Black and Afro-Latinx Women in Public Relations: A Collaborative

Autoethnography on the Construction of Intersectional Identities in the Workplace

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by

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

thesis entitled

BLACK AND AFRO-LATINX WOMEN IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: A

COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF

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presented by Arzelia Williams,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Abstract

Public relations is considered a feminized industry with women making up nearly 70 percent of its workforce. However, women only fill 30 percent of the top leadership roles (Angela Chitkara, 2018) and sufficient representation from Black women is lacking among the ranks. To better understand how race, gender, and class intersect in Black and Afro-Latina women PR practitioners' workplace experiences, this study used intersectionality theory as a lens of analysis. Using a collaborative autoethnographic approach, weekly reflections and in-depth interviews were conducted with six Black women working in the public relations profession. Participants noted how their race, gender and class status have shaped how they display their identities in the workplace, campaigns they are assigned to, and opportunities for career advancement in the future. The findings resulted in three major themes: *structural and social inequalities, hypervisibility and invisibility*, and *representation*. Findings revealed Black and Afro-Latinx women were being assigned to projects that aligned with their race, gender, or ethnicity and were being unequally paid for their workload. The findings also indicated that many of the participants lacked access to formal networking and mentoring opportunities or were considered for promotions despite their performance. Lastly, the findings revealed an overall lack of representation has shaped their perception of upward mobility and leadership. However, the participants expressed that where there is a gap in representation, they can strive to fill it. Ultimately, this study has fulfilled the need for more research regarding the understudied topic of non-White or Caucasian races and ethnicities outside the realm of gender relations (Vardeman-Winter et al, 2013).

Chapter 1: Introduction

An elegant and classy woman intentionally marches into the Oval Office, gazes into the eyes of the United States President and his Chief of Staff and they hear a sigh of relief. She is best referred to as the leader of the Gladiators, and the all-time utterance of "It's handled" to any of her clients. Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington, caught the attention of many viewers across the country following the debut of the television show Scandal, which first aired in 2012 (IMDb). Pope is the leader of a top Washington DC crisis-management firm called Pope and Associates. In a city where crisis is ongoing, Pope and her organization are known for solving or fixing problems of many elites. Pope uses her standard external markers of a privileged, Black, women leader within the PR industry to spin stories, network, and continue to build her reputation in the field. Many Black and Latina women, like Pope, wish they could convey their expertise and openly discuss their workplace experiences without being forced into a binary. While this nuance of Black public relations practitioners is new on screen and Olivia Pope's actions are a little exaggerated and portrayed as ethically questionable, the core of her work is still relevant to advancing diversity for Black and Latina women in the public relations industry.

The public relations workforce population is moving toward becoming more diverse. According to a *PR Week* report on agency executive diversity, "21% of the overall PR agency workforce in the U.S. in 2018 was non-White, equating to a 14.3% year-on-year improvement in 2019. BIPOC individuals held 12% of the C-suite or board room positions in 2018, equating to an increase of 8% on a year-on-year basis" (Moore, 2020). It has become increasingly important for agencies and organizations to understand

the potential harm caused by misrepresentation and look for ways to mitigate negative reactions. Depending on who controls the media messages, and whether they have a seat and voice at the table, power can be unevenly distributed or monopolized. In the public relations industry, it is important that agencies and organizations not only learn how to communicate with more diverse publics, but also how to represent employees and entities both internally and externally that identify outside the dominant majority (Moore, 2020). Understanding these things requires that PR organizations embrace diversity. Over the last few decades, the public relations field has recognized that public relations professionals represent individuals and organizations from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures. Social-cultural identities like gender, race, age, class, nationality, and sexual orientation affect how public relations practitioners perform and specifically, the messages they create for vast groups of people (Vardeman-Winter and Place, 2017; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Waymer, 2012). Much of the public relations workplace diversity research has primarily focused on workforce composition and factors related to race, ethnicity, and gender. This has resulted in diversity programs tending to focus on a single axis of identity, usually gender, for professional development programs, and undervaluing Black and Latina women's unique experiences (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

Harvard Business Review (HBR) 2020 stated that to diversify the workforce, most organizations have leaned toward the business case and the ability to increase the bottom line to emphasize the value that diversity brings to a company ranks . Diversity is frequently referred to in terms of race and gender, but companies are increasingly considering other factors such as sexual orientation, disabilities, and age and going

beyond the legally protected categories that diversity research has always looked at.

Diversity can be defined from personality and work style to race, age, ethnicity, or

gender, to secondary influences such as religion, socioeconomics, and education, to work

diversities such as management and union, functional level, or classification (SHRM,

2020). Golombisky (2015) argues that within diversity, there are differences in avowed

identities and ascribed identities, defined by how we see ourselves and how others

perceive us in the larger realm of society and power dynamics. For instance, as members

of two or more oppressed social identity groups, Black and Latina women experience

compounding effects of discrimination. While scholars haven't looked at this issue in

public relations careers, the compounding effects of the discrimination lead Black and

Latina women to experience invisibility and the necessity to assimilate into a White

hegemonic corporate culture, or hypervisibility, where their identity becomes tokenized

(McCluney & Rabelo, 2019) and adds pressure to become a spokesperson for their

marginalized groups in exchange for exposure (Dickens et al., 2019, p.159). Additionally,

tokenism can occur when employers showcase a few successful employees of color as

adequate representations of diversity in their department (Holder et al., 2015). Due to

people of color remaining seriously underrepresented in many industries and in most

companies' senior ranks (HBR, 2020), early career employees who belong to

underrepresented groups and are the solo member of their race in the workplace (Dickens

& Chavez, 2018) and engage in identity shifting, also known as identity negotiation to

assimilate to the dominant culture. Identity shifting, another phenomenon that frequently

occurs in corporate culture, refers to the conscious and unconscious process of shifting

one's worldview and cultural behaviors through the modification of one's appearance,

language, and mannerisms to neutralize the culturally based assumptions associated with their gender or racial identity groups (Dickens et al., 2019).

Outside of maximizing the return for shareholders, diversity also has the potential to broaden learning in the workplace, innovation in the field, and creativity among employees. The latter half of a workplace diversity initiative is inclusion (Harvard Business Review, November–December 2020) and the need to avoid tokenism and other instances of exclusion in the workplace. Instances of discrimination (i.e., racism) examined from a single axis have led colleagues to assume that Black or Latina people are a monolithic racial group who had the same experiences, opinions, and interests because they shared the same racial background (Holder et al., 2015). Workplaces have the power to accurately represent marginalized groups, both in the public and private eye (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Thus, using an intersectional framework to identify how Black and Latina women practitioners make meaning of their experiences in the workplace would provide critical information to employers on how to create an inclusive work environment for all employees (Dickens et al., 2019).

The goal of this thesis is to address some key questions about Black and Afro-Latina women PR practitioners' workplace experiences, including: How do Black and Latina practitioners construct and display their identities in the workplace? How do Black and Latina practitioners perceive the role of race, gender, and/or class in determining their assigned campaigns? How do Black and Latina practitioners predict their representation will change in the public relations industry in the future? This study used intersectionality theory to analyze the documents and reflections produced by Black and Afro-Latina public relations professionals over twelve weeks.

While in the present climate more attention has been given to reach diverse stakeholders and publics, that same effort should be put into understanding and retaining practitioners of color. The Harvard Business Review (2018) reported that the ethnic makeup of the public relations industry in the United States is 87.9% White, 8.3% African American, 2.6% Asian American, and 5.7% Hispanic American. While there has been a universal push for diversity across multiple industries, it is imperative that both practitioners and scholars understand the experiences of a marginalized segment of the workforce. It is assumed that race, gender, ethnicity and class influence Black and Latina public relations professionals' messages and/or their accepting/rejection of an organization's culture consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, this research employed a collaborative autoethnography method accompanied with semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of Black and Afro-Latinx women as they relate to race, gender, class, and ethnicity within the public relations profession, and interpreted these through a critical intersectional lens. Having worked in the public relations industry for over two years now, my initial menial interest has evolved into a genuine desire to gain all possible knowledge, information and experience related to this field. It excites me, piques my interest and is something that I do not consider to be merely a subject to be studied or a job to be done-but rather as knowledge that will become the catalyst for a career which will be exciting and challenging, unpredictable, and impactful.

This research aimed to rethink the way public relations professionals and scholars usually approach representation in the public relations industry, specifically focusing on the back-and-forth conversation between audience and company, and how that impacts crisis messaging and perception. Much of the existing academic literature such as

Pompper (2007), Tindall (2009), and Place (2015) discusses how gender and race/ethnic differences influence communication styles and upward mobility. While this is pertinent information to study, continuing to discuss how gender and race/ethnic differences influence communication styles and upward mobility is not reflective of how public relations professionals' identity factors are not mutually exclusive in their work. They don't just put out a press release or other communication and forget about the metrics. They look to see how their audience responds, and based on that response, decide whether to adjust or reframe their initial messaging to better manage the work product. This study intended to identify the areas of concern for scholars and practitioners in the public relations field by exploring the experiences of Black and Afro-Latinx women from their own perspective and identify areas for future consideration.

This study differentiates between Hispana, Latina, and Latinx with the differences between Hispana (Hispanic) and Latina lying within Brazil and Spain. Hispanic refers to people from Spain or Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, while Latino/as are people from Latin America regardless of language spoken (Pew Research Center). Brazilians are Latino because the country is in Latin America but are not considered Hispanic because their primary language is Portuguese. Whereas Spain has Spanish-speaking ancestry, it does not share the colonization history, more specifically, the erasure of Afro-Latin culture and Indigenous communities that people in the South and Central America hold. Latinx emerged from Latinos and Latinas born in the United States as an alternative to both identity labels and to be more gender-neutral and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, or queer individuals, in a language that has traditionally relied on male or women constructions (Simón, 2018). While some

have chosen to embrace the new term, others "believe that it is important to conserve the Spanish language and that it erases 1970s feminist movements that fought to have women represented women with the word 'Latina' (Rodriguez, 2019).

While "Latina" is an ethnicity and not a racial group, the term overlaps with how Blackness is characterized in the United States and how identity itself is multi-dimensional. One-quarter of all U.S. Latinos self-identify as Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean or of African descent with roots in Latin America (Pew Research Center, 2016). "Afro-descendants is a term that recognizes the ancestry of individuals who are descendants of people of African origin who were brought to Latin America and the Caribbean enslaved" (Lassen, 2016, p.67). There are different reasons why some Latinas have chosen to emphasize their African roots. For some, it is their visible Blackness such as their skin color, hair texture, or other physical traits that lack that privilege provided to lighter-skinned Latinas; for others, it is just a personal choice (Alford, 2018).

To understand the experiences of public relations practitioners working in the field requires an understanding of what is defined as public relations. The definition of public relations has changed and evolved with advances in technology. According to *The Muse* (2020), public relations is often confused with other media fields, specifically marketing, advertising, or journalism. While they share common characteristics, differences among them include the publics, promotional space, and who it seeks to represent. Understanding how practitioners define public relations and the assumptions they hold on to, and the most important elements is crucial to scholars researching the profession. The late-twentieth-century definition was "public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other" (PRSA, 1982). Today's

definition used is "public relations is a strategic communication process that builds

mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, 2021).

