social and cultural privilege of White employees. Perhaps racial minorities in the advertising and public relations workplaces view their racial presentations of self as performances meant to combat negative stereotypes, as shown by Jun (2012) and Glenn and Johnson (2012). The researcher seeks to explore how people of color in these industries may adopt certain behaviors or employ certain tactics to negotiate their experiences in these predominately White social structures.

**Code switching.** According to Peter Auer (2013) code switching is a verbal action where the “alternating use of two or more ‘codes’ within one conversational episode’ needs to be taken as such, i.e. as a conversational event” (p. 1). Auer (2013) also explains that code switching creates communicative and social meaning when engaged, and can be interpreted and analyzed differently using cultural and social knowledge and when placed in certain contexts.

This researcher hopes to explore code switching as it relates to the experiences of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries, and how this identity negotiation tactic affects their daily lives. The researcher would also like to explore how code switching may be used in conjunction with other negotiation strategies.

**“Acting White.”** In response to African American’s attempts to shed certain racial stereotypes, some members of this racial minority group, as well as other racial

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

minority groups, have been set with the burden of shedding their racial identities in an attempt to “act White” in order to avoid prejudice (Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005).

In a qualitative study of Black adolescents from eight North Carolina secondary schools, “acting White” is defined as “blacks who use language or ways of speaking; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities considered to be White cultural norms” (Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005, p. 583). Jamie Lew (2006) discovered that the construction of “acting White” also played a role in identity formation of Korean American students, especially those who had dropped out of school or received low grades. Lew found that students with higher grades were more likely to highlight their Korean backgrounds while students with lower grades were “more likely to identify themselves as ‘minorities’” (Lew, p. 337). This act of willingly shedding racial identity by racial minorities as explained by Tyson, Darity and Castellino (2005) will influence the questions this researcher plans on asking racial minority advertising professionals about how they may implement tactics of downplaying their racial identities in order to fit in within their workplaces.

Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) define the term “stereotype threat” as the “risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). As suggested by Tyson, Darity and Castellino (2005), the negotiation of racial identity in Black students was an assimilation response to the White majority in an effort to avoid stereotype threat. For Black and Korean students, “acting White,” meant doing well academically, using certain language and talking about certain topics (Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005; Lew, 2006). Signithia Fordham (1985) also studied the role of “acting White” with academically successful Black students, calling it the “well-defined”

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

fear of excelling academically in a way that has “traditionally been defined as the prerogative of White Americans” (Fordham, p. 3). By pursuing academic excellence, which is frequently perceived as a White trait, Black and Korean students are perceived as not properly acting out their minority identities by their peers and must learn to negotiate their identities to fit into their workplaces. (Fordham, 1985; Lew, 2006).

In their book, “Acting White?: Rethinking Race in Post-Racial America” Carbado and Gulati (2013) propose that employers seek out employees who have the physical features of racial minorities, but act like White employees. So while these employers are hiring racial minorities, they actively look for minorities who are willing to negotiate their racial identities in order to act more “White” and minimize the performance of their racial differences.

In an article for *The Huffington Post*, Carbado and Gulati (2013) explain that employers hire minorities who are “racially palatable”, meaning that the only racial differences they show may be the color of their skin or the shape of their eyes. The employer is able to perceive them as just like White employees, and “profit from their skin color diversity without worrying about whether their racial character will create tension within the institution.”

This researcher hopes to explore how racial minority advertising professionals feel about the racial dynamics of their own workplaces, how they navigate their workplaces as racial minorities, and in what ways they may choose to negotiate their identities. This researcher would like to explore if minorities are comfortable displaying characteristics that exhibit their racial or ethnic backgrounds or if they are more comfortable assimilating with their White coworkers and exhibiting White behavior in

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

order to fit in, as Carbado and Gulati (2013) explain is attractive to employers and comfortable for White coworkers.

This research also seeks to explore how negotiating a racial or ethnic identity feels to advertising and public relations employees, and whether they believe that negotiation of identity is a purposeful performance, as described by Goffman (1959) to fit into a certain group. Understanding the portrayals of race in the media and how they may affect racial minorities and their identities is also an important aspect of identity formation.

### **Media Portrayals of Race**

Recognizing and understanding the portrayals of stereotypes and racial identities in the media is important to gain understanding of why racial minorities may feel compelled to construct their racial identities in a way that distances them from how they may be portrayed in the media. Since the media chooses to recycle stereotypes instead of challenging them, they strengthen labels such as the Asian ‘model minority’ or ‘ghetto girl’ (Paek & Shah, 2003; Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). This researcher is hoping to gain insight into whether those negative portrayals have an influence on their racial identity formation.

**Advertisements.** Stereotypical representations of racial minorities pervade advertising targeted toward children. The images and representations circulated in the media toward children can be so strong that by the time they enter adulthood, they are entering with already shaped assumptions and perceptions of other people (Maher et al., 2008). Maher et al. (2008) found that in children’s advertisements on 5 cable networks, African American, Asian, and Hispanic characters were underrepresented in relation to

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

their population percentage in that market, while Caucasians were overrepresented. In a similar study, Merskin (2008) found that in half of the advertisements analyzed the cast was entirely Caucasian children. Maher et al (2008) suggested that stereotypes portrayed in the media can reinforce negative stereotypes and potentially shape children's perceptions of race from a young age. The more often these incorrect portrayals of minorities and how their race, class and gender interact are propagated in advertisements, especially children's advertisements, the more audiences are going to take that information as factual and let it influence their beliefs and "unconsciously take this misinformation as truth" (Brooks & Hebert, p. 302).

Perhaps as children, racial minorities didn't consider working in the advertising industry because they didn't see themselves represented in the advertisements that the industry produced in a way that resonated with them. Perhaps low penetration rates of minority advertising professionals in the industry equates to less access to other racial minorities in the industry, ultimately resulting in underrepresentation and misrepresentation of racial minorities in the media. This research seeks to explore how media portrayals of race might have an effect on the identity constructions of racial minorities and how the process of forming their racial identities as professionals in the advertising and public relations industry may be influenced by stereotypes propagated in the media, knowingly or unknowingly.

### **Racial Microaggressions**

According to DigiDay (2014), there are approximately 74.3 million millennials, or 18 to 34 year olds, in America, totaling to about 23.5 percent of the entire population. According to Pew, 43 percent of millennials are non-White, and according to the Census

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Bureau, around 2043 most of the population in the United States will be non-White (“Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends,” 2014). The face of the United States is changing and diversifying, meaning that the face of the American workforce is changing and diversifying, too. Microaggressions, or “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights or insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007) are problematic to this diverse generation in the workforce and in turn, affect the way racial minorities in the workforce construct their identities.

Over the years, racism has changed from outright discrimination to a more concealed and surreptitious form of prejudice. The perpetrators of these covert manifestations of racism are often unaware that their actions and words are as offensive as outright racism and are perceived negatively when communicating with racial minorities (Sue et al. 2007). Sue (2007) identified three main forms of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. Sue et al. (2007) defines microassaults as “explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 274). Microinsults are rude or insensitive communication that demean racial heritage or identity and can be characterized as “subtle snubs” that “clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color.” Microinsults can also occur nonverbally (p. 274). Finally, microinvalidations are characterized as communication that excludes, negates or nullifies “the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.” An

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

example of a microinvalidation might be when a White person compliments an Asian American for speaking English well, or repeatedly asking where they are born. Another example would be when “Blacks are told that ‘I don’t see color’ or ‘We are all human beings,’ the intended effect is to invalidate Blacks experiences as people of color (Sue et al., p. 274).

This researcher hopes to find evidence of Sue’s (2007) three forms of microaggressions while interviewing racial minority advertising and public relations employees and hopefully pull more insight into how microaggressions live and thrive in their workplaces.

**Supervisor disregard.** When studying 37 Latino students and the microaggressions they experience, Tara Yosso et a. (2009) discovered that students experienced microaggressions in all of the forms identified by Sue et al (2007). Most importantly, students experienced discomfort from a heightened sense of being the racial “other” and were the recipients of racial jokes and offensive remarks from peers on multiple occasions.

Constantine and Sue (2007) performed another study on perceived microaggressions by White supervisors, concentrating especially on racial supervision. Constantine and Sue (2007) noted several microaggression themes in their study, including invalidation of racial-cultural issues, reluctance of giving performance feedback out of fear of being viewed as a racist, blaming racial minorities for problems that stem from oppression, and offering culturally insensitive recommendations. Supervisors in the Constantine and Sue (2007) study behaved much like the professors and teaching assistants in Yosso’s (2009) study, offering no reprieve from the

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

microaggressions experienced daily by racial minorities. Constantine and Sue's (2007) findings will help shape this researcher's exploration of how supervisors and people in charge may fail to recognize and reprimand for microaggressions aimed at racial minorities.

**Organizational and workplace microaggressions.** Sue (2010) indicates that the standards used to hire applicants in a workplace are generally based on the criteria of a heterosexual White male, and low retention of racial minorities in an industry may be a result of organizational policies or structures that make minorities feel unfairly treated (Sue, 2010). Likewise, Hunter (2011) suggests that microaggressions experienced by employees damaged their health and work performance, and caused them to feel as if their workplace climate expected them to "'act White', and to 'tone down' their racial and cultural mannerisms" (Hunter, p. 59). Offermann et al. (2014) also discovered a relationship between colorblindness and microaggressions, and that colorblindness is a "potential barrier to the advance of equality and fairness within organizations" that doesn't promote inclusion (Offermann et al., p. 506).

Hunter's (2011) research also points out that colorblindness caused employees to feel conscious about their racial identities and characteristics. Multiple instances of microaggressions followed by denial of microaggressions under the guise of colorblindness forces racial minorities to compromise and negotiate the way they form their racial identities and understand what it means to be a racial minority in the workplace. These microaggressions caused employees to feel self-conscious about their racial identities and influenced them to consider the way they construct their social identities, especially around their White peers and coworkers.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Hunter's research (2011) will serve as an inspiration for this researcher, as this researcher hopes to explore 1) how microaggressions present themselves in an advertising workplace and create an uncomfortable workplace climate and 2) if advertising professionals feel as if they must "act White" and erase any mannerisms that may mark them as racially different and 3) if minorities react to microaggressions and if they do, how.

**Situations and circumstances.** Everyday acts of aversive racism are commonly perceived as "attributionally ambiguous", meaning that the receivers of discrimination may have difficulty in assigning a certain motive for a microaggression or prejudiced behavior (Deitch et al., 2003, p. 1303).

Perpetrators of microaggressions discriminate against racial minorities in situations when the guidelines and social norms for appropriate behavior are unclear, or when they are able to blame their discrimination a factor other than race (Gaertner et al., 2005). Deitch et al. (2003) proposes that microaggressions could be as simple as the exclusion of a racial minority in meeting, the excuse being the meeting maker assumed the racial minority employee would be busy during that time.

These everyday discriminations are less likely to be reported, though the frequency of these microaggressions still have large consequence and may accumulate over time, even affecting racial minorities and their psychological well-being (Deitch et al., 2003). In order to counteract these negative discriminatory behaviors, companies should hire employees from diverse social identities and races (Fox & Lituchy, 2012).

This researcher would like to explore if racial minority advertising employees feel as if their voices and perspectives are being heard and implemented when in group or

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

workplace settings. Do they feel as if something as simple as not being invited to a meeting is related to them being a racial minority, and if so, affects the way they view themselves?

In 2012, Adweek pointed out that 74 percent of racial minorities in the advertising industry feel their experience “as an employee from a multicultural background is different” from their colleagues (Wheaton, 2012). This statistic serves as the motivation for this study. This 74 percent suggests that the experiences of racial minority employees at advertising or public relations agencies are unique, and this researcher hopes to uncover what makes this experience especially unique, how this experience influences the social identity formation of minority advertisers and possibly explore why minority professionals are underrepresented in the advertising and public relations industry.

This research study seeks to explore how the intersections of race, class and gender, the negotiation of identity, media portrayals of race, and racial microaggressions affect how racial minority advertising and public relations professionals construct their racial identities in their workplace.

The literature review in this paper leads to the following research questions:

1. How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?
2. Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?
3. What was the experience of racial minorities as people of color in adolescent years and college, and how does that compare with their reaction to the representation of people of color in advertising and public relations workplaces?

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

4. Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?,
5. How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries?
6. How do racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries feel about negotiating their racial identities and the performance of their racial identities?

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## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Questions and Analysis Overview

To analyze how racial minority employees in advertising and public relations workplaces form and maintain their racial identities the researcher used the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions: How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, What was the experience of racial minorities as people of color in adolescent years and college, and how does that compare with their reaction to the representation of people of color in advertising and public relations workplaces?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries? And How do racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries feel about negotiating their racial identities and the performance of their racial identities?

### Discourse, Context and Qualitative Research

Using qualitative methods was appropriate for this study as these methods generally attempt to uncover “what people think or how they feel,” (Bristol & Fern, 1993, p. 444). Semi-structured interviews are valuable because they are flexible and encourage casual discussion (Berg, 2009) and literature suggests that some structure in an interview

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

is beneficial since open-ended questions may lead to participant anxiety or uneasiness (William Foote Whyte, 1994). Participants studied in this research were racial minorities, people who identify as non-White or people of color, currently working in the advertising and public relations industries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the advertising field is 6.6 percent African American, 5.7 percent Asian and 10.5 percent Hispanic (“Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” 2015) and in 2012, Adweek featured a study that found 74 percent of racial minorities in the advertising industry feel that their experience “as an employee from a multicultural background is different” from their colleagues (Wheaton, 2012). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015 Report, 9.8 percent of Public Relations specialists are African American, 4.8 percent are Asian and 7.7 percent are Latino (“Household Data Annual Averages”, 2015).

Interviewing racial minorities in these industries and gaining their perspective provided a unique viewpoint and helped this researcher better understand the construction of their racial identities in these fields.

