

DEI SENSEMAKING AND SOCIAL IDENTITY SIGNALING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS:
RECRUITMENT OF PRACTITIONERS WITH MARGINALIZED RACIAL AND ETHNIC
IDENTITIES AND QUEER IDENTITIES THROUGH DEI CUES

by

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(Under the Direction of María E. Len-Ríos)

ABSTRACT

This multi-method dissertation explores diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues at public relations (PR) agencies in the United States to recruit and retain more practitioners with marginalized racial and ethnic identities as well as queer identities. My first study, in-depth interviews with 12 DEI professionals at U.S. PR agencies, captures their perspectives and contemporary understanding of DEI. This explorative study uses Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to discuss environmental factors and relations that influence the agencies' DEI processes and practices. I use the findings from this qualitative inquiry to develop DEI cues and conduct an experiment to investigate their effectiveness in recruiting entry-level PR practitioners with historically marginalized social identities. Guided by social identity theory, intergroup emotions theory, and signaling theory, this follow-up study provides experimental evidence of the importance of DEI efforts and communication of those efforts, social identity, and intergroup emotions in understanding students' job pursuit intention for a public relations agency.

INDEX WORDS: Public Relations, Agency, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Social Identity

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents.

이 논문을 저의 부모님께 바칩니다.

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CHAPTER 1

CURRENT STATE OF DEI IN PR

In this beginning chapter of my dissertation, I offer assessment of the current state of DEI in public relations that motivated the conception of the two studies that make up this dissertation. Furthermore, I provide definitions of important terms that will frequently appear in this dissertation and identify the scope of first study's research interest. Finally, I discuss theoretical and practical contributions of the first study of this dissertation.

“The way we communicate translates through words and pictures” (Gantman, 2020). Whereas public relations involves making sense of reality in strategic positions of power, lack of diversity in the field has impeded the profession's potential in eradicating systemic bias and discrimination against historically marginalized communities (Bardhan & Engstrom, 2021). Although public relations (PR) reflects and has the potential to drive political, economic, technological, and socio-cultural changes (L'Etang, 2008), the field has progressed little on communicating with diverse publics and implementing inclusive and equitable practice. As diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been viewed as core elements for organizations and businesses in recent years, PR agencies increasingly recognize the importance of their work to help with their clients and employees' DEI-related needs. My dissertation aims to illuminate more about the DEI efforts at PR agencies and the effectiveness of the efforts.

The first part of this multi-method study is a qualitative discourse analysis of in-depth interviews with 12 senior-level professionals leading their PR agencies' DEI efforts. In this part, I explore conceptualization, operationalization, and evaluation of diversity, equity, and inclusion

at public relations agencies in the United States context. Discourse analysis was used as the theoretical and analytic framework to understand how DEI is constructed and communicated to various stakeholders of public relations agencies. From the findings of the in-depth interviews, I make sense of how the DEI discourse is constructed by capturing contemporary understanding, practices, and processes of engaging DEI in the public relations context.

First, before we move onto the next section, I clarify important terms related to racial, ethnic, and queer identities here. By individuals with marginalized racial and ethnic identities, I refer to those who are systemically discriminated against and excluded from full participation in US society (Garrett, n.d.) because of their racial and ethnic identities. By queer identities, I refer to “the umbrella term for nonheterosexual and/or nongender-normative identities” (Ciszek, 2018, p. 135). This dissertation uses various terms to refer to individuals with historically marginalized social identities in the United States. It should be noted that recognition of diversity of social identities and usage of terms to refer to a variety of social identities vary over time and depend on cultures and countries. For another example, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) is a more commonly used acronym to refer to marginalized racial and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom whereas BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) is more commonly used in the United States. I recognize the reductive and evolving characteristics of using such terms along with other terms such as underserved or underrepresented populations, minorities, practitioners of color, BIPOC individuals, LGBTQIA+ individuals, etc. For instance, BIPOC refers to those groups in the United States that are and have been historically targeted by racism, including people of African, Asian, and Latin American descent and indigenous peoples (Native Americans or American Indians) (Tatum, 2017). The term LGBTQIA+ is used to group various sexual and gender minorities, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,

Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual individuals and beyond (Gold, 2018). Although these terms do not reflect the complexity and multiplicity of racial/ethnic and gender identities and sexual orientation, the terms will appear in this manuscript to reflect the usages prevalent in various types of literature and the lack of terms to describe the population. When it is possible, I will try to be as specific to identify certain individuals or populations.

In the following section, I provide background context to understand the PR industry's structural discrimination of women, individuals with marginalized racial and ethnic identities as well as individuals with queer identities. Discussions on the emergence of the term DEI, and the state of scholarship on DEI in PR will follow. Concluding the chapter, I discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the first study.

Public Relations Workforce

The Covid-19 pandemic and social unrest resulting from the murder of George Floyd awakened many in the United States to issues of DEI as well as that of social injustice. In 2020-2021, the United States experienced extreme polarization and the largest deterioration in peacefulness (Dimock & Wike, 2020; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2021). In this divisive political climate, PR consultations were fundamental to organizations communicating with their stakeholders on these political economic and sociocultural topics. However, it did not take long for PR agencies and industry to recognize that there are too few practitioners from marginalized backgrounds who could bring different perspectives and connect agencies and organizations with diverse communities.

The PR workforce in the U.S. has historically been dominated by White practitioners (Landis, 2019), many of whom are women (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). This does not reflect today's U.S. population. Even though 40% of the U.S. population is identified as

individuals with marginalized racial or ethnic identities according to the 2020 United States Census Bureau (Jones et al., 2021), they only account for 24% of the PR workforce and 13% of the PR leadership in the C-Suite or on agency boards (Moore, 2020). Additionally, whereas half of the U.S. population and nearly 75% of PR workforce are estimated to be female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), females hold only 20% of the senior leadership positions (Moore, 2020). These statistics illustrate significant underrepresentation of women and individuals with marginalized racial or ethnic identities in PR leadership positions. Some ways to mend this leadership gap is to hire more women and BIPOC practitioners for leadership positions, to rebuild the pipeline cultivating future PR practitioners, and to ensure an environment where they can thrive as a respected and valued individuals and professionals. Public relations professions are projected to grow faster than the average of all occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). As every semester ends, entry-level jobs are filled by students looking for their first jobs. To foster a professional environment to cultivate diverse PR workforce, recruitment and retention of people with marginalized social identities are the key.

Despite the increasingly diverse population in the U.S. and the growing recognition and support of diverse identities over time, there has been a significant lag in hiring and promoting of practitioners with marginalized social identities including BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners in the public relations industry (Moore, 2020; Pompper, 2007; Tindall & Waters, 2012). Additionally, the status of LGBTQIA+ practitioners in the public relations industry has not been captured at its entirety (Tindall & Waters, 2012) and the community has been predominantly represented and dominated by White gay men (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). The progress in diversifying the workforce has been slow even though there are more conversations about the significance of DEI in professional organizations (e.g., Diversity Action Alliance, Institute of

Public Relations, The Page Society, the Public Relations Society of America, etc.) as well as in the academic scholarship in public relations. Many businesses are lagging behind today's societal changes including rising rates of immigration, racially and ethnically diverse individuals, and self-fashioned identities (Humberd et al., 2020). The composition of the PR workforce has demonstrated contradictions to those societal changes today. This creates disparities between how organizations/agencies view their stakeholders such as jobseekers, employees, customers and clients and how these stakeholders view themselves, and between what to be represented and seen.

PR, as industry, should work toward building workforces that at least reflect the demographic changes. The dominant public relations workforce resembles those who dominate the economic and political relations in the United States. In public relations, homogeneity of the workforce shaped its own professional habitus, affecting unconscious rules and norms that govern professional practice (Edwards, 2006). Combined with the lack of diversity in the industry, public relations' role in producing meanings and legitimizing power relations through the use of language has reinforced interests of those who are "already privileged" (Edwards, 2006, p. 229) such as "organizations, the elite, or dominant coalition and capital" (Motion & Weaver, 2005, p. 51).

One may suggest that there are agencies that specialize in multicultural public relations reaching out to and hiring members of the BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ communities. However, the agencies are often pigeonholed by their clients (organizations or larger agencies lacking knowledge and experience in BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ audience and media markets) to take on certain projects or campaigns reaching out to marginalized audiences. Given the vulnerability of PR agencies in their relationships with clients (Pincus et al., 1991) and the power imbalance

between large and small agencies (Bashir & Fedorova, 2014), the public relations industry at large has contributed to maintaining the status quo of power relations despite its potential as transforming agents (L'Etang, 2008; Motion & Weaver, 2005). Even though the chair of PRSA in 1993 urged that the then-minority population in the U.S. would become the majority by 2050 (Holtzhausen, 2000), the public relations industry is still not ready for the country's demographic changes, and 20 years later the prediction still holds true (Bardhan & Engstrom, 2021). This concentration of power held by dominant individuals and social groups in the United States have been detrimental to achieving the country's self-claimed ideal: pluralist democracy. To fulfill the role of public relations in informing publics, promoting interests of everyday people, and amplifying multiple voices (Heath et al., 2013), public relations workforce should ensure that they are better informed, heard, and empowered.

To transform the status quo and resolve the dire necessity to advance DEI and its representation within organizations, recruiting employees with marginalized backgrounds has been considered as one of the most important ways to achieve this (Marszalek, 2021). Furthermore, organizations need to be strategic and authentic with their DEI efforts to ensure that DEI advancement does not end at recruitment. There is growing importance in organizations to recognize the complexity of employees' identities (Humberd et al., 2020). Without meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion, PR will continue to be an exclusive field, missing the contributions of those with historically marginalized social identities, and the profession will remain, as it has been called in the past, a "lily-white field of women" (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017).

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for PR

Early scholarly work on DEI in PR was built from the non-academic literature, individual experiences and other disciplines. DEI research in PR scholarship frequently addresses the difficulties of students and practitioners of color (Brown et al., 2011; Len-Ríos, 1998; Munshi & Edwards, 2011; Qiu & Muturi, 2016). Despite these scholarly efforts to help recruitment and retention of BIPOC professionals in the field, progress has been slow. The issues of lack of representation that were discussed two to three decades ago still remain a concern. Even though there is a wide range of identity markers that help understand diversity (age, religion, political affiliation, etc.), much literature in PR is still based on certain demographic categories, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Even then, the problem is that the literature often omits the complexity and intersectionality of identities like of those who are multi-racial, Black transgender, or White Latino/a/x. The continuation of gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity research reflects that the field is still struggling with hiring and retaining practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic identities and LGBTQIA+ identities.

In general, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives refer to organizations' various, multi-faceted efforts to achieve social justice and diminish various disparities existing in organizations or society. Because of this, it is critical to understand how these understandings contribute to achieving social justice. Some scholars (Golombisky, 2015; Sison, 2013) have highlighted the importance of social justice in public relations and called for the field's commitments to social justice. Pointing out the surprising scarcity of the existing definitions of social justice despite the term's wide use, Golombisky (2015) defines social justice as "the sustainable material and social circumstances in which all people enjoy general wellbeing, participate in self-determining communities, and thrive in the pursuit of fulfilling lives" (p. 409).

For public relations, this does not only mean practitioners engaging with, building relationships with, and empowering diverse communities and facilitating changes by eliminating gaps in pay and promotion, but also diversifying the workforce. Social justice goals should be set for the PR industry itself as well as for agencies and for their clients/organizations that PR practitioners work with. For example, this may mean that public relations industry and education have to put extraordinary efforts to increase awareness of public relations within marginalized communities, so they are introduced to the career option along with many other professions for them to choose from. This may also mean employers need to be aware of the whiteness of the field and purposefully hire and promote more individuals with marginalized identities and ensure sustainably inclusive work environment. These examples are only a small part of efforts to achieve social justice. Journeys to social justice take a long time and huge endeavor.

Diversity refers to “the presence of differences that include demographic and psychographics” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6). Equity refers to “promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness, and includes providing proportionate access, resources, and opportunities based on people’s individual needs and differences” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6). Inclusion refers to “an outcome to ensure all individuals feel heard, welcomed, accepted, and respected in an organization” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6). A DEI workshop company’s CEO in California argued that the employees’ demand for authentic changes toward DEI engagement is increasing (Zelevansky, 2019). Additionally, job-search engine Indeed reported a 25% increase of DEI-related job postings from August 2018 to August 2019 because organizations are also increasingly aware of their accountability to stakeholders in terms of diversity (Zelevansky, 2019). Although DEI may mean different things to different

people, it is critical to understand how each concept contributes to achieving social justice and diminishing disparities at the organizational level and in the PR industry.

Even though each concept that makes up DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) is not new, the concepts started appearing as bound together in the trade and academic publications in the 2000s. However, it is only recently that U.S. organizations have begun active DEI engagement and commitments. Discussions about setting DEI as a core value for organizations and strategic communication have been ongoing (Gantman, 2020), and PR agencies started creating roles dedicated to enhancing DEI in the recent years. Although some agencies already had positions leading their diversity and inclusion efforts, equity was a recent addition to their work titles. The Covid-19 pandemic and social unrest taught us the importance of equity to account for systemic injustice, which was demonstrated by distinct experiences of different communities during times of crisis.

In the United States, in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic's "disproportionate toll on communities of color" and civil unrest regarding systemic racial injustice in 2020 triggered organizations to reflect on and rethink their DEI efforts (Harvard Business Review, 2020). For instance, because BIPOC individuals and communities are more likely to face barriers to healthcare due to the lack of health insurance, transportation, childcare, or ability to take the time off to go to the doctor (CDC, 2022), employers implemented policies enhancing flexibility of work hours, family leave, and sick leave. Similarly, the disproportionate representation of BIPOC workers in front-line and essential occupations in farms, factories, grocery stores, and public transportation; their lack of occupational choices due to less access to high-quality education; and the higher percentage of BIPOC living in crowded housing fueled COVID-19's disproportionate toll on BIPOC communities (CDC, 2022). This exposed the stark differences

engendered by systemic discrimination against the communities in multiple aspects. These negative health outcomes disrupted supply chains affecting many organizations and businesses (Al Essa, 2022) and awakened the American publics about institutionalized inequalities (Perry et al., 2021).

As “advisors to every sector,” the PR industry is committed to counsel its various clients, but the industry also revealed its own problem coming from a lack of diversity (R. Roberts, 2020). Without changes to the industry itself, the DEI efforts that are implemented by PR practitioners in organizations and PR agencies may remain “empty pledges and commitment” (R. Roberts, 2020). The PR industry needs to show that the industry is committed to diversity by hiring and promoting employees with marginalized social identities. To do so, employers must provide welcoming and safe environments for practitioners with diverse backgrounds and signal the efforts to practitioners with diverse backgrounds that they are interested in hiring and working with diverse employees.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

In this mixed-methods study, I start by applying discourse analysis as a theoretical and analytic framework to understand the construction of DEI in contemporary public relations in the United States. This is to provide an overview of how the DEI discourse in PR agencies in the United States is constructed by situational demands and changes in addition to their relationships with external and internal stakeholders. Until 2020, virtually no academic literature discussed all three concepts that make up DEI. Additionally, the scope of DEI research was not specific to public relations agencies. Because public relations agencies play an essential role in constructing professional identities of PR practitioners (Tsetsura, 2010) by hiring 40% of the workforce in the industry (Verčič et al., 2018; Wilcox & Cameron, 2014) in the United States, this overview of

the structures and relationships influencing DEI efforts in agencies further inform the professions' identity and roles in organizations and broader society. Through discourse analysis, I reveal how the public relations industry is influenced by the interconnectedness of the system undergirded by white supremacy, patriarchy, cisnormativity and heteronormativity.

Moreover, the discourse analysis provides a way to understand various relationships in the public relations industry and theorizes how the DEI practice is actualized in PR agencies. This helps conceptualizing DEI in the public relations context where power is “exercised, contested, negotiated, and resisted” (Switzer et al., 1999, p. 26). Based on this conceptualization, this present study also shares how to apply this understanding to measure the DEI efforts at public relations agencies.

Furthermore, this present study contributes to the DEI research in public relations based on qualitative data by capturing the evolving understanding of DEI in early 2020s. My interviews with senior-level DEI professionals at some of the top public relations agencies in the United States provide valuable knowledge because they provide influential thought leadership in the field. As an explorative study, this study can provide foundational grounding for other DEI research in public relations and other disciplines such as education, human resources, and organization or business management. For instance, I use the findings from this in-depth interview study to design the second study of this dissertation, an experiment.

Finally, this study offers specific examples of various DEI processes, practices, and policies that the industry's leading DEI professionals shared in their interviews. I believe that such examples will benefit the public relations industry and practice. This dissertation will explain why it is important for all of us—PR agencies, organizations in various sectors,

educators and researchers—to work toward DEI and to participate in constructing and reconstructing the DEI discourse in the industry.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING DEI IN PR

This chapter provides an overview of literature that explores DEI in the public relations context. Beginning with identifying a lack of DEI in the field, I spotlight why this is a serious problem for the profession and the industry given the role of public relations in the society. After that, I explore academic literature and trade publications to understand how scholars and industry leaders understand each element of DEI—diversity, equity, and inclusion. Next, I discuss why public relations agencies are important sites for this research. Three research questions were developed from the review of literature. I conclude this chapter by explaining how Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) helps understanding the construction of the contemporary discourse on DEI in public relations.

Since its birth as a professional practice, the PR workforce has never been diverse. After the mid- to late 1900s, when the share of women significantly grew in the U.S. labor force (Toossi, 2002), the public relations field became a female-dominated profession. Today, it is estimated that 85% of the public relations workforce is White and 60-70% of that are women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). Additionally, even though women make up the majority of PR professionals, their advancement to leadership roles has been limited despite some recent progress in the field (Meng & Neill, 2021; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). These racial, ethnic, and gender discrepancies in the workforce and leadership positions in public relations industry are concerning considering the increasingly diverse U.S. populations and stakeholders. The homogeneity of the PR workforce and the structure of the

industry have primarily promoted interests of dominant social groups (i.e., Whites, the rich, the elites, etc.) and this power imbalance was aggravated by lack of representation of multiple historically marginalized communities that make up the country.

Until 2020, there was virtually no PR academic literature discussing all three components that make up DEI because there has been more focus on representation and less on inclusion and equity. This is related to how affirmative action neglected inclusion and equity in the workplace beyond hiring BIPOC and women at only to the extent that was legally required, preventing full participation of the PR practitioners with marginalized identities (Logan, 2011). It was only recent that PR agencies have started discussing DEI more (Bardhan & Engstrom, 2021; Wallace & Luttrell, 2020) and have created roles within agencies dedicated to enhancing DEI (Ketchum, 2020; Omnicom Group, 2020). Public relations scholarship needs to look at the roles the public relations profession play in today's societal changes and how this understanding of profession shapes the role of public relations in addressing DEI issues as "advisors to every sector" (Roberts, 2020).

Public relations provides strategic communication consultations to clients on stakeholder communications (Roberts, 2020). Despite the profession's significant impact on this multicultural society, public relations is still a "lily-white" profession in the United States (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) and the lack of DEI proficiency has long threatened the field's advancement. Diversity Action Alliance's benchmark report (2021) identified that there has not been significant improvement on racial and ethnic diversity in strategic communication organizations: the percentage of White professionals increased substantially as the position level within the organizations went up, reaching 93% of the leaders at top strategic communication organizations.

Although diversity means “the presence of differences that include demographics and psychographics” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6), what constitutes demographic composition can differ depending on contexts. Diversity has a wide range of dimensions, but the public relations industry and scholarship in the United States have largely focused on racial and ethnic diversity, women, and sexual orientation (K. A. Brown et al., 2011; Ciszek, 2018; Len-Ríos, 1998; Pompper, 2007; Qiu & Muturi, 2016; Tindall, 2009; Tindall & Waters, 2012; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). This knowledge of diversity in public relations has impacted the understanding of inclusion and equity. The public relations literature often addressed inclusion by sharing exclusive experiences of practitioners with those of marginalized racial and ethnic identities, women, and sexual orientations (K. A. Brown et al., 2011; Len-Ríos, 1998; Pompper, 2007; Qiu & Muturi, 2016; Tindall, 2009; Tindall & Waters, 2012). Compared to diversity and inclusion, equity was often indirectly discussed by researchers who provided critical looks at the systemic injustice that affected communities of marginalized racial and ethnic identities (Edwards, 2013; Logan, 2011), women (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018), and queer identities (Ciszek, 2018; Tindall & Waters, 2012).

Despite public relations scholarship’s primary focus on an apparently limited range of identities, scholars have addressed some of the most urgent structural or institutional discriminations. Because of the historical marginalization of certain social groups rooted in racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia, public relations has privileged cisgender straight White men. *Provoke*’s report on the PR pay gap in 2021 reflects the long-standing structural discrimination toward women and BIPOC practitioners (Shah, 2021). As for LGBTQIA+ community, there is no quantitative data reflecting its workforce in the PR industry in the U.S. and their experiences are largely discussed through White gay men’s perspectives even though

prejudice, discrimination and violence toward the LGBTQIA+ communities are apparent (Hoffmann, 2019; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). Ciszek (2018) argued that fluidity and multiplicity of queer identities make these identities hard to measure or quantify. Similarly, Tindall and Waters (2012) pointed out the challenges of measuring non-observable forms of diversity such as sexual orientation and wrote, “precise numbers of gay practitioner population are unknown, the percentage of lesbians and gays in the workplace is between 4% and 17% according to one estimate” (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991).

Whereas there is a wide range of identity markers that help understanding diversity (such as neurodiversity, religion, political orientation, etc.), the scope of what constitutes diversity, equity and inclusion research in public relations is largely based on some of the most externally identifiable demographic identity markers such as gender and race/ethnicity. Even then, much literature dismisses the fact that those identities are not always observable. Lack of understanding of multiplicity, fluidity, and intersectionality of social identities including racial/ethnic, gender, and queer identities not only result in essentialism but also pose obstacles to DEI efforts.

Race, ethnicity, and binary gender identities have been dominant staples of measurement, which aided addressing some of the systemic issues that created disparities that negatively affected women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ PR practitioners. Moreover, even though racial, ethnic, and gender identity may or may not be obvious on appearance (Alcoff, 2006; Read-Bullock, 2018; Song, 2020), visibility of those identities has been used to refer to the racial/ethnic and gender compositions in the U.S. (Li & Heath, 2017; Song, 2020) regardless whether someone’s identity corresponds the perceptions of the identity. Thomas (2020) also pointed out that organizations tend to focus on visible representation of diversity. These observable physical

characteristics (e.g. skin color, eye color, hair type, chins, eyebrow ridges, cheekbones, etc.) are often used to assess individuals' gender and race/ethnicity and they are called phenotypes (Read-Bullock, 2018). "Race and gender are unique forms of social identities (compared to, for example, sports fan identification) in that they are thought to visually manifest through bodily markers" (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 3). However, this often contributes to essentializing social identities and promoting "prejudice and discrimination toward those who challenge essentialized categories" (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 4).

With societal changes such as "rising rates of immigration; marriage between racially and ethnically diverse individuals; and a growing push for self-fashioned identities in Western culture," organizations need to address the discrepancies between these societal trends and the traditional norms and assumptions about identities that are deep-seated in organizational practices (Humberd et al., 2020). The way that many organizations identify an individual's demographic identity does not recognize one's "identity autonomy (the feeling that one has freedom and personal control over one's identity) and identity legitimacy (the feeling one's identity is seen and experienced as valid, real, and justifiable)" (Humberd et al., 2020). Studies have found that employees with marginalized identities who do not conform to traditional norms and categorization are more likely to feel left out and threatened (Humberd et al., 2020). This marginalization can lead to low motivation, lack of engagement, poor performance and low satisfaction at work. Starting to recognize and respond to fluidity and multiplicity of these identities is part of organizations' DEI efforts (Humberd et al., 2020).

DEI is frequently discussed in trade publications of the field and academic literature in other disciplines including human resources, public health, medicine, education, and management. Especially in the organizational setting, human resources has driven programs

related to diversity management (Hon & Brunner, 2009). This makes sense as human resources ultimately processes and manages hiring for organizations even though diversity is also a key issue for public relations (Hon & Brunner, 2009). Although public relations also concerns organizational culture and communication with internal and external publics that are diverse, diversity management also necessitates the involvement of human resource management. This may partly explain why lack of understanding related to diversity persists in public relations. PR practitioners often perceive that diversity management is the responsibility of the HR department of the organizations rather than “an integral part of the organization’s culture and communication efforts” (Hon & Brunner, 2009, p. 334). However, Hon and Brunner (2009) argued that public relations stepping into diversity management is imperative to ensure its voice in the management of an organization along with human resources and cultural affairs departments. PR practitioners engage in the hiring process with HR personnel, and the employee composition is highly related to organizations’ internal stakeholders and organizational culture (Hon & Brunner, 2009). Therefore, the public relations industry should be aware of the roles and responsibilities of the field in DEI, a critical part of organizations’ accountability.