Raupp (2017) adds the organizational and the normative perspectives to the definition:

> From an organizational perspective, public relations is concerned with
> maintaining and managing internal and external communication relationships of
> organizations and individuals with key stakeholders and influencing perceptions
> of organizations, persons, and public issues. From a normative perspective, public
> relations is a contested discipline because of its roots in propaganda and its
> proximity to marketing, advertising, and other forms of persuasive
> communication. (p.1)

In defining public relations, it is also important to note who belongs to the profession. In

the early stages of theory building in the 1970s, public relations scholars sought to define

and validate practitioners' roles defined as gender specific (Pommper, 2004) and

positioned within both technical and managerial roles. Technical tasks could include

writing and editing information, such as speech writing or disseminating information to

the media, producing publications, web and print, event planning on behalf of an

organization or client, and public speaking. Some of the tasks of public relations

professionals in managerial roles include planning and implementing programs that

achieve goals for an organization, and research and evaluation. The objective is to gather

information, both formal and informal, to gauge the effectiveness of an organization's

programs. Some of the disciplines/functions within PR include: "corporate, crisis,

executive, internal, investor relations, marketing communications, integrated marketing

communications, media relations, content creation, events, social media, multimedia, reputation management, speechwriting and brand journalism" (PRSA, 2021).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins with an overview of the historical context of intersectionality and examines how Black feminists have expanded upon the definition. I then discuss constructions of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and class within the public relations industry, including problematic reoccurrences such as monolithic beliefs.

Intersectionality Framework

Intersectionality has become somewhat of a buzzword, appearing more frequently in pop culture, political discourse, and academia. In the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbury, and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020, more companies made a swift move towards creating diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, using the intersectionality concept to encompass the overlapping identities of their employees and consumers. The protests even led some communities of color to mobilize and confront racism, colorism, and sexism within their communities (Acevedo, 2021). The concept of intersectionality is derived from Black feminism and argues that the identities of the most marginalized and oppressed groups such as Black women (i.e., Black and woman) are not mutually exclusive. Collins and Bilge (2020) defined intersectionality as

the investigation of how intersecting power relations influence social

relations to cross diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday

life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender,

sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others -- as interrelated and

mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and

explaining complexity in the world, in people, and human experiences. (p.1)

To illustrate how intersectionality can be employed as a framework for studying practices

within public relations, it is important to point out in any discussion of Blacks and

Latinas that race, and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive categories and that there are

numerous interconnections between the two groups, including women who share the

experiences of being a Black person as well as a Latina person (Asencio and Battle, 2010,

p.4). One can't claim to be invested in an expansive notion of Black womanhood if they

fail to acknowledge the range of experiences that shape Black and Latina women in the

workplace and instead choose to ascribe to one-dimensional representations (Cooper,

2017).

Origins of Intersectionality

While Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) conceptualization has been hugely significant and

credited for intersectionality development, Black feminist before her were writing about

intersectionality. Black women first applied a Black feminist lens in the United States to

make sense of how White supremacy and patriarchy interacted to inform the experiences

of enslaved Black women for centuries. Black feminist theory addresses the subject of

both sexism and racism by showing that patriarchy has different effects on women and

men when social constructions assigned to sex and race intersect (Junco & Limonta,

2020, p.327). It points out the racial privilege in the larger feminist movement that has

enabled White women to challenge gender-based oppression while preserving access and

freedom by defining *woman* in terms of the White woman's experiences alone (Lorde, 1984) and alluding to Black and Latina women as the "other." Furthermore, gender privilege, often categorized as patriarchy or masculinity in the context of larger Black movements, allows Black men and White women to practice a sense of superiority and power that Black women have not had access to historically (Carby, 1997).

In examining the history of intersectionality, the work of Black feminist scholar-activists such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Barrier Williams, and others must be considered. Their work opened the door for other Black women scholars who emerged in the late twentieth century by educating individuals on how patriarchy, racism, and sexism intertwined to cause discrimination. Sojourner Truth (1851) made one of the early cases for Black feminism with her speech "Ain't I a Woman," advocating for equal rights for Black women at a convention in Akron, Ohio and challenging the ideology that being Black, and woman is mutually exclusive. hooks (1981) emphasized that "Sojourner Truth's experiences were evidence that women could function as a parent; to be the work equal of man; to undergo persecution, physical abuse, rape, torture; and not only survive but emerge triumphant" (p.160). This highlights how White women are viewed as delicate and weak by men, but Black women face a combination of racism and sexism because they are not viewed in the same light.

Ida B. Wells advanced intersectional analyses in the context of lynching by pointing out how sexuality was intertwined with racism and sexism (Collins, 2017). She kickstarted her anti-lynching campaign throughout the confederate South and showed

how lynching wasn't just a Black man accused of raping a White woman but was also

Black women who were raped by White men, stripped naked and hung. Wells urged

Congress to do something about rampant mob violence, and it was widely disseminated

in brochures and her book, *A Red Record*. She offers names, locations, and justifications

of each lynching she encountered in the South within the book. Black women scholar

Anna Julia Cooper (1892) made the formal introduction of intersectionality in her

collection of essays, *A Voice from the South*. Cooper sent out a radical call for a version

of racial uplift that focused on Black women by asserting that the intersection of race,

gender, and region is something that should not be overlooked. Cooper stated:

> The colored woman of today occupies, one may say, a unique position in
>
> this country. In a period of itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of
>
> the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our
>
> civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem and
>
> is yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both. While the women of the
>
> White race can with calm assurance enter upon the work, they feel by nature
>
> appointed to do, while their men give loyal support and appreciative countenance
>
> to their efforts, recognizing in most avenues of usefulness the propriety and the
>
> need of woman's distinctive co-operation, the colored woman too often finds
>
> herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative
>
> attitude on the part of those for whose opinion she cares most.

She made it known that Black women had unique experiences that were best expressed

through their own voices, argued that racial progress could not be defined solely through

Black men's perspectives nor the lens of White men, and as May (2008) summarized the "lived experience of marginality lends access to knowledge not readily available to those positioned at a culture's center" (127). Mary Church Terrell's work in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century also revolved around involving Black women in the women's rights struggle, particularly with them obtaining social equality for their sex in the educational sphere. She was also an advocate in the movement to stop the lynching of Black people. Terrell published "A Colored Woman in a White World," a narrative that discussed the social status of Black women and the impact of racism and sexism on their lives. As well as Fannie Barrier Williams, who made it known that Black women were just as committed to the struggle for women's rights as any other group of women. bell hooks was disturbed by how White women insisted that race and sex were two separate issues and built upon the earlier work of Sojourner Truth's Ain't I A Woman. Hooks' (1981) wrote:

> No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have Black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men or as a present part of the larger group of "women" in this culture. When Black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgment of the interest of Black women; when women are talked about, racism militates against recognition of Black women interest. When Black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on Black *men*; and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on *White* women. Nowhere is this more evident in a vast body of feminist literature. (p.7)

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Hooks' comment led Barbara Smith to introduce sexual oppression into the categories of

analysis and highlight how sexuality has fundamentally shaped Black women's

experiences in conjunction with race, class, and gender. Smith argued that "struggling

against or eliminating racism would not completely alleviate Black women's problems

because it does not take into account the way that sexual oppression cuts across all racial,

nationality, age, religious, ethnic and class groupings" (Nash, 2011, p.453). The

Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organization, released the

Combahee River Collective Statement (1978), arguing that that the White feminist

movement and the Civil Rights Movement largely ignored the needs of Black women,

and more specifically, Black Lesbians. Members of the Collective fought for

representation in both the Civil Rights, which was inherently Black male leadership, and

feminist movements, which catered to White middle-class women. Smith proclaimed that

"she did not see any way she could be "Black and a feminist and a lesbian. She was not

thinking so much about being a feminist. She was thinking about how she could add

lesbian to being a Black woman" (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p.77). This statement, authored

by Smith and other delegates, extended the Black Feminist movement's argument beyond

the aspects of race, gender, and class, to include sexuality.

Crenshaw would later expand on the Combahee River Collective's theory of

interlocking systems of oppression and coin the term "intersectionality," applied to a

series of court cases and describe how people, because of power structures, are often

disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression, including their race, class, gender

identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers. Thus, stating that to

understand the oppression of Black women, it is necessary to look at the intersection of both Blackness and womanhood. These identity markers do not exist independently of each other. Instead, each informs the other, creating a complex dynamic of oppression. Crenshaw (1991) describes three forms of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational. Structural intersectionality is used to describe how different structures or institutions such as school, housing, financial, legal, or medical establish norms or patterns of behavior that highlights the differences in the experiences of women of color when burdened by instances such as poverty, childcare responsibilities, language barriers, and an overall lack of job skills. Political intersectionality highlights the conflicting systems, resulting from institutions combining that forms a web of privilege and inequality, that separates women and women of color into two subordinate groups due to the experiences of women of color differing from those of White women and men of color. This manifests into racism, sexism, and White privilege. Consequentially, Black women encounter a combination of race and sex discrimination as both Black and woman and are generally only protected to the extent that their experiences coincide with either of the two groups (Crenshaw, 1989, p.143). As a result, they are forced to choose between "articulating the intersectional aspects of their subordination and risking their ability to represent Black men or ignoring intersectionality to state a claim that would not lead to the exclusion of Black men" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.148). Representational intersectionality looks at how multiple identity stereotypes in cultural products such as music, television, and film affect and further marginalize individuals for whom two or more of those

negative stereotypes are applicable and, in turn, advocate for them to have representation in media and other workplace settings.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) extends the understanding of intersectionality through the concept matrix of domination that describes four interrelated domains that organize power relations in society: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. The structural domain organizes oppression in society through large-scale institutions such as banks, insurance companies, police departments, the real estate industry, schools, stores, restaurants, hospitals, and governmental agencies, reproducing the subordination of Black women. The disciplinary domain manages oppression through the rules, regulations, and organizational practices that control specific subpopulations. This includes social policies and rulings that govern the practices of public relations. The hegemonic domain refers to the system of ideas developed by a dominant group by manipulating ideas, symbols, and images to justify their practices. "Given the growth of mass media and digital media, it is important to ask what cultural messages concerning race, gender, class, sexuality, and similar categories are being broadcasted to global audiences" (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p.9). The hegemonic domain takes into consideration that within public relations agencies and corporations, gender and age have been used as reasoning for why women have not gotten promoted in the industry, and class, specifically education and access to mentoring as justification for the preparedness of women of color. The fourth domain, the interpersonal, refers to how our consciousness perpetuates the subordination of others through routine practices and interactions with others.

Why intersectionality as a framework?

Intersectionality can influence the field of public relations by casting light on the issue of representation surrounding who has power in public relations, based on their identities, but "remains understudied because of the relative difficulty of conceptualizing, operationalizing, and measuring it" (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013, p.289). In addition, Vardeman-Winter et al (2013) found that only a handful of public relations studies have purposefully sampled participants from non-White/Caucasian races and ethnicities (p.283) with most focusing solely on gender relations. While there are assertions that women are not a homogenous group, the implications of this observation seem to get quickly lost in the application of theory. Considering this, Golombisky (2015) and Vardeman-Winter and Place (2017) argue that the stories of women and men who are not part of the standard White, heterosexual, able-bodied, American experience—are severely underrepresented in public relations practice and research. We need tools such as intersectionality applied to public relations research to counteract these trends and address the structural and institutional power dimensions at play. Since "we are people with a nationality, race, ethnic group, sexual orientation, and any other identity marker all at the same time, we must understand there is not a single way to observe, comprehend, or live these categories" (Lassen, 2016, p.60). The identity categories do not manifest themselves in any singular way that can express their complexity and intersectional positions. Therefore, it is important to carry out an intersectional analysis, question the categories themselves, and not view them as fixed identities.