### **The Study Design**

This research drew inspiration in terms of methodology from a study by Rebecca Pfister (2014). Pfister used semi-structured interviews to study the impact of teenager’s media consumption on their perceptions of people with mental illness. She collected her data using 30-minute face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews enabled the researcher to take note of participants’ body language in the appropriate context and allowed her to control certain variables, such as location (2014). Audio

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

recording permitted Pfister to take notes and identify if her research questions needed to be changed as the interviews took place.

Another research study that serves as an inspiration focused on the relationship between music journalists and their readers. Kelsey Whipple (2011) used 10 semi-structured interviews, each one-hour long, to gain insight on the music industry. Whipple also used purposive sampling to select her participants based on selected criteria, as research did as well. Emily Mabry (2010) conducted 12 semi-structured interviews at a digital advertising agency and five more semi-structured interviews at a full-service advertising agency. Her interviews varied in length from 15-25 minutes each and she interviewed various positions within both agencies.

This research study used Pfister (2014), Whipple (2011) and Mabry's (2010) studies as models and inspiration in various aspects. Each of the three research studies conducted anywhere from 10 to 17 semi-structured interviews, either in person or over the phone, all ranging from 15 minutes to one hour. Using these studies as guides, this researcher interviewed 11 racial minority professionals working in advertising and public relations, from a variety of agencies varying in size, with interview times ranging from 30 minutes to over an hour. Further, after initial interviews were completed and the researcher uncovered no new significant data, the researcher decided conceptual data saturation had been reached.

### **The Data Collection Process**

During the interview process, participants were granted confidentiality, as they were speaking of personal topics. The interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy; date, location and the name of the interviewee were recorded for each interview. The

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

researcher consciously interviewed a variety of racial groups and ages across various positions within an agency. Subjects interviewed had a range of time spent in these industries, all having spent at least one year working in advertising or public relations, with some working over 15 years. Background research was completed on each participant, and they were contacted via email before the initial interview to ensure participation and comprehension of the topic being discussed.

Purposeful sampling, along with snowball sampling was the strategy used for this research study. The researcher reached out via email to initial participants who were chosen carefully based on selective criteria, for example, they were all racial minorities with at least one year of experience working in the advertising or public relations industries and they were all over 18 years old. In an initial email to participants, they were invited to take part in a Qualtrics survey that included the informed consent form. Participants were asked to identify their name, age, gender identity, city they work in, name of company or agency they work for, official position at work, size of current company and their perceived racial composition of their current workplace. The size ranges provided were taken from the American Association of Advertising Agencies website (Miranda, 2016).

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to share other participants or coworkers who they believe may be willing to participate in the study. Secondary participants' usefulness to the study was evaluated based on the same criteria as the first participants and were sent the exact same Qualtrics survey with informed consent form. Since the population of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries is narrow (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), it was beneficial to utilize purposeful

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

sampling to gain access to initial participants and then utilize snowball sampling to get in touch with further participants. The researcher found willing participants from using LinkedIn to search for possible participants, contacting University of Missouri alumni, and searching through LinkedIn groups such as the Asian American Advertising Federation and the African American Advertising Association and other professional groups. The researcher also has previous work experience as an intern, and contacts made through past work experience and through the Missouri School of Journalism were utilized to find participants for this study.

Though the researcher aimed for the interviews to all take place in-person, geographical restraints led all of the interviews to be conducted via phone or Google Hangouts. Three interviews were conducted via Google Hangouts and the remaining 8 were conducting via telephone. Google Hangouts interviews, similar to face-to-face interviews, as shown in Pfister (2014), provided the researcher with the opportunity to read nonverbal cues and to put body language into meaningful context. The phone interviews were used to contact interviewees in different states and locations than the researcher. According to Novick (2008), telephone interviews are advantageous for decreasing cost while increasing access to subjects who may be geographically far and gives the researcher the ability to take notes unobtrusively. Phone interviews also may permit more anonymity than a face-to-face interview, decrease social pressure and increase rapport between interviewee and researcher.

After participants filled out the Qualtrics survey and informed consent form, the researcher emailed them a pre-interview activity that was meant to familiarize participants with the topics that the interviews would cover. During the semi-structured

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

interviews, the researcher posed broad established questions, along with more race-centric questions. Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, the interview participants were given a chance to respond to the initial questions and the direction of the interview varied slightly based on the participant's answers. These questions can be seen on Appendix A: Discussion Guide. Throughout the interviews, the interviewer recorded each interview, with the consent of each interviewee, and took notes of notable points to follow up on, with the intent to not interrupt the flow of conversation and also to make note of context clues such as the participant's tone of voice. Follow up questions varied slightly with each interview and were recorded. Interviewees were always asked if there were points or topics the researcher did not touch on that they would like to talk about. Responses were recorded to these topics, if applicable, and the interview itself concluded.

The researcher came to an agreement with each participant to find a day and time that would allow the participant to speak freely and without reservation. According to Elwood and Martin (2000), varying interview locations based on the interview participant may result in richer information since the interview itself is not only about gaining information from the participant's responses, but "also an opportunity for participant observation" (p. 656). The researcher took note of each participant's chosen location, especially during video interviews, and added it to their interview notes.

The following table represents the participants who participated in this study. Since participants have been granted confidentiality, this table also serves as a reference for readers and gives background to the participants.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Table 1

*Participant Information*

<u>Name/Code</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Job Title</u>
1	Female	Indian	41	Dallas	Account Supervisor
2	Female	Mexican	24	LA	HR Coordinator
3	Male	African American	28	Dallas	Brand Manager
4	Female	African American	25	LA	Assistant Account Executive
5	Female	African American	41	St. Louis	SVP and Senior Creative Director
6	Female	African American	51	LA	Senior Business Manager
7	Female	African American	23	Kansas City	Community Manager
8	Female	Asian	22	Chicago	Entry-level employee
9	Female	African American	26	LA	Producer
10	Female	African American	23	Chicago	Entry-level employee
11	Female	African American	23	Dallas	Account Executive

### **Approaches to Data Analysis**

After each individual interview, the researcher read through their notes to search for possible codes and themes, to determine how many more interviews were required to reach data saturation, and to inform the researcher when to adjust the interview questions or if they needed to reach out to different interview participants than originally planned.

After interviewing 12 participants and deciding not to use one of the interviews because of lack of relevance to the study, the researcher decided that they had reached conceptual data saturation at 11 interviews. Researchers suggest that generally data saturation is difficult to define since it varies with each research project, however there are some general principles: no new data, themes, coding and someone else may have the ability to replicate the study (Guest et al. 2006).

Bernard (2012) explains that the number of interviews needed to reach data saturation is a number that cannot be quantified, however the researcher is to take advantage and make the most of all the interviews and information they do get. This

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

researcher believes that they have reached conceptual data saturation with this research based on Guest et al.'s (2006) guidelines. After having the interviews transcribed by an outside transcriptionist, the researcher coded each interview using the constant comparative method while searching for themes in relation to social identity theory, the research question and the hypotheses found in the literature review. After this, the researcher found no new data, themes or coding that could necessitate more interviews.

Based on the literature review, this researcher searched for themes relating to the intergroup relations between White advertising professionals and advertising professionals of color, the negotiation of racial identity through social interaction and structure, “acting White”, the construction of racial identity in workplaces that pressure racial assimilation, attitudes toward stereotypes and portrayals in the media and advertisements, cultural embedding in the workplace, diversity within racial identities, organizational and workplace microaggressions, and colorblindness.

The researcher used the same discussion guide for each interview, making sure they probed for and listened for the same content and similar themes across all interviews.

Special attention was paid to the way participants spoke about microaggressions, as this researcher attempts to sort the experienced microaggressions into the three themes as presented by Sue (2007): microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. New themes found not previously mentioned or considered were also addressed and coded using the constant comparative method. The researcher also determined that this research could also be replicated further by other researchers.

**Chapter 4: Analysis/Results**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how racial minorities working in specific industries create and maintain their identities through the lens of social identity theory. The guiding research questions for this study were, How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, What was the experience of racial minorities as people of color in adolescent years and college, and how does that compare with their reaction to the representation of people of color in advertising and public relations workplaces?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries? and How do racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries feel about negotiating their racial identities and the performance of their racial identities?

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to speak with 11 participants who identify as racial minorities and who work in either the advertising or public relations industries to gain information on how they individually construct their racial identities.

The researcher drew inspiration from the literature review to explore how and why racial minorities who work in the advertising and public relations industries knowingly negotiate their identities in their workplaces and how these negotiations affect

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

intergroup relations and ultimately workplace culture between White and non-White advertising and public relations professionals.

After the interviews, which were recorded, the researcher transcribed the interviews and coded them, searching for responses and conceptual themes that were outlined in the literature review, and also to identify potential themes not previously outlined in the literature review. Both themes found in the literature review and data collected and coded during research collection include, but are not limited to topics of the intersections of race, class and gender, the negotiation of identity, media portrayals of race and racial microaggressions. The researcher coded the interviews by searching for specific language and topics used by the participants to describe their experiences in their own words. The researcher also relied on other cues, such as tone of voice or perceived mood when speaking about a subject, to add to the researcher's understanding of that participant's experience.

In general, the researcher found that all racial minorities studied in this research spoke of the formation and reinforcement of their racial identities in their workplaces in terms that Tajfel and Turner (1979) can identify as complying with the constructs of social identity theory. By using this theory, the researcher was able to conclude that the participants researched in this study actively self-categorized themselves based on their racial identity, and participated, in differing levels, of in-group and out-group behavior. Participants in this study perceived themselves as racial minorities in their workplaces and their social constructions of self were influenced by how they identified both themselves and others in their workplaces. From this, the researcher concludes that the participants clearly identified with their perceived in-groups more closely and knowingly

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

created these groups based on racial identity. Participants also actively performed their identities differently based on the situations they were in and the people around them, showing evidence that their behavior and racial identities are fluid and as such, fluctuate based on their surroundings.

Each of the following themes outlined are overlapping, many of the participants spoke of experiences and behaviors that could have been categorized thematically into multiple sections, however for flow and cohesion, the researcher organized the themes in the way they thought would tell participant's experiences comprehensively and logically.

### **Sources of Influence**

In the literature review, the researcher uncovered that because racial minorities don't see themselves represented in advertising and public relations industries and in the products that these industries make, there are low penetration and retention rates of racial minorities in these industries. While seeking the answer to the research question, How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?, the researcher discovered one of these common threads of experience was the importance of familial influence in the selection of advertising and public relations as careers.

**Familial influence.** When speaking of their parents and the influence that they have had on their lives, multiple participants commented on being grateful for their parent's hard work and how their dedication has helped them attend good schools and attain valuable college educations. Along with respect for their parent's hard work, participants also relied on and took into consideration their parent's knowledge and

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

guidance when choosing career paths. 7 out of 11 participants talked about parental advice they received in relation to racial identity formation.

The researcher searched for language and words that could be coded and understood to learn more about where influence of the construction of social identity comes from. Participants spoke about experiences growing up where parents offered subtle guidance and advice in growing up as a person of color. Participants talked about experiences where their parents taught them that growing up and navigating the world as a person of color is a different experience than growing up White. Participant 6, who works in public relations, recalled a childhood story when her mother told her daughter, “Black people are handicapped.” The participant said of the memory:

How can that impact the way that you deal with other people where you carry that bias or that impression throughout your entire life?... I really tried to pinpoint what moment made me feel the way I do about certain things and that was one of those pivotal moments.

Participant 11, who was the only participant with a parent working in the public relations industry, came into the industry “knowing there weren’t going to be a lot of Black people... not even just Black people, but like any type of anything.” The participant’s mother would explain that it was important to dress a certain way and warned her daughter that there was always somebody that would have criticism and told her, “That’s going to be the rest of your life. You’re going to have to be prepared to work harder and just be nice.”

These samples show the relationships between racial identity formation and familial influence, proving to the researcher that this link exists. Several participants identified their families and parents as being particularly influential in their lives and regarded them as important voices when they make important decisions.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

**Choosing advertising and public relations.** When interviewing participants, the researcher was curious to learn about the participant's parent's influences in the participant's choosing of advertising and public relations as careers. In the literature review, the researcher suggested exploring the different obstacles racial minorities may face when entering the industries, and the different reasons why the numbers of racial minorities working in advertising and public relations are not proportionate. The researcher also noted that while collecting data, they might uncover that familial background and influence would be important factors in this choice, too.

While speaking with participants, the researcher listened for language that could be coded in accordance with the themes and concepts outlined in the literature review. The researcher discovered that all the participants who spoke of their parent's influence on their lives did so in positive terms, however, many also acknowledged that because their parents didn't have a lot of knowledge about the advertising and public relations industries, the participants themselves weren't familiar with those industries and the opportunities available in them. Participant 10 said, "I didn't know about it just because no one in my family did it. I didn't know anyone who did it."

**Lack of knowledge and education.** Participant 4 talked about her entry into the advertising industry and she noted that she had always been interested in advertising but, "just never knew that's what it was called." Participant 1 described how throughout high school and college she was not aware of public relations as a career field, even though she enjoyed writing and working with media. She stumbled into the public relations industry "randomly" after a friend encouraged her to apply to an internship after college.

Participant 7 talked about her belief that students who are racial minorities may

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

face disadvantages in entering the advertising and public relations industries, citing her own lack of knowledge of the industries as one piece of evidence. She explained that advertising is a field about connections and who you may know, and said, “No one has the same access to people in advertising, so we can’t get into a field that we know nothing about.” She explained that if she hadn’t been so interested in social media, she wouldn’t have even considered advertising as a career. “I just had no idea the agency, a job, anything existed.” Participant 10 offered a similar sentiment explaining, “I don’t think if you don’t have anyone mentoring you and telling you what’s available, you’re not going to choose that.” All these participants and more noted they all had a similar experience of falling into the advertising or public relations industries because the skills they had acquired and their interests lined up perfectly with the work they could be doing for agencies.