“Public relations research has explored the role of diversity in PR process and issues related to diversity” (Hon & Brunner, 2009; Mundy, 2015, p. 3; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017), equity (Logan, 2011), and inclusion (Len-Ríos, 1998; Pompper, 2007; Qiu & Muturi, 2016; Tindall & Waters, 2012), but there are only few that provide definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Mundy (2015) uses the definitions from Roberson (2006) to discuss D&I-driven public relations. Roberson (2006) found that “definitions of diversity focus on differences, heterogeneity, varied composition of groups or organizations and definitions of inclusion focus on employee engagement and how diversity is incorporated into organizational systems and

processes” (p. 227-228). Although these efforts to define diversity and inclusion highlight the importance of understanding and distinguishing diversity and inclusion, this study is not specific to any certain industry. Mundy (2015) applies these definitions to PR practices and processes with considerations of various stakeholders that organizations interact with. However, this study does not address the concept of equity.

It was not until November 2021 that scholars and practitioners (Institute for Public Relations, 2021) came up with definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion for public relations based on a survey among communications and public relations leaders. For organizations, it is highly important to proactively conceptualize each concept in DEI and implement specific attributes and practices associated with each concept (Mundy, 2015; Roberson, 2006). Because understanding of DEI constantly changes and can vary for different countries and organizations, this conceptualization is fundamental to establishing and implementing, and evaluating DEI programs. Based on the conceptualization of DEI, organizations and PR agencies create DEI goals and time-specific and measurable objectives that will result tangible achievements. For example, one of the objectives for the goal of diverse hiring can be to commit to have at least 50% of the candidate pool for every position in search be candidates who identify as women of color, some of the most marginalized groups of practitioners in the industry (Shah, 2021). Also, an example objective for the goal of outreach to diverse communities can be to participate in X number of career fairs in local high schools with its student body with more than 50% BIPOC students. Although it may be late, it is time for the field of public relations to walk the walk. The specificity of objectives requires organizations to understand the power dynamics in the industry, identify the gaps in the organization’s workforce, and counteract the exercise of the power that tries to maintain and reproduces the status quo. Based on a review of literature, there is need for

a contemporary understanding of how public relations industry leaders conceptualize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: How is DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) conceptualized?

Diversity in Representation

In the earlier stages of DEI research in PR, diversity was the main concern. Diversity refers to “the presence of differences that include demographics and psychographics” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6). Even though there are many dimensions of diversity, diversity at workplaces often focus more visible differences (Thomas, 2020), including race/ethnicity and gender. Diversity within an organization often means representation of those visible dimensions of identities (Thomas, 2020) reflecting the visible or measurable demographics of larger groups of people including local communities or populations in a nation and voters (e.g., the U.S. census). The PR workforce, like many other white-collar professions, does not resemble the demographics of the United States and this diversity issue has been a challenging topic for the field for a long time.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) annually reports the demographics of employed persons by occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. In the report, the PR profession is featured in two different occupations: public relations and fundraising managers, and public relations specialists. Of those employed as public relations and fundraising managers (total employed: 73,000), 71.4% are women; 89.8% are White; 8.0% are Black or African Americans; 1.4% are Hispanic or Latino; and 0.4% are Asian (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Of those employed as public relations specialists (total employed: 137,000), 63.6% are women; 83.6% are White; 9.9% are Black or African Americans; 13.6% are Hispanic

or Latino; and 5.8% are Asian (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This data for both PR occupations demonstrates the dominance of White practitioners and women.

Because these data feature the PR profession in two different occupations, both depict somewhat different workforce demographics. Other than this data, the PR profession does not have a comprehensive data source on the workforce demographics. Trade associations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) have limited data on the workforce composition (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). This makes it challenging to find reliable data on the PR workforce. Additionally, this existing data omits information combining gender and race/ethnicity (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). For example, this data does not indicate how many Black/African American women or White Hispanic or Latino men are working in the field. Until the Diversity Action Alliance's bench mark report (2021) of the racial and ethnic diversity, there was no reliable industry-wide research or data on the workforce demographics depicting the diversity in relation to the vertical hierarchy. Even then, it is not feasible to know how many Black/African American women or White Hispanic or Latino men are practicing PR in managerial roles and non-managerial roles.

Lack of racial and ethnic diversity is not the only issue that the PR workforce has. According to available reports, women make up about 60-70% and men about 30-40% of the PR workforce. Although the field is numerically dominated by women, men are overrepresented in managerial roles (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). This indicates stereotypes and discrimination against women as well as gender inequity neglecting women's needs to succeed in organizations' hierarchical structures in the field (Black et al., 2019; Pompper, 2007; Tsetsura, 2010). Furthermore, although gender is one of the most studied dimensions of diversity, most research studies treat gender as binary and corresponding to sex (Vardeman-Winter & Place,

2017). Additionally, due to incomplete and fragmented understanding of gender identities and sexual orientation, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to have marginalized experiences.

Diversifying the public relations field starts by hiring practitioners with marginalized social identities. The PR profession is far lesser known as a job option among marginalized social groups (i.e. Black or African Americans; Asians or Asian Americans) (Brown et al., 2011; Qiu & Muturi, 2016), so hiring more individuals with marginalized backgrounds not only benefit the agencies and clients for diversity of experiences and perspectives but also promotes awareness of the profession to these communities, which in turn will contribute to increasing the number of students who are interested in pursuing career in PR.

Equity in PR Workplace as Practices and Processes

Due to the lack of diversity in public relations and disproportionate representation of various social groups in the PR workforce, organizations implemented programs to address these problems. Affirmative action, introduced in the 1960s in the United States (Logan, 2011), was one of those efforts to increase equity by providing additional resources and opportunities to historically excluded and marginalized social groups (Leslie et al., 2020). Equity refers to:

“promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness, and includes provides proportionate access, resources, and opportunities based on people’s individual needs and differences. Equity elevates equality by recognizing that people start from different places, acknowledging and correcting imbalances of power, both present and historical, for both individuals and groups to which they may belong. Equity is rooted within procedures and processes, and how resources are distributed by institutions or systems.” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021)

Despite the efforts “to break down old patterns of segregation and hierarchy and to overcome the effects of past or present practices, policies, or other barriers to equal employment opportunity”

due to racism, patriarchy and cisheteronormativity¹, there were a number of reverse discrimination lawsuits against the action made by White males (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1981). Additionally, despite that the introduction of affirmative action was closely associated with the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans were still isolated and excluded from mainstream, profit-and-loss responsibilities, fundamental management and high-level executive roles and assigned to work that are related to minority issues once hired for an affirmative action jobs (Logan, 2011). As an adverse consequence of the action, historically marginalized social groups experience increased intergroup bias such as stereotyping and discrimination (Leslie et al., 2020; Leslie et al., 2014).

This was no different in public relations. Many times, minority practitioners were limited to serve the communities that are related to their identity markers and, therefore, they were excluded from profitable projects or from the decision-making process (Logan, 2011). Even though affirmative action may have slightly increased simple numerical representation by hiring individuals with historically marginalized identities, it contributed to reproducing stereotypes about those social groups and made it hard for them to move up in the organizational hierarchy (Logan, 2011). Racial and ethnic minorities who were hired through affirmative action programs were set apart to serve the communities to which the organizations thought they were related (Thomas & Ely, 1996). For example, Black or African Americans were assigned to work with Black communities and Hispanics were assigned to serve Hispanic communities or to work for Latin American subsidiaries (Thomas & Ely, 1996). However, this does not indicate that policies to ensure equity do not work. When policies are developed and implemented, it is critical to

¹ “Cisheteronormativity refers to the systemic normalization and material privileging of bodies, identities, and subjectivities that most closely align with white cisgender and heterosexual cultural expectancies” (LeMaster et al., 2019)

consider other factors such as diversity and inclusion. Equity should accompany diversity by hiring and retaining individuals with historically marginalized backgrounds vertically and horizontally across the organization structures and inclusion by creating a supportive environment for them to thrive.

For PR agencies, there are a number of commitments to make to advance equity through transforming their organizational policies at multiple levels. Examples of those commitments include: setting specific hiring or recruitment goals targeting individuals with historically marginalized identities; committing to pay equity; implementing anti-racism policies and trainings; ensuring board composition representing diverse backgrounds of employees; paying a living wage and supporting housing and healthcare costs; expanding paid family and sick leave; investing in emergency relief and low-cost loans; and intentional ‘colorful’ recruitment as opposed to colorblind recruitment, which often puts individuals with marginalized identities at disadvantage (Chitkara, 2018; Dover et al., 2016; Kramer, 2020; Provoke Media, 2020b; Sudhaman & Shah, 2020). Equitable practices start from recognizing the historical privileges and disadvantages of various social groups and diminishing the disparities between the privileged and the marginalized.

Inclusion as Experience

Without inclusion, diversity and equity cannot advance. Inclusion refers to “an outcome to ensure all individuals feel heard, welcomed, accepted, and respected in an organization” (Institute for Public Relations, 2021, p. 6). Mere representation and equitable practices and policies without consideration given to inclusion contributes to generating or maintaining stereotypes (Black et al., 2019; Len-Ríos, 1998; Moscatelli et al., 2020; Sheppard & Johnson, 2019) and discriminatory practices at workplaces such as tokenism, pigeonholing, and creating

lavender ceilings or glass ceilings (Aldoory et al., 2008; Len-Ríos, 1998; Logan, 2011; Munshi & Edwards, 2011; Pompper, 2007; Qiu & Muturi, 2016; Tindall & Waters, 2012). Therefore, scholars and organizations started focusing on how to be more inclusive so that everyone has empowering experiences that make them feel valued at organizations.

Lack of inclusion leads to poor retention rates of practitioners with marginalized identities at organizations. Often, employees with such identities have a hard time with stereotypes and moving up in an organization's hierarchy (Johnson et al., 2016). Because of this, many PR practitioners with marginalized backgrounds leave the field or use their experience at an organization to get promoted at another organizations by midlevel mark (Chitkara, 2018) or start their own small agencies to be free from structural challenges in traditional, corporate workplaces (Ahmad, 2014; Ford & Brown, 2015). Because hiring another person to replace those who quit is costly for organizations from an HR perspective, organizations became more aware of this problem (Leonard & Levine, 2006; Rogers, 2020).

Research has found that inclusion can be manifested by several practices. Examples include the formation of affinity groups or employee resources groups who represent or support a specific social group (Mundy, 2015). Other practices include the use of inclusive language (Blow & Monzón, 2020), recognizing bias, inclusive leadership, and mentorship programs (Jain-Link et al., 2020). Inclusion plays a key role in retaining practitioners with diverse backgrounds and in continuing to diversify the PR workforce. DEI experts highlight the importance of purposeful efforts to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ward, 2020).

Based on the needs to enhance the operationalization of actions to support DEI as highlighted in the literature review, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: What processes and practices are there to promote DEI at PR agencies?

Public Relations Agencies

There are 7,000 to 10,000 PR agencies in the United States (Wilcox & Cameron, 2014). As a large proportion, 40% of all U.S.-based PR practitioners are estimated to work in agencies (Verčič et al., 2018). Despite the fact that PR firms/agencies are a huge industry employer, research on PR agencies has been lacking. More studies looking into the role of agencies in the PR industry and society as a whole are needed (Verčič et al., 2018). PR agencies have their share of the unrepresentative workforce composition and the average racial and ethnic diversity across small, midsize, and large agencies are behind of nonprofits and corporations (Diversity Action Alliance, 2021).

PR agencies are not only the biggest employer of PR practitioners, but they are also critical to the structure that legitimizes the PR practice. Tsetsura (2010) emphasized the importance of the agency environment, arguing that practitioners' identities are manifested in the workplace and professions are socially constructed and reconstructed. Unlike in-house environments, PR agencies are the places where practitioners focus on defining and evolving the profession as a whole without having to constantly negotiate the role of PR like in-house practitioners. As a collective, agencies provide a professionally recognized environment where practitioners work together.

This collective characteristic is also apparent in the spoken and written discourses found in the PR workplaces (Bremner, 2014). PR agencies require practitioners to be collaborative and communicative with each other. As cited in Hon and Brunner (2009), "the more different kinds of people that contribute to the team effort, the better. Different viewpoints, backgrounds and different approaches can lead to a better product" (Brinkerhoff, 1994). However, the serious lack

of practitioners with historically marginalized backgrounds at many PR agencies challenges incorporation of varying voices and cultures in PR practices and the profession.

PR agencies' hiring capacity and role in the profession and industry of public relations offer grounds as to why promoting DEI at PR agencies is important. *PRWeek's* annual business report on the top 98 U.S.-based PR firms in 2019 found that half of the PR agencies have no people of color on their boards or in the C-Suite, and only 13% of the PR agency boards or C-Suite and 24% of the PR workforce at agencies are BIPOC (Moore, 2020). Despite a small improvement from the previous year's report, progress has been slow and far from enough to reflect the U.S. demographics. Given that PR agencies are vital to fostering vigorous pipeline to enhance diversity by hiring, retaining and training many entry-level professionals and working with various clients, multifaceted DEI efforts should also begin and grow within the agencies (Asare, 2018; Chitkara, 2018; Ramaswami, 2018).

For public relations agencies, it is pivotal to respond to ever-changing needs of employees and the next generation of communicators and publics. Herrera Smith, executive vice president and head of diversity, equity and inclusion of WE Communications, argued that hiring diverse candidates and fostering a company culture in which they can thrive are paramount.

“Valuing diversity means being open to different ways of thinking and doing. We all have work to do on this front to increase representation across our industry. We can't say we are doing enough until everybody feels they belong, and in a place where they can grow and thrive.” (Herrera Smith cited in PR News, 2020)

PR agencies' journey to advance DEI will not only respond to dire societal, industry-wide changes but also cultivate meaningful collaborations and incorporation of diverse voices and cultures at the organizational level.

Based on the need to increase the responsibilities for DEI among PR agencies demonstrated in the literature review, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: How do PR agencies measure DEI initiatives to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting goals?

Theoretical and Analytic Framework

This study uses Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to explore the structures and frameworks that underpin practices and knowledge/power relations in public relations (Pincus et al., 1991). PR scholars (Edwards, 2012; Motion & Leitch, 2007, 2009) found this approach helpful to theorize the public relations practice in constructing and transforming societal discourses and processes. Therefore, this study will analyze the interactions of extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive dependencies, shaping the discourse of DEI at PR agencies. Foucault (1972) emphasized the role of this three-level analysis to understand practices and processes. First, extra-discursive dependencies refer to environmental factors (Foucault, 1972; Jeffrey & Troman, 2011) such as economy, technology, and political/legal trends that indirectly affect organizations (Williams, 2018). Through extra-discursive practice, these external factors will be discussed as the contemporary forces and events that influence the DEI discourse in public relations agencies. Second, inter-discursive dependencies refer to symbiotic relations with others (Foucault, 1972; Jeffrey & Troman, 2011). For instance, PR agencies have symbiotic relationships with external stakeholders such as clients, freelance creative professionals, and job seekers. Therefore, DEI discourse in PR agencies cannot be understood without considering relationships that construct the discourse such as clients' demands or job seekers' interests in the DEI context. Lastly, intra-discursive dependencies refer to the relations "between the objects, the operations, the concepts of a same formation" (Foucault, 1972, p. 232). This level of analysis looks at how DEI discourse is constructed within PR agencies, particularly focusing on the processes and practices that affect employees with marginalized social identities.

The PR profession and its practice are integral parts of society, a system that defines conditions and sets rules. FDA helps scholars to (re)gain a view that captures the underlying assumptions (Khan & MacEachen, 2021) that shape the profession and practice of public relations. For example, public relations plays an important part in cultural production (Edwards, 2010, 2013; Munshi & Edwards, 2011). Culture, particularly high culture, has been historically produced by elites who are often White, wealthy, and well-connected individuals in the U.S. Due to the racialized and gendered myth of meritocracy or colorblindness that normalized Whiteness and heterosexuality (Logan, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010), meritocracy and diversity have been considered as incompatible in many workplaces (Leslie et al., 2020) including PR agencies in the United States. PR practitioners have often advocated the importance of diversity and equal opportunities from colorblind approach (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) without recognizing that the different social groups have varying levels or types of privileges and disadvantages and therefore needs different levels or types of support. In fact, this colorblind approach is prevalent in many workplaces in the United States (Plaut, 2002; Plaut & Markus, 2007; Thomas & Ely, 1996) and studies found that colorblind ideology negatively affect minorities' workplace experiences (Emerson & Murphy, 2014).

There have been largely three underlying assumptions related to diversity that have penetrated our society and the PR industry: (1) individuals with marginalized social identities are not perceived as sufficiently qualified; (2) individuals with marginalized social identities are believed to be hired only for their cultural competencies and literacy, and (3) individuals with marginalized social identities are not viewed as equally important as those with other technical skills.

Public relations actively engages in constructing discourse, interacting with the sociopolitical context, and FDA is a tool that aids understanding the dynamics of various stakeholder relationships in public relations. Because of the constructive and performative attributes of discourse (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004), discourse analysis provides scholars a critical tool to research public relations practices and analyze organizational issues and problems that are transformative (Motion & Leitch, 2007). Even though there are many ways to analyze discourses, FDA's focus on power, knowledge, and sense-making helps researchers analyze the role of public relations (Motion & Leitch, 2007) in "producing of meanings, strategizing exercise of power, and the propagating knowledge" (Foucault, 1978; Motion & Leitch, 2007). This perspective also presents DEI as an evolving concept and how it affects agencies' conceptualization and operationalization of DEI in today's public relations.

As DEI discourse in public relations constantly shifts and transforms interacting with extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive factors, the discourse analysis enables us to explore how power is "exercised, contested, negotiated, and resisted" (Motion & Weaver, 2005). The analysis will help explore how the demographic change, COVID-19, and social unrest in the United States affect the organizations' perceptions of the importance of DEI efforts at the extra-discursive level. Given the organizations' interests in DEI, the inter-discursive practice will help understand how these interests pushes public relations agencies to respond to DEI issues in their relationships with stakeholders. Finally, the analysis will also look into how the relationship between public relations agencies and clients impact recruitment and retention of public relations practitioners with historically marginalized social identities. In short, the Foucauldian framework yields a discourse analysis that illustrates power dynamics of various stakeholders with diverse values, perspectives, and needs surrounding public relations agencies.

In this review of literature, I discussed how each element that make up DEI means in the public relations context. I also demonstrated why public relations agencies make an important object of study and described how the Foucauldian approach can be applied to theorize power dynamics that construct the DEI discourse in today's public relations industry. In the next chapter, I will discuss how I conducted in-depth interviews that were used as the textual basis of the discourse analysis.

CHAPTER 3

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

This chapter outlines how the in-depth interviews were conducted to answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter. I provide details on who participated in the research as well as how data was collected and analyzed.

Participants

This study used a purposive sampling method. Participants were recruited through the researcher's professional networks including a local PRSA chapter, advisors, and a college's career and alumni networks. The priority in contacting the potential participants was given to DEI professionals working at large public relations agencies in the United States based on available lists of top public relations agencies (Bashir & Fedorova, 2014; Provoke Media, 2020a). As a result, 12 DEI professionals participated in the study.

Emails and messages on social media were sent to potential research participants. The criteria for the DEI professionals included the following qualifications: (1) at least 18 years of age or older, (2) at least five years of full-time work experience in PR industry, and (3) currently working full-time as the senior-level DEI professional, share the senior-level DEI responsibilities or report to the senior-most DEI professional at a PR agency/firm/consultancy in the United States. Because the research study aims to explore how diversity, equity and inclusion are understood at PR agencies and what processes and practices PR agencies have to promote and evaluate those values, DEI professionals at PR agencies were specifically asked to participate in the study.

The interview participants had varying titles such as CEO, Chief DEI Officer, Chief D&I Officer, Head of DEI, Director of DEI, Vice President and Partner. Some titles were specific to certain agencies, so to maintain participant confidentiality, the specific titles are not shared here to protect the interview participants' identities. The senior-level DEI professionals, often with titles such as chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer or chief diversity officer, are mostly hired by large PR agencies with large fee incomes and a high number of total employees. Also, the professionals with titles that include the specific term DEI started their position within the past two years; they were recently hired or promoted for the position responsible for the agencies' DEI efforts in 2020 or 2021. Like many organizations and advertising agencies (Ivy Exec, 2020; Monllos, 2020), some large PR agencies focused on adding senior-level DEI professionals to address the urgent need to improve DEI at agencies.

Because this study focuses on interviewing senior-level DEI professionals, the participants were more likely to work at large PR agencies. Ten participants are from top 30 PR agencies in the U.S., according to the Global Top 250 PR Agency Ranking 2020 (Provoke Media, 2020b); one from small-sized agency; and one from an independent consultancy. Although participants declined to share their agencies' annual fee income, I obtained the information from the aforementioned list. Of the seven agencies for which I obtained annual fee income information, the combined fee income is estimated to be \$2.38 billion. The participants reported that their agencies, all combined, employ approximately 8,000 PR or strategic communication professionals. Instead of summing up all the reported numbers, I excluded the numbers of PR professionals at subsidiary companies if they were a part of a holding company. Also, some participants only shared the number of PR professionals at their local offices because they were not sure about the size of the agencies at the national level even though they

participate in national DEI efforts. Some DEI professionals reported that they engage in local, national and global projects at the agencies, so the impact of their work is assumed to reach beyond 8,000 PR professionals.

Basic demographic information of the participants will only be provided as an aggregation to protect the participants' identities. The participants are based in New York City, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, and St. Louis. The participants' age ranged from 30 to 53 and the average age of the participants was 40.7 excluding one respondent who answered "middle-age" instead of a specific number. Out of 12 respondents, three identified as straight Black women, three as straight White women, two as straight Asian women, two as straight multiracial (Black and White), one straight Hispanic or Latina, and one gay White man. The participants' average years of professional experience in public relations was 17.25.

The interviews with DEI professionals are considered informant/expert interviews as the interview participants consist of those whose knowledge is valuable for achieving the research objectives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Good informants/experts are knowledgeable insiders who "have inhabited (or overseen) many roles and thus can speak from experience about various aspects of the scene; counselors who "are generally regarded by the membership and are plugged into one or more key social networks"; and mavens who "hoard and dispense certain kinds of cultural capital in a scene, including knowledge of the local languages and other symbol systems" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017, p. 227).

By interviewing senior-level DEI professionals, this study provides an understanding of DEI practices and processes of some of the largest employers of the field. To be working as a DEI professional at a PR agency, it is imperative to know the ecology of the industry, especially the PR industry structure and to be well-versed in the rapid social changes that transform culture,

economy, institutions, and businesses. DEI professionals at PR agencies are hired to lead some of the most important changes that organizations need. However, they face challenges as they make progress because of the power dynamics with clients, employees, and other senior executives. Given the power dynamics in which the professional is partaking and the intense competitiveness among agencies, despite the resourcefulness of the DEI professionals at PR agencies, they may provide selective and partial information during interviews because they represent the agency as employees. Even so, conducting interviews is a valuable way to assess things and learn about processes that cannot be studied by other means (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

Data Collection

The interview data was collected April through July of 2021. Twenty-eight DEI professionals were initially invited to participate in the study through emails and social media. If a potential participant did not respond to initial invitation, reminders were sent to each potential participant up to three times. The recruiting efforts and data saturation resulted in-depth interviews with 12 DEI professionals at PR agencies in the United States. For a qualitative study, eight in-depth interviews is considered a sufficient number for data saturation (Guest et al., 2020; McCracken, 1988; Qiu & Muturi, 2016). Because 11-12 interviews are recommended for higher degrees of saturation, 12 interviews are adequate to respond to the study's qualitative inquiry (Guest et al., 2020).

In-depth interviews were conducted in an online, semi-structured format. Due to sampling across the United States and the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via the online video meeting service Zoom. Once a DEI professional expressed an interest in participating in an interview, an email with links to a consent form, a scheduling request, and a short questionnaire followed, using online appointment scheduling tool Calendly. The questions

were to affirm their qualifications as DEI professionals, preferences on the interview style (with or without video), and agreement to participate in and recording and transcription of the interview. Once the interviewees provided consent and the answers to the questionnaire were returned, the participant received an interview confirmation email and a reminder prior to the interview with a link to the Zoom meeting. Each interview ran 50-60 minutes.

Interview questions were primarily guided by three research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Interviewees were asked to share their professional backgrounds and their agency's backgrounds as well as their understanding of each concept associated with DEI and their agency's efforts to enhance and evaluate diversity, equity, and inclusion. I also asked questions related to their hiring/recruitment process and how they communicate their DEI efforts especially on agencies' websites. Participants' responses to those questions informed the design of the second study, an experiment, in this dissertation research.