Vardeman-Winter and Tindall (2010) contend that there is a need to apply a theory of intersectionality in public relations to analyze and understand how identities of practitioners impact the creation and implementation of strategic messages through nine levels: intra-industrial, inter-organizational, organization-publics relational, publics and community, representational, media, multinational/global, theoretical, and pedagogical. The inter-organizational levels focus on how power is distributed among types of organizations. Groups gain power through the accumulation of tangible wealth such as money, materials, and employees and intangible wealth such as relationships with policymakers, access to media personnel, and public goodwill that is limited within a society. Many of the individuals who are a part of marginalized groups and are hired into predominantly White industries to reach a quota, experience discrimination based on their race, age, gender, class status, or sexual orientation (Cocchiara, 2006). For instance, an analysis of occupational salaries showed that White women earned $138/week more than Black women and $129/week more than Hispanic women. While White men made approximately $520/week more than Black and Hispanic women. Thus, leading to competition between the groups. At the public and community level, those with easy access to resources can alleviate social and structural problems for themselves. In contrast, resource-poor communities may be less able to fix the problem from within (Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010, p.229). The representational level acknowledges that public relations practitioners use media containing words, symbols, and images in all communication efforts, and within that, media groups are represented differently. At the media level, the representational level considers who has access to media resources and

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their ability to get important information and illuminate the problems within their communities—for this reason, applying intersectionality to public relations requires looking at the role and influence of practitioners at each of these levels and how they experience marginalized status in the field as a result.

First and foremost, using intersectionality in the public relations field requires that scholars and practitioners think differently about identity, equality, and power. It requires a focus on the points of intersection, complexity, dynamic processes, and the structures that define our access to rights and opportunities rather than on defined categories or isolated issue areas. Secondly, using intersectionality requires employing a "bottom-up" approach to public relations research, analysis, and planning. Information gathering should account for the various influences that shape Black and Latina women's lives and begins with asking questions about how those living at the margins experience race, gender, and class oppression in the workplace. While quantitative research can provide aggregated data on race, sex, ethnicity, caste, age, citizenship status, and other identities, we need both personal accounts and testimonies as well. The rich descriptions produced through qualitative, intersectional analysis will illuminate the actors, institutions, policies, and norms that intertwine to create a given situation, and this research aims to reveal how workplace practices and policies shape the lives of those practitioners impacted, as compared to the practitioners whose identity factors have been privileged. Overall, for an intersectional analysis to be useful in the field of public relations, it must be informed by the experiences and views of those whom it seeks to impact. The subjects of the analysis should be at the table and involved in developing the analysis and the application.

Pitfalls and Challenges

The theory of intersectionality faces many challenges and reservations regarding its appropriateness as a theoretical framework and its ability to address other marginalized communities and instances of social power because of the historical centrality of American Black women and Black feminism as subjects of intersectionality" (Cho et al., 2013, p.788). One of the most important criticisms has to do with its applicability in practice. Junco and Limonta (2020) note that little has been written about how to analyze the intersections between the different structures that make up the concrete experiences of people, "what variables should be taken into account, which is central, invisible, or left out, and under which criteria the selected categories are considered sufficient for the analysis" (p.329). To achieve its full potential, Davis (2008) argues that "intersectionality needs a definition, a set of clearly demarcated parameters, and a methodology that would eliminate any confusion among researchers concerning how, where, and when it should be applied" (p.78). While we all have multiple intersecting identities that inform our experiences in life and our interactions with society (Oluo, 2018, p.75), as intersectionality becomes more institutionalized in the wider culture and is applied to White women and even White men (Cho et al., 2013, p.798), its meanings can become diluted and even misappropriated. In the case of White men, intersectionality is usually a default to one's class/wealth status to avoid being held accountable for one's privilege or default to their queer identity. Which in turn can render the identity factors of those most marginalized (i.e., Black and Latina) in the workforce invisible.

Collins and Bilge (2020) outline three other criticisms posed of intersectionality: (1) the overuse of personal identity as an analytical category; (2) intersectionality values cultural recognition over economic redistribution; and (3) that it fosters victimhood politics. Critics argue that "because too much attention is given to identity, intersectionality underplays structural analyses, especially materialist analyses of class and power" (178). Secondly, valuing cultural recognition leads to groups being concerned with "their own narrow interests rather than having a broader commitment to the social good. Lastly, it leads to individuals clinging to some sort of victim status – as women, or Blacks, or disabled – as the basis of the separatist claims for recognition" (181-182). Combating the criticism, Collins and Bilge collectively argue that "these arguments against intersectionality's claims to identity only work within a narrow understanding of intersectionality that simultaneously emphasize it as a form of abstract inquiry and neglected as a form of critical praxis as it actually happens" (182).

Overall, I've come to a key realization that we as Black women cannot help other Black women by simply addressing one aspect of our lives. If we want to help Black women, we need to address the system and our position in its entirety. This takes into consideration that intersectionality is not an account of personal identity, but one of power. Intersectionality offers us an account of power systems that work together to work against us" (Cooper et al, 2017, p.236). Intersectionality operates as an analysis of these power imbalances and serves as the method by which those power imbalances could be collectively eliminated by providing us with the language to challenge the systems that

oppress us. Which in turn can be applied to plans for preventative measures and retention in the public relations field.

Race and Ethnicity in PR

While race is a socially constructed identity marker that replicates itself in public relations, there is a lack of racial diversity in the profession itself, as well as in academia. Some scholars have found that if/when race or ethnicity is discussed relative to public relations, it is used in the context of strategic management with a focus on crisis mitigation, crisis management or image repair (Waymer & Dyson, 2011, p.468). Race can broadly be defined as a socially constructed phenomenon by which individuals categorize and construct realities based on the color of one's skin pigmentation or other physical characteristics such as hair texture and nose shape (Waymer, 2013). Munshi and Edwards (2011) study on race in public relations define race as being neither an event nor a specific series of events but a process of structured events that over time demonstrate a system in which groups and individuals are racialized and analyzed from a socio-historical perspective and cannot exist without a social context. Thus, race as a process comes into existence through the social and depends on the social to evolve and survive. Race within a social context argues that race and instances of racism are potentially experienced differently across different groups of people (Munshi & Edwards, 2011, p.358) and are grounded in Eurocentric history and culture which further leads into a divide of Whiteness and otherness.

The practice of public relations, like other professions, "normalizes the concept of Whiteness as the standard experience of society in which one who is *not* White, is seen as having a different, less natural experience" (Vardeman-Winter, 2013, p.228). This

includes the reproduction of Whiteness through White leadership that appears normal, neutral, and natural, rather than the result of racialized practices" (Logan, 2011, p. 443). In which it has remained fundamentally invisible to many White people occupying these positions in the workplace. A study on Whiteness among leaders in the public relations profession positions it as "the status quo by which social power is unequally distributed among authoritative and marginalized groups" (Vardeman-Winter, 2013, p.228). Frankenberg's (1993) study of Whiteness found that White women participants made meaning of race through experiences of oppression and privilege and encounters with discourse of difference that assumed that individuals of color were fundamentally different, or inferior compared to Whites. It also found that participants voiced, often unconsciously, their awareness of oppression and discrimination among Black citizens, whereas they interpreted Whiteness as "neutral" or privileged (Place, 2015, p.65). Within the social context, Frankenberg's study leads to the conclusion that race, racial dominance and Whiteness exist as historically situated lived experiences that are neither a singular nor series of events but a process. To analyze the dialogue between the racialized elite and non-racialized elite, Munshi and Edwards (2011) propose removing the power of Whiteness as the dominant race and placing it on an equal footing with the *other*" (p.359). Therefore, PR must be understood as part of a system that racializes disadvantage by creating and circulating meanings that perpetuate a White worldview (Munshi and Edwards, 2011).

Due to racial and ethnic individuals who stray from the White normative worldview being put on exhibit and gazed upon, Pompper (2005) argues for a critical race theory of public relations by advancing that difference should be considered an

opportunity and benefit, not an issue. Also, Pompper asserts that "being conscious of race, ethnicity and culture is the first step" (p.156) toward achieving equality within the public relations field. bell hooks (1992) further describes this concept of racial difference and othering by asserting that othering is a racialized act of violence perpetrated against minorities by Whites. bell hooks' study focuses entirely on the motivation and what it holds for White individuals, particularly White men who are eager to encounter differences. This otherness or difference, traditionally looked at in schemes of Black and White, extends to other races and ethnicities as well. This includes practitioners who identify as Hispanic or Latino but are commonly misconceived as being a homogenous group (Abeyta & Hackett, 2002) who share similar experiences and backgrounds (Len-Ríos, 2002). Ultimately this recognition of difference leads to the center of attention being placed on revenue generation and the bottom line for agencies and organizations. hooks (1992) describes the concept of cultural appropriation as "race and ethnicity becoming commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, being seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (p.367). This commodification can be extended into the understanding of Hispanic Public Relations (HPR). Due to the growth in Hispanic purchasing power, HPR is a specialty that maintains the core objectives of mainstream public relations combined with a strong knowledge of both Hispanic and general markets and an emphasis on language and culture (Vendrell, 2001; Len-Ríos, 2002). Consequently, this has led to the othering of Latino and Hispanic practitioners in the campaigns they are assigned to and the publics in which they interact with by employers.

Racism within public relations has been birthed from the social constructions of race, Whiteness, and difference that has been previously described. Racism is considered as a prejudice or belief that some people are better than others based on their conceived race that is reinforced by systems of power (Oluo, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Ultimately, Kendi (2019) takes this definition a step further and describes racism as a union between racist policies and ideas that produce and normalize racial inequalities through power structures. Bonilla-Silva (2013) argues that instances of colorblind racism are viewed by the dominant race through four primary frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Those in favor of abstract liberalism argue that each person as an individual has free will with choices and equal opportunity to good jobs, schools, and universities. Therefore, the abstract liberalism argument categorizes affirmative action policies as "preferential treatment." Naturalization argues that racial preferences are biologically driven instead of being influenced by societal factors. While on the other hand, cultural racism focuses on society-based arguments that blame marginalized individuals and presume cultural or biological inferiority stereotypes. Bonilla-Silva (2013) provides examples such as "Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education" or other examples of "their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values." Lastly, the minimization of racism suggests that discrimination is no longer a primary factor predicting the life outcomes of minorities.

Smaller scale instances of racism commonly described as micro aggression or micro-assaults (Kendi, 2019; Oluo, 2019) challenge the minimization framing. For many professionals of color, the daily occurrences of racial insensitivity presented themselves

in the form of comments, behaviors, and actions from colleagues and supervisors (Tindall, 2009, p.444). Emerging in a hypothetical post-racial era, micro-aggressions are small, cumulative interactions that can be explained away as a misunderstanding but help to normalize racism (Oluo, 2019) and distinct from macro level instances of racist violence and policies (Kendi, 2019. In challenging this post-racial era assumption, which is the belief that we have overcome or moved beyond racism, Kendi suggests the effects of the abuse on the people to whom the comments are addressed include distress, anger, worry, depression, anxiety, pain, fatigue, and suicide (p. 47). Oluo sums this up by describing how microaggressions keep minorities off balance, distracted, and defensive, which has kept qualified people of color from being hired and having their grievances taken seriously.