For 9 out of 10 of the participants, choosing advertising and public relations was a decision that came after entering college. Most of the participants noted that they were interested in activities such as writing, graphic design or blogging on social media, but they often were never informed or made aware that those skills could be applied to careers in advertising or public relations. Participant 2 explained,

People don't know what we do, and they don't know that this world exists. When you work in advertising... you'll see it's a very small world. Everyone knows each other, you float around from different agencies and you'll see the same people at different ones every time you move around. It's such a small world, and I think because it's so siloed, the world doesn't really know anything about it...Advertising doesn't advertise itself.

The researcher learned that it wasn’t until they entered college, and even their last couple years of college that participants started learning more about how they might apply their skills to a career that would satisfy their need to pursue their interests. For

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

these participants, then, their main influence while growing up and upon entering college was their families. Upon entering college, their main influence became their peers, their professors and their classmates. In the literature review, the researcher predicted that participants would be influenced by their parents both in choosing to pursue careers outside of advertising and public relations and in providing guidance in the construction of the participant's social identities. This research suggests the researcher correct, as the participants used the guidance from their parents in choosing to enter college and in the formation of their racial identities, guidance that all the participants still point back to now as full-time employees.

**The American Dream.** A recurring theme the researcher encountered is the American Dream ideal. Several participants spoke of how racial minorities define successful for themselves in the advertising and public relations industries and how even working in those industries can be considered unsuccessful. According to the Library of Congress, the American Dream is defined as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” Among these beliefs are truths found in the Declaration such as “all men are created equal” and are endowed with “certain unalienable rights” such as “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (“The American Dream,” n.d.).

***Privilege and the American Dream.*** Part of the American Dream and its portrayal is the idea that anything is possible with hard work. This ideal of hard work equals success in practice is not that straightforward, since some people have more privilege than others, including the circumstances in which they were born to and their race and

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

resources upon birth. For many of the participants in this study, the pressure of achieving the American Dream comes not from themselves, but from their families or parents.

To participants, success and the American Dream is defined very differently to them versus how their parents or families would define it, one main attribute being the ability to have a lucrative career. Many participants mentioned the low salaries college graduates are offered upon entering advertising and public relations. Participant 10, who works in public relations and is the first person in her family to attend college, explained:

If you're going to college for the first time in your family, you're probably going to want to do something that makes money. You're not going to want to waste your time on a creative field. That's why I wanted to be a lawyer, I wanted to make money.

Participant 9 described advertising entry level positions as paying "poverty wages." She said, "If you're 26 doing that and you don't have mom and dad helping you, you're not going to make it there." This participant explained that if an employee entering the advertising industry doesn't have financial help or come from a family with means, "they're going to automatically be relegated to something else." These samples show how privilege has a direct effect on success and on how racial minorities perceive the American Dream.

Participant 8, who works in public relations and who came to America for college, mentioned that the meaning of success to her Asian parents is different than how success might be defined to White parents. She explained that expectations and the choice of a career have different meaning to racial minority parents. She said, "I think most racial minorities; their cultures just don't grant their kids as much freedom often with their career choice... we're expected to go into science or math, one of those big careers." She said that White people generally "have a lot of freedom" when it comes to

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

deciding their careers and that her parents wanted her to pursue a lucrative career, something in accordance to the model minority stereotype, even though the participant wanted to pursue graphic design. She explained that she is aware that her parents want her to be successful in the way that they define success and see the American Dream.

Other participants echoed this narrow definition of success, participant 3 referred to being a “lawyer, being a doctor, doing something like that is how you become successful.” Participant 3 explained that when he told his mom that he was changing his college major from biology to marketing, she became very upset, and he described advertising as a field that someone of color may be steered away from because, “it doesn’t fit the ideologies that we’ve been trained on. It’s almost to the point where I’m shocked when I’m interviewing someone for a job in my company and they are Black.” These quotes show the theme that success and the American Dream are perceived differently for racial minorities, who may not consider jobs in advertising and public relations as being part of the American Dream. This also affects the ways in which they construct their identities in these industries.

***Lack of representation.*** In the literature review, the researcher suggested that because racial minorities don’t see themselves represented in the advertising and public relations fields, they don’t see these fields as being viable for success and to the American Dream. The researcher also anticipated that participants would speak about the link between the lack of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries and the resulting poor representation of racial minorities in the products that these industries create.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

From the literature review, the researcher understood poor representation as circling back to the advertising and public relations industries as not being representative of an attainable and sustainable American Dream for racial minorities in these industries. Throughout the interview process, several participants described the lack of representation of successful racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries as harmful to children and young adults, and that it could serve as a reason why the population of racial minorities in these industries is comparatively small. Participant 11, who works in public relations, talked about being younger and noticing that guest speakers were never African American women. She described thinking to herself, “Of course you’re successful, because you are connected to all these people and it’s easier for you than it is for me.” The participant said that her attitude is something minorities are “taught at a young age.”

Lack of representation of a certain racial minority group in a position of power, or even being rightfully representing in a career field or position may lead to suspicion that the field isn’t conducive to success for minorities or isn’t representative of a reachable American Dream for minorities, or even an American Dream in general.

### **Background and First Impressions**

To answer the research question, What was the experience of racial minorities as people of color in adolescent years and college, and how does that compare with their reaction to the representation of people of color in advertising and public relations workplaces?, the researcher discussed racial identity with participants and where and how that identity was formed. All participants spoke of their backgrounds, where they grew up and their transition to college and the workforce. There were a range of responses from

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

participants when they described their primary years, some described attending high schools with fair levels of diversity, while others described their high schools and communities as mostly White. Of the participants who went to schools with fair levels of diversity, they had a range of reactions upon entering college and seeing mostly White students in their classes and again upon entering the advertising or public relations industries and seeing a majority of Whiteness reflected in the industries populations.

Many participants spoke of their first reactions to coming to college and realizing that they were one of few racial minority students in their classes. 7 out of 11 participants mentioned noticing a lack of racial diversity in their college classes.

Participant 3 remembered being the only Black person in his advertising classes in college, and described becoming familiar with this lack of diversity in the advertising industry as “one of those things that’s built long before you actually get into the working place.” He explained that college was when he learned to really negotiate his identity, especially among peers and professors.

You get in such a mode, especially in college, where once again you know you are the minority. If I’m going to be perceived a certain way by my classmates, by my professors... this is who I kind of need to be.

Participant 9, who works in advertising, described her high school as one of the most diverse in her city and said when she came to college her personality shifted and changed. “I really just went super insular and did my work... it felt like those little mechanisms of protecting yourself and just being the shells in these certain places, who you are in these certain environments, started happening in college.” Typical participant responses aligned with these quotes.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

**College experiences.** A common way the participants described learning to navigate this new world full of new social situations, was to simply seek out other students of color to connect with. Participant 5 described college as an eye opening experience that required her to adjust her identity as a Black woman. She noted that discovering a tight-knit African American community at her school helped keep her from feeling isolated, especially since the students in her classes were mainly White. Similarly, participant 7 described her experience of transitioning from a diverse high school in a diverse area to a Predominantly-White Midwest college for her undergraduate studies. She said, “I was like, “what is this?” She explained:

I was in the classroom focused on the work at hand and then in the free time all my friends were Black. It was like, in class, I’m a student; but when I can be free, I choose to be around people who look like me because I feel more comfortable.

Participant 11 explained that within her college there wasn’t a lot of diversity, but she sought out other students of color, describing it as a “little mini HBCU (Historically black college and university)” within her larger university. These participants all mentioned that while in class, they didn’t feel that they could relate to their White classmates as they could their Black friends outside of class.

**Transitioning to the workplace.** Participants described the act of seeking out of other racial minorities as a common shared experience that helped them learn how to cope and negotiate their identities before they entered the advertising and public relations workforces. Participant 5 noted that while transitioning to her first job in the advertising industry, she felt that being a minority in her undergraduate years helped prepare her for being one of the only people of color at her work. She was accustomed to being the only Black face in a social setting while at school, so when the time came for her to play that

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

role again in the workplace, she felt prepared because she had already learned how to negotiate her identity in a predominantly White atmosphere. This was a typical response from participants when they spoke about making the transition from college to the workplace.

Participant 7 described her initial reaction to entering the advertising industry, and compared it to her first reaction of her predominantly White college classes. “When I came to work, I was like, “okay, here we go again.” She explained how her approach from college of concentrating on work is the same approach she takes now. Throughout the interview, she spoke about being afraid to use her race as an identifier while growing up because she felt identifying as Black “fit into a set of assumptions in itself.” She has since learned how to negotiate her Black identity and take pride in it, though she said in her workplace, she has noticed her coworkers making assumptions about her because of her strong racial identity.

Participant 8 was the only participant who had a slightly different experience and sentiments from the rest. She came to the United States to study public relations in college, so her classroom experience until that point had been outside of the U.S. The participant explained her initial shock to entering her first public relations class in college and realizing that she was one of a handful of racial minorities in the class. Her reaction to being in the minority was to feel that she had “something to prove” because she didn’t look like her classmates, and she also described feeling pride. Once she entered the public relations field after college, she had become so used to being one of the only minority faces in her classes that she figured:

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Maybe this is what the PR industry is. And right now there's not a lot of racial diversity in the field. I feel like I'm used to it now because I studied for four years and it's been what it has been. It became a normality for me.

The participant learned to actively negotiate her identity during her four years of college classes and public relations internships on the West Coast, so once she entered the industry as an employee, her racial identity negotiation seemed ordinary to her.

**Physical and emotional isolation.** A topic that frequently came up during the interview process was participants describing feelings of isolation and actual physical isolation once they entered the advertising and public relations industries. Most participants understood racial identity negotiation and techniques for negotiating, but they were unaware of how much and how often they would need to employ those tools while at work, and once they entered the industries, they began to realize how the low levels of racial diversity would directly affect them and the way they formed their racial identities on a daily basis.

Participant 9, who studied film in school and worked at a nonprofit company before entering the advertising industry, described her response when she began her first job at an agency. "I walked in and realized my office had 600 people and I was one of six Black people in the office... it made me feel very vulnerable." She described her job before her agency job as one that she felt wasn't diverse enough, but after entering advertising, she realized was actually quite progressive. She described her first advertising experience as a "huge shock" to her system and said she immediately felt that the environment wouldn't be a place where she would "be protected or supported or understood," saying that in her first few months of work she felt "very isolated."

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

This experience is similar to participant 5 who explained that when she began her first public relations job, she was the only African American working in her department and on the floor on which she worked. She described going weeks at a time interacting with no other racial minorities and how everyday conversations with her coworkers caused her to feel isolated. She said of her experience, “In those moments, the difference, the gap feels very wide and those are the times when I felt more isolated than I just did in a regular district meeting.” These samples show the toll that racial identity negotiation had on participants, and caused them to feel uncomfortable and alone in their racial identities.

**New challenges.** Participants pointed out that while being a person of color during college did slightly prepare them for entering a low-diversity workplace, once they were working in agencies full-time, they experienced new sets of challenges. Participant 7 said that upon entering her new advertising agency, her initial reaction was that it was like her undergraduate experience “all over again.” However, once she began working she realized that perhaps college was a little simpler. She said that at school, students seem to be on some sort of common ground in terms of generational similarities and pop culture references. She explained how working at an agency is more difficult because she experiences less common ground with her coworkers than with her classmates. She also talked about her frustration with working with people with whom she feels she has no connection. “You’re working with people who are White. Some of them have never been exposed to people of color, Black people specifically.” She explained her irritation as stemming from the fact that the products being made by her advertising agency are lacking in comparison to what they could be producing because

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

her coworkers are mostly White. “Some of them are marketing brands for people of color and people have no idea what it is like to be a person of color, nor do they want to take the time to research our lifestyle.” This participant’s frustration rang true for other participants as well, who mentioned that even though they faced challenges during college, those challenges seemed to manifest into different beasts once they entered the workplace.

### **Negotiation of Identity**

In the literature review, the researcher outlined identity negotiation, as the different steps people take in the formation and verification of their identities including displaying identity cues, using interactions strategies and engaging in routine self-verification. To answer the research question, How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries?, the researcher explored how participants in this study use identity negotiation tactics in their workplaces and in social situations with their coworkers in order to develop and reinforce their racial identities. The researcher found that 10 out of 11 participants said they participated in some level of identity negotiation in their workplaces. The researcher also explored how the identities of participants in these workplaces would be affected by the lack of diversity and shared experiences among racial minorities that could affect the formation of social identity.

**Advice and guidance.** To answer the research question, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, the researcher asked participants where they believed they learned these techniques. While many participants

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

cited college as being their primary learning experience, other participants made note that racial identity negotiation advice came first from their parents. Typical responses from participants included advice from parents, such as that they would need to “work twice as hard to be just as good” as described by Participant 11. This sentiment rang true for another participant 5 whose mother taught her that she would need to work “twice as hard, to be twice as good to get half a star”, and participant 9 received the exact same advice from her mother that she too would need to “work twice as hard because some things aren’t going to come as easy for you.”

These samples show that even though all these participants come from different backgrounds and work at completely different agencies, the advice that they received regarding the negotiation of their identities was consistent. Overall, when speaking of their backgrounds, most participants pointed to their undergraduate years as being the years where they first learned to negotiate their racial identities and learned to employ those techniques. Later, upon entering college and the advertising and public relations work forces is when participants really employed those techniques in order to negotiate their identities depending on social situations in order to “navigate other people’s perception of them” (Jones and Erving, 535).

**Coping mechanisms.** Throughout the interviews, the researcher encountered many different tools through which participants were choosing to present themselves, and using to cope with becoming actors while in the workplace. These mechanisms served as tools which the participants knowingly engaged and used in certain situations in order to adapt their racial and social identities. Participant 9 said she feels jealous of White coworkers who aren’t constantly judging how they should present themselves in certain

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

situations and who don't encounter the "barriers of age, race or gender when they're walking into situations." She explained, "there's not a situation when I'm not calculating that."