With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. In transcriptions, I used the pseudonyms that the interview participants chose for themselves and removed professional identifiers. This is to ensure that the participants' personal information is confidential and none of their answers is linked to the participant or the participant's agency. In the end of the interview, I explained about the member check process and the participants were asked whether they would like to opt in or opt out from the process. All participants agreed to participate in the member check process. Upon completion of the interview, participants were provided with a debriefing statement and thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed within five days after the completion. Separate from the interview transcriptions, I did in-process writing including asides, commentaries, and memo on

the interview guide. Asides are “a brief, reflective bits of analytic writing that succinctly clarify, explain, interpret, or raise questions about some specific happening or process described in a fieldnote” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 80). A commentary is “a more elaborate reflection, either on some specific event or issue, or on the day’s experiences and fieldnotes The in-process writing helps” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 81). Memos are “snapshots of analytic thinking at a particular point of research—ranging from issues about field tactics or the quality of data; to reflections about puzzling cases; to a line of thought that integrates previous asides, commentaries, and memos (Gibbs, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). The in-process writing helps analyzing the primary data such as interview transcriptions because it is valuable for researchers when they deal with positionality in qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

There are many ways to conduct discourse analysis. With the interview transcripts as my primary text, I focused on structural level of the DEI discussion. I identified extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive dependencies in the text and explored the interconnectedness of the dependencies that construct the DEI discourse. This manuscript was shared with participants for member checks to verify their words and experiences. Five participants took part in member checks. A minor factual error was pointed out by a participant and corrected.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, I discuss how DEI is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated in public relations agencies based on the in-depth interviews. In the first section, I conceptualize each element of DEI based on the definitions that participants provided. The next section explores operationalization of DEI, studying how DEI is practiced by analyzing the three levels of the DEI discourse: extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive levels. At the extra-discursive level, I surveyed environmental factors that affect DEI practices and processes. At inter-discursive level, I identified various external stakeholders and looked at how they construct the DEI discourse with PR agencies. At intra-discursive level, agencies' DEI practices and processes for their employees, particularly PR practitioners with marginalized social identities, were the focus of the analysis. Finally, after discussion of evaluation of DEI in PR agencies, the chapter concludes.

Conceptualization of DEI

RQ1 asked how DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) is conceptualized by public relations DEI professionals. The professionals' responses to the conceptualization resembled the understanding of the concepts shared in literature review. Some used metaphors to describe the distinction of each concept. For instance, Regina shared an analogy from a poet Jennifer Chang: if DEI is a house, "diversity is the door, inclusion is how comfortable you feel in the house, and equity is how much access you have to change the property."

However, when I asked participants to define each concept associated with DEI, some participants highlighted the importance of interconnectivity of the concepts and found it challenging to separate them out.

“I think what you’re doing right now is really interesting to kind of take the diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts and separate them and it’s a bit of a challenge for me because we have thought of that as three initiatives but they don’t necessarily map well to those specific items...” (Diana)

Even though she appeared hesitant to separate the concepts, she continued, “Our top priority is really in the equity lane, and then diversity.”

Similar to Diana’s agency, some agencies prioritized one concept over the other two depending on agencies’ circumstances or perceived necessity as whether to focus on diversity, equity, or inclusion efforts at their agencies.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that the understanding of equity appeared more controversial and challenging to reach a consensus on despite its importance. Because equity starts from recognizing that our system produces and reproduces unfair outcomes for certain individuals based on their social identities, including women of color (Tulshyan, 2020), the divisiveness of the perceptions on systemic discrimination may have made a shared understanding of equity a “moving target” (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016).

To answer Q1, I address each concept in turn.

Diversity

Although diversity “means a lot of different things to different people” (Anne), participants viewed diversity as a complex, multifaceted concept, therefore there could be “hundreds of classifications of diversity” (Clara). At the organizational level, diversity meant representation of diverse identities encompassing race, ethnicity, gender identities, education, socioeconomic status, religion, disabilities, languages, veteran status, age, skills, family status,

type of employment, industry experience, geographic background, immigration status, and more. The participants also recognized the nuances of each. For example, as for education, not only the size or type of college but also attending the college as the first-generation makes differences. Furthermore, diversity meant “different ways of thinking, different ways of showing up at the table based on the life experiences” (Betty). Participants also discussed intersectionality of identities.

“So, recognizing that identities are multifaceted, you can't just look at gender...even if this view decided to look at women who identify from heritage perspective as having Hispanic or Latinx background, there are going to be things, even within that group.” (Grace)

And Anne said that it is important to take a holistic view of what these multiple aspects of diversity means for the organization.

Equity

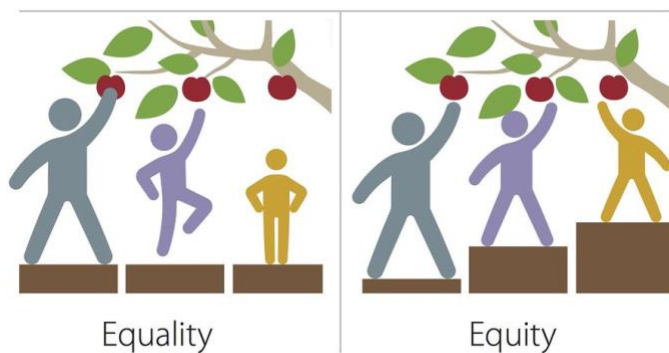
Even though the concept of equity has existed for a long time, equity was recently introduced, particularly in 2020, and added to diversity and inclusion in the public relations industry. PR agencies along with other organizations created roles (e.g., Chief DEI Officer, Head of DEI, etc.) that are responsible for not only diversity and inclusion, but also equity. This reflects the evolving understanding of DEI in public relations and this is “a recognition of inequity” (Susan). This recognition is highly important because equity is about understanding that “the playing field is not leveled for everyone” (Clara).

Nearly all professionals differentiated equality and equity, but Bruce said that she was “not sure that we quite understand yet as a country, the difference between equity and equality.” Bruce shared that her agency approaches equity “as the same way we always have in that everyone has the same opportunities regardless of what group they self-identify with or belong to.” She added, “I think that is still up for discussion, let’s put it that way...I don’t know, we, you

know, we've moved away, [it] used to be diversity, equality, and inclusion." Melba also shared that she "used to struggle with that difference between equality and equity." This demonstrates our understanding of DEI evolves and that its conceptualization can be challenging to grasp.

Figure 1.

Equality vs. Equity



Note. "Equity vs Equality" by MN Pollution Control Agency is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/?ref=openverse&atype=rich>

To describe the understanding of equity, especially in comparison with equality, many said visuals like Figure 1 helped provide an understanding of the concept and was useful in explaining the concept to others.

“Equity is really the recognition that not everyone is starting from the same place, and we need to account for that in our programs, policies and practices to ensure that everyone has access to opportunities, and the support that they need to get there.” (Anne)

Achieving equity involves identifying disparities and opportunity gaps and leveling the field through policies and programs that offer requisite resources and eliminate historical barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups due to their social identities and the discriminatory practices that have limited their access to opportunities.

Inclusion

Several DEI professionals reported that inclusion is at the core of organizational culture and the most important, the biggest, or the overarching element of DEI. Grace said, “You can hire people from all different backgrounds but they won’t have the environment to grow and thrive in” without inclusion. Some DEI professionals reported that the PR industry has seen “a proportional turnover of BIPOC employees” as much as there has been progress in hiring BIPOC employees (Anne & Kyle). They believed that inclusion is a critical component to retaining employees with marginalized social identities.

The interviews revealed that inclusion is creating a strong sense of belonging within the organization where people feel safe bringing their full selves to work, feeling that their opinions and perspectives are valued, and sought out within the agency. However, Betty believed that belonging “deserves its own attention,” sharing her personal experience.

“...the person above me was a White male, and he would go play golf, all the time with the people that I was having to work with. They never invited me to go play golf. I didn’t know how to...play golf. So, in an effort to making me feel belong, you would think, maybe, ‘let’s come up with something that Betty could also do with us.’ But that wasn’t the case. So, I’ve always felt like there was a chasm between me and the client that I could never bridge, because I was never going to be invited on the golf course...[to] play with the people who you know were evaluating me and my support for the business and having the sidebar conversation. All that happened on the golf course.”

Betty said that she did not feel included because her supervisor and clients did not invite her nor that she belonged because they did not try to find something all of them, including Betty, could do together. To highlight the significance of belonging, Betty described:

“Inclusion is...(being) invited to the dance...but nobody asked them to dance. So they come, they're counted, they're included, but they aren't included in places that matter. And so, if...nobody's dancing with

them, you never get to see the potential...So, that's kind of how I see it like in the most simple terms, invited to the dance, but not asked to dance.” (Betty)

Interviews and the prior literature review indicated that inclusion refers to creating an environment where everyone feel psychologically safe and comfortable to thrive, participate, belong, and be authentic. Betty’s analogy of the difference between inclusion and belonging parallels with the way affirmative action invited more women and BIPOC to public relations yet excluded them from mainstream, profit-and-loss responsibilities, fundamental management and high-level executive roles (Logan, 2011). Betty’s account highlights the importance of belonging in permitting full participation of employees with historically marginalized social identities, no less than the level of participation that dominant social groups have.

The interviews suggested employees with marginalized social identities are worried at workplace. Employees with marginalized social identities are more likely to fear for negative consequences of who they are and feel uncomfortable because of their social identities.

“Inclusion is like a feeling...how you feel when you are at work or with your colleagues. ‘Do I really feel like I can be myself?’ ‘Do I feel like people are going to judge me for...liking this or wearing this or wearing my hair like this?’...Inclusion is feeling that they can bring their full selves to work without judgment or any sort of...negative reaction.” (Lisa)

When employees have feel uncomfortable in their work environment, they are more vulnerable to leave their organizations (Brown, 2018). Thus, inclusion is an essential element to retain of practitioners with marginalized social identities.

Operationalization: DEI processes and practices

RQ2 asked what processes and practices are in place to promote DEI at PR agencies. While the conceptualization of diversity, equity, and inclusion showed the general understanding of the concepts at public relations agencies in the United States, this section will discuss how

DEI is operationalized through practices and processes at the agencies. The interviews revealed that, in spite of the broad understanding of diversity, it was operationalized with a primary focus on race/ethnicity and LGBTQIA+ identities in reality. This may be related to that “there are a lot of women in PR...but unless you are White, Christian, heterosexual, male in this country, you’re basically an other who may feel disfranchised and ignored” (Betty). In particular, all the participants indicated that most of their work centered around race/ethnicity because of the deep-rooted systemic racial inequality in the United States, relative visibility and convenience of measuring racial and ethnic identities, clients’ increasing interests on racial and ethnic diversity due to the diversifying US population and ongoing demands for racial justice. When DEI professionals used the term diverse talents, they often mean women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ talents, especially BIPOC individuals. This not only highlights the racial and ethnic homogeneity of workforce at most PR agencies but also the otherization of “diverse individuals” considering that dominant social group members were not viewed as diverse.

This narrow operationalization of diversity with a particular focus on racial and ethnic identity affected the scope of equity and inclusion efforts. Efforts for equity focused on systemic discrimination based on racial and ethnic identities. Similarly, efforts for inclusion often meant creating a welcoming and safe work environment for BIPOC practitioners.

“When we think about systemic inequities, a lot of those have been centered around race. These issues are deeply rooted and have been around for centuries, so to achieve real, meaningful change, we have to talk about and address those systemic issues.” (Lisa)

In this following section, I analyze the DEI discourse at public relations agencies in the United States by exploring their processes and practices at extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive levels and how they interact with one another.

Extra-discursive dependencies

The analysis of extra-discursive dependencies helps understanding of the external context surrounding the discourse of DEI in the society and the industry to which PR agencies actively contribute. PR agencies viewed DEI as business and moral imperatives that influence their business and relationships with internal and external stakeholders. The extra-discursive dependencies of the DEI discourse at PR agencies are steeped through the inter- and intra-discursive practices as the fundamental tenet with the following understandings seen through the inter- and intra-discursive analyses.

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. population. DEI professionals recognize the significant lack of diversity in their agencies and the industry, which does not reflect the increasing diversity in the U.S. population. They also highlighted the necessity to serve stakeholders representing a wide range of identities and perspectives including clients and clients' stakeholders and believed that increasing diversity of PR practitioners is important to address. DEI professionals in general agreed that the demographic changes in the market make DEI efforts business imperatives. Anne said, "we must represent the very people that we are trying to reach with the campaigns and stories...It is absolutely a business imperative." Betty shared her experience with a client:

"I actually talked to...one of the clients...and I was like, 'I noticed on your...slide of consumers and they were all like, a 30-year-old White man, woman with a couple of kids on every single image'...at the end of the presentation, I was like, 'You won't grow bigger than you are if you don't start introducing your product and brand to Black people, Spanish-speaking people, Asian people...they have equal opportunity to enjoy it...' I mean, the demographics show you that those numbers are going down." (Betty)

Betty also emphasized the role of the PR profession in shaping perceptions and making people feel included by saying, "it's a very powerful role if you take it seriously." Melba also

pointed out that companies hire PR practitioners for their counsel. She argued that if agencies do not hire diverse employees, the counsel they provide cannot be based on diverse viewpoints relevant for clients' stakeholders, thus defeating the purpose of why companies hire PR agencies. DEI professionals placed value on workforce diversity as a business imperative because they believe that increasing workforce diversity helps reach diverse audiences and cater to marginalized communities' interests in enhancing their representation in White-collar workplaces and high-status positions that reflect the growing population of marginalized racial and ethnic identities in the United States. This perspective contrasts with the pervasive view in U.S. workplaces that diversity initiatives violate norms of meritocracy or undermine organizational success (Cundiff et al., 2018; Fraser & Kick, 2000) by looking at lived experiences of individuals with marginalized identities as a merit.

Demands for Racial Justice. Many DEI professionals mentioned that the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement (re)ignited the racial reckoning, referring to “increased confrontation with the history of race, racism, and white supremacy in this country” (Hammonds, 2021). Lisa stressed,

“at the end of the day, we are human beings and that’s at the center of all of this...it’s not only about...business impact and...consumer spending...we’re dealing with human beings...and these are affecting us as people, and we have to figure out a way to...make sure that people are given the opportunities that they deserve...what side of history do you want to be?” (Lisa)

Lisa’s emphasis on DEI efforts as moral imperatives was not highlighted by some interviewees who discussed the efforts only in light of business imperatives. Whatever the reason was to combat systemic racism, PR agencies started addressing topics related to unconscious or implicit bias and systemic and historic racism internally and externally.

DEI professionals also reported that the murder of George Floyd affected many employees with marginalized racial and ethnic identities, especially Black employees. Moreover, some PR agencies started recognizing mental health issues correlated with persistent societal racial injustice experienced among employees with marginalized racial and ethnic identities. As a result, they discussed expanding mental health care coverage for BIPOC employees. For instance, Anne's agency was looking for a healthcare service and insurance program that matches BIPOC employees with BIPOC counselors.

Industry reports and academic literature believe that the role of public relations is crucial in addressing issues of systemic racism and achieving social justice. Edelman's recent trust report (2021) revealed that organizations' responses to demands for social justice are seen as moral obligations to employees and society and also increases people's purchase intention. Logan (2019) also pointed out the racialized roots of corporations in the U.S. history and the crucial roles of organizations in improving race relations. These industry leaders and scholars (Edelman, 2021; Logan, 2019) asserted that PR practitioners' critical approach to images, stories, and other communication tools and strategies are paramount to dismantle systemic racism.

COVID-19. Working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to organizations' perceptions of expanding their view of employees as human beings rather than as talents. Thus, organizations offered more consideration to the significance of employees' mental health and their lives outside the workplace. Grace said, "We're bringing more of...ourselves into the workplace and we're seeing each other's homes." Kyle also said,

"...the last year we've been forced to do that...we've all been let into each other's homes...whether you want it to or not...there's been more conversation about...your relationship status...your entire family... how people have been managing through this and the stressors that have been intensified or that are new because of it (the COVID-19 pandemic)." (Kyle)

Additionally, anti-Asian hate crimes and xenophobia fueled by anti-Asian rhetoric during the COVID-19 pandemic caused employers to consider how their employees might be affected. Moreover, the interviews revealed that some DEI efforts at PR agencies were derived from the pandemic's disproportionate health outcomes and economic impacts on women, Black, Hispanic or Latina/o/x and other marginalized communities that exhibited systemic, historical, and structural discrimination against those communities (Stewart et al., n.d.).

Such pronounced negative experiences and health outcomes shared among members of historically marginalized communities during COVID-19 have drawn Americans' attention to racial inequalities and systemic discrimination (CDC, 2022). Furthermore, they had serious impacts on organizations and businesses due to labor shortages, supply chain interruptions, and increased costs of health insurance premiums, government-mandated business closures, and paid sick leave (Stang, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic made businesses and employers reconsider their human resource policies to provide a more supportive workplace for their employees and other stakeholders (CDC, 2021).

Interdiscursive Dependencies

The analysis of interdiscursive dependencies illustrates the dilemmas, tensions, negotiations, and constraints in the dynamic relationships in the PR agency discourse. This interdiscursive practice can be viewed as practices and processes that are constructed by PR agencies and their external stakeholders such as clients, clients' strategic publics, educational and trade organizations, job seekers, business partners and suppliers, and local communities with marginalized social identities. This analysis revealed that deep-seated systemic discrimination across the US society requires multi-faceted, multi-level DEI efforts. Moreover, the analysis indicated that DEI professionals valued the role of PR practitioners with marginalized social

identities in their ability to connect the agency's clients with communities of marginalized social identities, to engage in diverse recruitment strategies, and to educate clients.

Serving clients and their interests. Interviews demonstrated many DEI agency leaders define public relations agencies as client service businesses. Hence, clients were deemed some of the most important stakeholders or *raison d'être* for public relations agencies. This often led agencies to put their clients' interests at the forefront. As clients' interests in diversity have grown, agencies experienced their clients' growing push for DEI efforts at their agencies. Clients would ask for the agencies' demographic breakdown and how agencies approach DEI-related topics. Grace said, "Clients who ask about team dynamics, we will give them the breakdown of the team, but there are obviously rules and regulations...if it's a small team with...10, we won't provide the information because then, it's...identifiable." Kyle said, "I'm sure it's not surprising to you our clients are asking questions about that more and more...but the intensity just within the last year has definitely spiked." This shows clients/organizations' growing interests in hiring PR agencies that provide consultation on DEI to meet expectations of diversity for the client's stakeholders based on the extra-discursive dependencies: external environmental factors influencing the PR practice and processes.

"Clients are...asking, through the pitch process, 'what's your diversity strategy?' 'Do you have a supplier diversity program?' 'Tell us about your...internal diversity numbers.'...Over the past year, clients are asking even more now and some clients even want us to consult and provide insights for them for what they can do internally, and clients are now holding organizations accountable...with that in particular we probably have some things that are packaged those visibly for clients." (Grace)

In response to their clients' push for diversity, DEI professionals found that having diverse talent on staff helps bring ideas and strategies to clients and educate them especially at culturally relevant moments.

“We had an email go out yesterday, ‘we need to flag to our clients that Derek Chauvin...his sentencing hearing is happening tomorrow at 1:30.’ So, knowing that...we’re advising our clients...‘We shouldn’t be going out reaching out to media tomorrow,’...‘We need to be sensitive...that’s probably going to dominate the news cycle...we should not be reaching out to any African American media tomorrow...we don’t want to seem insensitive...we want to make sure that we’re respectful...’ making sure that we’re showing up...in the right place at the right time.” (Caitlyn)

This demonstrates disproportionate attention to the significance of the Derek Chauvin trial among Black or African American communities. Whereas this trial was considered as “a defining moment in the US racial history” (Forgrave & Rao, 2021), Caitlyn suggested that it would be particularly insensitive and disrespectful to reach out to African American media because they will be on a higher alert about Derek Chauvin’s sentence hearing more than others. This implies that the way other communities experience this critical event may be so disconnected and different from Black experience of this sentencing hearing that it takes someone in the know to communicate this to be seen thoughtful as others may not be thinking about this if they do not see the importance of this moment.

Betty also found that it is important to include practitioners with marginalized social identities in work and decision-making, especially related to their communities. To concerns of pigeonholing, which refers to “being designated to primarily interact with minority community members” (Len-Rios, 1998, p. 542) in public relations context, Betty believes that increasing diversity can help reduce pigeonholing.

“...your company is about to launch a campaign to reach LGBTQIA+ people, but nobody in the room is [a member of any of LGBTQIA+ community]...a group of PR women in a room, coming up with a campaign to teach men how to shave...it’d be...ridiculous...The more you have, you don’t have to go back to the same person all the time with the same insight...if you have a pool of people from which to choose from...because you won’t have to put all the burden on that one person to be the voice for an entire group

of people...And I have been in the position before...I didn't mind...sharing my voice but I also made sure that they knew that...the community is not monolithic...Black in the South is different from somebody Black in the North.” (Betty)

As Betty pointed out, having a member of a marginalized community to reach out to the community can help provide a more authentic insight. This has been a recurrent argument to promote recruiting and retaining employees with marginalized social identities. For instance, critics pointed out the lack of representation of women in businesses and media when women make 70-80% purchase decisions for their families (Nelson, 2019). However, it is crucial to note that this practice can also contribute to essentializing social categories. This essentialist approach can conversely suggest that people of color have nothing to do with campaigns targeting White communities and LGBTQIA+ communities campaigns targeting heterosexual or cisgender communities. Thus, it is essential to respect how employees identify themselves, recognize individual differences within the community and increase diversity within the communities of marginalized social identities.

Whereas practitioners with marginalized identities were viewed as an asset because of their knowledge in their communities or perceptions that they have the knowledge, Kyle was concerned about pigeonholing by having them communicate with or on behalf of the communities they may or may not associate with in client service and education. For instance, clients ask questions such as “what do your Black employees think about this? What is the Black perspective on this?” (Kyle) When clients associate practitioners with a particular community, they value the practitioners’ perspectives on issues affecting that community. However, this creates a situation where one person is asked to provide a perspective for an entire group and the agency is put in between serving clients and protecting identities and privacy of their employees.

“...as they [clients] are focused on having more diverse teams... ‘Oh, you just hired that account supervisor, are they Black, are they Asian, are they Hispanic?’ have been like direct questions we've heard from clients, and then that puts our employees in a really awkward position because... we also want to keep the confidentiality of our employees' information top of mind and... it's not our place to disclose... who that person is and how they identify... I don't think many of our account people are necessarily trained or equipped to answer that in the moment.” (Kyle)

The interviews demonstrated that clients' push for diversity was largely limited to racial and ethnic identities and sometimes LGBTQIA+ identities of the practitioners, and hardly concerned the agency's inclusive work environment or equitable policies for practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic identities and queer identities. Bruce's remark on consumer and audience segmentation also highlights clients' and therefore agencies' lack of emphasis on inclusive and equitable PR and marketing practice.

“We've been hearing that for years you never saw a billboard for a Cadillac go up in inner city Detroit. For instance, we didn't market... Louis Vuitton in Oakland, California or highly disadvantaged Hispanic communities for that matter. And yet in New York, we've always marketed high fashion to a lot of the Asian population because that's where the money is and then they buy it. So, is that new? Absolutely it's not new. We have clients where certain, there may be ethnic groups, or multicultural groups who are not their primary market. It may not be because of money and may be because of experience and sales figures, that's okay. It's fine to base decisions on where you put your marketing dollars based on who is buying your product... for the same reason, sickle cell treatments are not something... we would market in those wealthy White communities, it is not a disease that affects that community, but we, I really haven't heard any pushback in our agency from clients, not understanding the value of multicultural marketing in this country.” (Bruce)

Certain social identity factors such as racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as sexual orientation play a substantial role in shaping different life experiences and outcomes in the United States. Although these differences may help strategic communication professionals

communicate with their audiences efficiently and effectively, this targeting practice has also contributed to fortifying social injustice by limiting access to opportunities, products, and services to those with marginalized social identities.

Recruiting Practitioners with Historically Marginalized Identities. The interviewees highlighted opportunity gaps between White and BIPOC students and practitioners. Agencies put their efforts to counter implicit bias in the typical agency hiring process that has traditionally favored White students and practitioners. Because of this gap, the findings from the interviews indicated that prospective job applicants with marginalized social identities pay attention to the representation of their identities at the agency, particularly at the leadership level, and rely on word-of-mouth from those who look like them. Existing research has also pointed out that testimonials and word-of-mouth using cues related to social identities, particularly among individuals with marginalized racial and ethnic identity, play a critical role in attracting others and providing information credibility (Walker et al., 2009, 2011, 2012).

“For diverse talent, they want to see people who look like them in the place where they're gonna work...more importantly, they want to see people who look like them in positions of...power and leadership to know...I have this path...I can do this, too...I have this great example...They want to understand...what the culture is like...I think diverse talent probably feels more comfortable asking someone like them this question...I actually...did the same thing when I started...‘Look, give it to me straight. How was it for Black people at this agency?’...‘How is it?’... ‘Do you feel like people respect you?’ or ‘Do you feel like there's room for you to grow and advance?’” (Caitlyn)

This indicated that the internal efforts to retain employees with marginalized social identities affects external efforts to recruit employees with marginalized social identities.

Due to the influences and networks of employees with marginalized social identities on job candidates with marginalized social identities, PR agencies viewed employee referrals and referral bonus programs as opportunities to diversify the workforce at the industry. On the other

hand, DEI professionals were also concerned that those programs could contribute to the lack of diversity at their agencies because of unconscious bias shared among the majority White practitioners who often refer people with the same backgrounds. Anne said, “We end up hiring people who look like us, think like us, talk like us.” Because of this, DEI professionals were looking for ways to encourage practitioners with marginalized social identities to participate in those programs.

“one of the downfalls of that [referral bonus] is we continuously recruit people that look and...think like us. So, if our agency is primarily White females, they're going to recruit other White college-educated females from the same background. So how do we break that cycle?” (Regina)

To break the cycle of reproduction of unconscious bias, DEI professionals indicated that they provide workshops and trainings particular to bias in hiring process for inclusive hiring especially among those in hiring roles. Melba reported that her agency is pilot-testing stripping names on job applications due to potential signaling of ethnicity and discrimination in hiring decisions (Segrest Purkiss et al., 2006). Moreover, Anne reported that her agency discourages sharing opinions of job candidates among colleagues to prevent unconscious bias.