Gender and Sexuality in PR

Issues related to gender and sexuality have created a divide among men and women in public relations. While often used interchangeably in conversations, sex and gender have very distinct meanings. Sex refers to the biological categories of male and women, whereas gender refers to the idea that what we understand as masculine and feminine is socially and culturally determined (Yeomans, 2013, p.385), including instances of authentic gender performance. For instance, Pompper's (2007) study conducted semi-structured interviews with Latina public relations practitioners and found that Latina public relations practitioners experienced both racism and sexism by Anglo clients and bosses. To deal with the intersections of racial and sexual discrimination in the workplace, Latina women "had to become much blander. Less makeup. Less vocal. Less use of their hands to fit in" (p.299). This was coupled with developing coping

mechanisms such as crying, "developing a thick skin," "toughening it out," being patient, "just surviving," and "enduring" (p. 301) to navigate the workplace. While Pompper's study provides insight into how practitioners have constructed their gender through experience, many other scholars and practitioners have come to conceptualize gender differently. Considering that the demographics have shifted in the nearly 15 years since the study's publishing, corporations, governments, agencies, etc. produce different understandings of gender.

Place (2015) found that women practitioners defined gender in terms of binaries, social construct or continuums, and intersections. As a binary, gender was defined using the terminology of male/women and masculine/feminine. Gender binaries were also used as methods to engage stereotypes and assumptions in the workplace. For example, one of the interviewees stated that "certain characteristics such as being diplomatic, a good host or hostess and a bit of a nanny lend themselves to success in PR and are typically ascribed as being more women" (p.67). Gender as a social construct analyzes the ways each person in society perceives his or her role. For women, it is gendered norms that determine their success in the industry. For example, a White agency owner defined gender as a cultural concept and stated that it had nothing to do with biology at all (p.69) but that the ways in which gender is performed and critiqued are based on the social context. In terms of gender intersecting with other identity factors such as race, the findings of Place's study showed that race for White practitioners did not create a sense of gender-based discrimination, but that it did serve as a socially constructed category by which they understood difference (p.70) when interacting with diverse publics. Likewise, Linda Aldoory and Elizabeth Toth (2002) found that gender

discrepancies according to both male and women practitioners were related to differences in the socialization of women and men. This included sex discrimination and sexism, unrealistic expectations of women who balance family and work, skills differentials, favoritism toward men due to their low numbers, type of organization influences, access to promotions, and a belief that gender discrepancies in promotions and salaries do not exist (p.123).

While the public relations industry is overwhelmingly women, with the highest women majority being in agencies, many women reported a glass ceiling and pay gap within the field (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007). A glass ceiling is when women encounter barriers mid-career preventing them from being seen in top positions at the executive level (Aldoory & Elizabeth Toth, 2002; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007). Wrigley (2002) asserts that denial, gender role socialization, historical precedence, women not helping other women, and corporate culture are contributing factors to the glass ceiling (p.44). To overcome the odds of reaching the glass ceiling, women practitioners conceive that "mentoring, working hard(er), changing jobs, going out on your own, demonstrating competence and efficiency, women taking control of their own futures and creating new work cultures, being a problem solver, and having patience" (p.41) are all necessary. In addition to the glass ceiling, there was an evident pay gap between women and men, in which men grossed more than women for the same work. For instance, Black women with some college education earned less than White women with only high school degrees. Black women needed to obtain advanced degrees before making more than White women with bachelor's degrees. Still, Black and Latinx women earned the least overall, while White and Asian men earn the most overall (Kendi, 2019, p.189).

Similarly, men admitted to knowing that they received higher salaries over women with comparable qualifications and that women were socialized with only two options regarding salary: taking the offer or not taking the job (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Gender socialization tends to influence not just the workplace but private life, as well. Both men and women practitioners still construct work-family balance as being a woman's issue (Aldoory et al., 2008, p.13). Due to public relations being a deadline-based profession, most often women are the ones who adjust their schedules and make compromises when family needs collide with work (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Aldoory et al. (2008) found that practitioners defined their work and their life outside of work as fluid and complex, and uniquely situated public relations as a field that was not conducive for work-life balance (p.13). This has led to dominant group members, usually White heterosexual male leaders, consciously or subconsciously holding views "about the kind of tasks that women and male public relations practitioners should undertake" (Yeomans, 2013, p.386), in which women are further subjected to subordinate roles. These views include culturally designated sex roles and norms such as women are better at nurturing and Black women and Latinas are more suited for service jobs (Cocchiara et al., 2006, p.282). This has resulted in women in the public relations profession tending to occupy more of the junior level roles such as crafting press releases and organizing events; whereas men tend to occupy manager roles and offering advice to top leadership.

Lastly, few studies have examined sexuality as it relates to queer public relations practitioners of color. Moving away from the biological construct, gender should also be interpreted as an aspect of identity that people ascribe to themselves as men or women,

which is repeatedly and authentically performed and embodied (Yeomans, 2013; Kendi, 2019). Practitioners who didn't align with traditional biological constructs have braved homophobia in Black spaces and racism in queer spaces (Kendi, 2019, p.187), resulting in antiracist queer people forming their own spaces. Tindall (2013) asserts that this is in part due to women practitioners who self-identified as lesbian and bisexual not seeing representations of themselves and their experience in the practice and feeling invisible due to not connecting with other lesbians in the field. While LGBT is the common umbrella acronym used for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (Tindall, 2013, p.519), Ciszek (2018) argues that the "q" for queer is often left out especially for people of color. Queer is used an umbrella term for non-heterosexual and/or nongender-normative identities (p.135) and disrupts binary categories like gay and straight, and challenges normative identities, institutions, and epistemologies, including the field of public relations. Because practitioners may be asked to identify, create, and disseminate messaging aimed at publics who engage in same-sex behavior but remain gender non-binary, Ciszek (2018) argues that a queering of public relations is necessary to challenge, deconstruct, and unlearn ways of thinking and doing that have previously made queer practitioners invisible.

Class in PR

Intersectionality involves more than race, ethnicity, and sexual identity. Class is also important in public relations. Public relations practitioners' social class status has the potential to determine their success in a role. Social class refers to the grouping of people into a hierarchy based on wealth, income, education, occupation, and social networks. For minority practitioners, their "other" status is what justifies specific

communications campaigns assigned to them; for professionals, their other skill set is what justifies their employment (Munshi & Edwards, 2011, p.357). In the case of Latinas, many of whom are bilingual, their other skill set poses a disadvantage (Pompper, 2007). Bilingual employees are pulled away from their regular jobs to translate or act as cultural representation, but employers don't see the skillset as being of value. Employers' refusal to recognize language as a marketable skill and a factor to be compensated, disadvantages bilingual employees and the organizations that do not recognize this valuable asset (Cocchiara et al., 2006, p.279).

Furthermore, formal education and accumulated knowledge through internal and external networking have also shaped agency dynamics (Cocchiara et al.,2006; Edwards, 2009; Place, 2012). Many practitioners of color reported exclusion in the workplace such as not being invited to social gatherings and work-related meetings, thus not being afforded key career opportunities as others in the group (Holder et al., 2015, p.170). As a result of the lack of formal sponsors and informal networking opportunities, Black and Latina women chose for themselves the level of education, training, and other knowledge they achieved and viewed these as investments to be used for their own growth and development (Cocchiara et al. 2006, p.275). In addition, they created "formal opportunities, such as regularly scheduled meetings, to gain the kind of support and information they need to achieve their organizational goals" (p.281). These formal opportunities are like what P.H. Collins (2006) refers to as safe places.

Safe spaces are social spaces where Black women speak freely and are necessary for oppressed groups to continue to exist as a viable social group. Safe spaces require that the members can express themselves apart from the hegemonic

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or ruling ideology and build relationships with one another; this can form and

function within informal relationships such as family and friends or they can

occur within more formal and public spaces, thus providing opportunities for self-

definition and empowerment.

In a case study, Edwards (2009) supports this by revealing that access to external

networks was a fundamental requirement to do a job effectively. The ability to

communicate quickly and effectively resulted in social capital and was linked to

competence and credibility in future work relationships. Place's (2012) study of women

practitioners making meaning of power found that power served as a function of

influence, a function of relationships, knowledge and information, access, credibility, and

empowerment (p.440). One of the indications was that knowledge isn't generally shared

between colleagues, and it's the difference between managers being taken seriously. One

interviewee stated:

Once I got my APR [Accreditation in Public Relations] and I understood a very

theoretical, textbook, research-based approach to public relations, I brought more

value to my role in the organization in a science-based, analytical organization.

So, when I'm at the table and I say, ""This is a very complex message and there's

another tactic that we are going to use and here's why, they get it"". (443)

Success in public relations is determined by whom you can pick up the phone-

and call-in terms of content coverage. Simply put, it is "access to key individuals and

information—and a practitioner's ability to implement that access that equates to power"

(Place, 2012, p.444). Upward mobility is seen as a sign of success and power, and has

shown to be greater for White people, whereas downward mobility has shown to be

greater for Black people" (Kendi, 2019, p.158) along the United States' race-class ladder. Weaver (2016) takes this power assumption one step further and applies a Marxist lens to public relations and capitalism. In particular, the intersections of race and gender have been shown to have a visible impact on the labor market as it relates to wages, workforce discrimination, and domestic labor. Public relations practitioners with the greatest number of financial resources have more power to influence outcomes, whereas those who are marginalized are inherently forced to sell their labor and work as propagandists for capitalism (Weaver, 2016, p. 45). This in turn has led to practitioners having a vested interest in the organizations that they represent and not the consumers or publics being targeted. Power is ingrained in privilege and manifests itself differently. Crucial to the success of social outcomes, privilege is defined as an advantage or set of advantages that one person or group possesses that another does not (Oluo, 2018, p.59). These sets of privileges, in the case of patriarchal power, are not just reserved for White men. "Patriarchal power, the power men use to dominate women, is not just the privilege of upper- and middle-class White men, but the privilege of all men in our society regardless of their class or race" (hooks, 1981, p.87). Subsequently, many public relations practitioners intentionally and unintentionally leverage their privilege, whether it is through social, economic, or cultural capital to get a seat at the table and at times have maintained the hierarchy that has become essential to the public relations industry. Overall, Black and Latina women's lower formal education levels and less access to informal networks than White women and men has been used to justify the gender wage gaps (Cocchiara et al. 2006) and has made a difference regarding opinions being

considered as valid, the ability to garner trust internally and externally, and the ability to produce results.

Research Questions

This study looked at the intersections of race, gender, and class to understand Black and Afro-Latina women PR practitioners' workplace experiences. The reviewed literature explored feminization of the field, minority women's encounters with the glass ceiling leading to obstacles in upward mobility and the relationship between race, gender, and class in the public relations profession. Previous literature leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black and Afro-Latinx practitioners construct and display their identities in the workplace?

RQ2: How do Black and Afro-Latinx practitioners perceive the role of race, gender, and/or class in determining their assigned campaigns?