Several participants also explained that these coping mechanisms are learned through a "community training" from friends, peers and mentors where racial minorities quickly learn what to do and what not to do to survive in the workplace. For example, one mechanism that participant 9 has developed is carefully keeping track of all her interactions with every single person at work, calling them her "case files." The participant developed these "levels of protection" for herself after clients and coworkers alike falsely accused her of doing things she knows she has neither said nor done. The participant developed this coping mechanism out of necessity to successfully interact with and navigate her way around her social space in order to maintain her racial identity.

***Code switching.*** Throughout the interview process, participants responded to questions regarding how they may alter their personalities while at work versus how they may present themselves to friends. Participants mentioned employing code switching throughout their workdays, and all noted the differences in the way they speak and relate to coworkers, depending on the context of the situations and especially depending on whether that coworker is White or non-White.

***Navigating situations and conversations.*** A common topic among participants was having identifying and knowing what subjects are acceptable and safe to talk about at work, especially when their workplace is mostly White. Participant 3, who works in the advertising industry, talked about how he intentionally chooses topics according to what he believes his White colleagues will find interesting, rather than what he may really

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

want to talk about. He explained that it's not about how good you are at your job or the role you play within your job, it's more about interpersonal relationships "and knowing which ones to negotiate." He said he "can't talk about turning up in the club," but maybe he could bring up an article he read in the *Huffington Post*. He judges his conversation topics on whether or not they're "too urban" and alters them in accordance to his conversation partner. His comments were typical of other participants as well, who gave examples of what they might consider "safe" conversation topics, most being topical subjects unrelated to social issues.

The same participant talked about his ability to read people, calling it a fine-tuned skill that allows him to know how and when to negotiate his identity and alter the way he communicates with those around him. He explained that his code switching goes both ways, he has been in situations where he has been surrounded by Black people who he knows may not necessarily understand the mostly-White advertising world that he works in. He said, "I might change my slang, I might change how I speak... there are times where it goes the other way and I'm like okay, let me not use big words, let me not be so articulate." This participant's behavior is similar to behavior described by other participants who said that their knowledge of navigating situations and modifying their racial identities consistently changes based on the atmosphere and people around them.

***Programmed switching.*** Participant 9, who also described her code-switching as automatic, explained that she switches code frequently throughout her day, from lunch with friends to meetings at work, and that she's constantly negotiating her identity and how she presents herself. She explained, "I feel like I give very much less of myself to the workspace as a form of protection." She said, "I think it's survival, it's what you have

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

to do.” Other participants agreed and described negotiation of identity in these same terms of “survival”, saying that in order to be successful in the workplace, it’s vital to read situations and alter racial identity accordingly.

To many participants, code switching is a coping mechanism that is learned before one enters the workforce. Participant 4 described it as something racial minorities are raised knowing and understanding that they must negotiate their racial identities in response to certain social situations and atmospheres. She said, “I think that anyone, especially that has a different culture or racial background at home versus your everyday surroundings, you’re taught to code switch.” The same participant explained that knowing how to properly employ codes is “something that’s ingrained in you at a very young age.” This quote shows how programmed code switching is for participants and how the formation of their racial identities is directly related to social identity theory.

Many participants commented that when they were younger, learning to negotiate their identities was more difficult. Participant 3 said that now, negotiation is “so automatic that it’s not a decision anymore.” He talked about how in different situations, such as getting a phone call from a client or talking to a stranger at a bar, he automatically switches into a different mindset. He explained, “It’s kind of almost like you water down your personality. You clip off the ends that would link you to a culture that other people wouldn’t understand.” This participant views code switching as shaping perceptions so others will look at him a certain way. He explained:

You want to be accepted. But I think, early on, you’re kind of taught culturally that in order to be accepted, in order to be perceived a certain way, you need to fit into this type of box from a cultural or personality standpoint.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

This same sentiment was shared by other participants who all agreed that racial identity negotiation and code switching are vital to acceptance in advertising and public relations workplaces.

***Challenges of code switching.*** While speaking about code switching and how they choose to present themselves in different social settings, many participants mentioned how putting on a front and constantly readjusting their identity, much like an actor on a stage might do, is exhausting. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that being hyper aware of their racial identities and surroundings and constantly readjusting their identities is demanding and tiring. Participant 9 talked about code switching being so draining that when she doesn't feel like explaining herself, she will choose to the "PR answer." She also talked about her dislike for work events because she doesn't feel free to express herself in those situations either, though they are intended to be more relaxed. She explained, "I hate small talk and I hate fake relationships and I know the only reason they're doing this is because they want jobs from me." The participant explained that going through 8-hour work days with her coworkers is already long enough, she doesn't want to spend more time surrounded by them. "I don't care how good this restaurant is. I just don't want to do it. I just can't do it. I'll still be in work-mode." To this participant, and the majority of others, 8 hour workdays filled with code-switching and constant compromise is draining enough, added time outside of work spent putting on a continued performance of their adapted racial identities is not worth it.

***"Acting White."*** In the literature review, the researcher explained that the practice of acting White is employed by racial minorities to shed their racial identities in order to avoid prejudice. The researcher entered this study seeking to explore how racial minority

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

advertising and public relations employees employ this technique and implement the tactic of acting White to minimize difference between themselves and their coworkers and in order to fit in within their workplaces. The researcher found that participants do employ this identity negotiation technique throughout the course of the interviews.

Participant 3 said when he was younger his mother sent to magnet schools, where he was a Black student surrounded by White classmates. It was during this time, as a child, that he became familiar with the phenomenon of going to school and being teased by White kids for talking or acting Black, and going home and experiencing the opposite. He said, “When I would go home, my Black friends would say you talk White or act White. It was the beginnings of learning how to show one side or mask one side, almost like an actor in a play.” For this participant, he directly addresses his behavior as being an “actor”, saying that at work he feels compelled to act out his identity in a noticeably different way, in order to better fit in with his White colleagues. This participant’s response was echoed by several other participants who described that learning to act White was a learned behavior from their youth.

***“Acting White” but appearing non-White.*** In the literature, the researcher described a book where Carbado and Gulati (2013) propose that employers seek out employees who physically appear as racial minorities, but who act like White employees. Meaning that employers are they are truly looking for racial minorities who are willing to negotiate their racial identities to act more “White” and minimize their racial differences. Participant 3 explained that this downplaying of his racial identity is something that he doesn’t view as a burden, but as “just kind of something that you have to do.” Viewing the downplaying of racial identity as necessary was a typical response from participants,

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

who said that appearing as a racial minority just enough was beneficial, but too much and that was off-putting to coworkers.

The same participant then went on to talk about how he believes that Ben Carson, President Obama and Colin Powell are “a little more relaxed, a little more rambunctious, a little bit more of who they are” around their non-White friends. The participant may be alluding to the fact that these prominent Black men choose to downplay their Black racial identity while around Whites and to the media, to avoid acting or appear “too Black,” and instead choose to emphasize their White characteristics, or “act White” to be more appealing to a White audience. The participant then suggested that these Black men are more honest and up front about their Black racial identities when they are around their friends and compared his own behavior to these Black men by saying that he tends to embrace his Black racial identity more while around other Black people. This participant was the only one who explicitly gave examples of a famous person acting White and compared his actions to that person.

### **Presentation of Self and Co-Cultural Communication Theory**

As mentioned in the literature review, Goffman (1959) views human interaction as theatre where people perform their social identities in various social spaces and Orbe (1997) explores the relationships between co-cultural group members and members of the dominant social structure. The researcher explored how racial minorities working in advertising and public relations relate to their coworkers, both White and non-White, to answer the research question, How do racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries feel about negotiating their racial identities and the performance of their racial identities?

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

The researcher proposed that they would uncover participants in this study who were likely to change or adapt their identities depending on the social spaces they were in, and that their performances of identity would be affected by their relationships with their coworkers, both White and non-White. The researcher found that each and every participant talked about their relationships with their non-White coworkers differently than their relationships with their White coworkers.

**Relationships with coworkers.** During the interview process, all participants mentioned how they constantly monitor their racial identities at work and that they are mindful and cognizant of how they choose to relate to their coworkers, both White and non-White. All participants mentioned race as the factor that works in dividing them from pursuing and maintaining close relationships with their White coworkers, and mentioned race as a uniting factor between themselves and their friends and non-White coworkers.

A common theme among participants when describing relationships with their White coworkers was experiencing a feeling of discomfort, and a reluctance to share that feeling of discomfort with others. The chief reasons that participants avoided making White coworkers and others in their workplaces aware of their discomfort could all be categorized into one theme, avoidance out of protection. Participants spoke of wanting to avoid offending White coworkers, wanting to avoid becoming a stereotype for their race, and wanting to avoid highlighting differences between themselves and their White coworkers. All of these hesitations stopped most of the participants from speaking out.

Typical responses aligned with a quote Participant 11. She said, “there’s a greater risk of things being miscommunicated or people assuming something or people taking things a certain way that you didn’t mean.” Participants agreed that in order to combat

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

miscommunication, it's better to be safe and "not say something that might offend someone."

Participant 6 was the only participant who gave an atypical response. She said, "I don't feel uncomfortable having difficult discussions. I don't feel uncomfortable making other people feel uncomfortable." She has worked in the advertising industry for over 16 years and said that 16 years ago, she was more hesitant to speak up, but now, she feels more free.

*White coworkers.* To further explore co-cultural communication theory, the researcher asked participants how they might relate to a White coworker differently than a non-White coworker.

The majority of participants spoke of a desire to avoid highlighting differences between themselves and their White coworkers, and all spoke neutrally or negatively about their relations with White coworkers. None of the participants spoke absolutely positively of their relationships, and participant 4 gave a reason for her disgruntlement, a sentiment echoed by several other participants. She said, "I don't feel like White people have culture, or it's expressed differently. I don't feel like they go home and have an experience that's different than when they leave home." This participant's quote shows that she doesn't feel that White employees construct their racial identities in their workplaces, that they in fact don't have racial identities. The most important takeaway from all the participants was that avoiding emphasizing differences between themselves and their White coworkers was extremely important. Highlighting disparities meant White coworkers would be forced to be uncomfortable and to address that their ideologies were being challenged.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

A common comment throughout the interviews was that participants don't feel closeness or particular friendliness with their White coworkers because they don't believe they have anything in common, leading the participants to feel isolated and out-of-place. Several participants commented on the White-washed look of advertising and public relations agencies. Participant 4 compared the advertising agency she works at to her high school,

where everyone was wearing the same thing from the same place and have all worked at the same four to five agencies... I think it may just be the world, but it does feel like you're just around the same person and they cloned themselves fifty times to fill a room.

All participants in this study agreed that there were clear differences between what they felt they could speak with their White coworkers about versus what they feel comfortable speaking with a non-White coworker or family or friends about. The most common topic discussed as being cut out of work conversations was social issues. Participant 7 explained that staying up-to-date with social issues is important to her, yet she doesn't feel comfortable having those conversations with her White coworkers because she wants to "keep it professional." This was a typical theme brought up by participants, suggesting that being professional was synonymous with acting White, dressing White, or otherwise conducting business as a White person would. Participant 3 recalled his mom and grandma telling him to be professional and interpreted it as having undertones of "don't be urban, don't be cultural." The participant, and several others echoed, that they always monitor what they talk about with White coworkers, the language they use in daily conversations and even the clothes they wear to work.

Participant 8 acknowledges that being an international student in college helped her gain a "thick skin". This participant feels a wider gap with her White coworkers,

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

explaining that she feels that she will always have a “gap with Americans” because she isn’t a native English speaker, but she does feel confident in her skills to contribute strategy and campaign ideas. She sees her identity as a person of color as something that encourages her to work hard. “At first I was like, okay I have something to prove. But later on it just became part of my daily life. I don’t see any difference in the work I’m producing and the work they’re producing.”

The most common sentiment among participants was that their relationships with their White coworkers was strictly professional and practically superficial. Participant 10 explained that she isn’t trying to be friends with her White coworkers, all she’s trying to do is her job. Participants emphasized that the lack of real relationships with their non-White coworkers stems from a feeling of disconnect which ultimately feeds into a feeling of apathy.

*Non-White coworkers.* Where participants spoke in indifferent tones when speaking of their relationships with their White coworkers, they became more energized when speaking of relationships with their other non-White coworkers, using more positive language.

Because participants felt that their White coworkers expected them to behave and conduct themselves in the workplace as a White person would, the participants felt as though they were negotiating some parts of their racial identities. However, speaking of relationships with their non-White coworkers, participants all agreed and emphasized that they felt a better connection with other racial minorities, regardless of race, because they all have a sort of shared understanding and shared experiences.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Participant 3 described his experience of in-group behavior with another Black colleague in the mail room. “The other day I just stopped there to kind of drop some stuff off, but we ended up having a 15-20-minute conversation. I don’t have 20 minute conversations with my other coworkers. It just doesn’t happen.” Participant 2 explained, “You just feel more of a connection.” This feeling of familiarity shows how social identity theory is prevalent in the lives of participants in this study.

***In-groups and out-groups.*** To participants in this study, there were clear in-groups and out-groups, as defined by Tajfel and Turner (1979) that the participants self-categorized themselves in based upon race. Once within these self-defined groups, participants were able to easily highlight differences between themselves (racial minorities) and the out-group (White coworkers) in order to define their racial identities. When speaking of their in-group of racial minority coworkers, participants often spoke of a feeling of comfort or honesty. Participant 9 explained, “I give those coworkers, including the ones that I feel like are in the same wavelength as far as being a minority at [agency name] my truer self. I’m more honest.” This sentiment of automatic comfort upon encountering another racial minority or being more open and showing someone a more honest view of yourself described by participants showed the researcher that the development and maintenance of in-groups was an important part of the participant’s lives and identity formation.