“That is really meant to be more inclusive and remove the bias from the interview process, so...none of us are able to share our opinions of that...candidate with one another because we don't want to influence that person's evaluation of the candidate that they spoke with. So, we each have to fill out the form on our own, turn that into the talent acquisition team, and then they will review it holistically and determine if it's a person that we're going to move forward with to hire.” (Anne)

Furthermore, some agencies tried to diversify the candidate pool by using the Rooney Rule or the Wilson Rule. The Rooney Rule was originally started in the National Football League to require the league to interview at least one woman, minority, or LGBTQIA+ candidate when hiring a head coach (Solow et al., 2011). Similarly, the Xerox Wilson Rule “requires that women and minorities be among the final pool of qualified candidates for open management and

senior-level professional positions in the US” (CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion, n.d.). Similar to affirmative action, these are efforts that some public relations agencies make to enhance equity for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ employees. The effectiveness of these tactics remains controversial in academic literature and also among the interviewees in the present study. However, equity effort starts from recognizing structural discrimination and unconscious bias in recruitment of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners.

To introduce BIPOC students to public relations and agency careers, some agencies already have or were planning on launching internship programs specific for BIPOC students. Betty emphasized the importance of internship.

“I truly believe...you introduce the opportunities to people when they’re in school. People can see people who look like them in positions of power, in positions of influence...They have to see other people really enjoying it, probably look like them knowing that women can make it. People of color can make it. And they have to be comfortable being, being the minority in the room for a while until they can recruit other people...I actually started...a campaign program designed to introduce PR agency life to students at historically Black colleges and universities, so that they didn’t get hired and then realize, ‘oh my god, this is too much, this is too intense.’...So, we wanted them to know...before they graduated so that they could decide...especially an agency...at least know...being...probably the only one that looks like you (them) in that firm.” (Betty)

This illustrates that introducing work at PR agencies through internship opportunities help BIPOC students make their career decisions because it not only presents the opportunities at PR agencies but also informs that they will be in the absolute minority in the agencies. This warning in advance implies that they will have to be prepared to be the only ones and if not, they better choose other career options. Thus, if PR agencies seek to increase racial and ethnic diversity by hiring BIPOC practitioners, they have to hire and retain BIPOC practitioners and introduce what the agencies have to offer them to professionally grow.

Recently, job seekers and applicants, particularly Generation Z, increasingly ask what specific efforts agencies have made for DEI. Bruce said, “it’s an absolutely valid question” as “many companies may be hiring solely to check box[es]...”

“I saw a lot of diverse individuals. They are in my field. So, the talent is there. You just have to know where to go to find them, how to talk to them, what are the benefits, like, what they need to grow and develop. You have to put in the work at the end of the day.” (Caitlyn)

Caitlyn emphasized the needs for agencies to proactively search “diverse practitioners” and to put multi-faceted efforts to increase diversity at PR agencies, including inclusion efforts like anti-bias trainings and equity efforts ensuring more likelihood of representation of practitioners from historically marginalized social groups. Without a holistic approach to DEI, diversity, inclusion or equity alone cannot eliminate systemic discrimination at PR agencies.

Reaching Outside of Comfort Zones. To increase diversity of racial and ethnic makeup of the workforce, agencies put their efforts onto school outreach. DEI professionals believed that developing the “pipeline” or “funnel” is critical to cultivate diverse workforces in a long-term. However, the efforts that DEI professionals are making to develop the “pipeline” or “funnel” revealed deeply entrenched systemic discrimination in foundations of our society including education.

Participants emphasized the importance of introducing the career early. Caitlyn said, “One thing I think is really important to talk to these students when they’re younger, like when they’re in high school...because a lot of people don’t know PR and communication as a career.” Clara has also pointed out the lack of awareness of the career in historically marginalized groups and mentioned the significance of high school outreach.

“Historically from underrepresented groups...even if you lived in a major city...PR wasn’t a career that ever heard of, of course, you hear publicist, you know...celebrities have publicists, but...like corporate,

tech, and government PR, you don't really hear about that. You don't know what you don't know...before the pandemic...we had a few programs out of our office where we had sophomores and juniors in high schools coming into our agency...doing like a day in the life, so that they can get exposure because...only when you get exposure to that, that's when you can kind of broaden your horizons." (Clara)

Clara added:

"If you have a student who comes from a rural background, for example, and up from K through high school, that's all they've known, and then they go to a HBCU, which is predominantly in the south, that deals with maybe like agriculture and education, might not have a...comm(unication)s program." (Clara)

To enhance diversity at PR agencies, "looking outside of the normal places to find talent" (Caitlyn) is crucial. DEI professionals at large agencies focused their efforts to recruit BIPOC students at post-secondary educational institutions such as universities and colleges. The outreach was specific to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) including Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), cultural interest fraternities and sororities—particularly Black fraternities and sororities, and other multicultural or racially and ethnically diverse groups within other large colleges and universities. Clara added that it is important to support PR students who come from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities at universities because HBCUs enroll only 10% of all Black or African American students and they only make up 3% of the country's colleges and universities (UNCF, 2019) and not all HBCUs have communication or PR programs.

Because of the lack of awareness of PR in historically marginalized communities and lack of diversity in public relations education in post-secondary education institutions, Bruce, Clara, and Regina shared that hiring people outside of PR majors could increase diversity at PR agencies and industry. They commented on critical contributions made by PR professionals who studied other disciplines such as English, political science, legal studies, journalism, public health, and religious studies at their agencies. Combined with the lack of diversity in collegiate

public relations education, Bruce and Kyle mentioned that hiring those outside of PR majors is helpful to increase not only racial and ethnic diversity but also to enhance capability to serve various types of stakeholders in a wide range of industries.

The interviews reaffirmed the White and female student majority in most collegiate public relations programs (K. A. Brown et al., 2019). Melba also pointed out the fact that White women are the majority in the post-secondary public relations education and said:

“For a while we were like, ‘do we only hire Z UNIVERSITY grads?’ We love having Z UNIVERSITY grads because they are some pretty phenomenal people...And Z UNIVERSITY is struggling to diversifying. If their student body isn’t diverse, then you can turn out phenomenal people in the program...it’s not going to help us in getting different perspective.” (Melba)

Similarly, Caitlyn said, “It’s so easy to recruit from X UNIVERSITY and Y UNIVERSITY...but again, if you’re not getting people from different places, and different backgrounds...you’re just bringing in the same talent.” The racial and sex homogeneity of the public relations student body in many colleges and universities poses threats to not only the public relations profession but also public relations education. Public relations collegiate education prepares students for practice by teaching effective communication skills and other public relations knowledge through curriculum and extracurricular activities (Waymer et al., 2018). Lack of diversity in public relations education in collegiate education imperils social development for career preparation (K. A. Brown et al., 2019). Along with the lack of awareness of the profession in BIPOC community, racialized and gendered collegiate public relations education can jeopardize collegiate public relations programs’ students experience and career outcomes.

Elevating the industry-wide DEI efforts. PR agencies found partnering and sponsoring various organizations working with individuals from marginalized communities who are interested in pursuing career in public relations, advertising, marketing, and other creative or

strategic communication industries. The organizations and events serving LGBTQIA+ communities, communities of marginalized racial and ethnic identities included The LAGRANT foundation, DAA (Diversity Action Alliance), 4As Foundation's MAIP (Multicultural Advertising Intern Program), ColorComm, AdColor, NBPRS (National Black Public Relations Society), HPRA (Hispanic Public Relations Association), Indigenous Peoples Public Relations Association (IPRA), VOICES for AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islanders), INROADS, and Yard Con. Susan said that working with trade organizations serving marginalized communities benefit agencies to connect with great talent and highlighted the importance of becoming part of the communities.

“I think that’s really important for any kind of work with different communities of color is that you have to be a part of the community. You can’t...be...transactional...come in and come out...because we know...a lot of these great organizations need our financial support to do the work that they do, it means having our people participate at the local levels where they have local chapters, also at their national conferences...It think it also means...being on committees or boards...you’re contributing... [to] thought leadership...So, whatever organization that we’re involved with...we’re in...deep partner[ship] and sponsor[ship].” (Susan)

Clara has also underscored the importance of working with trade and nonprofit organizations that help elevate underrepresented groups into professional fields. Anne also believed that partnerships and sponsorships with those organizations contribute to the next generation of PR and communications talents. Because many of those organizations focus on cultivating students, particularly students of color, at the college level, the agency provides the students scholarships and internships through those organizations. DEI professionals believed that working with trade and nonprofit organizations specialized in fostering diverse talents in public relations help increase diversity in their agencies and the field as well as enhance equity

by providing focused resources and connections for practitioners with marginalized social identities.

Additionally, DEI professionals shared some of their programs that promote DEI among freelancers, contract workers, and other service providers whom agencies hire to outsource some of their work. Kyle shared that his agency works with BIPOC individuals who want to become influencers. His agency provides education programs for BIPOC influencers in the United States, which in turn helps the agency to identify and work with them for future initiatives or campaigns. Furthermore, the agency partnered with BIPOC influencers to launch a study on pay parity among influencers to identify hurdles for influencers of color. This initiative touches on diversity by increasing the representation of BIPOC influencers, inclusion by providing an environment for them to thrive, and equity by identifying pay disparities to further ensure fair pay for all. This example demonstrates that the significance of connecting with diverse external stakeholders for organization/agency's DEI efforts (Schuman, 2020).

Diana found that such external efforts can be something that small agencies can do as small agencies are more likely to have limited hiring capacity.

“Our ability to make an impact is small. We thought about ‘where can we have the most immediate impact?’ And for us, that came into spending money with businesses owned by people of color because in many ways, we know that we’re going to be spending money as a business all year...So, being intentional about seeking out opportunities to spend that money in the Black community and with businesses owned by people of color, was a way...We know it’s not going to solve the whole problem. We know it’s not...but it’s a way to have an impact and maybe it makes a specific impact for those businesses...like...have a list of restaurants we can order from that are owned by people of color...to looking at all of our vendor relationships, and thinking about as those come up for contracts or we look at bringing on new partners and who we spend money with...and then the other things that we outsource work sometimes, or we refer work.

And when we do that, we want to be doing that as intentionally as possible to businesses, creative firms, research firms, video firms, photographers who are people of color.” (Diana)

This example shows public relations agencies’ relationships with a variety of external stakeholders and DEI efforts in those relationships are important considerations to make.

Intra-discursive dependencies

The analysis of intra-discursive dependencies revealed insights regarding PR agencies’ relationships with their employees. Because of the critical roles that PR practitioners play in inter-discursive and extra-discursive levels of PR practice, PR agencies put substantial effort in retaining practitioners with marginalized social identities. Those efforts included increasing the level of diversity at the leadership level; achieving pay and promotion equity; providing growth and development programs and healthcare coverage and benefits for PR practitioners with marginalized social identities (e.g., fertility benefits for same-sex couples, health care coverage for transgender employees, and providing employees of color with mental health services from health professionals of color); and celebration of diverse heritages, cultures, and communities.

However, the significant lack of diversity in the leadership of the agency and work environment that continue to exclude and marginalize employees with certain social backgrounds have presented challenges to retain employees with marginalized social identities. Some DEI professionals reported that the PR industry has seen “a proportional turnover of BIPOC employees” as much as there has been the progress in hiring BIPOC employees (Anne & Kyle).

Increasing representation of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ employees. Similar to the agencies’ external efforts focusing on communities of women, historically marginalized racial/ethnic identities and LGBTQIA+ identities, the interviews informed that agencies’ internal DEI efforts were mainly designed for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners.

Particularly, to retain “diverse employees,” DEI professionals believed that diverse leadership is one of the most critical aspects because practitioners with marginalized social identities need to see leaders who look like them. Clara said, “Diverse leadership helps with retention and diversity of thought...it’s a win-win all around.” Many agencies were in a dire need of recruiting and retaining leadership-level practitioners with marginalized social identities.

As for why agencies focus on representation of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ employees, Regina said:

“You know, I think it is something to do with being more visible. So without asking, ‘what is your ethnicity?’ or ‘what is your race?’...it gets a little bit complicated with sexual orientation, obviously because that’s another question, you can’t ask in an interview, but you know people think that they can tell, but that also has to do with...people’s biases...But anyway,...those factors are more or less visible, but also...they don’t technically affect the way people work. But when it comes to neurodiversity, or even physical disabilities...that will affect how you work, and how you communicate with clients because it’s going to be a little different...I think that’s why it’s more difficult to talk about those factors, and why people just shy away from that topic because they don’t want to change.” (Regina)

However, the most efforts went to increase the representation of BIPOC practitioners. When asked why, Susan shared:

“We’re also coming out of a major time of racial reckoning following the George Floyd murder last year, which has heightened awareness even further of the lack of diverse representation. Today, we’re able to better measure demographic data such as race and ethnicity, so it’s easier to at least from a quantitative point of view to have benchmarks that we can measure against. It’s more difficult to measure other dimensions of diversity such as LGBTQ+ as well as disability because of the legal ramifications of collecting some of that data.” (Susan)

Caitlyn also said, “...because race and ethnicity, you can actually see that. I do think that that’s one of the things that are the focus...because we work in PR where we’re servicing clients, and these clients have their audiences.” This points to the layered obligations of PR agencies to serve

clients and clients' audiences and why visibility or representation of identities matters for PR agencies.

Unlike other agencies, however, Kyle, a DEI professional at an agency with a holding company based in a non-US country says that it had been challenging for his agency to gather and share the data on employees' race/ethnicity until recently. This shows that the understanding of diversity can be different by country and the understanding of diversity in the United States is grounded in the country's law, history and culture.

Similar to the way sound data on gender disparities can help drawing more attention to gender issues and impact policy making to some degree (Schüler, 2006), the relative measurability of racial and ethnic diversity can aid race-conscious policies and better representation of BIPOC employees at workplaces. For instance, some agencies used demographic data to assess key information related to recruitment and retention such as pay equity and promotion velocity in their audits that they conducted through a third party or on their own.

“We launched a gender diversity dashboard, but we also can look at other things...you're actually allowed to track and calculate, but we leverage that dashboard to be able to see where we have deficits....So we be able to look at that data and say women in this particular industry within our organization, seem to be getting promoted at a lower rate. And of those 40% report to the same three supervisors. So, then, we would know we could go in and do additional training or make changes if we had to.” (Grace)

This portrays that measurability of certain identities and representation can help agencies to develop inclusion and equity efforts, too. Anne also said:

“Because what we are seeing, especially at the more junior levels of the organization, is that...they are increasingly more diverse, and that's what we need to see. And at the same time so many of our leaders are primarily White. So how do you then begin to bridge the divide that may exist between employees of color and White leadership?” (Anne)

Anne's remark indicates that lack of diversity, specifically in the leadership level, adversely affects inclusion and equity in her agency. This shows diversity, equity, and inclusion are different concepts yet interconnected with one another.

Equitable policies, programs, and processes. To achieve equity, DEI professionals closely examined policies, programs, and practices, and addressed some struggles and opportunities they experienced in their work to advance equity, seeking a “sense of fairness” (Susan) across the agency.

“Our ability to advance equity is going to depend on not diverse people and their ability to commit to this cause and understand the role that they play...it's not always positive experience [for diverse people] because of non-diverse people that are managing them.” (Lisa)

“The challenge and the opportunity in DEI is that so much of what we do is more at the infrastructure level where it's just like all that behind-the-scenes stuff around pay equity and benefits and hiring practices that don't necessarily seem sexy, if you will, they're not the most visible things but they're really important.” (Anne)

As part of efforts to enhance equity, some agencies reported that they underwent or plan on audits of their pay and promotion equity.

“An audit of pay...you could look at the salaries...or qualifications and course correct where you may have had some unconscious bias toward women of childbearing years, ‘we don't need to give them that big raise because...they might leave realizing that it's too hard to do this job and have a child or maybe they will be distracted.” (Betty)

Additionally, Kyle and Melba pointed out the importance of considering intersectionality and hence cross examination of various factors that affect pay and promotion rate. Melba said, “In most organizations...you see that...White men at the top of the food chain, Black women kind of at the lowest sort of point.” They also argued that factors such as promotion velocity, baseline

salary, bonus, rate of raise, opportunities, and socioeconomic circumstances at the time of hire (i.e., job market) should be also considered to ensure that employees are fairly compensated.

In addition to pay and promotion audits, PR agencies also evaluated their current benefits and health care offerings. Although providing health coverages for diverse populations was often mentioned as company's efforts to enhance inclusion, some agencies were trying to find particular ways to address certain needs related to health care and health coverage for employees with marginalized social identities, particular to employees of color and transgender employees.

“Recently, a lot of our employees of color have said that they would like easier access to mental health providers who also identify as people of color. So our benefits manager has really been trying to find the easiest way to do that within the confines of the industry because, obviously, there's only so much we can do based on how far the healthcare industry has come.” (Anne)

“We did a session, a facilitated session with a DE&I expert in psychology...specifically for our Black colleagues about just around processing everything in the past...two weeks...from the Chauvin trial, to the most recent killings, and just to have a safe space.” (Melba)

“I think it also goes one step further in terms of the policies and procedures...something as like health care and health coverage, which for someone who's cisgender and heterosexual, they can just take on any planet they want, but if you have someone from the LGBTQ community, who say is transitioning, or has transitioned, what are our policy saying? Because if our back end policy saying that, ‘Oh, we don't cover transitional health care coverage, or we don't provide health care coverage for same sex, or same partner relationships’ While you might not think that reflects in your organization, it does tremendously because what that saying is that ‘I don't have a place here.’” (Clara)

Furthermore, agencies had growth and development programs designed for practitioners of marginalized social identities, especially women and BIPOC practitioners, due to the underrepresentation of such identities at the organization and the industry, particularly at the

leadership level. The programs included additional education and mentorship opportunities. Caitlyn emphasized, “From an equity standpoint, Black talent don’t see people who look like them in senior level position...the objective of that is then to provide them with additional resources from a growth and development standpoint.”

However, Kyle also mentioned that not all BIPOC practitioners welcome the focused equity efforts on BIPOC practitioners.

“There are some members of our BIPOC community that are a bit offended that they feel like they need something extra. And it’s not about giving them something extra, but it’s about potentially exposing them to tools and education or training that they may not have had...you can say that there’s a tremendous amount of our White population, that might not have that...but then you get into the debate of...‘Has that impacted them the same way?’ (Kyle)

A series of internal equity efforts focused on certain social groups in PR agencies illustrate that structural discrimination in PR agencies is a microcosm of our gendered, racialized, and cisheteronormative society that creates socioeconomic and health-related disparities.

Creating inclusive workplace. Agencies’ inclusion programs aimed to help employees feel belonged by checking employees’ unconscious biases and privilege and celebrating different awareness and heritage month celebrations such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Pride Month. Kyle, Melba, and Grace said that their agencies use information from pay and promotion audit to “unbias” the process. This helps agencies to identify discrepancies coming from cognitive bias that negatively affects employees with marginalized social identities. For instance, in-group bias in the public relations field intensifies hiring and promoting White practitioners due to the homogeneity of workforce. This led agencies to have employee resource groups for marginalized social identities, agency-wide trainings and work on unconscious bias and microaggressions that negatively influence hiring and retaining practitioners of historically

marginalized practitioners. For instance, Caitlyn's agency examined terminologies that perpetuate systemic stigma and recommended avoiding these terms in workplaces (i.e., master media list, master tracker, blackball, blacklist). Also, Diana shared that her agency sometimes uses technology to equalize and anonymize decision-making processes by letting people vote or type in their opinions in meetings to prevent people with certain styles and personalities have outsized voice.

Furthermore, many agencies reported that they celebrate different cultures and communities to enhance inclusion of marginalized communities through different awareness and heritage months such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Pride Month. Regina opined that these inclusion programs aim to help employees feel like they belong, saying "It's important to acknowledge those months...because, otherwise,...how else are you willing to give members of that community the voice...that they need to really celebrate their own heritage, their own culture and feel that belonging without having to explain themselves." Similarly, Kyle also highlighted how holiday policies at workplaces reflect issues of inclusion and equity across different cultures and communities.

"You pull a calendar of things you could celebrate...forget about what's a federal holiday...everything has something attached to it...whether it's Martin Luther King Day or Presidents Day or Fourth (of July)...the debate between Juneteenth and Fourth of July...This year, the agency did decide to make it (Juneteenth) a holiday, so we were off last Friday in observance for it. That's one day. But going into next week (Fourth of July), we have Friday off and then Monday and Tuesday." (Kyle)

This reflects that every holiday is associated with different communities and not every holiday is celebrated equally.

The interviews also revealed that Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) play a fundamental role in the agencies' inclusion efforts. ERGs are a critical part of creating communities,

connections, and sense of belonging for employees with marginalized social identities (Chaney et al., 2016). Most mid- and large-size agencies in the interviews had ERGs or were planning on launching them. The ERGs were primarily based on employees' marginalized social identities such as ERGs for employees with marginalized racial and ethnic identities; for members of LGBTQIA+ communities; for women; for working parents; for communities with disabilities; and for members of certain faiths and beliefs. This characteristic of the ERGs reflects historical disparity of resources and support (Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). ERGs are also helpful for internal workshops and trainings on various issues related to identities and cultures. However, many agencies' programs and practices to educate their employees relied on unpaid volunteer work of practitioners with marginalized social identities even though some agencies provided budgets for such ERG programs. For training sessions on different heritages, religions, cultures or LGBTQIA+ community, practitioners with marginalized social identities volunteered or were asked to educate employees on topics about their social groups or communities as a service to the agency and for their communities.

Most agencies found that “diverse employees” in their agencies, including employees who identify as BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ are valuable human resources to educate their outgroup employees about the group and provide comfort and support for other in-group employees. DEI professionals believed that this understanding of the values that “diverse employees” have as human resources contributed to creating positions that oversee organizations' commitments to DEI such as chief DEI officer.

“Two years ago...it was just a bunch of people who were trying to do this as like a side hustle. I think there's still a lot of that happening but at least now we have chief diversity inclusion officer, and we have a team under her of, you know, three or four people that are helping execute the plan.” (Lisa)

This was also demonstrated by the fact that the DEI professionals who participated in the study identify themselves as women, BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. Most of them have served on different roles and committees for DEI before the creation of such positions overseeing DEI efforts. Despite the DEI efforts that are ongoing or just beginning at the agencies, DEI professionals shared challenges that appeared paradoxical. Women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners were often leading DEI efforts, but policies, programs, and processes to support, compensate, and protect their work were lacking.

DEI professionals were concerned about non-inclusive experiences such as pigeonholing, stereotyping, and microaggression that employees with marginalized social identities have. However, many agencies did not have programs, policies and practices targeting non-inclusive behaviors from colleagues and even clients.

Betty's experience shared on p. 41 demonstrated the layered experience of exclusion and marginalization from her hierarchical relationship with a White male supervisor and clients. Although "the constant monitoring of...policies, ensuring that there are avenues to report things that aren't appropriate and that there are consequences for non-inclusive behaviors" (Bruce) is important to address and correct non-inclusive behaviors, it is not always easy given the complex power dynamics of PR industry. Lisa said that even though there is an ethics hotline at her agency, she did not think anyone ever uses it.

"It's something we're worried about...microaggressions...or...inappropriate comments [that] could come from a client, and we need [practitioners with marginalized social identities] to feel safe...We hope we have chosen a client [inaudible] that cares as much about inclusion as we do. But if that is something that happens...that could be on gender issues as well it could be on stylistic issues. During COVID, it could be political comments or refusal to wear masks...How do you, in a client service business, create a culture where clients don't take advantage of or abuse your staff is really core to us...if a client isn't living up to our core values, we will not continue to work with that client." (Diana)

Diana said her agency would rather lose a client than a team member because her agency is small and every team member is critical to the agency. When I asked Diana whether they are more careful or sensitive around assigning responsibilities to the one practitioner of color at her agency given that “agencies were historically uneasy about matching people of color with White clients (Layton, 1980)” (Muturi & Zhu, 2019, p. 82), she responded that their agency is highly aware of individual practitioners’ strengths and interests. With the information, managers make thoughtful account or project assignments, and employees also have rights or abilities to refuse assignments. However, this did not appear as feasible for other agencies, especially larger agencies due to more complex hierarchical structures.

Whereas many DEI professionals at PR agencies were concerned with lack of inclusive environment for practitioners with marginalized social identities from a perspective of DEI as a moral imperative, it appeared that PR agencies have not always followed through on the moral aspect given the lack of policies against discriminatory practice. The accounts of DEI professionals indicated a strong need to provide structural safety to protect practitioners with marginalized social identities. Grace pointed out that the campaign or feel-good story mindset that is pervasive in public relations does not help achieving DEI; she highlights the significance of thoughtful, holistic, comprehensive approaches in developing and evaluating DEI efforts. This provides an important insight for public relations practice and commitment to DEI, suggesting that DEI work is a long-term commitment and the accomplishments from the DEI efforts will not be immediately apparent. DEI should not end because a campaign is over. DEI work should not end because 2020 is gone.