RQ3: How do Black and Afro-Latinx practitioners perceive their representation will change in the public relations industry in the future?

These questions focus on the intersections between race, gender, and class, understanding how the participants negotiate their intersecting identities, and the extent to which they are allowed to participate in the industry.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I employed a qualitative method for this study, as qualitative inquiry allows for exploring phenomena by collecting stories, personal experiences, and making meaning

(Pauley, 1991). Qualitative methods of research are most appropriate to answer my research question because they often seek to make meaning of cultural and interpretive studies by employing a wide range of interconnected practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), much like this study sought to understand the implications of race, gender, and class on public relations practitioners. The study also aimed to answer the question "how" concerning the creation of social experiences or the meanings of these experiences (2003). Denzin and Lincoln also note that qualitative research is "inherently multi-method in focus" to better secure an in-depth understanding of the observed phenomena (2003). For these reasons, I used collaborative autoethnography and in-depth semi-structured interviews to triangulate the information and produce a more conclusive understanding.

Collaborative Autoethnography

According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography combines autobiography and ethnography characteristics. When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture's relational practices, shared values and beliefs, and shared experiences to help cultural members and outsiders better understand the culture. Chang (2008) adds the collaborative component by asserting that collaborative autoethnography stems from the researchers' decision to investigate a particular life experience of their own. According to Chang (2008) including others with similar experiences as co-participants in the study broadens the database but keeps the research focus is anchored in the researcher's personal experience (p.65). Autoethnography as a research method uses the researcher's

personal experiences as primary data and intends to explain the understanding of social

phenomena (Chang, 2013, 108). I identify as a Black woman born in 1997 with the title

of media relations specialist in a corporation. The use of myself as the focus enabled me

to use autoethnography as both a process (doing ethnographic research) and product

(writing an ethnography) (Ellis et al., 2011). In other words, this study uses my personal

experiences with race, gender, and class to purposefully reflect on cultural phenomena,

such as hierarchical power structures in the public relations industry. This study adhered

to autoethnography's overall purpose being the focus on personal experience, articulating

insider knowledge of cultural experience, and creating texts accessible to larger

audiences, primarily audiences outside of academic settings (Adams et al., 2015, p.4).

Thus, autoethnography's accessibility and research design made it an appropriate method

to engage both academic and non-academic audiences in the practices.

In-Depth Interviews

According to Chang (2013), "Autoethnographic data collection does not have to

be a solitary activity. Auto-ethnographers can interview others implicated or participating

in their studies as well as others related to their research topic" (114). Many types of

interviews can be used to collect information and data. Brennen (2017) added that

qualitative interviewing explores respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences, and values

within their 'deeply nuanced inner worlds. Conducting qualitative interviews allowed me

to use the language used by practitioners, gather information about what they see, ask

about the past, and validate the information from other sources including the reflections.

However, to gain further insight into the overarching themes found within the reflections,

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews simultaneously. With structured interviews, interviewers have pre-established questions asked of all participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Brennen, 2017). Structured interviews also do not allow for variations of questions, further explanations of questions, or deviation from the script. That structure can increase the likelihood of the researcher and participant not being on the same page when it comes to comprehending certain words and phrases used. This can, in return, lessen the chances of researchers receiving accurate answers to their questions. The guidelines for structured interviews are in place to minimize the chance of error and produce an ideal interview (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

However, proponents of semi-structured interviews do not consider these deviations from the list of questions as an error but rather a way to ensure parallel understanding between the interviewer and interviewee. Semi-structured interviews also allow participants to share their experiences without limit, giving them the freedom to share as much as possible and for the researcher to best understand these responses without limited communication. While semi-structured interviews contain pre-established questions, as well, I can ask follow-up questions specific to the participant's response to delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed, or to clarify answers given by the respondent (Brennen, 2017).

Data Sampling and Selection

After IRB approval, I used collaborative autoethnography and assumed the dual role of researcher and research participant, in which my experiences were under investigation even as I lead the investigation (Chang et al., 2013, p.22). To recruit an

additional 6 participants, I relied on a purposeful sampling method through Linked-In and

a selective criterion. The selective criterion consisted of all participants being women,

identifying as Black or Latinx, had at least one year of work experience in the public

relations industries, but were within their first five years in the field and were at least 18

years of age and born after 1981. Black and Latinx women make up less than 10% of the

public relations workforce and generally have yet to obtain a management position. I

have previous work experience as an intern at a local mortgage company, where she is a

current employee and has established rapport with a co-worker who identities as a Black

woman within the first five years of her career in the public relations industry and born

after 1981 and at least 18 years of age at the time of the study.

After identifying a pool of potential participants, I reached out via email with the

recruitment script and attached the informed consent document, along with a Qualtrics

survey link. Although pseudonyms are used in the final record, participants were asked to

identify their name, age, gender identity, the city they work in, the name of the company

or agency they work for, official position at work, and current company size.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of six self-identified Black women ranging in

age from 24 to 31 who work in public relations. All participants have obtained at least a

bachelor's degree and have a year or more of experience. All participants were assigned

pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Presented below in Table 1 is a summary of

the demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

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Participant (pseudonym)	Title/Role	Industry	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Geographic Location
Imani	Community Relations Specialist	Non-profit	25	Black	Tulsa, OK
Aaliyah	Media Relations Specialist	Corporate	30	Black	St. Louis, MO
Jasmine	Public Relations Consultant	Agency	26	Black	Detroit, MI
Destiny	Communications Manager	Government	24	Black	Detroit, MI
Alexis	Senior Account Executive	Agency	25	Black	New York, NY
Mia	Cultural Strategist	Agency	25	Black/Hispanic	New York, NY

Data Collection and Analysis

Autoethnographic data can be gathered in various ways: recalling, collecting artifacts and documents, interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues about the research topic (Chang, 2013, p.113). To complete the autoethnographic data collection portion of this study, I relied on a total of twelve writing reflections stored over Google drive from 6 participants. The recruitment email contained example prompts that the participants could expect. Collaborative autoethnography can be done with "full" collaboration in which researchers work together from the beginning (data collection) to the end (writing), or with "partial" collaboration in which researchers work together at selected stages of their process (Chang, 2013, p.111). This study involved partial collaboration, in that all auto ethnographers worked together in pooling autobiographical data, but only I analyzed the data used in the written autoethnography. The reflections utilized a free-writing approach and yielded an estimated 72 typed pages

for analysis. Self-observation focuses on taken-for-granted yet observable matters, whereas self-reflection allows auto-ethnographers to focus on their present perspectives on issues related to the research topic (Chang, 2013, p.113). Simultaneous to the self-reflections, the researcher conducted 6 semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately 25-30 minutes, carried out over Zoom, and recorded. I also use Rev for all interview transcripts. Upon receipt, I verified each transcript to the recording for accuracy and corrected any words mistakenly transcribed in the service. My primary focus was on the accuracy of the other women's words, ensuring no manipulation or reinterpretation on my behalf, and placing the transcripts in a uniform format.

Taking a semantic and deductive approach, I then used thematic analysis to analyze the reflection data and narrative analysis to analyze the interview transcripts. Since I approached this study from the perspective of intersectionality theory, and a deductive approach is theory-driven, it is more appropriate than using an inductive approach that discovers or constructs theory from the data. Based on following the first five of six steps developed by Braun and Clarke (2008) to conduct a thematic analysis, I first familiarized myself with the data by reading through the text and taking initial notes. Next, with assistance from NVivo, I color coded the data by highlighting sections of the text, including anything that appears relevant and potentially interesting, creating codes that describe its content. This resulted in an overview of the commonalities throughout the data. Afterwards, I reviewed all the codes and identified patterns that fit within broader themes. Finally, I reviewed those themes to ensure accurate representations of the data before defining and naming them. Defining the themes describes what the researcher

means by each theme and how it helps us understand the phenomenon. Once coding is complete and overarching themes have been defined, interview questions would complement the analysis. Narrative analysis was appropriate for the interview transcripts because it makes sense of the participant's individual stories while highlighting the important aspects that would best resonate with your readers and support points found in other research areas.

Riessman (2005) describes four narrative analysis approaches: narrative thematic analysis, structural analysis, interaction analysis, and performative analysis. I focused specifically on interaction analysis, a focus on in-use language to understand how people jointly construct the meanings of their interactions. In interaction analysis thematic content and narrative structure are not abandoned, but interest shifts to storytelling as a co-construction process in which the teller and listener create meaning collaboratively (p.4). The analysis accounts for the fact that my own stories of personal experience, as well as additional probing, was inserted into the question-and-answer exchanges.

Data Validation

Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers utilize at least two strategies in any given study. Strategies would include promoting credibility (internal validity), consistency (reliability), and promoting transferability (external validity). To ensure internal validity, I included sharing drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure that I represented them and their experiences accurately and not reinterpreting them to fit within my own experiences. To ensure the findings' reliability, I have included a detailed description of the proposed data collection and analysis. It is widely understood

and accepted that qualitative research is not generalizable. However, to promote external

validity, I included rich, thick descriptions of the study participants using pseudonyms,

and findings would include narrative quotes pulled from the interviews. The term thick

description is described as a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and

the findings of a study (Geertz, 1973). The use of rich descriptions of the experiences

through reflection makes autoethnography distinct from other methodologies. The

purpose of thick descriptions in autoethnography is to facilitate an understanding of the

culture, move the reader to feel emotions expressed in the writing, and understand the

researcher and participants' viewpoints and lived experiences. By utilizing pseudonyms, I

can better protect my subject's identities while still providing ample space for their stories

to be told.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

My objective for exploring the intersections that exist between race, gender, and

class among Black women practitioners resulted from my own personal feelings and

perceptions on the topic. Through weekly reflections and in-depth interviews with six

Black women practitioners, I discovered my experiences specific to race and gender are

similar to the practitioner's experiences outlined in the reflections and interviews. And if

not similar, I still recognized and understood their perception that was articulated based

on the background and experiences of the practitioner that were offered. As participants

spoke about their experiences as Black women in public relations, their narratives were

refined and organized to form three overarching themes: *social and structural*

inequalities, hyper-visibility and invisibility, and *representation*. Structural inequalities in

this study are defined as an embedded bias that provides advantages for some while marginalizing or producing disadvantages for others within organizations, institutions, and social networks. Hypervisibility is defined here as the feeling of being overly visible because of an individual's race, ethnicity, or gender sometimes to the point of overshadowing their skills and lived experiences. Whereas invisibility was defined as the feeling of not being fully recognized or valued in the workplace, along with being denied power and voice. Lastly, representation is defined as the portrayal of someone in a particular way that influences the way we see ourselves in the workplace.

Structural Inequalities

The excerpt below introduces how I entered the public relations field and the systemic challenges I have incurred because of existing structures:

Growing up on the west side of Detroit in a lower middle-class neighborhood, I received numerous reminders from my grandmother and great aunt that I had to work twice as hard as the 'good ole boys' because not only was I a woman, but that I was Black. My household was intergenerational in the sense that my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother all lived near each other (one door over to be exact). They always stressed speaking "proper" English when interacting with White peers especially when seeking employment. Say "yes" instead of "yeah" and remember not to drop off the endings to my words, which I've had a habit of doing. According to them, Proper English was the way to fit in or gain approval in non-Black spaces aka corporate America. Those conversations flashed back when I found myself working remotely from Detroit

over the holiday season. After a phone call, my mom laughed at me and said that I sounded like a "White girl" and my grandmother seemingly nodded in approval. This hadn't been the first time I was forced to modify my approach, change the way I dress, how I wear my hair in its natural state, and the way I portray a sense of "professionalism" to feel like I belong in the corporate space.