Typical responses from participants described how shared experiences and feeling of familiarity could be categorized as someone else understanding the nuances of your personality and the significance that your race carries both for you and how it affects the way you relate to people around you. Participants mentioned several times how it felt

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

good to see other racial minorities in their workplaces, regardless of their race and regardless if they even knew that person. Participant 4 explained:

I feel like my relation to another minority is on the level of understanding that there are a deeply held set of beliefs that you may have been raised with... there's this intrinsic understanding of, "hey, our world is different than what we're sitting in every day."

Participant 10 explained, "I think you just have a shared experience with that co-worker just because you understand that it's like to be one of few." This sentiment was also shared by another participant 2. She said she "made friends with the only other Mexican Americans" in her college classes something that has carried over to her professional life as well. "It was kind of funny how I've kept up that trend here at work now." These quotes show how active in-groups are in the lives of racial minorities in advertising and public relations industries and how participants actively maintain them.

***Invisible barriers.*** Other participants spoke of barriers that restrained them from truly connecting with their White coworkers. To the participants, these barriers are unspoken and unseen, but understood by both groups. Participant 3 explained, "It's not that there are specific things that you hide per say, it's just that there's a certain barrier, like there's a force field." He explained that he doesn't like letting White coworkers get past those barriers, fearing that they might see him as "more than just a well-spoken Black person." This sentiment was shared by the majority of other participants, who explained that these barriers are what keeps them exclusively separated from their White coworkers.

These barriers are self-imposed restraints that participants impose upon themselves in order to preserve who they believe belongs in their self-categorized in-group of racial minorities. These barriers were especially important to participants who

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

explained the comfort they felt only from other racial minorities in their workplaces after a racially-charged incident had occurred.

Participant 7 described how Black coworkers who she wasn't even friends with showed support after an incident with a White coworker. "They're in different departments but we talk about it because it's more of people who understand. It wasn't awkward because we all could relate." She mentioned that there is an unspoken understanding. "Even before we said our words, just to see each other's head kind of go down at work because you're still kind of sad, you just get it. When you get it, you get it. You know?" These quotes and comments show that participants have a deep understanding of the ways their racial minority colleagues directly affect the way they construct their racial identities in their workplaces and how they participate in in-group and out-group behavior.

### **Intersections of Race, Class and Gender and Colorblind Ideology**

The researcher explained the intersectionality of race, class and gender, meaning they cannot be studied separately, as they intersect differently for all people in all instances, for example, a Black female advertising professional will have a different identity construction based on these intersections than an Asian male professional, even in the same workplace. As outlined in the literature review, colorblind ideology fails to take into account the unique experiences of people of color, disregarding their identities as racial minorities. Colorblind ideology disregards intersectionality and attempts to prove it as mute by enabling stereotypes to thrive. Taking this into account, this researcher sought to explore what role these intersections played in the identity constructions of the participants studied. The researcher found that 3 out of 11

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

participants spoke exclusively about the intersectionality of their identities and that 10 out of 11 of the participants would rather let their coworkers believe that colorblind ideology is an acceptable ideology to believe, rather than challenge it.

**Combatting stereotypes.** Throughout the interview process, several participants mentioned common stereotypes for their respective races and how those stereotypes affect the way they construct their identities in their workplaces. Most of the stereotypes mentioned embodied some combination of race, class and gender, the most commonly referenced being the “crazy” or “angry Black woman” stereotype. This “angry Black woman” stereotype was mentioned by several participants who explained it as being ascribed exclusively to Black women, especially when they express their opinions freely, and it works to minimize the impact of their opinions by positioning them as irrational or out of control.

Participant 5 described how she carefully monitors her behavior at work in order to be perceived by her colleagues as “more of a safe Black person.” She explained that in her personal experience as a woman of color, there are certain stereotypes assigned specifically to women, and she doesn’t want to associate herself with one of those stereotypes because an opinion or comment she made was taken the wrong way. She explained, “you’re either an aggressive person or you’re overly sensitive.” Being aware of these stereotypes affected the way this participant interacts with her coworkers and how she portrays her identity as a Black woman. “The idea of the eye-rolling, neck-rolling Black person. I have no idea if my colleagues even thought about that stereotype, but I most certainly did, because I did not want to be seen that way.” This quote shows

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

this participant's understanding of her own intersection of race, class and gender and how she intentionally works against the stereotype for it.

Participant 11 said she is careful to not lose her temper at work, and she tries to present herself as happy and pleasant to her coworkers. She explained that she doesn't want anyone to catch her "acting crazy" at work because she feels like she may be representing all Black women:

I just always view it that way because I may be the only 'Black friend' that somebody has, and I know a lot of people base their stereotypes off of one person. So I just am very sensitive to that.

She explained that this monitoring happens "naturally" and usually when something makes her angry because she doesn't want anyone to put her in "that category." This participant acknowledged her knowledge of this "angry Black woman" stereotype and how it specifically works against the specific intersections of her race, class and gender and how the fear of being assigned that stereotype affects her life and how she portrays her identity daily.

Other typical responses from the Black female professionals interviewed in this study such as Participant 7 included words to describe themselves at work such as "bubbly and optimistic". They choose to portray themselves this way because they understand the stereotypes assigned to their race and gender. Participants explained that these stereotypes are so pervasive in their day-to-day lives, that they actively try to redefine them for their coworkers. Participant 7 explained that being the only Black woman in her department, she feels pressure to redefine the stereotype of the "angry black woman", so she makes an effort to not act "crazy" or "have a stereotypical attitude, or whatever, how they think Black women react." She explained that her "bubbly"

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

demeanor works to offset the angry Black woman stereotype, and that if coworkers see her as a happy person then she is “helping break down those barriers.” This participant’s response was typical among all participants.

### **Racial Microaggressions**

In the literature review, the researcher suggested that viewing these racial microaggressions through the lens provided by Sue et al. (2007) would help the researcher understand the impact on the way racial minorities define their identities in their workplaces. This researcher found that throughout the interview process, mention of these microaggressions were not contained to the workplace, rather, most participants mentioned experiencing microaggressions while growing up. The researcher also found that 9 out of 11 participants spoke of situations where they had personally experience microaggressions. Participant 1 explained experiences such as going to a department store and knowing that the woman behind the counter would take longer help her or being repeatedly asked “No really, where are you from.” Other participant’s similar experiences such as these makes them consciously aware of their racial identities in the workplace, and serve as a foundation and of racial injustices and discriminations.

**Supervisor disregard.** In the literature review, the researcher described a study by Constantine and Sue (2007) where the researchers identified invalidation of racial and cultural issues, blaming racial minorities for problems stemming from oppression and speaking insensitively toward racial minority employees by White supervisors.

Several participants in this study described situations where feeling that they were being treated unfairly by supervisors or people who held higher job titles, and have even faced microaggressions and discrimination directly from those people. Participant 6

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

explained an incident where someone in a higher position than her made a disrespectful remark which made her feel alienated. She described taking the problem to human resources in her agency, however she didn't feel that her situation would be taken care of properly.

Many participants gave examples from when they had tried to speak up in the past, but out of all the participants, there were no examples of positive outcomes. Supervisors disregarded issues by framing them as non-issues, coworkers were never reprimanded for offensive language and comments and the participants were left feeling like speaking out was a hopeless pursuit.

Participant 9 explained an instance that took place in her workplace after Beyoncé, a female musician, released an album called "Lemonade." The participant explained that her office decided to show the music videos from the album to the entire agency to showcase Beyoncé's marketability. She reached out to the event coordinator and explained that she felt "a little weird" about the videos being shown at an agency that "does not reflect the world or reflect anything," but the event coordinator showed the videos anyway. The participant emailed the coordinator again explaining topics in the album are related directly to social issues and Black culture and that "Showing it within our context of the office without any conversation, without context or anything, is not appropriate." The participant explained that the coordinator said she would bring it up to the president a possible forum, but the president said they didn't feel comfortable doing that. By minimizing the participant's concerns, the event coordinator successfully quieted the voices of the participant and her Black colleagues and by ignoring the participant's

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

concern, the president successfully perpetuated the theme of supervisor disregard as explained by Constantine and Sue (2007).

The theme of lacking empathy and care for racial minority employees as outlined in the literature review is also reflected by participant 7. This participant described a situation at an all-agency meeting where 3,400 employees gathered to watch a video clip produced by the agency that featured the n word, along with stereotypical portrayals of Black people. She explained:

The problem for me in that was, they reviewed that before they showed it to the group so, who reviewed this? Why didn't you see a problem with it? The crowds would laugh or joke and act like nothing happened, like it was normal, and that was really hurtful.

The participant ended up going to her boss to explain her discomfort. Her boss, however, offered no reprimand for the coworkers who created and displayed the video. This experience and her supervisor's apathy made the participant feel isolated. She said, "I know we're all at the same agency, but we're having such different experiences." Yet, like other participants in this study, she has trouble bringing them up to supervisors because she feels these concerns have been looked over in the past and bringing them up again would be useless. "It's hard to say how you feel to someone who will never get it and who probably doesn't care," she said. This experience and others described by participants show how lack of action toward microaggressions from supervisors and people in management roles in advertising and public relations agencies directly affects how participants construct their identities.

**Organizational and workplace microaggressions.** The researcher talked about a study done by Hunter (2011) in the literature review, where Hunter pointed out that microaggressions followed by denial of those microaggressions by using the guise of

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

colorblindness forces racial minorities to compromise their racial identities in their workplaces. This researcher wanted to explore how these situations occur, how participants feel and react when they occur and if participants then feel pressured to negotiate their racial identity in accordance to their workplace.

Typical responses from participants were stories of frustration and not belonging. Participant 9 told a story about the advertising agency where she currently works. A client asked for more “diverse voices” on a project, and when the participant found a more diverse cast, she brought those changes to one of the creative directors in an email. The creative director, whom the participant had never met, responded with, “What the fuck are we? Is this fucking BET?” She explained that there were a number of other people on the email chain, several of whom knew that participant is Black and yet nobody reached out. The participant made a point to introduce herself to that director in-person and said, “he at no point felt that that was wrong” and described situations like these as “demoralizing.” She said:

I feel like overall when you have a workplace that doesn't invest in you and doesn't value you as a simple core of who you are as a human, not who you are as an employee, you don't see longevity in it. It's not a culture that I want to stay in for the next twenty years. You don't see opportunity or community.

The participant felt that everyone on that email chain and in her workplace agreed with the creative director because nobody reached out to her, furthering her feeling of otherness and isolation.

Another similar experience happened to a participant 4. One day, she and her coworkers were discussing a particular mall when a coworker kept interjecting with offensive comments such as, “Oh, this mall's so ghetto,” and “Don't wear your red hat when you go visit there.” The participant felt infuriated and shocked that all the other

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

people in that meeting allowed the offensive comments to continue without criticism. “I was very affected by it, and the tone of the room completely shifted to accommodate that comment and that culture and just allow it to continue.” The participant noted that those are situations that she often allows to slip by because she doesn’t feel like there’s a platform to talk about those issues, especially when her coworkers do nothing to speak out against it.

This same participant also gave another example of a workplace and organizational microaggression. The participant, who identifies with the Black Lives Matter movement, explained how her coworker talked about being frightened of being attacked by the Black Lives Matter protestors near their office building, and how she felt threatened. The participant explained that instead of hearing, “I was scared of protestors,” from her coworker, she heard, “I was scared of predators. You know, Black predators.” She noted that this was one of many experiences where she has been the only Black person and minority in the room. She also explained that hesitance to speak up during these situations stems from her worry that she doesn’t want to be seen as “too sensitive”, or that she “holds onto things” and that she doesn’t want to “point out any differences.” This participant, and many others, explained that not only were the microaggressions they faced hurtful, but the fact that their coworkers, and even their entire agency body did nothing to combat these discriminations made them feel worse. These samples from participants join several other stories from other participants where their workplaces and coworkers constructed and reinforced workplaces that allow microaggressions to live and thrive.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

**Situations and circumstances.** As outlined in the literature review, microaggressions are less likely to be reported because they can be difficult to define. But just because they may be hard to point out explicitly, microaggressions still accumulate over time and affect the way racial minorities perceive themselves (Deitch et al., 2003).

The majority of the microaggressions encountered by participants were subtle and could be categorized as microinsults and microinvalidations. For each and every participant, the identification and scale for what constituted a microaggression differed. The criteria for calling these instances out as harmful varied as well, understandably because every participant's experience at their agency was different, but according to Sue et al. (2007), that's exactly what makes these microaggressions especially difficult to combat, they're so commonplace and can come across as seemingly inconspicuous remarks or side comments, it becomes difficult to categorize and positively define them as discrimination or racism.

Participant 3 spoke about a coworker who tried to use Black slang, and labeled the instance as "harmless." By harmless he meant, "I won't lose sleep at night over it. I won't think that this person is actually prejudiced." That participant attributed that comment to a lack of "tact" and "emotional intelligence", but commented that it wasn't something that would "genuinely upset" him. That participant he said that in order for him to speak out, someone would need to use the n-word. That participants are willing to look over microaggressions that they know are offensive and discriminatory, which suggests that participants negotiated their racial identities and responses to these microaggressions in order to avoid confronting their White coworkers. Participant 6 also explained how frequently people will tell her that she is "different." She explained,

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

“What they're basically saying is that I don't seem like the stereotypical person of color.”

This participant's experience with microaggressions throughout her career have been subtle discriminations like this one.

Participant 10 gave a slightly different viewpoint, she said she has never personally never noticed an explicit separation, but she does believe her outlook differs from her White coworkers, stating that they “look at things in different ways.” She cited a specific situation as an example, explaining how a team leader was trying to recall a name and in the process, called it out as a “weird name.” Upon remembering the person's name, the participant realized that the name in question was a traditional African American name. The participant explained, “Just her choice to use ‘weird’ to describe that name. She might not get it, might not have thought anything of it, but for me, that makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable.”

One quote about microaggressions that summed the majority of sentiments and responses from all participants came from participant 7. She said, “Sometimes I'll go through a day and I'll just feel so invisible in my Black skin.” This quote suggests that facing microaggressions at work affects the way participants see themselves and form their racial and social identities.