Evaluation

Agencies reported that they establish goals and objectives to enhance DEI and measure the performances. Betty said, “What’s not measured doesn’t happen.” However, many of them struggled with evaluating their efforts and few shared their evaluation with their publics. For instance, agencies had a hard time measuring DEI efforts because of the difficulties and sensitivities of quantifying identities. Melba asked, “How do you measure that [sexual orientation]? Do people feel comfortable self-reporting?” Similar to one of many reasons why agencies focus their DEI efforts on BIPOC communities, which was relative visibility and measurability, agencies were not sure about how to keep track of certain social identities that are not so visible such as sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic status. Interestingly, the perception that racial and ethnic identities are more observable and easier to measure has been also contributing to stereotyping and pigeonholing of BIPOC practitioners.

Additionally, it is questionable how helpful the ways PR agencies measure racial and ethnic identities has been to increase racial and ethnic diversity and improve working conditions for BIPOC employees. Many agencies reported that they have only started or plan to look at data through demographic lens. For example, for bigger agencies, engagement surveys among employees were a common way to measure or evaluate the level of inclusion or belonging. Melba said, “We do...employee engagement surveys a few times a year...I think those scores come in quite high...But, actually, they come in quite high, because we're still majority White. So, I'm just even questioning that.” Although DEI professionals at PR agencies reported that they have high employee engagement scores, there needs to be a closer examination of the scores. For another example, Diana shared, “I think inclusion may be the area where we've made the best strides because it is something our team cares so much about and easier to do.” However, given

that her agency has only one practitioner of color out of 20 practitioners, it may be easier for her agency to achieve a high level of inclusion in comparison to a bigger or diverse employee body.

As going forward, DEI professionals agreed that they have a long way to go and shared what they plan to do to enhance DEI. Lisa and Susan emphasized the significance of measuring outcomes rather than outputs of DEI efforts. If output refers to the activities done by PR practitioners, outcomes focuses on effect of PR activities including awareness, comprehension, attitudes, and behaviors (Smith, 2021).

“Diversity can be a little bit easier but even that, based on where you're at in the world, is not comparing apples to apples. Diversity is about the people you have in the workplace and equity and inclusion are about people's perceptions and feelings...their opportunities and experiences at work. I think we will have to continue to figure out how we are making progress, how we are measuring the impact that these programs are having.” (Lisa)

Additionally, Regina said that she will focus on transparent data collection on a regular basis to meet both short- and long-term goals. Susan also shared the importance of qualitative data to measure inclusion and sense of belonging.

The interviews implied that every agency is at different point of their DEI journey. However, it was apparent that not many agencies clearly outlined how each element of DEI is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated. Moreover, because DEI goals, objectives and evaluations are often only shared among internal stakeholders, it was challenging for external stakeholders to have a clear look at them. Even if they share the status of DEI efforts, it was at clients' request.

Given that there is no entity holding organizations accountable for their DEI-related pledges, corporate and government policies should guide internal and external transformations for profit-driven businesses to address these issues (Jan et al., 2021). Although NASDAQ and

some states adopted new rules and legislation that require their publicly traded companies to have women, BIPOC, and/or LGBTQIA+ board members (Briganti & Fata, 2020), the requirements are far from ideal and only applicable to NASDAQ-listed companies and publicly traded companies located in certain states such as California and Colorado (Barnard-Bahn, 2020). For example, NASDAQ will require NASDAQ-listed companies to have at least two diverse directors in their boards, one female and one BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ individual. Even then, there is more flexibility allowed for small-size boards. Thus, the industry as whole needs more conversations to explore ways to hold each other more accountable.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION FOR THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW RESULTS

The final chapter of the in-depth interview study lays out major findings about the environmental factors and relationships that construct the contemporary DEI discourse in public relations. The research questions asked how DEI is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated. Highlighting the three levels of analysis, I revisit these questions in this chapter. Concluding the chapter, I identify strengths and limitations of the study and provide directions for future research.

Findings

The analysis of interviews with 12 DEI professionals at PR agencies illustrated how they make sense of DEI through conceptualization, operationalization, and evaluation of DEI efforts. The analysis revealed that the DEI discourse at PR agencies is shaped by environmental factors and changes as well as PR agencies' external and internal strategic relationships. The DEI discourse at PR agencies was constructed by various power dynamics across extra-discursive, inter-discursive, and intra-discursive levels and highlighted the importance of recruiting and retaining BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners to challenge the status quo in the industry. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated the power imbalance between PR agencies and their clients, limited operationalization of diversity, and needs to focus on DEI as a moral imperative.

Although the PR profession plays a role as “advisors to every sector” (Roberts, 2020), the profession has its own problems associated with a lack of DEI. PR agencies found that recruiting and retaining practitioners with historically marginalized identities across the agency are critical

to respond to this issue. Practitioners with marginalized backgrounds, particularly BIPOC practitioners, are viewed as valuable resources to the agencies' relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, agencies see practitioners with marginalized social identities as significant contributors to increasing diverse representation within the agencies' workforce. In their efforts to cater to interests of practitioners and communities of historically marginalized social identities, creating paid positions that oversee DEI efforts at PR agencies (i.e., Chief DEI Officer, Head of DEI, etc.) is seen as an important step toward change.

In the analysis, extra-discursive practice identified critical social events and phenomena such as demographic changes in the US population, COVID-19, and demands for social justice. These extra-discursive factors made the publics in the United States confront the country's history of race, racism, and White supremacy. Due to such external, situational factors, organizations' interest in DEI increased. The growth of demands for DEI as part of public relations services highlighted the lack of diversity in the public relations industry as well as the importance of agencies' external DEI efforts at the interdiscursive level. At the intra-discursive level, agencies' efforts to enhance DEI focused on recruiting and retaining public relations practitioners with marginalized social identities, particularly BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners. In the interactions of the three levels of the discourse, however, the public relations agencies' vulnerable position in the client-firm relationship and public relations agencies' *raison d'être* as client service businesses affected how DEI is viewed and whose interests were prioritized. Because public relations clients are often those who are "already privileged" (Edwards, 2006, p. 229) such as "organizations, the elite, or dominant coalition and capital" (Motion & Weaver, 2005, p. 51), the analysis of the DEI discourse at public relations agencies displayed tensions between the privileged and the marginalized. Although extra-discursive

factors highlighted DEI as both business and moral imperatives for PR agencies, the power imbalance in the agency-clients relationship and prevalent emphasis on DEI as business imperative created a conflict of interest between the agency catering to their clients and experience of their employees with marginalized social identities. The conflict was derived from tensions between the notion that DEI is a path to achieve social justice DEI and the reality that DEI and marginalized social identities are being commodified and commercialized to cater to business demands.

COVID-19 and demands for social justice spotlighted the systems that perpetuate social injustice and the increasingly diverse U.S. population signaled disruptions to the racial hierarchies. These extra-discursive factors contributed to reexamining the values of lived experiences among PR practitioners with marginalized social identities. These external environmental factors and changes, in addition to the lack of diversity in the PR workforce, led PR agencies to view cultural competencies and abilities to connect with communities with marginalized social identities as merits and pivotal resources. This suggests that what is considered as a merit in the workplace in the United States, including PR agencies, should be reexamined. In the PR industry and education, diversity is often seen as an exception or addition rather than a core skillset. The norms imbued by meritocracy in US workplaces including the PR industry, and the contemporary understanding of diversity contradict each other. As the US population has become more diverse and more clients are interested in DEI, PR agencies increasingly find employees with marginalized social identities to be valuable, and their identities are being advertised to clients.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed limited operationalization of the term “diverse.” The term “diverse” was often used to refer to individuals with historically marginalized social

identities such as BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Thus, dominant social group members were not perceived to be part of diversity. Given the overrepresentation and dominance of White employees at white-collar workplaces in the United States, referring to BIPOC individuals as diverse may present a false understanding that White is not diverse. This may be one of the reasons why straight cisgender White men often do not consider themselves as diverse (Plaut et al., 2011) even though they make up diversity as much as their counterparts do (Kraus, 2021). Additionally, although racial, ethnic, and gender identities and sexual orientation strongly influences varying life outcomes in the United States, diversity dimensions include a number of factors such as level of education and socioeconomic status that shape individuals' lived experiences. This separation of dominant social groups from the diversity discourse emphasizes the idea of cisgender heterosexual White men as default or norm and "diverse people" as those who deviates from or less than the norm (Kraus, 2021). Because of this, for many dominant social group members, diversity often seems to matter only when it can be translated into business profits. Because clients' motives for diversity are often firmly grounded in their financial interests, multicultural outreach or marketing tends to segment and target audiences and consumers in a way that reinforces stereotypes and existing socioeconomic strata based on social identities similar to Bruce's example of multicultural marketing on p. 51. Although each campaign targets different groups for different purposes, the cumulative effects of negative representations and omission of certain groups perpetuate hierarchies of desirability and worthiness in the broader society.

The interviews also highlighted that agency clients' focus on DEI as a business imperative can dehumanize PR agencies' employees with marginalized identities. Although it is admirable that clients are holding PR agencies accountable by pushing for agencies' diversity,

clients should note that their push may lead to another form of discrimination against employees with marginalized social identities as shown from incidents where identities of such employees are essentialized or arbitrarily associated with certain communities. To avoid this, agencies can also use research to draw insights on those communities rather than fully relying on employees with marginalized social identities for their personal experience.

Moreover, agencies did not appear prepared to protect employees with marginalized social identities from these experiences; this calls for the needs to streamline the policies or programs to protect employees in the agency-client relationship. Combined with the struggles among PR practitioners with marginalized social identities due to varying hierarchies associated with their identities, the interviews revealed the vulnerability that agency practitioners experience in their relationships with clients. To build a more productive relationship between agencies and clients, there should be industry-wide or cross-industry efforts to focus on enhancing inclusion and equity and hold each other more accountable to achieve all aspects of DEI.

The public relations field is currently dominated by organizational interests that can pay for public relations services, and the profession's independent efforts to address ethics and morality have failed (Edwards, 2006). Organizations in general had never seemed as interested in DEI as they appeared in 2020-2021. Part of this is due to the social movements such as Black Lives Matter Movements protesting disproportionate police brutality on Blacks/African Americans following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) hate movements. This suggests that organizations take such social trends into account, suggesting that social movements can be an effective way to pressure

powerful organizations. Given organizations' growing interests in DEI as society changes, public relations' role in providing organizations moral and ethical consultations on DEI is critical.

Finally, the analysis demonstrated the difficulties of measuring and evaluating DEI efforts. Because of legal ramifications of collecting data on employees' information including different types of social identities, agencies had a tough time planning and evaluating. The analysis also indicated that despite DEI professionals' broad and intersectional understanding of diversity, DEI efforts often focus exclusively on BIPOC communities due to the relative convenience of collecting and measuring data on racial and ethnic diversity. The focus on racial and ethnic identities may also be due to the notorious lack of DEI toward those communities in the industry. However, it is important to note that some identity dimensions can be hard or meaningless to quantify. In this case, they can be measured by using qualitative approaches such as focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Also, because diversity can mean different things to different people depending on different contexts, it is crucial to be as specific as possible (Diversity Action Alliance, 2021). For example, reaching 30% of managerial positions with hiring responsibility to be represented by women of color is more specific than reaching 30% of employee representation to be diverse. This specificity will also help dissecting data to assess varying DEI variables such as pay equity, full-time or part-time status, tenure, promotion, and benefits across various demographics. Furthermore, it is important to consider peripheral approaches to measure DEI efforts like Diana's agency measuring their spending on business partners and suppliers.

Practical Implications

This study revealed various power dynamics by analyzing the contemporary DEI discourse in public relations agencies. One of the implications of the study is that clients can

drive meaningful changes by demanding diverse representation on their account teams because public relations agencies tend to prioritize clients' interests as client service businesses.

However, this also suggests that DEI efforts may dwindle if clients are no longer interested in pushing forward such efforts. To ensure that DEI remains top of mind for public relations agencies, multi-faceted systemic reviews and actions are critical.

First, organizations, clients for public relations agencies, should recognize the power imbalance in their relationship with those agencies and unintended consequences of pigeonholing and stereotyping practitioners with marginalized social identities. The findings of the study suggest that organizations may not be aware of the behind-the-scenes practices at public relations agencies to cater to their clients' DEI needs. Thus, agencies should provide a clear outline of their policies to protect their employees' identities so that employees do not feel pigeonholed and clients are aware of the need to respect such policies. This requires an industry-wide awareness on the ecology of the industry and respectful practice in the agency-client relationships, particularly on DEI issues.

Admittedly, some public relations agencies prioritize protection of their employees over their clients' interests, e.g., not agreeing to provide information regarding practitioners' identities or firing clients. Public relations agencies needing to prioritize interests of their employees or clients shows that there are occasions that interests of agency practitioners do not align with that of clients, and public relations agencies will continue to navigate what is right for their businesses. The findings demonstrated that practitioners with marginalized social identities are the most vulnerable when such conflict of interests occur because of marginalization of their social identities in addition to the vulnerability of PR agencies in the agency-client relationships.

Thus, there is a strong need for PR agencies to proclaim the importance of DEI efforts at agencies and develop systemic protection for practitioners with marginalized social identities.

Another implication of the study is that public relations agencies have various stakeholders besides their clients and manage relationships with them like any other organization. The discourse analysis indicated that environmental factors and external and internal stakeholder relationships are important factors that shape the DEI discourse at the agency level. Therefore, such stakeholders (e.g., publics, prospective job applicants, community members, business partners, board of directors, etc.) should be aware of importance of their roles in shaping the DEI discourse.

Lastly, this study presents various efforts that PR agencies are making to recruit and retain practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as queer identities. Interviewees in the study indicated that there is insufficient information about specific programs and practices for DEI in public relations. The findings of the study benefit public relations agencies and other organizations by providing practical examples, recommendations, and strategic considerations. Additionally, public relations educators and trade organizations can identify collaborating opportunities with PR agencies for industry-wide DEI efforts.

Strengths and limitations

This study captured the evolving understanding of DEI in public relations agencies in the United States in early 2020. In doing so, I shared concepts and practical examples of DEI in PR agencies through in-depth interviews with 12 PR professionals leading their agencies' DEI efforts. Public relations students and practitioners with historically marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities and sexual orientation can benefit from this study as they navigate the industry

to find a diverse workplace with an inclusive environment and equitable policies so they feel safe, respected, and belonged in pursuing this career.

However, despite the importance of DEI efforts at public relations agencies and detailed examples of policies, programs, and practices that are designed to enhance DEI, it is not clear how effective these efforts are to recruit and retain practitioners with historically marginalized social identities. The interviews suggested that recruitment and retention are strongly connected. For example, DEI efforts to create an inclusive workplace and equitable policies help retain practitioners with marginalized social identities. In turn, greater representation of such practitioners at various levels within PR agencies increased likelihoods of recruitment of practitioners with marginalized social identities, breaking the status quo and enhancing diversity within the communities of historically marginalized social identities. To address this, the following study in the dissertation attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of DEI efforts that are introduced in the interviews.

Although this study provided several implications for PR agencies' practices and research, there needs to be caution in expanding or generalizing the results to different industries or countries. As the interviews indicated, it is crucial to understand that there are specific contexts surrounding the concepts related to DEI in the United States and in public relations. Thus, it is principal to note that environmental factors can change and evolve.

Finally, there needs to be more approaches to understand DEI as moral and ethical imperatives like Logan's (2019) legal analysis on corporate responsibility to race and Russell and Lamme's (2013) historical analysis on public relations and business responses to the civil rights movement. Today, many organizations view DEI initiatives as financial drives. By separating diversity and profit (Roberts & Grayson, 2021), organizations can commit to DEI

initiatives that respect their employees and build meaningful accountability even when clients or cultural elites may lose interest in advocating for DEI. Public relations have had long-lasting issues related to a lack of DEI efforts. How the field and profession advances DEI efforts will be an important assignment for all PR practitioners, educators and researchers for a while.

Future Directions

Given the roles that practitioners with marginalized social identities play in their PR agencies, future studies can explore how PR agencies that specialize in multicultural clients or specific communities. For instance, there are PR agencies that primarily engages with specific audiences such as LGBTQIA+, AAPI, and/or Hispanic or Latina/o/x. It would be informative to understand how they navigate the PR industry and if their experience is comparable to the experiences shared among practitioners with marginalized social identities in PR agencies.

Future studies can also look into how work is assigned to BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners in PR agencies given that their social identities play paramount roles in shaping their professional experiences by conducting field observation studies. When PR agencies assign their practitioners to certain clients or projects, the decision-making process of assigning or not assigning BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners to certain clients or projects based on their social identities and backgrounds will unveil how power is exercised in the process.

Finally, future research can delve into how senior-level DEI professionals at PR agencies exercise, negotiate, and resist power in their positions. Because their positions are relatively new in the industry, their work has not been studied much. And because they often come from historically marginalized backgrounds, their positionality—social-historical-political location—is situated in intricate power relationships in the PR industry.

CHAPTER 6

DEI CUES

This chapter provides an introduction of a follow-up study based on the findings from the discourse analysis of the in-depth interviews in the previous chapters. To augment the analysis, an online experiment was used to examine the effectiveness of DEI cues, identified by the findings from the in-depth interviews, on prospective employee decision-making and attitudes. The first study of this dissertation looked at the discourse surrounding DEI issues in U.S. public relations agencies by exploring conceptualization, operationalization, and evaluation of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the experiences and perspectives of 12 DEI professionals. The literature review and the interview analysis revealed that the discourse of DEI at public relations agencies center around recruitment and retention of practitioners with marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identities and sexual orientations. Furthermore, the operationalization, particularly, helped identify the agencies' efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Based on these efforts, I developed DEI cues such as verbal and nonverbal signals that convey a safe, welcoming, and friendly work environment especially for job seekers with marginalized gender and racial/ethnic identities and sexual orientations. In the present study, I investigated how the level of DEI cues (low or high), embedded in a fictitious public relations agency's webpages, affected public relations students' (with marginalized identities or not) perceptions, emotions, behaviors and job pursuit intention toward the agency based on its level of DEI cues.

In this chapter, I introduce how DEI cues are conceived and understood and discuss three theories that guide this study. Concluding this chapter, I discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the present study.

DEI Cues for PR Agencies to Recruit Practitioners with Marginalized Identities

Despite the importance of DEI in public relations practice and a continuing lack of diversity in the field, there has been slow progress in recruiting and retaining practitioners with marginalized identities. The DEI cues aim to demonstrate the efforts that are made by PR agencies to attract PR practitioners with marginalized gender and racial/ethnic identities, and sexual orientations. This online experiment study is to investigate whether those cues help agencies in attracting employees of marginalized identities by having them evaluate a PR agency as a workplace. PR practitioners with marginalized gender and racial/ethnic identities, and sexual orientations are at a great disadvantage in entering the workforce and advancing to leadership (Edwards, 2010) due to many factors including lack of awareness of the field (Brown et al., 2011; Qiu & Muturi, 2016) and lack of mentorship (Brown et al., 2011; Len-Rios, 1998; Qiu & Muturi, 2016). This disproportionate lack of representation in the workforce and leadership also contributes to their experiencing of stereotypes, pigeonholing, discrimination, and isolation (Boulton, 2016; Len-Ríos, 1998; Pompper, 2007; Tindall & Waters, 2012).

There are many other important identity-related factors and outcomes that are overlooked in PR industry and scholarship such as age, ability, religion, nationality, and geography (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). However, this dissertation focuses on DEI efforts specifically for PR practitioners with marginalized gender and racial/ethnic identities, and sexual orientations because they have been some of the most prominent identity markers that require immediate attention and changes in the field. The lack of representation of these specific identities are

apparent in the workforce data and this has been a long-lasting problem despite the fact that many scholars (Len-Ríos, 1998; Pompper, 2007; Tindall & Waters, 2012; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) have highlighted this problem in their studies. Unlike many previous studies that implement binary fragmentation of race (Black or White) or gender (women or men), the present study will be more inclusive of a variety of racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as sexual orientations to reflect a complexity of identities.

Hiring practitioners with historically marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as sexual orientations is critical to increase representation of them. Without respecting diverse identities, creating safe work environment, and having equitable policies for them at work, agencies will continue to struggle with recruitment and retention of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners. One of the critical findings from the in-depth interviews was that retention of practitioners with historically marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities strongly impact recruitment of them. Thus, PR agencies need to focus on all aspects of DEI—diversity, equity, and inclusion—to ensure that practitioners with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identities feel safe, valued, and that they belong.

Previously, scholars have explored the effects of identity cues on recruitment materials such as brochures, advertisements or websites (Avery, 2003; Perkins et al., 2000; Wille & Derous, 2017). Many studies on the effects on identity cues were conducted as experiments in psychology (Braddy et al., 2009), marketing, and human resource management. Braddy and colleagues (2009) explored effects of website content that features diverse viewers' perceptions of organizational culture, but diversity was only one of nine cultural dimensions of interest and it was about a fictitious pharmaceutical organization. Similarly, Chaney and Sanchez (2018) studied whether identity safety cues can transfer across two gender identities and three

racess/ethnicities by presenting a financial company as an example. These studies found that diversity or identity cues not only increase perceptions of diversity (Braddy et al., 2009) but also perceptions of safety and fairness among individuals with stigmatized identities (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018). However, those studies often adopted binary understanding of identity (e.g. Black or White; Women vs. Men; High-status groups (Caucasians) vs. Minorities (Other races and ethnicities) (Walker et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2011). Furthermore, a great deal of recruitment literature often lacked the use of theoretical frameworks (Perkins et al., 2000) or operationalization of DEI. Until Montenegro's study (2020), which looked at PR agencies' communication of diversity and inclusion practice through their websites, there had not been a comprehensive effort to explore such practice in the PR agency settings. While some of the PR literature stressed the important aspects of DEI by using descriptive or critical perspectives, no research addressed the role of DEI cues pertinent to recruiting practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities and sexual orientations in PR agencies.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study extends social identity theory (SIT), intergroup emotions theory (IET), and signaling theory (ST) to the context of diversifying the workforce in PR. Social identity theory is used as a framework to understand the role of marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities and sexual orientations in group membership. Developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identity theory believes that individuals understand themselves based on their social identities that they belong and try to achieve or maintain positive social identity. This approach is useful to understand how individuals associate with certain groups based on their perceptions of belonging and how individuals' lived experiences can be different based on their social identities. For instance, "racial and ethnic minorities experience American workplace differently than Whites,

both economically and psychologically” (Emerson & Murphy, 2014, p.508) because of the overrepresentation and dominance of White employees at white-collar workplaces in the United States. Similarly, due to the prevalence of cisheteronormativity in American workplaces (Cumberbatch, 2021), many LGBTQIA+ professionals experience challenges associated with their identities (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). Therefore, individuals with marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as sexual orientations are more likely to perceive themselves as members of groups with marginalized identities in many social contexts including workplaces. In this case, members of social groups with marginalized identities are likely to perceive BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities as their ingroup and a group of White, heterosexual, cisgender males as an outgroup.

Intergroup emotions theory is also used in this study regarding emotions as a critical part of evaluation of the PR agency as a workplace based on group membership. This theory proposes that identification with certain social groups are associated with the way individuals feel group-based emotions toward their ingroups or outgroups (Smith & Mackie, 2015). This theoretical framework can be applied to predicting how jobseekers emotionally appraise workplaces based on their group membership. This is helpful to understand why an individual with marginalized identities feels comfortable and safe at a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace in comparison to how an individual who does not identify as a member of social groups with marginalized identities might feel. In that case, a person without marginalized identities may feel threatened by the same diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace that might attract someone with a marginalized social identity.

Finally, signaling theory helps investigate the effectiveness of PR agency websites’ DEI cues on the recruitment of young practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic and gender

identities and sexual orientations. In a recruitment setting, this theory posits that individuals make assumptions about organizational values, cultures, or ideologies based on the cues that they gather from the organization's website given that the website acts as representative of the organization until further interaction with the organization (Braddy et al., 2009; Spence, 1973, 1974). For instance, "given that most minorities are underrepresented in organizations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020), cues suggesting an organization wishes to hire employees similar to their current workforce signal that people of color may not be accepted or valued there" (Emerson & Murphy, 2014, p. 513). Like many organizations, marginalized identities are underrepresented in PR industry and agencies. Thus, this theory is useful to predict that cues suggesting a PR agency wishes to hire employees similar to their workforce will hardly attract individuals with marginalized identities.

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study provides several practical implications for the industry. For instance, jobseekers, including students and practitioners, can seek DEI cues at workplaces and demand changes that will help them protect their identities and promote inclusive and equitable workplaces. For agencies and other strategic communication organizations and businesses, the present study can provide example DEI practices and how to communicate the DEI efforts with stakeholders. The in-depth interview study indicated that DEI professionals at PR agencies wanted to learn more DEI efforts in the industry and how to communicate their DEI efforts through their communication platforms including websites and social media. I hope this research becomes a foundational piece to discuss further DEI efforts in other contexts in PR and other related fields.