In mid-March, when the pandemic forced statewide stay-at-home orders, I started my first full-time job as a program coordinator and media relations specialist at a company with more than 5,000 employees based in the Midwest. With dual bachelor's degrees, and in pursuit of a master's, my annual base salary was roughly $33,280 and I never thought of negotiating it. Coming from Detroit, MI, a much bigger metropolitan area and having family members that worked in service focused jobs, I was just happy to say that I was pursuing a career that landed in neither. While I had taken an interest in media production during high school and college, I knew absolutely nothing about the public relations industry other than the few classes I took as part of my minor but knew that I wanted that to be a key component of the career I was just beginning to map out. As I looked around the city that I just relocated to, and the company that I now worked for, I didn't see a lot of people that looked like me or that potentially had a similar background. While the public relations industry is predominantly women, it is still overwhelmingly White. I never even thought about negotiating my starting salary with my White women manager, because money was seemingly taboo to discuss among family, among friends, among co-workers. But I was reading a self-help book written by a Black woman for women of color.

I had expected what was about to happen from prior conversations and knew this was the moment Minda referred to in her book. "If you want more from your career, you would more than likely have to leave your employer due to them being comfortable." Still, I stared across the table two years later. My boss with ten years of work experience, knowing that I was in my first negotiation, told me that there was not much that could be done. There are budgets, and even with a stellar review my allowed amount was 2% and what they considered a substantial bonus for compensation. Although that bonus couldn't even cover a rent payment with current inflation rates. Still, I pushed forward. I brought up the key point that this was a competitive market, companies are going remote and that my salary was not in line with industry standards. In fact, it was 28.2% less than I should have been making according to websites such as PayScale and Salary.com. I walked out of there disappointed to say the least, but not surprised.

When a colleague resigned, I was commended for stepping into the role of senior media relations specialist with three years of professional experience related to communications. However, the reflection highlights that I did not receive recognition for a promotion or additional compensation. My experiences in terms of socioeconomic status, such as income, education, geographical location, and the gender pay gap, were consistent with the findings of Dozier et al. (2013). The findings showed that practitioners with less professional experience were less likely to play the managerial role, resulting in a lower income. Typically, the White men who have held the position had at least five years of experience at the current organization and another ten to twelve years of prior experience, including internships. Also, from previous conversations with my male colleagues, they

were exposed to the public relations profession earlier in their educational pursuit. Abeyta & Hackett, 2002; Pompper, 2004 findings showed that racial barriers could skew perceptions of the profession and hinder minority public relations students from pursuing careers in the field. As a result of minorities having few opportunities to become aware of the public relations profession, that lack of understanding about the profession could hurt the initiative of increasing diversity and representation.

Findings show that lack of exposure also dictates what areas Black women choose to pursue in public relations. Additional findings of Dozier et al.,2013 show that women working in lower-paying specializations such as media and community relations also had lower incomes. While I have background knowledge in other areas of communication, my current title matched with my educational background is less than the industry average. These findings are consistent with what Crenshaw (1991) theorized as structural intersectionality. Structural intersectionality looks at how structural policies and practices fail women of color because they do not consider all the layers of oppression they experience. Regarding policies and practices, the decision to provide me with additional work and inject comments regarding how I make more than other graduate students my age during the review process contributed to how I experienced the profession and made me hyper aware of how this is coupled with my race and gender.

The 'Strong Black Woman'

Whereas I discussed my socioeconomic background, Mia displayed her identity in the workplace in terms of combatting the strong Black woman stereotype. The Strong Black Woman stereotype is centered around emotional and physical strength, independence, and caretaking (Purushothaman et al., 2022). Mia stated that she "see's the

strong Black women trope being used as a way to sort of measure how much bullshit Black women can take in this industry." She recounted her own experience with the stereotype as a cultural strategist and as a member of the Latinx community, indicating in a reflection excerpt:

> I allowed myself to be vulnerable with a small group of co-workers in a space we had designated as a "safe space", and someone took something I shared there and flagged it to management. I can still remember the feeling of dread in my gut when I realized that a White woman, I had trusted had betrayed me and didn't have the guts to speak to me directly. Instead, she took something I shared and sent screenshots to someone and until this day I do not know how many people have been privy to my personal business. I remember the rage, the fear, and the regret.

> Regret has a distinct taste; it was sour and unpleasant. I spent weeks after with that taste in my mouth whenever my brain flashed back to that moment. I can still call upon that rage because it never really was resolved, it has continued to live inside me, at a simmer until my brain brings me back to that moment and then it goes from a simmer to a full-blown gust of anger.

> I feared for my job at that moment and then my life. What if some well-meaning person decided to have the NYPD do a 'wellness' check on me and I ended up dead? Would anyone even feel bad for signing my death sentence? Or would they excuse it by centering their intentions vs the impact of what they did. The conversations I had after this incident were important. I learned how to advocate for myself and push back against "policies" that did little to help me and

would put me in harm's way. I learned to not let people use policies to silence me or to dictate how things should be handled. I also learned how to stop being so trusting in these spaces. A lesson I had thought I knew by then, but that moment taught me the realities of 'safe' spaces with White people. It's become a core memory for me. It's taught me to only be vulnerable in spaces where that is respected and cherished. It taught me that not everyone is worthy of my vulnerability and that I can dictate when, where and how I will decide to be vulnerable. It taught me nuance to vulnerability.

Mia also added the importance of workplaces acknowledging mental health among Black women in her interview and stated that:

If you are a Black woman in this space who is living with mental health disorders, there almost is this need to prepare yourself to be gaslit at every turn. The way that this industry talks about mental health is forgetting that under the umbrella of mental health, there are those with mental health illnesses. So, their solution for everything is kind of like a very, "Woo-woo, here's some yoga, here's a calm app," which does nothing for someone who may have depression or bipolar disorder or actual serious illnesses. The industry's putting a band aid on the conversation and trying to move it along because I think if they actually had to address the things that can exacerbate someone's mental illness, it would ruin the business because the business is built on basically being at the beck and call of brands. There's a lot of smoke and mirrors, a lot of smoke and just nonsense going on here around it and it's been interesting to watch.

Through her reflection, Mia asserted that she was less likely to have work-life balance in her current position leading her to pursue other job offers. The reviewed literature addressed work-life balance in terms of being a women's issue, family responsibilities and caregiving. Aldoory et al's (2008) findings revealed several insights into how women public relations professionals perceived and strategized work-life balance in terms of gender. While work-life balance was constructed outside of the notion of family, young public relations practitioners constructed their identities through the job by pushing for more work hours and sacrificing personal pleasures, travel, and friends for what they perceived as career success. Still the participants blamed society for creating constraints to their efforts at balancing work and life through the impressions that taking advantage of family-friendly policies would be detrimental to their career. These findings are consistent with Mia describing how policies that dictated workplace outcomes in terms of mental health could be detrimental to her overall well-being. Considering that all of the other participants in my study also highlighted that they struggled with work-life balance in the public relations field, I would agree with previous scholars that work-life balance is interconnected with gender. The findings in Place and Vardeman-Winter's (2018) study highlighted that due to public relations being a deadline-based profession, most often women are the ones who adjust their schedules and make compromises when family needs collide with work. In the case of the profession, it also requires an understanding that work-life balance is not strictly reserved for those with children when observing that younger professionals are constantly entering the workforce.

The 'Angry Black Woman'

Destiny described combatting the Angry Black Woman stereotype in terms of how her identity is constructed in the workplace. The Angry Black Woman stereotype is centered around the notion that Black women are unnecessarily loud, dominant, and aggressive (Motro et al., 2022). She included in her reflection that:

A lot of times as Black women we're told, be seen, and not heard, or if you're seen and heard, don't be too loud. We're always just telling ourselves, don't be that loud Black woman, don't be that angry Black woman, so you keep so much stuff in, and you keep it bottled up. Also, we know that once you keep stuff bottled up for so long, eventually it's going to all come out. I decided to truly stand up for myself toward one of my coworkers, someone who is at least 10 years my senior. It's a male who is very much an alpha male. And at the time I was extremely uncomfortable to even have a Zoom call, or a phone call, or even an email encounter with this person because they were so aggressive toward me.

I truly felt it was because I was a woman. And, because I noticed him advance toward me, not in a sexual way per se, but he just tried to flirt with me, and I shut it down upon our initial meeting and that defined the trajectory of our working relationship. I remember when I discussed it with my superior and then in turn, I just wanted to bring it to my superior's attention, someone who was also a male. But of course, I guess males stick together. I ended up being blindsided a few days later and was brought onto a Zoom call with the two of them for essentially a mediation, something I was not comfortable with, something that my superior asked, "Was I comfortable with?" I said, "No." And it still happened.

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And I remember I was eating so I can still smell the food. I remember my eyes were tearing up, but to steer away from the sensitive soft woman exterior, and persona, and stereotype, I had to essentially suck my tears back in my eyes because I had in this moment, it was really a fight-or-flight essentially to me, because I felt like I was under attack. But I stood my ground. And I just remember I was so vocal and initially I just shut down and I said, "I'm not going to say anything."

And it turned into mentally, "I'm not going to say anything to, no, I'm going to tell both of you how I feel, and I don't care what you think, what you say, how you feel about it." Especially because the individual who I had an issue with tried to downplay the fact that we had an issue and we both knew it. He just said that we had communication issues and it was way beyond that. It was him constantly throwing into my face what the previous person in my role on our team had done, and the way they'd done things, and how he felt like I should do things, and how he felt like I was always doing things wrong, and how I probably didn't know much because of my age.

And considering that at this time it was 2021 and I had just graduated in 2020. I'd only been fresh out of school for not even a year or maybe a little over a year actually. It was stressful. This slipped out to me, but I guess it needed to be said. I told him to his face, I said, "You mansplain a lot. You don't even allow me the opportunity to speak. You don't allow me the opportunity to be in this role and to do it right or wrong because you're trying to tell me how to do it." And he just sat there with his face scrunched up trying to negate everything I said, of course,

trying to gaslight me. And even my superior tried to do the same thing and just really sat there. It was uncomfortable, but it was a conversation that was needed. That was so important.

And this was to this date, I think the most important encounter I've had at work because I not only talked about my gender, but I also talked about my age. I talked about my status as far as graduating. And at the time I would cry about it because I just felt like I didn't know what to do. I wanted to quit. I just felt so uncomfortable in this space. I find that worthy of exploring because I see how far I've come. I can talk about it and not cry. I can talk about it as something that I tried to unfence over, instead of something that I let define me.

I could have let those words; I could have let those actions define me. I could have gone back in my shell, and I could have let them tell me how to do my job. But then I would be doing myself a disservice. I would be doing Black people, even though these people were Black as well, but Black women specifically, a disservice and all those people who are the youngest on their teams. Those are the people who I did this for. People like me.