**Picking your battles.** While discussing microaggressions, the theme of knowing when to speak out and what to say came up frequently. Multiple participants described this process as “picking your battles.” In the literature review, the researcher stated a goal of exploring how the experiences of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries differ from their White colleagues, and in what ways these

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

participants learn to deal with this fact, knowing that they are not afforded the same experiences as their White coworkers.

Many participants said that they know they should speak out during these instances, but they aren't quite sure how to go about speaking out, or if it's even worth it. Given the nature of microaggressions, it can be difficult to explain and pinpoint and prove discrimination that has occurred. Participant 10 explained that, "If you don't say something then they just continue to build it becomes part of a larger problem. I definitely think it would help if you had more diverse faces. That would stop these things from happening." This participant's experiences mirror others who said that speaking out should be commonplace, but there are many caveats.

While talking about this balance with participants, the researcher was searching for responses that related to how racial minorities experiences are unique. A common theme that arose was the issue that microaggressions in the workplace are so commonplace and prominent that they can't be consistently fought and spoken out against because it would become too time-consuming and not worth every single battle.

Participant 3 brought up the paradox that many racial minorities negotiating their identities face: that racial minorities can train themselves to not be minorities in order to avoid microaggressions, but in training to not appear as a minority, "you also train yourself not to say anything when that does happen." He described this negotiation as "like an actor in a play" and that the more time that minorities spend playing this role, the more detrimental it becomes to their well-being. "It becomes the thing that prevents you from saying something stupid on a day to day level, but it's also the thing that prevents you from speaking up elsewhere." Other participants shared this sentiment and agreed

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

that speaking out against microaggressions could become extremely time consuming because they are so common.

Typical responses from participants were frustration. Participant 3 summed up these feelings of frustration and explained:

People are always going to say something. I could correct this person, but am I going to correct someone every week? Am I going to correct someone every month? When does it stop? Am I going to go correct the CEO if he says the same thing? To what extent, like how much of a battle is this worth?

Participant 4 shared the same feelings, admitting that she feels internal conflict whether or not to react. “You do feel like you need to pick your battles, which is horrible – it’s horrible that it’s a war where the battle is the appropriate vernacular. But it is.”

The researcher uncovered that many participants said that they have spoken up in the past, but have developed the attitude that speaking up may not even be worth the battle. Common responses from White coworkers who have been called out on microaggressions ranged from, “I don’t understand why race is always an issue,” to “Why do you have to make it about race. Not everyone is a racist.” Participant 10 explained that these responses are disheartening because they make her hesitant to correct future microaggressions. “I don’t feel like explaining to someone why this is important. I feel like if they don’t get it by now, I don’t know how to help them.” Another participant, who works in advertising agreed. She said:

The more that you’re in this role, the less you want to play the race card. Maybe in some ways, you’re more likely to accept something that’s racist... it almost like suppresses that urge. You become less outspoken about those kinds of things anyway.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

These samples show that picking battles carefully is a sentiment that was common among participants, but even just the act of standing up and speaking out contributes to the way they construct their racial identities.

**Becoming a spokesperson.** Another theme that rose out of discussion of microaggressions was the theme of becoming a spokesperson. This theme relates to picking your battles, but differs in that it has presented itself as an expectation in the experiences of participants. Many noted that they felt the pressure to speak up against microaggressions, but they feel that when they do speak up, they are speaking up for all Black women or all Asian men or all Mexican women. In the literature review, the researcher explained that microaggressions allow perpetrators to stereotype entire populations of people, even though social identities within groups are fluid depending on the person and how they choose to perform their identity in that social space.

The researcher wanted to explore how racial minorities in these workplaces negotiate their racial identities in relation to their workplaces, and speaking out against microaggressions and feeling pressure to be a spokesperson for their race is a direct negotiation of racial identity. Some participants said that being expected to speak out against discriminations is an unfair assessment by coworkers, and that playing that character isn't something they are comfortable doing. That being said, participants also felt pressure to speak out against discrimination because their race gives them a platform to speak from. Others argued that being asked to be a spokesperson for a whole group of people is uncomfortable and a no-win situation. Participant 4 said:

It's two-fold because it almost feels like a catch-22, because you don't want to be singled out for your race but you do also want to be singled out for your race. I think the bigger picture is that you want people to be informed and educated and considerate.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Being forced into these situations and feeling pressured to act in a certain way in relation to race and in response to an act of discrimination by White coworkers was described by participants as “exhausting” and “draining” and that it allows white coworkers to never experience discomfort. Participant 4 explained that this allows White coworkers to live in “an extreme sense of privilege.” Another common instance as described by participants was that they felt some obligation to speak up at every opportunity concerning race. Participant 9 referred to it as a double-edged sword. She said, “I can’t choose not to because then I’d look like I’m not down for the cause and against my whole race.”

This theme of becoming a spokesperson also manifests itself into another microaggression: participants being asked their opinion on agency work to give feedback from the point of view of a racial minority. One participant said she doesn’t mind giving feedback because she feels that her perspective is valuable and if she didn’t feel like doing it, she wouldn’t.

In contrast, the majority of other participants feel that this role is inappropriate and discriminatory. Participant 5, who has worked in the advertising industry for over 16 years, said she has chosen not to participate and give her perspective as a Black woman anymore. She said that if the agency is trying to show that they’re diverse, then perhaps they should try to actually be diverse. This directly relates to the literature review when Carbado and Gulati (2013) spoke of employers wanting to hire racial minorities who are “racially palatable”, or in other words, who are willing to downplay all aspects of their racial background. This leaves employers can perceive these employees as White, yet still be able to profit from their racial diversity and diverse experiences.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

The interaction between social identity theory and racial minorities working in the advertising and public relations industries was explored through the use of semi-structured interviews, and this researcher worked to uncover and interpret the data collected. The researcher used knowledge of the intersections of race, class and gender to explore how racial minorities construct their identities across race, class and gender lines in their workplaces daily. The researcher also learned that strong familial influence and past experience with microaggressions form a foundation on which racial minorities in the advertising and public relations workplaces understand their racial identities to this day.

Overall, the researcher set out to answer the research questions, How do racial minorities choose advertising and public relations as careers, and what are the factors that influence that choice?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, What was the experience of racial minorities as people of color in adolescent years and college, and how does that compare with their reaction to the representation of people of color in advertising and public relations workplaces?, Where do racial minorities learn to negotiate their identities, and do these tactics affect their identity formation in the advertising and public relations workplaces?, How do racial minority professionals construct and display their identities as racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries? and How do racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries feel about negotiating their racial identities and the performance of their racial identities?

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain a better understanding of how racial minorities working in the advertising and public relations industries construct their identities, studied through the lens of social identity theory. The population of participants studied in this research project include 10 female participants and 1 male participant working in advertising and public relations agencies across the nation. The age range is 23 to 51 and job positions range from Assistant Account Executive to Senior Creative Director. Participants in this study identify as racial minorities and agreed to give their opinions and perspectives as such.

This research is important in that it uniquely studies the ways in which racial minorities construct and maintain their racial identities in advertising and public relations workplaces, a subject that hasn't been explored by previous researchers and information that is missing in current research. Significant themes and results as they relate to the literature review revealed themselves as the research progressed, and the researcher was validated that many of their suggestions for research as stated in the literature review were confirmed. Among the most important results uncovered while speaking with participants was that participant's would speak of the formation of their racial identities in terms and themes consistent with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory.

The researcher is able to successfully conclude that participants in this study actively self-categorized themselves based on their perceived racial identity and participated in in-group and out-group behavior. Their social identities were also

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

dependent on the situations and environments that they were in, and they performed their identities in accordance with the racial make-up of those around them.

The researcher believes that the importance of this research and the results found are not to be understated. The ways in which racial minorities construct, maintain and perform their identities relates directly to the low numbers and penetration rate of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries. If workplaces in these industries wish to increase the number of racial minorities employees and enhance the experience of these employees, they should take notice of findings that research projects such as this one uncover, especially as they relate to racial microaggressions. If strategic communication professionals wish to continuously improve their products and services and wish to connect with diverse audiences in a genuine way without relying on the use of offensive stereotypes or clichéd language, they need to understand the perspective of their audience, which can only be done by not only allowing but nurturing those viewpoints in their own agencies.

As the results in this study show, by maintaining the current racial makeup of their agencies while simultaneously discouraging the growth of diversity and the performance of authentic racial identity, advertising and public relations agencies will fail to keep up and connect with the right consumers. This will negatively affect the experiences of racial minorities who currently work in their agencies, discourage retention and ultimately recruitment of more racial minority employees. The future of success for advertising and public relations agencies rests on the agency's ability to take research such as this study seriously and work toward creating truly diverse and inclusive workplaces, or they risk losing valuable insight from racial minority employees, creating

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

communication that does not resonate and ultimately, does not sell. If the goal of successful advertising and public relations is to create connections to audiences authentically in order to communicate a message, and the population of racial minorities in the United States continues to rise, then the advertising and public relations industries need to consider how to encourage those voices in their own agencies and understand that lacking these voices will result in unsuccessful businesses.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Familial influence in choosing advertising and public relations.**

Overwhelmingly, the researcher found that participants in this study relied heavily on their parent's knowledge and guidance when choosing their career paths after high school. As stated above, success is defined differently for participants and their parent's, causing dissonance between what success really means. While choosing a career path is an important choice, participants also spoke of how their parent's influenced them in their construction of racial identity in their workplaces. The researcher approached participants wanting to learn more about the guidance that their parents gave them regarding navigating the working world. Many participants recalled stories from their parents that managed their expectations about the types of experiences and the types of situations they would be facing, and how to react to those situations as a racial minority.

To the researcher, this is evidence that not only are parents significant in the way participants chose their careers, but they're also central to how participants construct their racial identities once they are professionals in those careers. The direct effect that growing up in a household that prepares racial minorities for the challenges that they will face once they enter the workforce is substantial. Participants, though they are all adults,

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

want to be successful, so when situations arise, they rely on the advice that their parent's gave them when they were younger, whether they are aware of this or not.

The important takeaway from this influence is that it emphasizes the preparation that goes into training racial minorities before they enter the work force, preparation that includes how to behave in certain situations to downplay race and how to talk about certain subjects, preparation that White employees entering a workplace likely haven't experienced. In training racial minorities to employ certain techniques to negotiate their identities in their workplaces, their parents are inadvertently sending them the message that they're the ones who are imperfect and must be redefined, not the system.

**Media communication.** The researcher approached this study wanting to better understand how stereotypes found in media communication affect identity formation.

While speaking with participants, the researcher found a relationship between stereotypes and racial identity formation, mostly in the way participants actively work to disassociate themselves with those stereotypes in their workplaces. Because participants work in the advertising and public relations industries, they are actively aware of portrayals found in media communication. As described in the literature review, the researcher found evidence that media communication and portrayals of racial minorities affected the way participant's understood their racial identities as children. And as these portrayals continue to affect and pervade their lives, especially in their workplaces and in the work that is created by the agencies they work for, the effects they have continue to be reinforced, continuing a cycle of improper portrayals of racial minorities and unnecessary identity negotiation.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

If racial minorities only have narrow identities that they are expected to conform to and there is no space for a minority who does not fit within the boundaries of these very specific stereotype, then there are limited “acceptable” ways for racial minorities to exist in these work spaces. The researcher believes that the lack of racial minorities working in these workplaces is harmful as well, as a limited number of racial minorities who can show different performances of identity and the fluidity of racial minority identity provides restricted opportunity for White employees to learn that racial minorities are more than just their stereotypes.

Restructuring in the communication industries that changes the way racial minorities are viewed, portrayed and connected with is necessary for growth. Reform can only take place when racial minorities are active employees in those industries. The more frequently that these stereotypes pervade the advertising and public relations industries, the more likely it is that employees will let them influence their beliefs and take these misrepresentations as truth.

**Defining success and the American Dream.** An important theme that was unveiled during the interviews was the idea of defining success as a racial minority and how that fits in with the ideal of The American Dream. According to participants in this study, success and the American Dream go hand-in-hand; but this success is also influenced by the participant’s families and how success looks to them. The researcher believes that the lack of racial minorities who work in the advertising and public relations industries may be partially attributed to the nature of these industries. Participants said main concerns about these industries include lack of stability and low wages from entry-

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

level jobs. To many of the participants and their families, the American Dream entails pursuing non-creative careers such as law, medicine or science.

Many participants talked about a complete lack of knowledge about the advertising and public relations industries even upon entering college. This shows that the narrow definition of the American Dream is significant because it places itself as a barrier between racial minorities and the industries studied.

Advertising and public relations agencies need to do a better job detailing the opportunities available within their workplaces. Many of the participants described confusion when they first began learning about these industries because they weren't aware of the different jobs and skills that could be put to use in agencies. By failing to reach out to potential new employees, the advertising and public relations industries are missing out on valuable talent and viewpoints, which happen to be the talent and viewpoints that the industry is greatly missing.

**Background and first impressions.** When speaking about their experiences before entering the advertising and public relations industries and their first reactions upon entering the industries, participant's responses varied. Many spoke of their initial shock upon entering college and realizing that they were one of few racial minorities in their classes. Many participants explaining that they felt prepared to negotiate their identities at work since they had just finished negotiating their identities for four years at school.

For many participants, though they were somewhat used to being one of few, being in a workplace day after day surrounded by people who didn't look like them led to feelings of isolation and discomfort. Upon entering the workplace, not only were

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

participants further isolated by race, but also by age, leading to feelings of frustration and annoyance. These feelings of seclusion seemed to further separate participants from properly portraying their racial identities in their workplaces, an important finding from this research that could potentially point to reasoning for further research on retention rates of racial minorities in these industries.