CHAPTER 7

SIGNALING SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INTERGROUP EMOTIONS

This chapter addresses three theoretical underpinnings that guided the experiment and provides explanations as to how these theories were used to understand social identities and intergroup emotions. In this chapter, I first provide a review of literature on how signaling theory was used in recruitment settings and organizational communication. Next, I address how certain social identities—racial/ethnic and gender identities and sexual orientations—play critical roles for individuals to understand themselves according to social identity theory. Finally, I present how such social identities contributed to individuals' group-based emotions and evaluations of potential workplaces. This chapter features hypotheses that are developed from the assumptions of the theories, independently and synchronously.

Signaling Theory

Researchers have examined various aspects of organizations' websites such as website quality including aesthetics and user-friendliness (Djamasbi et al., 2011; Eveleth et al., 2018; Matuszak et al., 2013; Wells et al., 2011), website user behavior (Sutcliffe & Namoun, 2012), content (Braddy et al., 2009; Eveleth et al., 2018; Len-Ríos, 2002; Walker et al., 2011, 2012), purpose of the website usage (Pirolli & Card, 1999; Wedel et al., 2008), and more. The ample body of research on this indicates that there are many factors that influence website viewers' perceptions, emotions, and behavioral intentions towards engaging in websites.

Organizational websites are often discussed as important online communication tools that offer information to and build relationships with strategic stakeholders (Sallot et al., 2004;

Sommerfeldt et al., 2012; Wirtz & Ngondo, 2013). Moreover, organizations communicate their identities and culture to visitors through the content on their websites (García García et al., 2017; Uysal, 2013). Signaling theory posits that given that websites represent organizations, individuals make assumptions about an organizations' values or cultures based on the cues that they gather from the organizations' websites (Smith & Mackie, 2015). Many studies have explored the applicability of signaling theory in scenarios of employee recruitment in the context of recruiting talents from marginalized backgrounds. For example, studies have found that organizations' websites can influence jobseekers' attraction to the organizations (Braddy et al., 2009; Eveleth et al., 2018), and websites are one of the primary avenues jobseekers form impressions of a company, especially when they do not have prior knowledge of the company (Matuszak et al., 2013).

In public relations, scholars have conducted content analyses of public relations agency websites to examine their incorporation of principles of dialogic communication (Wirtz & Ngondo, 2013), communication of diversity and inclusion practice (Montenegro, 2020), and used an experiment to study the role of corporate social responsibility in attracting prospective public relations practitioners (Kim & Park, 2011). However, there is virtually no study investigating how public relations agencies use their websites to attract prospective public relations practitioners. As the public relations field struggles with recruitment and retention of public relations practitioners with marginalized racial/ethnic and gender identities, and sexual orientations as discussed in the literature review of the first study of this dissertation, evaluating the role of cues that signal an agency's DEI efforts in attracting such practitioners can be a significant contribution to the public relations scholarship.

In research on human resources, organization management, and social psychology, and higher education, various studies (Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018; Walker et al., 2009, 2011, 2012) have addressed the effectiveness of diversity or identity safety cues in attracting jobseekers or students with marginalized social identities. Due to the historic underrepresentation and marginalization of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in organizational environments in the United States, signaling theory has been actively applied to such groups to study the role of cues that signal inclusion or exclusion depending on individuals' social belongingness. To evaluate social belongingness or fit, individuals use various cues such as numerical representation to determine their interest in an organization (Plaut et al., 2011). The examples of diversity or identity safety cues on organizations' websites include awards or recognition of diversity efforts from third-parties (Braddy et al., 2009; Chaney et al., 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011; Walker et al., 2012), illustration of an organizations' policies and their references to inclusion (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008; Braddy et al., 2009), testimonials from employees of color (Walker et al., 2009), statements promoting diversity instead of colorblindness (Ihme & Stürmer, 2018), offerings of diversity training (Chaney et al., 2016) and the presence of gender-inclusive bathrooms (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018).

In combination with understanding of social identities, signaling theory can explain how individuals perceive identity safety or identity threatening signals based on their social group identification. For instance, based on a cue toward a social group from a company, people can make ideological inferences about the organization and different groups of people may feel safe or threatened based on how an organization represents their social group identification. For example, studies found that White individuals are less likely to perceive an organization's multicultural efforts as inclusive in comparison to racial minorities (Plaut et al., 2011).

A series of studies investigating the effectiveness in attracting individuals with marginalized social identities with these cues on organizations' websites demonstrated the importance of priming effects as they increase the accessibility of certain traits or attributes of the organizations through priming cues (Walker et al., 2011). For instance, if a website contained cues relevant to an organization's DEI efforts, website visitors viewed such specific attributes of the organizations as accessible to them. However, studies (Chaney et al., 2016; Dover et al., 2016) have also demonstrated that these diversity or identity safety cues can elicit different responses between dominant social groups and marginalized social groups. The study conducted by Dover and colleagues (2016) suggested that members of dominant social groups are more likely to perceive pro-diversity messages from organizations as threatening in the recruitment context. Moreover, media researchers (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008) have also found that racial cues influenced Black users' responses to media but not White users' given that Black users spent more time browsing and recalling more information from a Black-targeted news site than from a White-targeted news site. Furthermore, Chaney and colleagues (2016) found evidence that individuals with stigmatized identities experience identity safety from those cues even though the identity cues are not congruent with their identities.

The studies imply that these identity cues are perceived and appreciated in different ways depending on individuals' social identities, thus affecting individuals' evaluations of the organization. Even though many factors can influence a job seeker's intention to apply for jobs at a workplace, in the applying, screening, and interview processes, an organization's website plays an essential role in shaping the first impression of the organization. Websites serve various roles in employee recruitment. They help organizations provide information that might reduce the number of job applicants who are misfits for positions and jobseekers can save their efforts for

organizations that are a better fit (Eveleth et al., 2018). To further examine the role job seekers' social identities play in the evaluation of a workplace through viewing diversity or identity safety cues, I will discuss two social psychological theories, social identity theory and intergroup emotions theory, that will help understand salience of those cues.

Social Identity Theory at Public Relations Workplace

Social identities in public relations and within the workplace influence practitioners' social interactions and practice with a variety of stakeholders including publics, clients and colleagues (Tindall & Waters, 2012). "Social identity consists of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16). Based on social identities, groups are often formed. Group refers to

"a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p.15).

From this perspective, an ingroup refers to the group membership to which an individual identifies and an outgroup refers to a group with which an individual does not identify (Giles & Giles, 2013). As an example, a person who identifies as cisgender (a term that used to describe people who are straight or not transgender) will view cisgender people as ingroup and transgender people as outgroup (Read-Bullock, 2018).

Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) and later influenced many sociopsychological theories such as intergroup emotions theory, explaining intergroup behaviors and conflicts based on individuals' identifications with social groups. This social psychological approach believes that individuals understand themselves based on their social group membership as an aspect of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When those social

groups and memberships are compared, groups are viewed positively or negatively (Read-Bullock, 2018). This evaluation of groups influences individuals' decisions as to which group to affiliate with (individual mobility) or other changes, such as social creativity or social competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In terms of group membership, an individual may decide whether they are associated or dissociated with a group based on their evaluation of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Regarding social creativity, the theory posits that individuals are motivated to seek various strategies to increase the positive valence of the group to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Lastly, social competition implies that individuals compete with outgroups as a way to enhance ingroup favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), "a tendency to favor members of one's own group over those in other groups" (Everett et al., 2015, p. 1).

However, ingroup favoritism can "increase the likelihood of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination of the outgroup" (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 20). Stereotypes represent the characteristics of a group that are seen as typical or representative of social groups, or of individual members of those groups, and particularly those characteristics that differentiate groups from one another (Read-Bullock, 2018; Stangor, 2009). Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a group or toward members of the group (Stangor, 2009) that "results in creation or maintenance of hierarchical status rankings of groups" (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 20). Although there are contradicting research findings as to whether stereotypes may be the cause or the effect of prejudice, some scholars (Read-Bullock, 2018) argue that stereotypes can contribute to prejudice. Discrimination is understood as "the behavioral manifestation of prejudice" (Dovidio et al., 2010; Read-Bullock, 2018, p.21), and refers to partial or biased treatment of people based on group membership" (Aboud & Amato, 2003; Levy & Hughes, 2009, p.25).

At workplaces, ingroup favoritism may result in discriminatory hiring practices. Ingroup favoritism can explain why employees often make informal referrals and recommendations for the same-gender or the same-race/ethnicity candidates. Some studies (Boulton, 2013; K. T. U. Emerson & Murphy, 2014) argue that informal referrals and recommendations from employees in the hiring process perpetuate disproportionate gender and racial/ethnic representations. A study of a U.S. company indicated that 63.5% of the referrals or recommendations were for the same-gender candidates and 71.5% for the same-race/ethnicity candidates (Brown et al., 2012). Given that the American workforce has a disproportionate underrepresentation of people of color in white-collar workplaces and high-status positions, ingroup favoritism can contribute to intensifying the homogeneity of the workforce (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). For a field dominated by heterosexual cisgender White practitioners such as public relations, this sociopsychological behavior engenders higher chances for heterosexual cisgender White women to be recommended and referred. As a result, it reproduces the system characterized by overrepresentation of heterosexual cisgender White women and underrepresentation of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners.

Increased likelihood of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination as a result of ingroup favoritism can also threaten individuals with marginalized identities. For instance, due to the history of race relations in the United States, BIPOC individuals are often associated with inferiority (Emerson & Murphy, 2014) while Whiteness is considered as the embodiment of professionalism and leadership and the norm or prototype that naturalizes the racial and ethnic hierarchies (Edwards, 2010; Logan, 2011). Similar to the direct relation between the privileges of Whiteness and the disadvantages of Blackness (Logan, 2011), ingroup favoritism among White individuals place BIPOC individuals at disadvantage. In analyzing such power dynamics, SIT's

relative and relational understanding of social identities provides a critical perspective. Additionally, the theory allows room for situational, contextual understanding of ingroups and outgroups and acknowledges individuals' autonomy to associate and dissociate with social groups.

However, as the growing research in understanding complexity of identities has shown, identifying with ingroups and outgroups are not always clear-cut. SIT research has been criticized by some scholars for its lack of consideration with the interplay among multiple identities (Dahling et al., 2016; Greenwood, 2012; Miscenko & Day, 2016). Individuals can identify themselves with various dimensions of social identities. Identities can be multiple, ambiguous, and fluid. For instance, a transgender woman of color may identify herself with multiple identities: a woman, person of color and a transgender individual. Also, a multiracial person may identify oneself as a person of multiple races or neither of them. Additionally, a person may identify oneself as a genderfluid individual who has different gender experiences based on identification or circumstances. Given this complex dynamic of social identities, I aim to focus on specific identity dimensions: race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Those identities often not only profoundly influence individuals' lives but also prominently affect occupational segregation in the United States, like the homogeneity of the PR workforce.

Researchers argued that White Americans as the socially dominant group have had “a disproportionate share of resources with positive social value such as greater levels of wealth, political power, and access to higher paying jobs” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). On the other hand, BIPOC individuals hold “a disproportionate share of resources with negative social value such as substandard housing and underemployment” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Based on these assumptions and review of literature, I propose the following hypothesis.

H1: There will be an interaction effect between social identification (identification as historically marginalized or not) and DEI condition (low vs. high) on job pursuit intention. Specifically, job pursuit intention will be higher for an individual who identifies as a historically marginalized group member in the high DEI condition. However, job pursuit intention will be lower for an individual who does not identify as a historically marginalized group member in the high DEI condition. In turn, job pursuit intention will be higher for an individual does not identify a member of a historically marginalized group member in the low DEI condition.

However, it is critical to recognize that not all members of socially dominant groups are in support of group- or identity-based social hierarchies. The degree to which individuals seek to maintain inequality and the extant group-based hierarchy is referred to as having a Social Dominance Orientation (SDOs; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). Not every member of socially dominant groups demonstrate high SDO (Dahling et al., 2016). Scholars have argued that individuals with high SDO are against policies designed to discontinue social hierarchy and individuals with low SDOs seek to support those policies (Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). Many scholars (Chaney et al., 2019; Dahling et al., 2016; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) have identified SDO as an important measure to assess intergroup attitudes in social psychology. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis.

H2: A three-way interaction will occur among social identity (identifying as historically marginalized or not), the DEI condition (high vs. low), and the level of SDO (high vs. low). Specifically, job pursuit intention will be the highest for low-SDO individuals who identify as members of historically marginalized social groups in the high DEI condition. On the other hand, job pursuit intention will be the lowest for high-SDO individuals who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups in the low DEI condition.

Intergroup Emotions Theory

With its roots in social identity theory, intergroup emotions theory (IET) provides a framework to explore the role of emotions in intergroup contexts. The theory argues that “group-level emotions occur when people identify with social groups and appraise events in terms of their implications for those groups” (Smith & Mackie, 2015, p.349). The emotions elicited may be turned toward the perceiver’s ingroups or outgroups. For example, the emotions targeting the perceiver’s ingroup include patriotic national pride, a group leader’s emotion displayed in media reports affecting the group members or pride share among a successful sports team. On the other hand, the emotions targeting the perceiver’s outgroup include feelings of being under threat, anger, or anxiety toward other social groups (Smith & Mackie, 2015). Studies (Smith et al., 2007) have found evidence that group emotions are distinct from individual emotions. Group emotions are “related to individuals’ degree of group identification, they are socially shared among members of the same group, and they serve to regulate intragroup and intergroup attitudes” (Smith et al., 2007, p.441).

Similar to the social identity theory, the IET argues that social identity can govern social category membership and people can experience group-based emotions (Dahling et al., 2016; Mackie et al., 2008; E. Smith & Mackie, 2015). When one’s social identity is salient, group-based or intergroup emotions play a key role in driving behaviors toward ingroups or outgroups (E. Smith & Mackie, 2015). SIT predicts that members of a historically disadvantaged group (e.g., individuals who identify as gender non-conforming, transgender individuals, and individuals of color in the United States) who identify with the group will try to resist their disadvantages. Research indicates that those with stigmatized identities are more likely to experience negative and unengaged emotions such as anxiety, fear, alienation, and anger in

workplaces because of their low status in unequal social structure (Foy et al., 2014). For this reason, people appraise events based on the implications for the group rather than for their individual selves. Importantly, events that threaten a group are appraised negatively by those who identify with the group and elicit negative emotions from those individuals even though the event does not directly affect them individually (Mackie et al., 2008). For example, the Gallup data reported that Americans experienced an unprecedented increase in feeling angry and sad following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, but the increase was the starkest among Black Americans (Eichstaedt et al., 2021), indicating that seeing a member of an ingroup killed causes other members of the group to feel threatened and vulnerable (De Witte, 2021). For this reason, the continued disproportionate level of police brutality toward Black Americans puts the group at constant and higher mental health risks, reinforcing racial disparities (Eichstaedt et al., 2021).

Scholars (Durkheim, 1964; Foy et al., 2014; Gerth & Mills, 1946) argue that emotions can be one of the powerful forces to maintain or change stratified systems. Although some scholars consider emotion as a temporary psychological state, accrued experience of negative emotions increase mental health risks (Eichstaedt et al., 2021) and emotions play a crucial role in shaping engagement in group-referenced behaviors (Dahling et al., 2016; Frijda et al., 1989). Research has shown that traditionally high-status social groups (i.e. heterosexual White men) felt threatened, worried, and expected more discrimination, and made marginally poorer impression in job interviews with a pro-diversity company compared to a company without any mention of diversity (Dover et al., 2016). In this case, pro-diversity messages cued to high-status group members that they are not as welcome or valued and would not feel as if they belong, similar to the way marginalized social groups often feel in white-collar workplaces in the United States.

Thus, it can be expected that high-status individuals may feel more threatened, psychologically unsafe, uncomfortable, and excluded when they see a workplace with high DEI cues, leading to a lower level of job pursuit intention, as compared to individuals with marginalized social identities or a workplace with low DEI cues. In contrast, individuals with marginalized social identities may feel more threatened, psychologically unsafe, uncomfortable, and excluded when they see a workplace with low DEI cues, leading to lower level of job pursuit intention, compared to high-status individuals or a workplace with high DEI cues.

Based on the literature review, it is plausible to hypothesize the following:

H3: The interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention will be mediated by **perceived identity threat**.

H4: The interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention will be mediated by perceived **psychological safety**.

H5: The interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention will be mediated by perceived **social fit and comfort**.

H6: The interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention will be mediated by perceived **group inclusion**.

CHAPTER 8

EXPERIMENT

In this chapter, I explain the specifics of how the experiment was conducted. First, the design of the study is discussed in detail and I explain how the pretest informed some critical decisions for the main experimental study. And then, I delineate the study procedure and the manipulation of stimuli. In the stimuli section, the explication of the DEI cues is presented in great details. Description of participants' demographic information and enrollment status follows. Finally, measures that were used in the study are displayed at the end.

Design

This study used a 2 (social identification status: members of marginalized social groups vs. not) x 2 (DEI cues: high vs. low) mixed design. This study was conducted online using Qualtrics, a leading research software program.

The social identification status was determined by asking participants how strongly they agreed or disagreed that they identify as a member of a social group with a historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identity and sexual orientation in the United States. If a participant responded *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, or *somewhat disagree*, the participant was not considered a member of a social group with an historically marginalized racial, ethnic, or gender identity/sexual orientation. On the other hand, if a participant responded *strongly agree*, *agree*, or *somewhat agree*, the participant was considered a member of a social group with an historically marginalized racial, ethnic, or gender identity/sexual orientation. This question was developed to reflect the intersectional and nonbinary characteristics of social identities.

Half of the respondents in each social identity condition were exposed to a fictitious PR agency's webpages with high DEI cues, and the remaining half in each social identity condition were exposed to webpages with low DEI cues.

These two main independent variables—status as a member of a social group with an historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identity and/or sexual orientation and level of DEI cues—were tested using a pretest of members of the general public obtained through convenience sampling ($N = 30$). Of the 30 participants, 24 identified as White, two as Black or African American, two as Asian or Asian American, one as Latina/o/x, and one did not provide this data. In terms of gender identity, 22 identified as women, seven as men, and one as gender non-conforming. Moreover, one identified as a transgender. As for sexual orientation, 24 identified as straight, one as gay, three as bisexual, and two as queer.

In the pretest, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to understand how individuals identified themselves. One individual who declined to provide racial and ethnic identity was excluded in this analysis. On a 6-point scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 6=*strongly agree*), pretest participants indicated how strongly an individual agreed or disagreed that they identified a member of a social group with an historically marginalized racial/ethnic, or gender identity/sexual orientation. Cisgender heterosexual White men ($n = 4$) rated ($M = 1.25, SD = .50$) that they do not identify as members with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and identity and/or sexual orientation whereas BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals ($n = 11$) rated ($M = 5.36, SD = .50$) that they identify as members with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and identity and/or sexual orientation. Cisgender heterosexual White women ($n = 14$) rated that ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.87$) they tend to agree that they identify as members with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and identity and/or sexual orientation, but not as much as

BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. A one-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences of these groups in identifying as a member of social groups with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and identity and/or sexual orientation [$F(2,26) = 14.178, p < .001$]. Additionally, an independent t -test was conducted to evaluate the difference in the perceived level of DEI between webpages with low DEI cues and high DEI cues. The test revealed that there was a significant difference between low DEI cues ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.51$) and high DEI cues ($M = 6.71, SD = .04$); $t(28) = -5.192, p < .001$.

This pretest provided critical insights for the main study. The two stimuli, webpages of a fictitious public relations agency with low and high DEI cues, were perceived differently in terms of level of DEI. Thus, I decided to use the same stimuli in the main study. However, because of the higher standard deviation and above average rating of cisgender heterosexual White women on social identification status as a member of social groups with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identity and/or sexual orientation, the question was modified to “Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: I identify as a member of a social group that has been historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and/or gender nonconformity in the United States.” This modification was made because even though cisgender heterosexual White women experience discrimination as they progress to managerial or leadership roles, they are overrepresented among entry-level PR practitioners in the United States. As this identification status determined evenly randomized exposure to either low or high DEI stimulus, this modification was necessary to ensure that there is more data representation of BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Procedure

This online experiment was performed in accordance with requirements of the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB ID: PROJECT00005095). Participants were invited to the study with incomplete disclosure of the entire purpose of the research and an intervention for the purpose of the study. This incomplete disclosure was necessary to avoid bias in responses provided for the study and to ensure the external validity of the study. However, the informed consent included a clause indicating that some information about the study design is being withheld without providing any specific information about the incomplete disclosure.

At the beginning of the study, participants provided informed consent by clicking "Yes, I agree to participant." Next, participants responded to questions evaluating their level of social dominance orientation (SDO), which was followed by a picture of llama used as a distractor to interfere with participants' memory of the questions on SDO (American Psychological Association, n.d.). The distractor was placed to prevent the set of SDO questions from possibly influencing responses to the remaining questions in the study. Following the distractor, participants were asked to indicate whether they have secured employment after graduation and their willingness to work in a public relations agency. These two variables were measured as to control for confounding factors of the study. After that, participants indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed that they identified as a member of a historically marginalized social group on the basis of racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and/or gender nonconformity. Participants were then automatically assigned to either a condition with low or high DEI cues. While participants were viewing the stimuli, viewing time and number of clicks were tracked on Qualtrics. The stimuli were a series of webpages of a fictitious public relations agency that contained high or low DEI cues. Participants provided their responses to questions related to

emotions and perceptions, such as perceived identity threat, psychological safety, social fit and comfort, and perceived group inclusion, in addition to job pursuit intention indicating behavioral intention. At the end of the questionnaire, participants provided demographic information, enrollment status, and information to receive an in-class research participation credit or a \$5 gift card. Upon completion of the study, the participants were thanked for their participation and a debriefing statement was provided the full purpose of the study.

Stimuli

By using Wix.com, a website development service, I created two websites of a fictitious public relations agency containing six pages—Home, About, Services, Culture, Careers, and Contact. The two websites both featured the fictitious public relations agency with the identical name (Square public relations agency) and shared same stylistic elements (font size, font style, color, layout, etc.) across the webpages and same clients. Length and word count of the content were kept at the similar level as much as possible. All the visuals used on the websites, including headshots, were from Wix.com.

However, the two websites varied in the level of DEI cues. DEI cues are elements on the website that visually or textually convey an organization's internal and external efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). A review of the literature in public relations, human resources, management, and social psychology, combined with findings from in-depth interviews in this dissertation provided the following conceptual definitions. Diversity refers to presence and representation of differences in demographics and psychographics including race, ethnicity, gender identities, disabilities, education, socioeconomic status, religion, languages, veteran status, age, family status, geographic background, immigration status, and more. Equity starts from recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place. Achieving equity involves

identifying disparities and opportunity gaps and leveling the field through policies and programs that offer requisite resources and eliminate historical barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups due to a person's social identities and the discriminatory practices that have limited their access to opportunities. Inclusion refers to creating an environment where everyone feels psychologically safe and comfortable to be authentic, thrive, participate, and belong.

The conceptual understandings of DEI can be empirically defined and operationalized through specific policies, programs, and process. The in-depth interviews of this dissertation indicated that DEI in practice focuses on women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners. Given the scope of the DEI practice, this experiment incorporated DEI cues into a website of a fictitious public relations agency. DEI cues were empirically conveyed through the text and visuals that relay positive representation and/or support for the self-concepts, identities, efforts, and initiatives related to women, BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ practitioners. Montenegro (2020) suggested that PR agencies use verbal and nonverbal (images or videos) elements on their websites to convey their values and D&I practices. This research revealed that these cues were mostly located in the webpages titled, "about us," "culture," and "careers" (Montenegro, 2020). Furthermore, she argued that the use of images, videos, and text together on a website showcases the organization's identity, relations, and services related to D&I. In addition, other studies (Chaney et al., 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011) found that the presence of DEI-related awards signaled organizations' higher levels of DEI efforts as it provides a third-party endorsement of DEI efforts.

The DEI cues include many elements. First, increased representation of historically marginalized social identities is empirically displayed by a greater representation of women,

BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ persons as employees and leaders in organizations compared to other organizations where they are underrepresented. For instance, some elements of the surface-level diversity such as race and gender can be indicators of “visible” diversity of the employees and leaders in the agency (García-Prieto et al., 2003; Montenegro, 2020). Therefore, this study operationalizes DEI cues where there are 18 individuals’ headshots to signal the visible diversity of the employees and leaders in the “about us” page. For instance, the agency with high DEI cues represented a higher number of employees who were women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ individuals compared to the agency with low DEI cues (see Table 1 for specific percentages).

DEI cues can also represent the agency’s efforts to achieve equity through their policies, programs, and processes to eliminate the barriers to entry to the field and leadership for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners. The examples of these types of policies and programs include: pay and promotion equity; growth, and development programs; health benefits and mental health care; and support for professional and trade organizations and institutions that promote advancement of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners and college students who study public relations. These practices were discussed in Study 1 and introduced as best practices for DEI (Jain-Link et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2016; Madera, 2013; Mundy, 2015). These efforts for equity are intentional and focused policies, programs, and processes in response to discriminatory structures and systems against women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in workplaces and societies. Whereas the high-DEI cues agency website featured more intentional efforts toward women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, the low-DEI cues agency website features programs for communities that are not specific to those groups.