Destiny described constructing her identity in opposition to the stereotype simultaneously regarding race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status and avoiding being a "disservice to Black people." This is consistent with Dickens's et al. (2017) findings that early-career employees who belong to underrepresented groups and have solo racial status may be cared for and treated child-like rather than as a professional. Dickens continued that if a Black woman decides not to assimilate to the White dominant culture

in the workspace, she may incur a cost toward professional advancement. However, she may simultaneously experience the benefit of feeling connected to her Black culture in the workspace. Based on the findings from Dickens et. al. (2017) and Destiny's experiences, it can be concluded that race, gender, and class determine how expressed anger is interpreted in the workplace for Black women.

Hypervisibility and (In)visibility

The excerpt below describes how my race, gender, and class have been overtly visible at times:

> Months prior to stepping into an annual marketing retreat, I found myself staring down an email from someone in leadership in which I was blindly chastised regarding something that was sent out externally. I have always been extremely thorough in my assignments, and this was no exception. I verified titles, ensured links worked properly and hit send to a freelance reporter at a leading outlet. It had not occurred in the past and it wasn't the criticism that made me rethink my positioning in that moment. It was me staring in front of my outlook screen to see eight or so other emails included in the chain, all White, all men, all in higher up leadership within the department. That moment I could feel my confidence sink into my gut. I saw everyone who worked in the department face-to-face, I quickly realized that out of roughly 300 employees in the marketing department, I was one of only four who were Black. This meant I faced a strange dichotomy of being both hyper-visible and invisible. It is there that I began to situate my race and gender above my class status in the workplace. I

began to doubt each email that I sent afterwards after feeling like I had to represent the entire race. I needed to come across as more than proficient, more than competent, more than capable in all that I did. I had to be 'on' all the time. Because in the back of someone's mind, probably the person who sent the initial email, they could be judging the entire race based on me. It was constantly impressed upon me that I needed to 'talk properly' early on. Without hesitation, my director stepped in, addressed the situation at hand and reiterated that there was nothing that I had done wrong. However, in this instance, Blackness in the workplace was still something that I was left to figure out on my own.

The reflection above highlighted that the email chain contained senior White males in the marketing department. At that time, I was the youngest person on the email chain, the only woman, and the only Black individual. I experienced invisibility due to the necessity to assimilate into a White hegemonic corporate culture and hypervisibility where my identity became tokenized (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019) in exchange for exposure (Dickens et al., 2019). The experience was consistent with Place's (2015) findings that race, and gender simultaneously affected respondents' sense of professionalism and visibility. My experiences stemmed from being assigned a project that was considered menial and low priority for other junior level colleagues in the same department. Gallicano's (2013) findings on gender showed that men were getting less work than women or receiving more important work than women.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

Alexis, a senior account executive with a global agency mentioned a specific campaign she was assigned to:

I was in a client meeting and our client wanted to use orange rope to

connect the United States and Europe, and they wanted to put it around their

employees. I don't know about you, but I immediately thought of the Atlantic

slave trade one country removed. One continent, I guess you could say, removed,

and I felt really awkward about it, and I could tell that people were like, "Is she

going to say something? I hope she doesn't say something." So, I didn't say

anything in front of the client, but I did say it after because I didn't think it was

appropriate at that time, and it was almost like, "Oh my gosh. Why would you

ever think that?", and et cetera, when it's very clear as day. You're creating almost

a triangle, because they decided to use different countries for the third countries

instead of Africa, and it's not like Europe didn't slave trade minorities. Then to top

that off, the pictures were all White, and they still went ahead with it. When I said

something, it went over their head. It was like, you know, "Alexis, it's not that

serious. It's not that deep," and our client, European and American, like they

honestly didn't know, but it's our job to educate them on that platform, and the

position I was in at the time did not support doing that.

Crenshaw (1991) theorized that political intersectionality recognizes that women of color

are members of at least two subordinated groups—women and people of color—and,

thus, are critical to developing antiracist and antisexist agendas. Alexis' ability as a Black

woman to articulate how the campaign could be seen as the recreation of The Atlantic

slave trade advances hypervisibility in terms of race and invisibility in terms of gender by

being in a space dominated by White men. Furthermore, like the women in Tindall's

(2009) study, Alexis was not hired to communicate specifically with African American or

minority audiences. She was hired to conduct "mainstream" public relations efforts on behalf of their organization and serve in additional organizational capacities and public relations roles. However, in Alexis' position, she often found herself being the voice for all Black people regarding campaign content while simultaneously targeting minority audiences specifically.

The significance here is that junior-level employees typically produce the drafts of announcements and releases and complete more prep work while senior-level employees lead the strategies (Yeomans, 2013). The junior-level status often accounts for practitioners' ages and years in the field instead of their educational attainment. This was in line with the findings that showed that four of the participants' day-to-day tasks looked different. However, they primarily wrote releases, conducted outreach, and executed the strategy versus leading the overall project or campaign. Also, many of the projects and campaigns participants were assigned to were headed by White men or had majority male clients. In contrast, the accounts of Alexis and another participant indicated that completing more senior-level responsibilities with less than three full years in the field was indeed possible. Alexis works in the healthcare sector, and the other participant works in the fintech space. It could be concluded that while race and gender are apparent and factor into workplace exposure for Black women, practitioners working in agencies were more likely to assume managerial positions in the field compared to those working in corporations, government, and nonprofits.

Both Black and Latine

I have experienced with White counterparts where they kind of want the conversation, as they say it, they want to just make sure that the conversation with

clients is focused, is what I was told once. So, they really would rather not bring

up race. And this was specifically around conversation for multicultural and

Latino-focused work that we were doing. They didn't want me to bring in the

reality that Latino's are an ethnic group and there are a lot of different races that

people can be within the ethnic group because they felt that it would actually

derail the conversation, which to me at the time felt like they just wanted me to

kind of be quiet and not really speak truth to what I know to be the Latino

experience.

I am impacted by other people having the ability to comprehend that you

can be both Black and Latine. That the two aren't at odds and actually it makes

perfect sense when you have even just a 101 understanding of the differences

between race, ethnicity and nationality. Whether an opportunity is missed or

presented is always dependent on how others see me and understand my place

within Latinidad and the Black diaspora. Within the Latine space, I am tapped to

speak on Blackness. In Black spaces I am tapped to bring insight on the diversity

of Blackness & the diaspora at large.

Whereas everyone else has to rely on syndicated research to understand

what's popular and what's popping in culture, I'm a Black Latina from New York

City. Culture, really everything, all the trends, start here and obviously in other

places too, but I have insight that other people will never be able to have. They're

going to rely on syndicated research, I'm going to rely on lived experience and

community that I can tap into to learn more. And our learnings are going to be

different. They're going to understand things that are synthesized and read and

sort of positioned by other White people because that's how syndicated research works. Whereas I can actually bring in true insights from the people that we are trying to either reach or target people that we're looking to be tastemakers in different spaces. There was always a little bit of tension around that in my last role working on a really big brand because they had a Latino agency, but it was mostly White Latinos.

Mia's conference room experience highlights how her ethnicity coupled with her race allows her to "speak to and represent those who she sees as actually moving culture" while making her simultaneously invisible in terms of race to White Hispanics. Lens-Rio (1998) reported that due to minority members already having ties to minority communities, companies or organizations are more likely to look to their practitioners of color in these situations as the best ones for the job. This is because the public relations function requires that companies build relationships with minority communities to survive in an ever-competitive market. This is consistent with Mia's example in her reflection regarding being tapped to speak on Blackness in Latinx spaces and provide insight into being Latine when race was a dominant aspect of the conversations. The aspects of her identity she was allowed to highlight openly were aligned with the campaign's needs and illustrate the tokenization of employees of color experience when specific campaigns arise and the importance of being Hispanic and communicating with the Hispanic public. This is consistent with the findings of Lens-Rio's (2002) study that asserted "being Hispanic when communicating with Hispanic audiences matters not in the sense of understanding all Hispanic audiences but because there is more trust and

shared experiences." While I agree with the findings of Lens-Rio, I would take it one step further to apply it to other publics as well. One of the first steps toward equity in the field is being conscious of race, ethnicity and culture (Pompper, 2005, p.156) but not letting that be the sole driving factor when determining the positioning of a Black of Afro-Latine woman in the workplace. I think the perspective of practitioners like Mia fill the gap that previous research has had by providing lived experience perspectives in conjunction with offering recommendations for corporations. Nearly all of the participants have mentioned being utilized to address a public tied to a specific aspect of their identity but not receiving that same consideration when problematic portrayal of a certain demographic is interwoven into other campaigns.

Representation

The excerpt below highlights my perspective on representation and visible growth in the public relations industry within the near future:

At the onset of my career, I decided to pursue graduate school full-time while simultaneously working full-time against the recommendation of many individuals around. I couldn't help but think they assumed I couldn't balance the two, and not having had someone in my life make a similar attempt hadn't framed it as an easy feat. Having had only one Black women supervisor thus far, the thought of doing it as a Black woman made the struggle twice as hard. I sat on a Zoom screen in the second semester of my graduate program and learned about Inez, Kaiser, the first Black woman to own a PR firm. Kaiser started off as a columnist before branching into public relations and mentoring other young Black

girls and women. Without question, she was a role model and leader just like my formal manager.

You learn what type of leader you aspire to be from the qualities of the leaders you have had. So, when I had the opportunity to be a positive women role model for another young woman of color after years of being an intern, I jumped at the opportunity. Last summer, I recall sitting in a small huddle room, reading from my laptop everything that our incoming intern was interested in and the goals she had to the team. A senior colleague at the time, who was a White man in his early 40's, initially did not take the time to learn my intern's name and referred to her as the Spanish-speaking intern in conversations with us repeatedly. After the second or third time he casually brought it up in conversation, I asked if he had a moment to talk about the conversation from the other day and expressed how what he had said made me uncomfortable and was offensive to not just my intern but to me as a person of color who had been nicknamed due to my co-workers uneasiness with learning my name as well.

Before this encounter, I had experienced micro-aggressions throughout my life, from my ability to be well-spoken to the disbelief that I am educated. I had never found myself having to be the one that advocated for other marginalized groups and even my own in spaces. I learned to respond by ignoring it or laughing it off. I wouldn't confront the perpetrator or call them out. I could deal with my discomfort later. And afterward, I would go through a dialogue in my head that looks something like this: "They didn't mean it like that. I shouldn't be offended! They were just joking! No one was hurt by what they said. It's fine. It's not a big

deal. Even if I was hurt or bothered, I've already laughed and moved on, and so have they. They don't always say/do things like that. Dwelling on it isn't going to help. I don't want to make them uncomfortable or feel bad, especially when I still must work with them." This was not an uncommon experience, but it was new for me in a position of leadership. Often when women of color such as myself are talking to a White individual regarding a comment or remark, the conversation moves quickly from impact on the person of color to the guilt the White person feels for having made that impact. Unfortunately, that White guilt showed up instantly.

My colleague quickly responded with, "I'm not racist. I listen to you ladies." The "you ladies" referred to my co-worker and me, both Black women. Months later, in a separate conversation, when he felt the need to assert his dominance over us regarding a pitching plan, that conversation surfaced again. He said, "remember when you ladies brought up me referring to Isabella as the Spanish-speaking intern, I learned her name." At that moment, we were expected to celebrate his accomplishment of extending respect for the names we were given and the knowledge we maintained. I think about my experiences with my own name, the comments, the constant explanations, and the people that refuse to learn how to pronounce it. Where is that from? What does it mean? Or the ultimate Do you have a nickname? Many would suggest that this shows that they don't really want to learn how to pronounce your name and prefer to find a shortcut. I used a nickname in the workplace and even asked my mother if I could change my name once when I was younger before knowing what it meant. 'Ze' became easier to

pronounce, easier to remember. It was never that I was ashamed of my name, the one given to me after my great grandmother, just the assumption that it would make it easier to fit in a corporate culture that was designed to maintain the White status quo.