**Negotiation of identity.** The researcher approached this research suggesting that participant's negotiations would depend on the coworkers they associated with and the racial composition of their workplace, all of which was confirmed in the research. The researcher also discovered that identity negotiation for the participants is deeply rooted in personal history, so deeply rooted that past experiences and lessons learned about the consequences of not properly portraying their identity still affect the ways the participants negotiate their identities today. Similar to presentation of self, the researcher found that racial minorities in this study didn't feel as though identity negotiation is a choice or is something that they can engage when they feel like it, it is instead a survival tactic.

***“Acting White.”*** Participants spoke often of the importance of downplaying their racial characteristics by employing behavior that they observe from their White coworkers, such as talking about certain subjects or refraining from speaking out against social issues that offend them.

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which racial minorities who work in advertising and public relations construct their identities. The researcher was able to learn that many of the participants are so used to working to appear White that it has become automatic and programmed behavior. By no longer realizing that they are engaging in this behavior, racial minorities are actively shaping their identities in

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

order to not only relate to their coworkers, but in order to be successful in their workplaces. For them, negotiating their identities to act White has become their new standard of identity. This leads to an expectation that racial minorities will always negotiate in order to make their White coworkers comfortable, not the other way around, positioning Whiteness as the norm. By creating and maintaining this atmosphere of normalized Whiteness, racial minorities are consistently the “other”, and playing the role expected of them becomes problematic when this phenomenon is normalized.

**Presentation of self and co-cultural communication theory.** In this study, the participants identified themselves as actors and their racial identity formation as performances, giving evidence that they feel they must always be assessing their surroundings and adapting their personalities and behavior to fit those surroundings. Unsurprisingly to the researcher, the situations and atmospheres that the participants were adapting themselves to are overwhelmingly White.

The researcher uncovered how racial minorities in advertising and public relations workplaces directly view their racial presentations of self as performances meant to combat negative stereotypes, and that these performances vary by the minute. By forcing racial minorities to employ coping mechanisms, code switching was one of the most frequently-mentioned in interviews, agencies are making intolerant workplaces the norm. Participants largely felt that they need to shape perceptions and employ coping mechanisms as levels of protection in their workplace so they could do things as simple as performing a task or participate in meetings.

***White coworkers and non-White coworkers.*** By speaking to participants about pressures at work, especially when it comes to relating with their White and non-White

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

coworkers, the researcher uncovered that participants continuously downplay their racial identities simply in order to avoid situations that might make their White coworkers uncomfortable. Participants felt expected to accept colorblind ideology and enlightened racism, to ignore offensive and discriminatory remarks and to continue on with their daily lives and do the best work they can do knowing that they are unable to embrace their racial identities completely. This is extremely important because racial minorities are expected to choose between doing great work and feeling comfortable. Those two should not be mutually exclusive, employees of all races, classes and genders should feel that they can both create fulfilling work and feel comfortable in their identities.

When speaking of relationships with non-White coworkers, participants spoke positively. Feeling free and honest at the workplace should not be an exclusive event experienced only when interacting with a small population of coworkers. By being unable to properly relate with White coworkers, some participants said they feel apathetic toward their coworkers and in turn, apathetic about their work and jobs.

**Intersections of race, class and gender.** In the literature review, the researcher stresses the importance of the intersections of race, class and gender in the formation of identity. The caveat of studying these intersections is that they cannot be studied separately as they intersect in different ways based upon the instances in which they are defined. Throughout the research, the researcher took into account how participants may define their own intersection of race, class and gender, especially when participants were describing examples of situations or past events that have influenced the ways in which they view themselves as a racial minority and affects the ways they perform that identity.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

This research proves that stereotypical portrayals of race affect not only the way racial minorities in the workplace construct their identities, but also colors the way their coworkers view them as racial minorities. These findings are significant because they point towards a direct intersection of race, class and gender, showing that stereotypes hinge on at least one of these intersections. An angry woman is not a stereotype, and a Black woman is not either, but when the two come together to form “angry Black woman”, that stereotype relies on that intersection to perpetuate a meaning.

Furthermore, the participants in this study are acutely aware of how their identity is portrayed according to the intersection of race, class and gender that they identify with. They see these intersections as parts of their identities that are united, they do not see themselves simply as Asian or an Asian woman, but rather an Asian woman who grew up with resources and was able to travel to the United States to go to college. The participants see their personal histories and the parts of their identities that are ingrained in them from past experiences as irremovable, irreplaceable and most of all, inseparable. Likewise, they have such an acute understanding of their identities, that they are able to directly identify any stereotypes that may be used to categorize them. And they know exactly how to fight those stereotypes, because their experiences have taught them how to manage their intersectionality.

**Racial microaggressions.** Perhaps the most significant and compelling information gained was collected while participants spoke about racial microaggressions.

The researcher found racial microaggressions as they are defined and categorized by Sue et al. (2007) and was able to clearly recognize the impact that these discriminations have in the formation of racial identity formation. These experiences can

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

be so subtle and commonplace that some participants see frequent discriminatory comments, racist language and bigoted comments from their own coworkers as typical and something that is to be expected and glossed over. Research in the literature review and this research study show that microaggressions, though subtle, are just as dangerous and harmful as outright racism. They accumulate over time to weigh down on racial minorities and they directly affect the ways in which racial minorities see themselves and construct and perform their identities.

*Supervisor disregard and organizational and workplace microaggression.* When participants talked about microaggressions occurring in their workplace, every single participant admitted that even though they had pointed out an indiscretion to their supervisor or boss or manager, the microaggression and the aggressor got away unscathed. By allowing racist and ignorant coworkers to get away with making inappropriate and discriminatory behavior, supervisors are creating and reinforcing a workplace that is intolerant of racial diversity. This leaves racial minorities feeling helpless, hopeless and disappointed. If nobody in management positions takes a step in the right direction, and any attempts from employees are denied in doing so, then real progress and change will never come into fruition.

Racial minorities need leaders they can trust and rely on to not judge them or punish them for speaking out against microaggressions; encouraging racial minorities to discuss these issues while at work and with their coworkers will help them address the issues head on and create environments where they feel comfortable portraying their racial identities fully. Though the researcher found that most of the instances of microaggressions could be categorized as microinsults and microinvalidations, each and

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

every participant said they experienced these discriminations and that they make them want to downplay their racial differences and mannerisms, as uncovered in the literature review.

**Picking battles and becoming a spokesperson.** Racial minorities in the study reacted directly to microaggressions primarily by assessing the way they portray their racial identities and adjusting them in order to avoid future discriminations, though this proved to be unsuccessful as participants who have been in the industries over 15 years admitted facing microaggressions throughout their entire careers. The participants face the challenge of knowing that if they speak out, their opinion and discomfort is not going to be taken seriously by their workplaces and supervisors.

Participants said microaggressions occur so frequently that speaking out against them would mean spending entire days educating coworkers. Participants also pointed out that they could correct one person but if they correct one then they would need to correct the next, and the next and the next, and they question when and where that cycle ends. The responsibility to end that cycle should not rest on the shoulders of racial minorities who face these microaggressions on a daily basis. The responsibility should be on their White coworkers and their White supervisors.

Furthermore, racial minorities struggle with the decision to speak up because they feel the pressure of becoming a spokesperson for their own race and for an entire group of people. Speaking up against a discriminatory comment should not immediately designate a person of color as speaking for their entire race. Racial background should not be the only identifier that a person of color has in their workplace and it definitely should not affect the message that they are trying to communicate. If White employees in advertising

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

and public relations workplaces struggle to see the significance of race and racial issues, especially while it is coming from the mouth of a coworker who is likely just as qualified to be working in the same agency that they are, it can be easy to understand the frustration that racial minorities feel in these situations that they need to adjust their racial identities in order to avoid these circumstances.

### **Limitations**

**Technological and geographical limitations.** Throughout this research, the researcher was working full-time in the Dallas, Texas area and conducting this research simultaneously. The researcher was able to interview participants across the country with the help of technology such as a cell phone and video chatting. The researcher had originally anticipated conducting in-person interviews, however geographical, time and financial constraints played a major role in preventing the researcher from meeting participants face-to-face. Had the researcher had more time and flexibility with their schedule, they might have had a better opportunity to meet with and interview participants face-to-face. Because of this, all the interviews were conducted via cell phone or through video chat.

**Method limitations.** The researcher also understands that there are several limitations to the method of semi-structured interviews, such as unintentionally giving an unconscious signal or cue to a response, the possibility of one of more participants lying to the researcher and the difficulty involved in analyzing and coding long interview transcripts.

**Researcher limitations.** Throughout the study, the researcher did their best to interpret their research using social identity theory in order to answer their original

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

research question. However, the researcher understands that coming into this research study, they brought a special set of limitations including the researcher's own bias, assumptions, education and preconceived ideas. All of these factors affect the way the researcher formulated the research question, how they communicated and related with participants and most importantly, how they interpreted their data and findings. As a racial minority, the researcher may have received and interpreted information differently than a White researcher may have. They also know that they may have received different responses from participants because they felt that they could identify with the researcher more than a White researcher could. Several times throughout the interviews, participants would speak directly to the researcher, using language and phrases such as, "you know" or "you understand" and the researcher interpreted this as the participants relating to the researcher as a fellow racial minority. The researcher is also aware that participants may have made assumptions about this researcher's own personal experiences and made assumptions about the way the researcher constructs their own racial identity and that the researcher's own personal experiences may influence how they received information and interpreted personal experiences from participants.

Besides personal bias as outlined above, the researcher paid close attention to minimize opportunities for other bias through this research study. Several months were spent interviewing participants, however this thesis research was limited by by diversity in the prevalence of males as participants. While 11 total participants were interviewed, 10 of the participants were female. Gender was not a variable studied for this thesis to answer the researcher's research question, however more time spent contacting candidates may have resulted in a more even ratio between male and female participants.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

If the researcher were to go back and re-do this study, they would have spent more time in the interview and research collecting phase, as more time would have equated more information from male participants.

Early in the interviewing process, the researcher discovered a learning curve associated with speaking with participants and encouraging them to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, especially when talking about personal subjects. Throughout the research-collecting phase, the researcher's interview questions and tone while delivering certain questions varied. If the researcher had practiced these questions beforehand or perhaps had more opportunity and time to practice delivering these questions, they may have received more detailed answers and descriptions from the first participants they interviewed. The researcher believes that a few participants felt uncomfortable while describing certain situations and their feelings in those situations. Because the majority of the interview took place over the phone, the researcher believes that an in-person interview or video interview would have helped alleviate some of the participant's hesitation or awkwardness inherent in a non-face-to-face discussion.

### **Recommendations and Further Research**

The major findings in this research study include the influence of the intersections of race class and gender in the formation of social identity, how participants in the study employed presentation of self and negotiated their racial identities in their workplaces, the influence of media communication and stereotypes, familial influence in the formation of racial identity and lastly, how microaggressions affect both the social identity formation of racial minorities and affects the products that the advertising and public relations industries create. Based on the results and their analysis and the

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

limitations in this study, advertising and public relations practitioners can implement the key findings of this research study in various ways.

**Familial influence in choosing advertising and public relations.** The researcher uncovered that not only was familial influence key in choosing advertising and public relations, as predicted in the literature review, but it was also important in racial identity formation for participants once they began careers in those industries. A couple of the participants mentioned being first-generation college graduates, this researcher believes that future research should be done to explore the implications that come along with being the first person in a family to graduate college, such as being more predisposed to choosing a career that is financially stable and well-paid.

Participants all mentioned their families and parents as being influential in the formation of their racial identities and that they still rely on advice from their families today. It would be interesting for future researchers to learn more about how ideals and advice are passed down through generations, especially in populations of racial minorities. Researchers can also explore how this advice and guidance is passed from peer-to-peer as well, as several participants mentioned learning about negotiation tactics from fellow racial minorities. Exploring the nature of this guidance and recommendation and how it proliferates everyday life for racial minorities in the advertising and public relations workplace will help future researchers understand all the elements of racial identity formation.

**Media portrayals and the American Dream.** This is an extremely important section of research and advertising and public relations professionals should be particularly interested in these results, as it relates to their careers and livelihoods

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

considerably. Many participants spoke directly of negative stereotypes that are often attributed to their races by media communication. Future researchers need to consider the impact that stereotypes in advertising and public relations communications have on the identity formation of racial minorities. By conducting studies that observe how racial minority advertising and public relations employees feel about stereotypical portrayals in television and print advertisements and public relations communications, researchers can gain an understanding of how those portrayals directly relate to and negatively impact identity formation.

When racial minorities in advertising and public relations feel pressure to downplay their racial mannerisms and feel that it's necessary to considerably negotiate their racial identities, they are not bringing their best ideas and work to their work. That much can be seen from this research. But future researchers need to dig deeper and understand not only the different stereotypes that are portrayed in advertising and public relations communication, but where stereotypes come from, how they affect participants in their youth, how participants feel knowing that the industries they work for create those stereotypical portrayals, and how all of that knowledge comes together to form racial identity in the workplace. Without this vital information, stereotypes will continue to be created by mostly White advertising and public relations industries, racial minorities within those industries will not feel free to express their racial identities and positive improvements will not be successful.

**Presentation of self and negotiation of identity.** Overwhelmingly, the researcher found that participants in this study view their racial identities in the workplace as performances that work to minimize discrimination and to shed stereotypes.

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

To do this, racial minorities employ several tools and coping mechanisms that vary depending on the social situation that they find themselves in. Future researchers should delve deeper into the mechanics of identity negotiation as it relates to performance. The researcher learned briefly about where these coping mechanisms originated, but learning more about how racial minorities employ them in other aspects of their lives could give further and more comprehensive detail to how pervasive this practice is in their lives.

It would also be interesting for quantitative researchers to investigate how many times per day participants feel that they flip flop, change their identity or put on another mask or performance, this would help researchers investigate the impact of this practice in the identity formation of racial minorities. It would also be helpful for future researchers to explore other coping mechanisms that racial minorities use that may not be so explicit and how the use of those mechanisms continues to minimize the importance of racial identity and cultivates intolerant advertising and public relations workplaces.