Finally, the DEI cues can also represent a more inclusive and safer work environment for historically marginalized racial, ethnic, or gender identity/sexual orientation. These cues are

empirically signaled by efforts to create an inclusive work environment so women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners feel valued, safe, and comfortable to participate and thrive.

Specifically, these policies and programs are operationalized as: use of pronouns; employee resource groups (ERGs); trainings and workshops on different cultures and communities, as well as on the topics of anti-racism and implicit bias; celebration of heritage months and cultural communities such as Black History Month and Pride Month; and recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ Day and Juneteenth. These practices were not only discussed in Study 1 but also introduced as best or recommended practices to manage inclusion in public relations, communication, and management literature (Chitkara, 2018; Dover et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2016; Kramer, 2020; Madera, 2013; Montenegro, 2020; Provoke Media, 2020b; Sudhaman & Shah, 2020). Table 1 shows these operationalizations, with the agency website with high DEI cues (manipulation) highlighting its efforts to create an inclusive work environment so women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ practitioners feel valued, safe, and comfortable to participate and thrive mainly through “culture,” “careers,” and “services” pages. In contrast, the low-DEI cues agency website (control) features organizational efforts that are not specific to women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners or communities.

Table 1

Stimuli Manipulation (Low or High DEI cues)

	Control (low DEI cues)	Manipulation (high DEI cues)	Location
Diversity	89% White and 11% BIPOC (reflecting the current workforce) using employee headshots	22% White and 78% BIPOC using employee headshots	About
	67% women and 33% men (reflecting the current workforce, binary), no use of pronouns	44% women, 44% men, 6% transgender, and 6% gender-fluid using pronouns	About
	2019-2021 <i>PR Week’s Excellence Awards</i>	2019-2021 <i>PR Week’s Diversity Awards</i>	About

Equity	“We conduct annual pay audits to ensure that our long-term employees are rewarded for their loyalty.” (Word count: 16)	“We conduct annual pay audits to ensure fair pay for all races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations.” (Word count:18)	Culture
	For the PR industry: “We provide mentorship and paid internship opportunities for local college students.” (Word count:15) “We work with professional and educational organizations including PRSSA to create a network with future professionals.” (Word count: 16)	For the PR industry: “We provide mentorship and paid internship opportunities for underrepresented college students.” (Word count:11) “We work with professional and educational organizations including The LAGRANT Foundation to create a network with future professionals.” (Word count: 18)	Culture
	For the community: “We volunteer for disaster relief organizations , and donate to children’s hospitals . (Word count: 14) “We also match our employees’ donations to select nonprofits.” (Word count: 9) “We work with local business owners to raise awareness of the importance of PR.” (Word count: 14)	For the community: “We volunteer for organizations supporting transgender women of color , and donate to Historically Black Colleges and Universities .” (Word count: 20) “We also match our employees’ donations to social justice nonprofits.” (Word count: 10) “We work with BIPOC business owners to raise awareness of the importance of PR.” (Word count: 14)	Culture
	Benefit 2. Health Benefits Health care, dental and vision insurances for employees and their spouses (Word count: 15)	Benefit 2. Health Benefits Health care, dental, and vision insurances for employees and their spouses and partners for both opposite- and same-sex couples; and affirmative transgender-inclusive health care (Word count: 28)	Careers
Inclusion	Absence of pronouns	Presence of pronouns	About, Careers, Contact

2016-2021 <i>PRDaily</i> 's Best Places to work for employees (Word count: 8)	2016-2021 <i>PRDaily</i> 's Best Places to work for LGBTQ employees (Word count: 9)	About
AmTrak ("We expanded Amtrak's outreach to its business professional consumer base") with a photo of a White man with glasses in a train.	AmTrak ("We extended Amtrak's outreach to its LGBTQ customer base.") with a photo of a lesbian couple holding hands in a train	Services
National Park Service ("We developed the agency's safety campaign so visitors can enjoy the urban to wilderness adventures that national parks have to offer.") with a photo of mostly White visitors hiking.	National Park Service ("We developed the agency's diverse visitors outreach campaign so visitors can enjoy the urban to wilderness adventures that national parks have to offer.") with a photo of diverse visitors hiking.	Services
2020 Census ("We raised awareness of the 2020 Census to American households to enhance representation.") with a photo of a White family	2020 Census ("We raised awareness of the 2020 Census to Hispanic/Latino,a,x households to enhance representation") with a photo of Hispanic/Latino,a,x individuals at a restaurant	Services
"We believe that creativity and innovation result primarily from cooperation between people with unique experiences, perspectives, and talents/skillsets . We respect and honor all employees for their unique contribution to our agency. " (Word count: 31)	"We believe that creativity and innovation result primarily from cooperation between people with diverse experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds . We respect and honor employees of all races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations. " (Word count: 33)	Culture
"From Wacky Wednesdays to Casual Fridays , our celebrations go beyond the office happy hour." (Word count: 14)	"From Black History Month to Pride Month , our celebrations go beyond the office happy hour." (Word count: 15)	Culture
For our employees "Employee socials: We have employee socials and outings including Trivia nights, scavenger hunt challenges and annual cook-offs." (Word count: 17)	For our employees "ERGs (Employee Resource Groups): We have resource groups for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ employees." (Word count: 14)	Culture
We are hiring! We are looking for employees who understand the various demands of a global	"We are hiring! We are looking for employees who understand the cultural demands of a global	Careers

	<p>marketplace, who contribute to our agency, and who thrive in an agency culture where individuality is valued.” (Word count: 33)</p>	<p>marketplace, who contribute to diverse communities, and who thrive in an agency culture where inclusivity is valued.” (Word count: 33)</p>	
	<p>Testimonials by three White practitioners</p>	<p>Testimonials by three BIPOC practitioners including one transgender practitioner</p>	<p>Careers</p>
	<p>Benefit 1. Work & Life Balance: 401K with employer match; paid maternity and paternity leave; flexible work hours; and remote working options. (Word count: 22)</p> <p>Paid time off combines your vacation, personal and sick days together giving you more flexibility to manage work and life.</p> <p>We observe 10 federal holidays including Independence Day and Columbus Day. (Word count: 31)</p>	<p>Benefit 1. Work & Life Balance: 401K with employer match; paid family leave; flexible work hours; and remote working options. (Word count: 20)</p> <p>Paid time off combines your vacation, personal and sick days together giving you more flexibility to manage work and life.</p> <p>We observe 10 federal holidays including Juneteenth and Indigenous People's Day. (Word count: 31)</p>	<p>Careers</p>
	<p>Benefit 3. Career Development We offer workshops for PR strategy and APR (Accreditation in Public Relations) certificates as well as organization-wide trainings on AI, emerging technologies, and industry’s best leadership practices. (Word count: 31)</p> <p>We provide professional memberships including PRSA (Public Relations Society of America), IABC (International Association of Business Communicators), PR Council, etc. (Word count: 20)</p>	<p>Benefit 3. Career Development We offer workshops for PR strategy and APR (Accreditation in Public Relations) certificates as well as organization-wide trainings on AI, anti-bias/anti-racism, and industry’s best leadership practices for inclusion. (Word count: 32)</p> <p>We provide professional memberships including PRSA (Public Relations Society of America), BPRS (Black Public Relations Society), HPRA (Hispanic Public Relations Association), etc. (Word count: 22)</p>	<p>Careers</p>

After building the websites, I took screenshots of each page by using GoFullPage, an application capturing full page screenshots of current browser pages. The images were trimmed down to fit with the width of the Qualtrics' survey platform. The pages were presented in the order of Home, About, Services, Culture, Careers, and Contact with back and forward buttons so participants can navigate the webpages without leaving the Qualtrics platform. Before the exposure to the webpages, participants were informed that they are about to enter a viewing mode, indicating that they would view webpages of a public relations agency to evaluate the agency as a potential employer. Participants were also told that they can take time to navigate the pages by using the back and forward buttons. At the end of the presentation of the stimuli, participants were notified that they are exiting the viewing mode and they cannot return to the viewing mode.

Participants

Public relations students enrolled in 4-year colleges or universities in the United States who were 18 years old or older participated in this study for course credit or a \$5 gift card. The online experimental study invited participants across the country and was estimated to take 10-20 minutes to complete. An a priori statistical power analysis was conducted to estimate the sample size using G*Power 3.1. With an alpha = .05 and power = .80, the projected sample size was approximately $N = 158$ for the between-subjects comparison in the present study.

A total of 200 responses were collected through public relations courses (i.e., public relations or strategic communication writing, public relations case studies, public relations campaign, public relations) and Listservs of various student organizations' and programs in 4-year college and universities in the United States. Given the lack of racial diversity in public relations collegiate education (Brown et al., 2011) especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), I actively reached out to multicultural or cultural interest student organizations and

Minority Serving Institutions to invite BIPOC students who study public relations. Eight participants were excluded due to technical errors on Qualtrics in the beginning of the study, 21 participants were excluded for failing at least one of two attention checks used in the study, one participant who has already graduated was excluded, and one additional response was excluded as one participant provided two responses. Only the participant's first response was included in the study.

In total, 169 participants' responses were analyzed with 40.83% ($n = 69$) of the participants identifying as BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. Most participants identified as White/European American only ($n = 116$; 68.64%) while other identifications included Asian or Asian American only ($n = 17$; 10.06%), Black or African American only ($n = 15$; 8.87%), Hispanic or Latina/o/x only ($n = 5$, 2.96%), American Indian or Alaskan Native only ($n = 1$; 0.59%), Afghan only ($n = 1$; 0.59%), multiracial ($n = 5$; 2.96%), and individuals of multiple racial and ethnic identities but not as multiracial ($n = 9$, 5.32%). Of the multiracial individuals, 2 identify as Black and White, 1 Hispanic or Latina/o/x and White/European American, 1 Black, Hispanic or Latina/o/x, and White/European American and 1 as Hispanic or Latina/o/x, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and White/European American. Individuals of multiple racial and ethnic identities included 6 who identified as Hispanic or Latina/o/x and White, 2 as Asian and White, and 1 as Hispanic or Latia/o/x and Black.

Participants predominantly identified as women ($n = 137$; 81.1%), and 17.2% ($n = 29$) as men, and 1.8% ($n = 3$) as gender non-conforming including gender queer, gender non-binary, and gender fluid. Furthermore, 2 (1.2%) identified as transgender individuals whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. In terms of sexual orientations, 134 participants (79.3%) identified as straight

individuals, 14 (8.3%) as bisexual, 5 (3.0%) as questioning, 4 (2.4%) as lesbian, 3 (1.8%) as gay, 3 (1.8%) as queer, and 2 (1.2%) as asexual while 4 (2.4%) declined to answer.

Of those who identified as a member of a social group that has been historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity, 71.64% indicated that they are BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. On the other hand, of those who did not identify as a member of a social group that has been historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity, only 8.53% indicated that they are BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. The difference was significant, $z = 8.29, p < .001$. Furthermore, a correlation test revealed that people identify more strongly as marginalized if they belong to more than one social group that is historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity, $r(166) = .63, p < .001$.

Most of the participants ($n = 124$; 73.4%) were public relations majors and other majors ($n = 45$; 26.6%) included strategic communication, communication, and advertising. Over three quarters of the participants ($n = 131$, 77.5%) were seeking bachelor's degrees, 18.9% ($n = 32$) master's degrees, 2.4% ($n = 4$) doctoral degrees, and 1.2% ($n = 2$) professional degrees. Moreover, 26 participants (15.4%) identified as first-generation students referring to those who are the first in their family to attend college, 6 (3.6%) reported that they do not know, and 2 (1.2%) declined to answer while 135 participants (79.9%) did not identify as first-generation students. The average age of the participants was 21.02, with a range from 18 to 40.

Geographically, of the 169 participants, 72.8% of the participants ($n = 123$) resided in Georgia and the remaining participants resided in 12 other states including Pennsylvania ($n =$

15; 8.9%), Texas ($n = 13$; 7.7%), Maryland ($n = 6$; 3.6%), Connecticut ($n = 2$; 1.2%), Michigan ($n = 2$; 1.2%), New York ($n = 2$; 1.2%), California ($n = 1$; 0.6%), Massachusetts ($n = 1$; 0.6%), New Hampshire ($n = 1$; 0.6%), New Jersey ($n = 1$; 0.6%), Rhode Island ($n = 1$; 0.6%), and Virginia ($n = 1$; 0.6%). In terms of political orientation, 2 (1.2%) considered themselves very conservative, 20 (11.8%) conservative, 27 (16.8%) slightly conservative, 32 moderate (18.9%), 25 (14.8%) slightly liberal, 43 (25.4%) liberal, and 20 (11.8%) very liberal. As for religious affiliation, 101 participants (59.2%) reported that they were affiliated with a religion, 53 (31.4%) with no religion, and 15 (8.9%) declined to answer.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Information

<i>N=169</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race/Ethnicity	White/European Only	116	68.64
	Asian or Asian American Only	17	10.06
	Black or African American Only	15	8.87
	Hispanic or Latina/o/x Only	5	2.96
	American Indian or Alaskan Native Only	1	0.59
	Afghan Only	1	0.59
	Multiracial	5	2.96
	Of multiple racial and ethnic identities	9	5.32
Gender Identity	Women	137	81.1
	Men	29	17.2
	Gender Non-Conforming	3	1.8
Transgender	Yes	2	1.2
	No	167	98.8
Sexual Orientation	Straight	134	79.3
	Bisexual	14	8.3
	Questioning	5	3.0
	Lesbian	4	2.4
	Gay	3	1.8
	Queer	3	1.8
	Asexual	2	1.2
	Declined to answer	4	2.4
Political Orientation	Very Conservative	2	1.2
	Conservative	20	11.8
	Slightly Conservative	27	16.8
	Moderate	32	18.9

	Slightly Liberal	25	14.8
	Liberal	43	25.4
	Very Liberal	20	11.8
Religious Affiliation	Affiliated with a Religion	101	59.2
	Not Affiliated with a Religion	53	31.4
	Declined to Answer	15	8.9
Public Relations Majors	Yes	124	73.4
	Others (Communication, Advertising, etc.)	45	26.6
Degrees Sought	Bachelor's degree	131	77.5
	Master's degree	32	18.9
	Doctoral degree	4	2.4
	Professional degree	2	1.2
First-Generation Students	Yes	26	15.4
	No	135	79.9
	Do not know	6	3.6
	Declined to answer	2	1.2

Measures

Independent Variable

Social Identification Status (SID). Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed as to whether they identify as a member of a social group that has been historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity, using a 6-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 6=*strongly agree*); $M = 3.42, SD = 1.85$. Based on participants' responses to this question, they were randomly assigned to either control or manipulation of stimuli. Nearly half of the participants ($n = 82$; 48.5%) *strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed* with the statement and the other ($n = 87$; 51.5%) *strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed* with the statement. This was recoded into 1=*I identify as a member of marginalized social groups*, 0=*I do not identify as a member of marginalized social groups*.

Dependent Variable and Mediators

The following variables were measured after participants were exposed to the stimuli.

Job Pursuit Intention (JPI). To assess the intention to pursue a job in the featured PR agency, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with five statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). This 5-item measure was modified from the scale used in previous research (Avery et al., 2004; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). Overall job pursuit intention was calculated by averaging the entire scale ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.46, \alpha_{obs} = .93$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of job pursuit intention.

After participants rated their job pursuit intention, an open-ended probing question followed. Participants were asked to describe “why you have chosen the answers as you did above in detail.” Of 169 participants, 97 participants provided their responses to this follow-up question.

Perceived Identity Threat (PIT). To assess worry about potential identity threat, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they anticipated concerns related to belonging, respect, stereotyping, authenticity, marginalization, and being valued on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*not at all*, 7=*extremely*). This 7-item measure was modified from previous research (Kroeper et al., 2020). Overall perceived identity threat was calculated by averaging the entire scale ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.38, \alpha_{obs} = .94$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived identity threat.

Psychological Safety (PS). To measure the belief that the featured PR agency was safe, secure and capable of changing, this 7-item measure from previous research (Edmondson, 1999) was used. Edmondson (1999) argued that this belief is derived from mutual respect and trust among members of a group. Participants were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with seven statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Overall psychological safety was calculated by reverse coding the appropriate items and averaging the

entire scale ($M = 5.37, SD = .92, \alpha_{obs} = .78$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological safety.

Social Fit and Comfort (SFC). To assess whether study participants feel they would fit and feel comfortable in the PR agency, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with seven statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). This 7-item measure was modified from previous research (Cundiff et al., 2018; Gaucher et al., 2011; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Overall social fit and comfort was calculated by averaging the entire scale ($M = 5.20, SD = 1.31, \alpha_{obs} = .95$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of social fit and comfort.

Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (PGI). To measure perceived group inclusion, a 16-item measure in previous research (Jansen et al., 2014) of perceived level of belongingness and authenticity was used. Items 1-4 measured group membership, 5-8 group affection, 9-12 room for authenticity, 13-16 value in authenticity (Jansen et al., 2014). The perceived level of belongingness was the average between the mean score of the group membership subscale and the mean score of the group affection subscale (Jansen et al., 2014); ($M = 5.37, SD = 1.20, \alpha_{obs} = .96$). Similarly, the perceived level of authenticity is the average between the mean score of the room for authenticity subscale and the mean score of the authenticity subscale (Jansen et al., 2014); ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.30, \alpha_{obs} = .97$). Overall perceived group inclusion was calculated by averaging the entire scale ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.22, \alpha_{obs} = .98$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived group inclusion.

Moderator and Control Variables

To analyze the extent to which social dominance orientation moderates the interaction between social identification status and DEI condition on job pursuit intention and identify confounding variables, the following measures were included in the questionnaire.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). To measure individual differences in preference for maintaining social hierarchy, social dominance orientation was measured. Social dominance orientation scales are correlated with hierarchy-legitimizing myths such as racism and sexism (Pratto et al., 1994). Although various measures exist, I used a 16-item measure developed by Pratto and colleagues (1994). Participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward the items on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*very negative*, 7=*very positive*). Overall social dominance orientation was calculated by reverse-coding the appropriate items and averaging the entire scale ($M = 1.91, SD = .89, \alpha_{obs} = .91$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of social dominance orientation.

Job Search Variable. As a covariate, participants were asked whether they have secured an employment after graduation as this factor could confound one of the dependent variables, job pursuit intention. Except for 16 (9.5%) participants who secured an employment after graduation, 153 (90.5%) participants reported that they have not secured an employment after graduation or they were not certain. This was recoded into Unemployed (1= *I have not secured an employment after graduation or I am not sure*, 0=*I have secured an employment after graduation*).

Willingness to Accept a Job with a PR Agency. To evaluate participants' willingness to accept a job with a PR agency prior to their exposure to the stimuli, a 3-item measure was used. This measure was modified from previous research (Braddy, 2008; Braddy et al., 2009).

Participants were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the three statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Overall willingness to accept a job with a PR agency was calculated by averaging responses to the entire scale ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.56, \alpha_{obs} = .95$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of willingness to accept a job with a PR agency. This measure was used as one of the covariates.

Website Viewing Time and Number of Clicks. As a proxy measure, the participants were asked to evaluate the PR agency featured on the website as their potential workplace and to freely browse. To measure the selective exposure, participants' viewing time and number of clicks on the stimulus materials were measured and recorded on Qualtrics.

Demographic Information. Demographic variables included racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and public relations program enrollment information. The demographic information is detailed in the participant section.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range (Min, Max)
SID ^a	3.42	4.00	1.00	1.85	5.00 (1.00, 6.00)
JPI ^b	5.26	5.60	7.00	1.46	6.00 (1.00, 7.00)
PIT ^c	2.41	2.00	1.00	1.38	5.83 (1.00, 6.83)
PS ^d	5.38	5.43	5.71	.92	3.71 (3.29, 7.00)
SFC ^e	5.20	5.28	7.00	1.31	6.00 (1.00, 7.00)
PGI ^f	5.43	5.69	7.00	1.22	5.31 (1.69, 7.00)
SDO ^g	3.42	4.00	1.00	1.85	5.00 (1.00, 6.00)

^a Social Identification

^b Job Pursuit Intention

^c Perceived Identity Threat

^d Psychological Safety

^e Social Fit and Comfort

^f Perceived Group Inclusion

^g Social Dominance Orientation

Table 4*Correlations*

	JPI	PIT	PS	SFC	PGI	SDO
JPI ^a	-					
PIT ^b	-.457**	-				
PS ^c	.486**	-.623**	-			
SFC ^d	.836**	-.588**	.668*	-		
PGI ^e	.667**	-.701**	.762**	.864**	-	
SDO ^f	-.286**	.159*	-.288**	-.343**	-.352**	-

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^a Job Pursuit Intention

^b Perceived Identity Threat

^c Psychological Safety

^d Social Fit and Comfort

^e Perceived Group Inclusion

^f Social Dominance Orientation

CHAPTER 9

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of tests of the proposed hypotheses emerged from the literature review. Data was analyzed with basic descriptive analyses, analyses of covariance (ANCOVA), and regression analyses using Process Macro v. 4 (Hayes, 2022) on IBM's SPSS Statistics Version 28 software.

There were two conditions, one independent variable was based on self-categorization of social identification status and the other was based on random assignment to the DEI cues condition. First, of those who identified as members of social groups that are historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity ($n = 87$), 44 participants were exposed to the low DEI condition and 43 to the high DEI condition. Of those who did not identify as members of social groups that are historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity ($n = 82$), 40 participants were exposed to the low DEI condition and 42 to the high DEI condition.

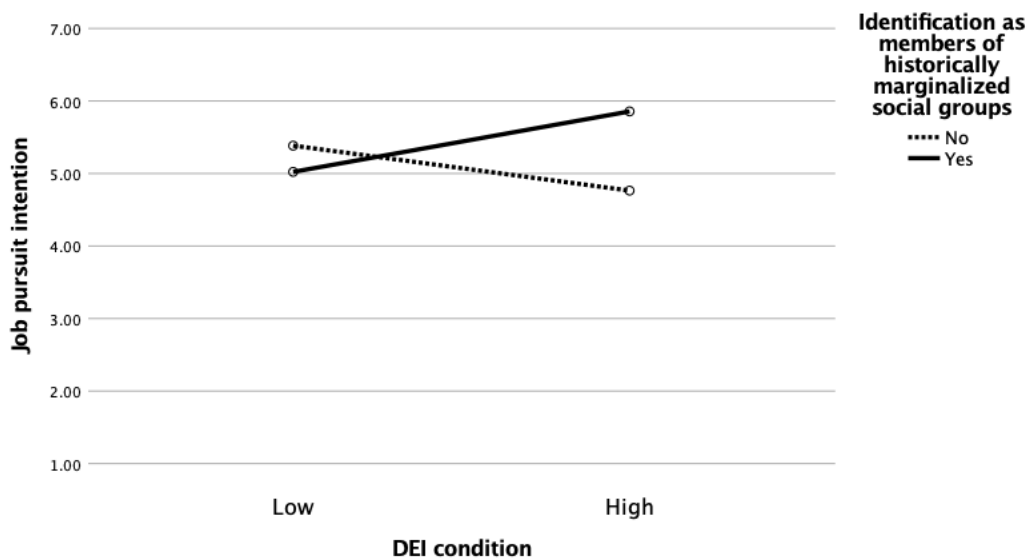
Interaction Effect Between Social Identification Status and the DEI condition

To test H1: whether there is an interaction effect between identification as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities and DEI condition on job pursuit intention, a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed, controlling for PR major, employment after graduation status, willingness to accept a job at a PR agency, and political orientation. The analysis revealed that there is a significant interaction between identification as

members of social groups with historically marginalized identities and DEI condition on job pursuit intention, $F(1,161) = 13.910, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$. In other words, the identification status as a member of historically marginalized social group and the DEI condition interacted. For participants who identify as members of historically marginalized social group, their job pursuit intention was higher at the PR agency’s website with high DEI cues ($M = 5.86, SD = .20$) than the website with low DEI cues ($M = 5.02, SD = .19$). Conversely, for participants who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social group, their job pursuit intention was higher at the PR agency’s website with low DEI cues ($M = 5.38, SD = .20$) than the website with high DEI cues ($M = 4.76, SD = .20$). Thus, H1 was supported.