My encounter with my senior-level colleague as a leader regarding his failure to remember the intern's name, and it becoming receptive in conversations as well as my own experience with assuming an easier to pronounce nickname, were consistent with what (Kendi, 2019 and Oluo, 2019) described as microaggressions or micro-assaults. Findings from Tindall's 2009 study argued that for many professionals of color, this is how these daily occurrences of racial insensitivity presented themselves: in the form of comments, behaviors, and actions from colleagues and supervisors.

Tindall's (2009) findings also showed that Black women practitioners realized the importance of a mentor to guide and the value of colleagues to encourage and partner with but struggled to meet people of color who worked in public relations. As a Black woman, I want to see people in executive leadership roles who look like me and understand the nuances of being a minority in an industry that does not often highlight diversity. The corporate environment in its entirety lacked people of color I could partner with. This led me to reach out primarily to White public relations and media professionals to make connections and create a more extensive professional network. By default, this led me to build a mentor relationship with my White colleague and serve as a supervisor and mentor for another young practitioner of color.

Deciding to Join the Profession

All six participants acknowledged the lack of representation for women of color in public relations and communications and would like to see more representation for Black women in the future. In fact, it was the primary reason they decided to join the public relations profession in the first place. Alexis stated that:

I'd watch the news, and I would see how many people did not look like me, and then I would see who they'd bring in as experts who didn't look like me, and then I would see the person and I literally hate it that they still do it to this day. I would see them bring in someone from a community and the person would not look like any of the experts on the screen, and it was almost kind of like a joke. So, I thought about, you know, the way that we receive news, the way that we receive information, the people giving it aren't diverse. The people studying it aren't diverse, but the people that need it are. Oh, they are nonexistent. We, or I just say not "they": we are nonexistent, and it's very sad. If you look at my own practice, I'm the only minority woman at my level and then there's one at the level just above me, and there's nobody else in our practice of 15. When you look at our firm, we have one minority woman SVP and one minority woman VP who's Black. Just from that standpoint, we have no EVPs that are Black. We have barely any middle management employees that are Black. Most of us are within that junior level, and then when you look at the global level, we have one Black and women representative, no others, and she is our head of global DE&I. So, unless you are in that position, we are nonexistent within this profession, even from the client side. I personally have never had a client that has not been a White

male or women, and I've had, at my current firm, I've had 20 clients, and at my previous firm I've had 10.

Deciding to Leave the Profession

While Aaliyah explicitly mentions race in her reflection below, it overlaps with her gender to create an interdependent system of disadvantage for her in the corporate workplace. While lack of representation drove the participants to enter the profession, it has also driven them to seek other career opportunities. It could be concluded that there is less opportunity for promotion and upward mobility than their counterparts of other races, male and women, within their current organizational structures. Aaliyah stated:

Representation is important throughout society, especially for people of color. To see someone that looks like us in the media, advertisements, movies, photos, etc - reinforces that we are also a part of a society that has never wanted us to be a part of it. It lets us know that our ideas matter and ultimately validates our place, that we belong here and truly make a difference.

At the company that I've worked at for the last four years, there's a huge lack of representation in leadership and throughout the company in general. We make up a small portion of the company and that number keeps changing because it is like a revolving door. One of the only people that were in a leadership role, barely lasted one year before resigning from the company. I recall that when I first joined the company, my entire department was White. Everywhere I looked was White except for about two other people at the time which I barely knew. In leadership to this day, a person of color is basically non-existent. The fact that I don't see it, makes me believe that there is no place for a person of color in a role

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higher than a coordinator or specialist. It shows a perspective, in my opinion, that

they do not hold as much value of POC in comparison to White employees. For

example, every single VP or Director in the department is White - but why? Every

day I can't help to think about why that is. Is this a red flag that I need to go to a

company that truly values Black employees and where there's a proven track

record of upward mobility for us? We bring fresh ideas, and cultural differences,

among other things to the table that are valuable and could be an asset, but they

would never know because they continue to promote the people who look exactly

like them…White.

Aaliyah explicitly stated that no person of color was in a role higher than a

coordinator or specialist in her reflection above. This led her to question her position in

her current organization and the path to upward mobility. Aaliyah's experience with her

current organization is consistent with Gallicano's (2013) findings that a lack of

racially/ethnically diverse people in executive positions who could act as mentors led

participants to question whether their agency would seriously consider promoting them to

prominent positions in the agency. Aaliyah's reference to all directors or senior-level

employees were White individuals was consistent with Logan's (2011) findings on the

White leader prototype. The White leader prototype is a historically constituted,

ideological discursive formation that organizes professional roles along racialized lines in

ways that privilege people who are considered a part of the White racial category by

communicating the notion that leaders in public relations are (or should be) White. This,

in turn, reproduces Whites as actual leaders in a system that appears normal, neutral, and

natural rather than the result of racialized practices. Reproducing White leaders,

especially White male leaders in a predominantly women field, can lead to Black women

like Aaliyah concluding that their representation will not change in the public relations

industry.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Only twenty-something odd days into the year, I knew it would probably be

another uncomfortable one for PR professionals and communicators, especially amid the

Great Resignation. I am one of three Black women in an entire marketing department.

Black women are largely underrepresented in corporate America outside and within the

White feminized public relations industry. However, I do not think the problem is solely

in the public relations but rather the discriminatory practices replicated within the field.

In the days and weeks following the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor killings,

companies scurried to put out releases and generic statements positioning clients and

brands in the best positive light. The majority of that work was put forth by public

relations representatives and finally featured the voices of their token Black employees.

CEOs and executives began speaking on panels or verbally committing to 'more diverse

teams. Many of them failed to follow up with some concrete actions.

Fortunately, I work for a company that values diversity in practice and not just in

namesake. However, a White man with twenty years of experience in the public relations

industry, a colleague of mine, admitted to having no personal experience of these issues

related to improper policing and brutality and struggled to have a proper conversation. I

was 12 years old when the police first stopped me. My cousin and I were headed back

from a local restaurant when two White police officers did a U-turn in the middle of a

busy intersection, followed us home, and jumped out of their car with their guns drawn. Their justification was that we looked suspicious. Still, my colleague's words were, "And, like many White people, I've spent recent days questioning my assumptions, attitudes and actions regarding race and prejudice." I wondered about the other 'White allies' in the field at other agencies and corporations. How were they using their privilege to elevate their fellow Black colleagues? How were they removing the burden placed on employees of color to explain White guilt? At a time of racial unrest, how were public relations addressing their race problem while companies rushed to update their board bios? Improving diversity in public relations is not just adding more Black women, but it is the sharing of power, privilege, and decision-making.

I began the findings and analysis section by discussing how my socioeconomic status has overlapped with my race and gender in my current organization. Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013 stated that future research would elaborate on previous intersectionality work of public relations personnel carried out by Pompper, 2007, 2010; Tindall, 2009. The current research added to the outdated body of literature on intersectionality in public relations by looking at the intersections of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in the workplace experiences of Black and Afro-Latinx women practitioners both within and outside of agencies. Using an intersectional lens helped to identify and explain how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized in society. It brings to the forefront how Black women have experienced inequality according to different aspects of their identity. Intersectionality also recognizes that there is no hierarchy of inequality, rather a combination of inequalities based on power relations that shape how each person responds in different situations. The studies

presented in the literature review created a foundation for this research but also presented several issues, such as observed gender perceptions at larger agencies in metropolitan areas, such as New York City and Southern Florida, and varied results regarding the construction and perception of gender in public relations (Aldoory, 2002; Froehlich and Peters, 2007; Pompper,2007; Aldoory, 2008; Place, 2015). The current study extends gender perceptions to account for other aspects of identity such as race, class, and ethnicity. This research also successfully applied intersectionality as validation to the experiences that ensue within the public relations industry by bringing attention to the fact that Black or Afro-Latinx women may not share the same experiences as others who work in public relations, including Black and Latinx individuals in general. As stated before, the overlapping of identities can influence messaging and/or their accepting/rejection of an organization's culture consciously or unconsciously. This study demonstrated that Black and Afro-Latinx women encountered double standards consisting of being assigned to projects that aligned with their race, gender, or ethnicity, being unequally paid for their workload, and having to counteract stereotypes. They also lacked opportunities such as networking, mentoring, and promotions that are the gateway to career advancement. Lastly, they indicated that an overall lack of representation had shaped their perception of upward mobility and leadership.

This study is not without its shortcomings. First, in acknowledging my own potential bias, I assumed the roles of both the researcher and participant. My experiences primarily guided the research in the workplace. Secondly, time constraints existed in selecting and interviewing other Black women practitioners. Lastly, this study focused explicitly on race, gender, class, and ethnicity, with millennials as the target population.

This limited the viewpoints and perspectives that were explored. Directions for future research would include the perspective of Black women practitioners in other geographic regions, ability status, and national origin, which will allow for a more varied and diverse intersectional understanding of their identities.

This study is also significant for its practical applications in the public relations profession. Although diversity, equity, and inclusion are hot topics in the evolving public relations professions and other industries as well, many organizations have implemented DEI strategies based on the isolation of identity factors such as race with affinity groups for persons of color or gender, with affinity groups based on LGBTQ+ or woman status. Through this research, organizations can better support authenticity among public relations professionals who feel the need to "perform" or conduct themselves differently within their roles daily. The results and discussion of this study can be taken and put into practice to improve diversity in the public relations field for public relations professionals, managers, CEOs, recruiters, and others both in academia and professional practice. Based on the practitioners' points of view and perspectives offered in the interviews, I created the following solutions to removing these barriers and mitigating stigmas in the workplace for co-workers and managers who may be unaware of how their bias impacts marginalized populations in PR:

1. Define a clear set of objectives for leadership advancement for exceptional Black women professionals at the time of hire with regularly assigned benchmarks before an annual review. Suppose the people in your organization or department who currently have the power to make decisions that impact staffing, retention, policy, and the way you support the communities you serve are not open to

understanding how intersectionality can be weaponized to harm others. In that
case, the organization or department will continue facing hurdles of exclusion.
This, in turn, will impact who wants to work with and for your organization and
the public's perception.

2. Establish transparent pay and title change structures across the organization based
on the amount and difficulty of assigned duties and prior performance, not on the
number of years in the industry. This ensures equal workloads despite identity
factors (Gallicano, 2013).

3. Establish formal mentoring or networking opportunities within your company or
organization that allow Black women to learn other company areas related to their
job positions and have face-to-face time with leaders and decision-makers.
Suppose Black women are not offered opportunities to cross-train and acquire
new skills or even supported in furthering their personal and professional growth
at the same level of support White employees receive. In that case, you likely will
have difficulties retaining them.

Overall, a fundamental understanding of how identity markers simultaneously persuade
workplaces is necessary to disrupt the inequality Black, and Afro-Latinx practitioners are
experiencing in the profession.

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