Additionally, social identity theory was used as the theoretical framework through which this research was analyzed and studied. Co-cultural communication theory used to identify and categorize certain findings and results, but could also be used as the theoretical framework for future researchers with studies similar to this. Looking at this research and future research through different lenses will help give the advertising and public relations industries a more inclusive understanding of the practice of identity negotiation by racial minorities in these industries.

**Intersections of race, class and gender, colorblind ideology and enlightened racism.** Ultimately, the researcher found that the intersections of race, class and gender

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

work together with colorblind ideology and enlightened racism ideology to limit the racial identities of participants in this study. Leaders in the advertising and public relations industries need to examine the relationship between colorblind ideology and enlightened racism and research how these two ideologies appear from the point of view of White employees. Future researchers may also examine how these ideologies affect the hiring of racial minorities in the advertising and public relations industries. The literature review and results show that while hiring racial minorities, White supervisors tend to hire minorities who appear non-White but act White. Future researchers may better understand why this practice is in place and study the ways which supervisors judge the “racial palatability” of racial minorities who apply for positions in advertising and public relations, and how they manage to rationalize these blatantly-racist decisions.

By understanding where these ideologies are first learned and how and why White employees feel comfortable employing them around their non-White colleagues, perhaps future researchers could gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to stop these ideologies from continuing to persist. Future researchers could also focus exclusively on intersectionality and how it affects the identify formation of racial minorities in these industries, learning how potential participants felt that they were being stereotyped based on their intersection of race, class and gender and how they reacted to that.

**Racial microaggressions.** As mentioned in the results, the information uncovered about microaggressions during the research is significantly important when considering the researcher’s original research question. Participants all shared many stories of microaggressions and racially-charged events that have happened to them, and the

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

researcher believes that if they had more time, they could have recorded hundreds of these instances.

Future researchers should focus more on microaggressions, using Sue et al. (2007)'s research as a guideline, and explore more of these instances and how they directly affect racial identity formation. Quantitative studies counting amounts of microaggressions and categorizing them into Sue's (2007) categories could produce information that shows important results such as frequency, length and degree of discrimination in microaggression instances. This researcher recommends that future researchers engage racial minorities in focus groups where they speak of microaggressions with other racial minorities. The researcher believes that since these instances can be so personal and frequent, racial minorities may feel more compelled to share their stories with others they know have experienced similar discriminations.

Information on racial microaggressions are of particular importance because these instances continue to infiltrate the lives and workplaces of racial minorities every single day. Without extensive research and findings, these difficult to identify and define microaggressions will continue to live unscathed, harming the future of racial minority professionals in the advertising and public relations industry long-term.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study explored the factors relating to the construction of racial identities by racial minority advertising and public relations professionals. The theoretical framework proposed that a person's concept of self originates from the social groups that they believe they belong to, and that through a process of self-categorization, an individual is able to solidify their concept of self, based on how they view themselves in

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

relation to other individuals in their social space. The literature implied that though there is existing research about social identity, the intersections of race, class and gender, presentation of self, racial negotiation of identity, media portrayals and stereotypes and racial microaggressions, there is no research or literature that explores the ways that racial minority professionals in advertising and public relations construct their racial identities. According to the 11 participants interviewed in this study, the formation and reinforcement of their racial identities is greatly influenced by their intersection of race, class and gender, the racial identity negotiation techniques that they were taught when they were young, media portrayals of race and stereotypes, racial microaggressions in their workplaces and their relationships with their White and non-White coworkers.

While themes varied as to individual values, the underlying conclusion of the interview data in this research study is that more education about opportunities within the advertising and public relations industries, less portrayals of racial minorities as stereotypes in the products of these industries, less tolerance for inappropriate and racist behavior within these industries and most importantly, the encouragement and acceptance of all racial minorities and the ways they choose to construct and portray their racial identities are all needed to inspire, attract and retain racial diversity in the advertising, public relations and strategic communication industries.

The findings of this study produced six themes that influence how racial minority advertising and public relations professionals construct their racial identities in their workplaces; a) past experience and history with racism, b) familial influence, c) stereotypes and media portrayals of race, d) negotiation of identity and coping

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

mechanisms, e) relations with White and non-White coworkers, and f) racial microaggressions.

In this researcher's opinion, the most interesting and provoking way this research could be extended is if the information gathering phase was conducted over an extended period of time and followed a variety of participants as they pursued their careers in the advertising and public relations fields. Following a participant from the very beginning of their career all the way through to their retirement from the advertising and public relations industries would provide valuable data. However, it is important to note that not every racial minority professional's experience could ever represent an entire race, generation, or portion of the population. It would only serve as a valuable asset to a growing list of research that will one day, hopefully, bring further insights and provide the information that the advertising and public relations industries need in order to cultivate more diverse and accepting workplaces and enact positive growth.

Ultimately, this research finds its importance in changing population of the United States. As pointed out in the introduction, by the year 2060, the population of racial minorities in the United States is expected to rise to 56 percent of the total population. In order to successfully reach this growing population of diverse faces, the advertising and public relations industries need to acknowledge the strength inherent within diversity, and what that diversity could provide to their own communication. The findings in this study and the voices of participants in this study prove that importance of the experiences of racial minorities both within these industries and outside of them.

In order to resonate with this population of racial minorities, advertising and public relations communication will need to connect with them authentically. This

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

authenticity will be achieved by incorporating more diverse voices, more diverse faces and more diverse points of view. Research such as this study calls for reform within these industries, growth from within will encourage communication that resonates with racial minorities, will aid in the recruitment of racial minorities to these industries and will result in the positive progress of racial identity formation of racial minorities working in the advertising and public relations industries.

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## Appendix A: Discussion Guide

**Purpose:** To examine how racial minority professionals in the advertising and public relations industries construct their racial identities.

**Introduction:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and taking the time to meet with me. I will be taking notes and recording this interview. For the next 30-45 minutes, we will be talking about racial diversity in the advertising and public relations industries. Every opinion is valid and there are no wrong things to say. If at any point you have questions or concerns, please let me know.

### Self-introduction/warm up: (10 minutes)

1. First off, I would like to go over the pre-interview warm up activity. Would you like to share how you filled out the columns?

**Probe:** Strategy for filling out different columns.

- What came to mind when you were filling out each column?
- Are these topics things you've thought about before?
- Tell me about... (probe around each element)

**Listen for:** Different behaviors/traits they employ at home/around friends and at work, different pressures they may feel in different situations

- Forms of self-expression (fashion, music, language, tattoos)
- Topics of small talk
- Teamwork/comradery
- Non-verbal cues
- How did you learn to separate the two identities? Do you remember when you first learned to behave this way?

### Discussion Area A: Experiences in the industries (15 minutes)

1. How did you make the choice to start your career in advertising/public relations?

**Probe:** Why did they choose this career?

**Listen for:** Professional strengths/weaknesses, pressure from society/family, personal goals

- Role models (family, mentor, acquaintance)
- Pop culture (Mad Men, movies, etc.)
- Identify point of influence (pre-college, during college, after)

2. How do you feel about the representation of the racial minority population in the advertising/public relations industry?

**Probe:** Personal opinion on diversity and racial minorities working in the industry

- Is the field receptive to hiring minorities?
- Are co-workers sensitive?

**Listen for:** How lack of diversity affects them personally, how personality or behavior may change based on the lack of diversity

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

- Whether or not they feel pressure to help bring about change in terms of additional hires
- Bringing about greater representation in the work
- Encouraging young minorities to pursue the field

### **Discussion Area B: Personal background/history (15 min)**

1. Can you describe the racial diversity where you grew up?  
**Probe:** What was the racial background of your home, neighborhood, schools, town/city, higher education experience  
**Listen for:** diverse/mostly white, childhood experiences that impact them and their behaviors today
2. What kind of advice did you receive about dealing with discrimination growing up? Do you still employ that advice now?  
**Probe:** How did they learn to cope and negotiate your identity to lessen discrimination in certain situations? Who or what were your greatest sources of influence?  
**Listen for:** Where do these mechanisms come from (family/friends/movies/social media)? How are they employed?
3. Would you respond differently to a discriminatory remark when with friends or family vs. at work?"  
**Probe:** How reactions change based on who they are with and their setting  
**Listen for:** Coping mechanisms, how environment forces adaptation

### **Discussion Area C: Relations with coworkers (15 min)**

1. Do you feel that your experience as an advertising/public relations professional from a multicultural and racial background differs from your coworker's experiences?
  - If yes, can you give me an example? Any others?
  - If no, can you think of any instances when you felt you were treated differently because you are a minority?**Probe:** Do they feel discriminated against as a minority?  
**Listen for:** Specific instances in which they have felt they have been treated differently because of their race; in group vs. out group
2. In what ways might you relate to your racial minority coworkers in a differently than you might relate to a White coworker?  
**Probe:** Modifications in behavior, style, speak, dress, subjects, likes/dislikes  
**Listen for:** specific behaviors or examples of notable changes; in group vs. out group of social identity
3. Do you have any examples of situations when a coworker has said something racist or offensive and not realized how offensive their comment actually was?
  - Overt actions: How did you respond? How did you feel in that moment? Afterward? Would you handle differently today? If so, what has changed?

## A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

- How might you address a racist or discriminatory actions or remark from a coworker that wasn't blatantly racist?
- Then delve into microaggressions – How did they respond? How feel in that moment? Afterward? Would you handle differently today? If so, what has changed?

**Probe:** Microaggressions from coworkers

**Listen for:** Putting microaggressions into their own words

- Coping mechanisms
- Specific examples and how they deal with them
- Self-presentation and levels of microaggressions

4. Could you give me an example of a time when you felt pressure from your coworkers or supervisors to downplay your racial or cultural background or mannerisms?

**Probe:** Examples of discriminatory behavior from coworkers, possible microaggressions

**Listen for:** Specific examples of in what scenarios do they feel empowered vs. pressured; self-presentation

5. Are you pessimistic, natural or optimistic about the future of minorities in the workplace?

**Probe for:** Outlook and attitude

**Listen for:** Topics in the news, greater representation in advertising/public relations programs, industry resources/support groups, etc.

**Wrap up:** I want to thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my study. Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't talked about today?

**Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

**Informed Consent**

Maria Martinez, MA Candidate  
School of Journalism / Univ. of Missouri-Columbia

**A social identity analysis of racial minority professionals working in the advertising and public relations industries**

The purpose of this research is to explore diversity in the advertising and public relations industries through the perspective of racial minority professionals. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts that might occur as a result of your participation in this research project.

Participants will initially complete a backgrounder survey, asking questions such as age and name of company they work for. Participants may then choose to participate in a 30-45-minute interview with the researcher. By participating in this project, you are increasing knowledge about how racial minorities such as yourself contribute to diversity in the advertising and public relations industries. This knowledge is especially valuable for media researchers and other professional practitioners who strive to understand diversity in the advertising and public relations workplaces. Your identity and participation will remain confidential. The results will be compiled for data analysis, but the identification of all participants will be withheld from public record.

**INDIVIDUALS MUST BE AGE 18 OR OLDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.** If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Maria Martinez at 248-404-7710 (cell phone) or Dr. Cynthia Frisby at 573-882-6232 (work). For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus Institutional Review Board Office at 573.882.9585 or [umcresearchcrib@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcrib@missouri.edu).

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. If you develop any discomfort during this research project, you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Also, you do not have to answer any questions that may be asked. You have the right to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

Should you decide to withdraw from the research, please inform the researcher of your decision.

**Appendix C: Email Recruitment Script**

Hello (insert name), my name is Maria Martinez and I'm a graduate student in Strategic Communication at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. Based on your qualifications and credentials, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that is focused on diversity in the advertising and public relations industries.

I also would be most grateful for your help in making this research opportunity known to associates, friends, or family that you think would be interested in participating in this research. **INDIVIDUALS MUST BE AGE 18 OR OLDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts that might occur as a result of your participation in this research project. By participating, you are increasing knowledge about how racial minorities such as yourself contribute to diversity in the advertising industry.

Participants will initially complete a backgrounder survey, asking questions such as age and name of company they work for. Participants may then choose to participate in a 30-45-minute interview with the researcher. To protect your privacy, your identity and participation will remain confidential. The results will be compiled for data analysis, but the identification of all participants will be withheld from public record. Please understand that your participation is voluntary. If you develop any discomfort during this research project, you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Also, you have the right to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

If you are interested in participating and contributing to this research, please fill out the following survey here: [https://missouri.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_eJWz5yd13F5eOUt](https://missouri.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eJWz5yd13F5eOUt). The survey asks general questions and will take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. Please keep in mind that in final results, only the researcher will know your identity and any identifying material will be kept confidential.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Maria Martinez at 248-404-7710 (cell phone) or Dr. Cynthia Frisby at 573-882-6232 (work).

**Appendix D: Sign Up and Activity Email**

Hi (name),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As outlined in the informed consent form, the purpose of this research is to explore diversity in the advertising and public relations industries. If you are comfortable sharing your experiences in a 30-45 minute in-person or virtual (phone or Skype/Google Hangout) discussion, please sign up for an interview slot using the following

link: <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e044ba9a82da1f58-maria>

If none of the available times are convenient for you, please inform me and we will work together to find a solution.

Along with the Sign Up Genius, I ask that you also complete a pre-interview activity. This activity should take no longer than 10 minutes and is meant as a warm up exercise to help you understand the topics that we will be discussing during our interview. You will find the activity attached to this email as a Word document.

Please remember that your participation is voluntary. If you develop any discomfort during this research project, you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

Should you have any questions or decide to withdraw from the research, please inform me.

A SOCIAL IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF RACIAL MINORITIES

**Appendix E: Pre-Interview Activity**

	Me at home with friends/family	Me at work with co-workers
Words to describe yourself		
How others describe you		
Ways you express yourself (ex. Music, food, water cooler talk, clothing, etc.)		
Sources of guidance		
Unwritten or written rules that are understood regarding behavior, language, dress, etc.		