Figure 2

Job Pursuit Intention by DEI Condition and Social Identification Status



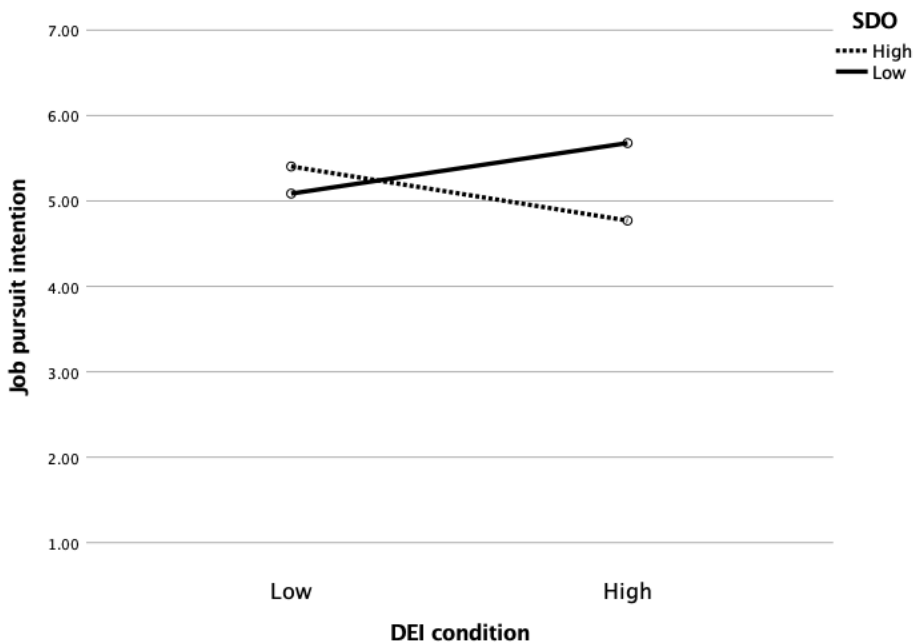
To test H2: whether there is a three-way interaction among identification status as a member of a historically marginalized social group, the DEI condition, and the level of SDO, a three-way ANCOVA was performed. controlling for PR major, employment after graduation status, willingness to accept a job at a PR agency, and political orientation. The three-way

interaction was not significant, $F(1,157) = 1.016, p = .31, \eta^2 = .01$. Therefore, H2 was not supported.

However, the interaction effect between the level of SDO and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention was significant, $F(1,157) = 9.431, p = .003, \eta^2 = .06$, in addition to the interaction effect between the identification as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities and DEI condition on job pursuit intention found in H2. For instance, those with low SDO in high DEI condition reported higher job pursuit intention ($M = 5.68, SD = .17$) compared to low DEI condition ($M = 5.09, SD = .17$). On the other hand, those with high SDO in high DEI condition ($M = 4.77, SD = .23$) reported lower job pursuit intention than in low DEI condition ($M = 5.40, SD = .23$).

Figure 3

Job Pursuit Intention by DEI Condition and Level of SDO



Mediation of Perceived Identity Threat

To test H3: whether there is a mediation effect of **perceived identity threat** on the interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention, PROCESS Macro was performed using model 8 (moderated mediation)². Perceived identity threat negatively predicts job pursuit intention: $b = -.41, SE b = .09, t(160) = -4.75, p < .001$. Moreover, the interaction effect of ID x DEI on perceived identity threat was conditionally significant, $b = -1.57, SE b = .41, t(161) = -3.95, p < .001$. For instance, for low DEI condition, those who identified as members of marginalized social groups rated 1.06 points higher perceived identity threat than those who did not ($b = 1.06, SE b = .29, t(161) = 3.69, p < .001$) whereas for high DEI condition, the interaction effect was not significant $b = -.51, SE b = .29, t(161) = -1.77, p = .078$).

Controlling for the effect of perceived identity threat, the effect of ID x DEI was remained significant, but changed to $b = .81, SE b = .36, t(160) = 2.23, p < .05$. This direct effect varied depending on the level of DEI cues. This conditional direct effect was only significant for high DEI condition, $b = .88, SE = .27, t(160) = 3.32, p = .001$, but low DEI condition, $b = .08, SE = .27, t(160) = .28, p = .779$. The index of moderated mediation for this effect = .648 (95% CI = .256; 1.138) is statistically significant. Thus, H3 was supported. However, it was only significant for low DEI condition; those who identified as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities reported -0.44 points lower than those who did not ($b = -.44, SE b = .15, 95\% CI = -.74; -.18$) whereas the indirect effect was not

² Because of the significant interaction effect between identification status (ID) and the DEI condition (DEI), model 8 was performed to evaluate the mediation effect of various emotions on the interaction effect.

significant for high DEI condition ($b = .21, SE = .13, 95\% CI = -.024; .50$). This means that the mediation of perceived identity threat between the relationship between the identification status and job pursuit intention is conditional depending on the DEI condition. Those who identify as members of marginalized social groups reported higher level of perceived identity threat in low DEI condition and perceived identity threat negatively impacted job pursuit intention.

Table 5

Regression results for H3.

N=169		<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
PIT ^a	PO ^c	-.01	.06	-.21	.84
$R^2 = .12$	UNEM ^d	.02	.52	.05	.96
	WAJ ^e	-.12	.10	-1.26	.21
	PR major ^f	.02	.26	.09	.92
	SID ^g	1.06	.29	3.69	<.001
	DEI ^h	.55	.28	1.99	.05
	SID x DEI	-1.57	.41	-3.85	<.001
JPI ^b	PO	-.08	.07	-1.22	.22
controlling for PIT $R^2 = .41$	UNEM	.24	.41	.58	.56
	WAJ	.34	.08	4.01	<.001
	PR major	-.30	.22	-1.37	.17
	SID	.08	.27	.28	.78
	DEI	-.39	.27	-1.47	.14
	SID x DEI	.81	.36	2.23	.03
	PIT	-.41	.09	-4.75	<.001

^a Perceived Identity Threat

^b Job Pursuit Intention

^c Political Orientation: 1=*Very liberal*, 7=*Very conservative*.

^d Unemployed: 1= *I have not secured an employment after graduation or I am not sure*, 0=*I have secured an employment after graduation*.

^e Willingness to Accept a Job with a PR agency: 1=*least willing*, 7=*most willing*.

^f PR major: 1=*PR major*, 0=*Not PR major*.

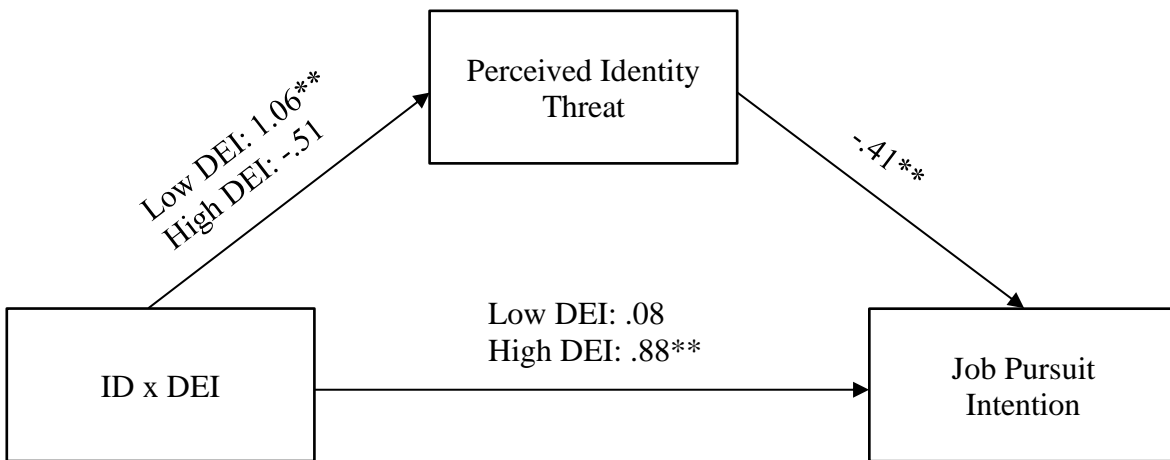
^g Social Identification Status: 1=*I identify as a member of marginalized social groups*, 0=*I do not identify as a member of marginalized social groups*.

^h DEI: 1=*high-DEI PR agency*, 0=*low-DEI PR agency*

Figure 4

Mediation of Perceived Identity Threat

Perceived identity threat conditionally mediates the interaction effect between the identification as members of marginalized social groups and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention.



Mediation of Psychological Safety

To test H4, whether there is a mediation effect of **psychological safety** on the interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention, PROCESS Macro was performed using model 8. Although psychological safety positively predicted job pursuit intention, ($b = .72, SE b = .11, t(160) = 6.498, p < .001$), the interaction effect of social identification as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities and DEI condition on psychological safety was not statistically significant ($b = .49, SE b = .27, t(161) = 1.81, p = .071$).

However, there was a significant conditional interaction effect of the level of DEI on job pursuit intention when psychological safety was controlled, ($b = 1.10, SE b = .34, t(160) = 3.197, p = .002$). Specifically, in the high DEI condition, those who identified as members of marginalized social groups rated .93 points higher on psychological safety than those who did

not ($b = .93, SE b = .25, t(160) = 3.71, p < .001$) whereas for low DEI condition, the interaction effect was not significant ($b = -.17, SE b = .26, t(160) = -.66, p = .510$). The index of moderated mediation for this effect = .353 (95% $CI = -.017; .787$) is statistically significant. Thus, H4 was not supported.

Table 6

Regression results for H4.

N=169		<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
PS ^a	PO ^c	.05	.05	1.02	.31
$R^2 = .16$	UNEM ^d	-.23	.31	-.75	.45
	WAJ ^e	.11	.06	1.78	.08
	PR major ^f	.22	.18	1.21	.23
	SID ^g	-.26	.19	-1.35	.18
	DEI ^h	.27	.20	1.35	.18
JPI ^b controlling for PS $R^2 = .45$	SID x DEI	.49	.27	1.81	.07
	PO	-.11	.07	-1.62	.11
	UNEM	.39	.42	.92	.36
	WAJ	.31	.09	3.50	<.01
	PR major	-.47	.21	-2.27	.02
	SID	-.17	.26	-.66	.51
	DEI	-.81	.27	-2.98	<.01
SID x DEI	1.01	.34	3.20	<.01	
PS	.72	.11	6.50	<.001	

^a Psychological Safety

^b Job Pursuit Intention

^c Political Orientation: 1=Very liberal, 7=Very conservative.

^d Unemployed: 1= I have not secured an employment after graduation or I am not sure, 0=I have secured an employment after graduation.

^e Willingness to Accept a Job with a PR agency: 1=least willing, 7=most willing.

^f PR major: 1=PR major, 0=Not PR major.

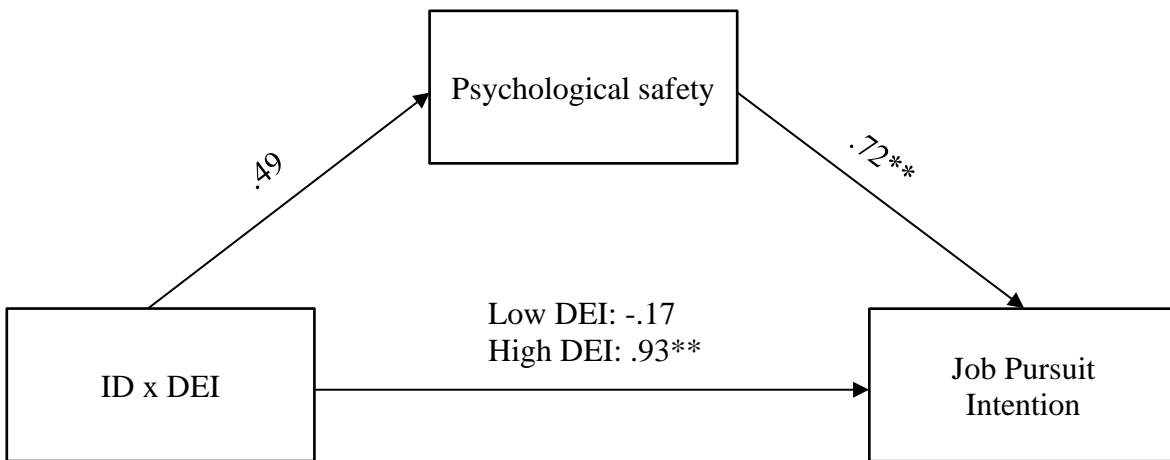
^g Social Identification Status: 1=I identify as a member of marginalized social groups, 0=I do not identify as a member of marginalized social groups.

^h DEI: 1=high-DEI PR agency, 0=low-DEI PR agency.

Figure 5

Mediation of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety does not mediate the interaction effect between the identification as members of marginalized social groups and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention



Mediation of Social Fit and Comfort

To test H5, whether there is a mediation effect of **social fit and comfort** on the interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention, PROCESS Macro was performed using model 8. Because a participant did not answer any questions related to social fit and discomfort, only 168 responses were analyzed. Social fit and comfort positively predicts job pursuit intention: $b = .87, SE b = .06, t(159) = 14.263, p < .001$. Furthermore, both identification as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities ($b = -.60, SE b = .24, t(160) = -2.53, p = .01$) and DEI condition ($b = -.60, SE b = .26, t(160) = -2.31, p = .02$) in addition to the interaction effect of both on social fit and comfort ($b = 1.58, SE b = .35, t(160) = 4.48, p < .001$) were significant. For instance, in the low DEI condition, those who identified as members of marginalized rated -0.6 points lower than

those who did not ($b = -.60, SE b = .24, t(160) = -2.53, p = .01$) whereas in the high condition, those who identified as members of marginalized rated 0.9 points higher than those who did not ($b = .98, SE b = .26, t(160) = 3.75, p < .001$).

When controlling for the effect of social fit and comfort, the direct effect of interaction of ID x DEI on job pursuit intention disappeared ($b = .08, SE b = .28, t(161) = .31, p = .76$), indicating a fully moderated mediation effect. The index of moderated mediation for this effect = 1.38 (95% CI = .75; 2.07) is statistically significant. Thus, H5 was supported. Specifically, for low DEI condition, those who identified as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities rated 0.52 points lower than those did not ($b = -.52, SE = .21, 95\% CI = -.95; -.12$) whereas for high DEI condition, those who identified as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities rated 0.85 points higher than those who did not $b = .85, SE = .25, 95\% CI = .40; 1.37$).

Table 7

Regression results for H5

N=169		<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
SFC	PO	-.04	.06	-.79	.43
$R^2 = .28$	UNEM	-.11	.40	.27	.79
	WAJ	.34	.08	4.42	<.001
	PR major	-.12	.21	-.55	.58
	SID	-.60	.24	-2.53	.01
	DEI	-.60	.26	-2.31	.02
	SID x DEI	1.58	.35	4.48	<.001
JPI	PO	-.04	.05	-.78	.44
controlling for SFC $R^2 = .72$	UNEM	.13	.31	.42	.68
	WAJ	.10	.07	1.41	.16
	PR major	-.21	.16	-1.27	.20
	SID	.15	.22	.69	.49
	DEI	-.09	.20	-.46	.64
	SID x DEI	.08	.28	.31	.76
	SFC	.87	.06	14.26	<.001

^a Social Fit and Comfort

^b Job Pursuit Intention

^c Political Orientation: 1=Very liberal, 7=Very conservative.

^d Unemployed: 1= I have not secured an employment after graduation or I am not sure, 0=I have secured an employment after graduation.

^e Willingness to Accept a Job with a PR agency: 1=least willing, 7=most willing.

^f PR major: 1=PR major, 0=Not PR major.

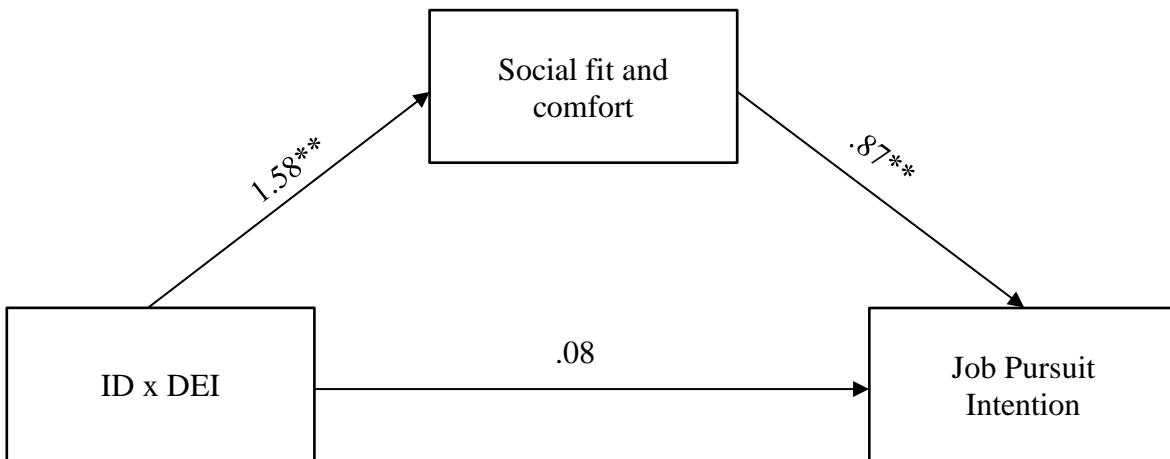
^g Social Identification Status: 1=I identify as a member of marginalized social groups, 0=I do not identify as a member of marginalized social groups.

^h DEI: 1=high-DEI PR agency, 0=low-DEI PR agency.

Figure 6

Mediation of Social Fit and Comfort

Social fit and comfort fully mediates the interaction effect between the identification as members of marginalized social groups and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention



Mediation of Perceived Group Inclusion

To test H6, whether there is a mediation effect of **perceived group inclusion** on the interaction effect between social identification (members of marginalized social groups vs. not) and DEI condition (high vs. low) on job pursuit intention, a PROCESS Macro was performed using model 8. Perceived group inclusion, measured by asking participants perceived belongingness and authenticity, positively predicts job pursuit intention: $b = .70, SE b = .08, t(160) = 8.68, p < .001$. Moreover, the interaction effect between identification as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities and DEI condition on job pursuit intention was significant, ($b = 1.40, SE b = .35, t(161) = 4.00, p < .001$).

When controlling for the effect of perceived group inclusion, the direct effect of interaction of ID x DEI on job pursuit intention disappeared ($b = .47, SE b = .32, t(160) = .144, p = .14$), indicating a fully moderated mediation effect. The index of moderated mediation for this effect = .99 (95% CI = .48; 1.60) is statistically significant. Thus, H6 was supported. Specifically, for low DEI condition, those who identified as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities rated 0.57 points lower than those did not ($b = -.57, SE = .20, 95\% CI = -.99; -.23$) whereas for high DEI condition, those who identified as members of social groups with historically marginalized identities rated 0.41 points higher than those who did not $b = .41, SE = .18, 95\% CI = .07; .77$).

Table 8

Regression results for H6.

N=169		<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
PGI $R^2 = .18$	PO	-.02	.06	-.28	.78
	UNEM	-.26	.43	-.61	.54
	WAJ	.23	.08	2.80	.01
	PR major	-.04	.24	-.17	.87
	SID	-.82	.25	-3.25	<.01
	DEI	-.36	.26	-1.36	.18
	SID x DEI	1.40	.35	4.00	<.001
JPI controlling for PGI $R^2 = .56$	PO	-.06	.06	-1.07	.29
	UNEM	.41	.37	1.12	.27
	WAJ	.23	.08	2.82	<.01
	PR major	-.28	.19	-1.44	.15
	SID	.21	.26	.82	.41
	DEI	-.37	.25	-1.48	.14
	SID x DEI	.47	.32	1.44	.15
PGI	.70	.08	8.68	<.001	

^a Perceived Group Inclusion

^b Job Pursuit Intention

^c Political Orientation: 1=*Very liberal*, 7=*Very conservative*.

^d Unemployed: 1= *I have not secured an employment after graduation or I am not sure*, 0=*I have secured an employment after graduation*.

^e Willingness to Accept a Job with a PR agency: 1=*least willing*, 7=*most willing*.

^f PR major: 1=*PR major*, 0=*Not PR major*.

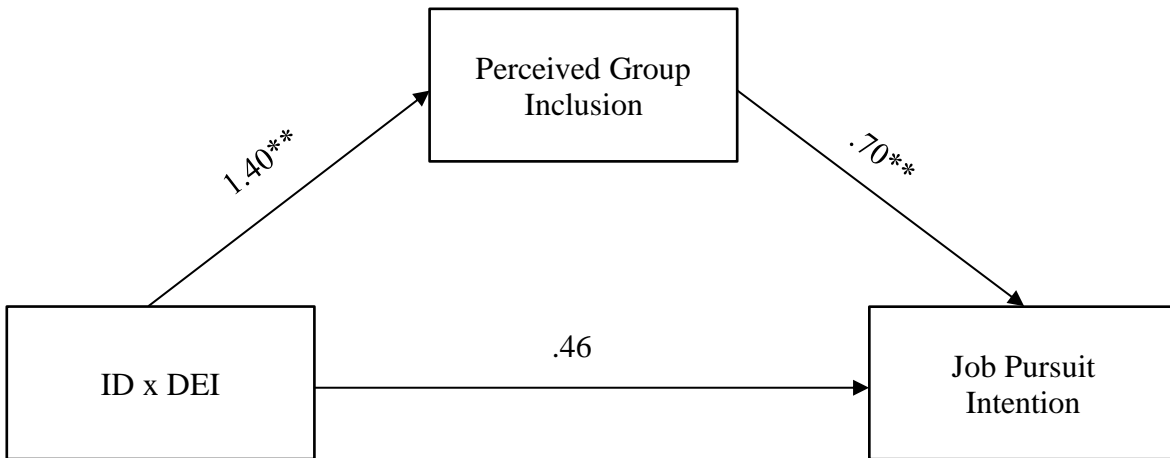
^g Identification Status: 1=*I identify as a member of marginalized social groups*, 0=*I do not identify as a member of marginalized social groups*.

^h DEI: 1=*high-DEI PR agency*, 0=*low-DEI PR agency*.

Figure 7

Mediation of Perceived Group Inclusion

Perceived group inclusion fully mediates the interaction effect between the identification as members of marginalized social groups and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention.



Post-hoc Analyses

Given that racial cues influence how Black audiences respond to media but not White audiences in terms of browsing time on a news website (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008), I expected that those who identify as members of historically marginalized social groups would spend more time and click more on browsing the high-DEI PR agency website. Accordingly, I examined the website viewing time in seconds ($n = 155$; $M = 13.77$, $SD = 9.12$) and number of clicks ($N = 169$; $M = .94$, $SD = 1.50$). For the website viewing time, 14 cases that were outside of the one level of standard deviation were excluded from the analyses. However, there was no significant interaction of the identification status and the DEI condition on website viewing time, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .97$, nor number of clicks, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .42$, except for the direct effect of the identification status on number of clicks. Those who identify as members of marginalized social groups clicked more ($M = 1.19$, $SD = .16$) than those who do not

($M = .67, SD = .17$), $\Delta R^2 = .03, p = .03$. Overall, the post-hoc analyses did not reveal possible selective exposure effect.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This chapter provides important findings from the experimental study as well as provides an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study. Furthermore, I offer practical implications of the study and concluding thoughts.

In this study, I looked at how the level of DEI cues on a PR agency's website affected attracting PR students who identify as members of social groups that are historically marginalized on the basis of racial/ethnic and gender identity and sexual orientation. I used social identity theory, intergroup emotions theory, and signaling theory to examine how the interaction of one's social identification as a member of a historically marginalized social groups and level of DEI cues (low vs. high) affects intergroup emotions and job pursuit intention at a public relations agency. Results revealed that DEI cues play a pertinent role for evoking intergroup emotions, which ultimately predicts job pursuit intentions. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the results, strengths and limitations of the study, and the practical implications of this work for the public relations profession and DEI managers.

Findings

The findings reveal that, although participants in general expressed a high level of job pursuit intention for the public relations agency, participants' levels of job pursuit intention varied depending on identification as members of historically marginalized social groups and the level of DEI cues. Participants who did not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups reported higher job pursuit intention for the public relations agency with websites

with low-DEI cues than they did when they were exposed to the webpages with high-DEI cues. In contrast, participants who identified as members of historically marginalized social groups reported higher job pursuit intentions to apply to the public relations agency with websites with high-DEI cues than they did to apply to the agency with low-DEI cues. This indicates that students who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups are more likely to pursue a job at PR agencies that reflect the current dominance of a heterosexual cisgender White workforce whereas students who identify as members of historically marginalized social groups are more likely to pursue a job at PR agencies with majority-minority composition of employees and demonstrate efforts to create an inclusive environment for historically marginalized social group members and equitable programs and policies. The implication of this result is that students who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups may be resistant or reluctant to pursue opportunities with at public relations agencies with high DEI efforts. Participants who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups, mostly White, heterosexual, and cisgender individuals, reported the lowest level of job pursuit intention for the PR agency with high DEI cues, even though agency's website featured White employees and policies that also benefited heterosexual relationships and cisgender employees. This shows that the assumptions of social identity theory are consistent with the findings that those who do not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups perceived the low-DEI PR agency as their ingroup and favored this agency over the high-DEI agency, thus potentially intensifying homogeneity of the group.

Additionally, the results provide critical insights into the role intergroup emotions play in affecting job pursuit intentions. Although not all of the emotions—perceived identity threat, psychological safety, social fit and comfort, and perceived group inclusion—mediated the

interaction effect of identification as members of historically marginalized social groups and the DEI condition on job pursuit intention, the emotions significantly predicted job pursuit intention. Higher levels of perceived identity threat predicted lower levels of job pursuit intention. Higher levels of psychological safety, social fit and comfort, and perceived group inclusion predicted higher levels of job pursuit intention for those identifying as from marginalized groups.

Looking into social identification, those who identified as members of historically marginalized groups reported higher perceived identity threat in the low DEI cues condition but reported higher levels of social fit and comfort and perceived group inclusion in the high DEI cues condition. On the other hand, participants who did not identify as members of historically marginalized social groups reported high levels of social fit and comfort and perceived group inclusion in the low DEI cues condition. This shows that even though they do not experience the emotions as an employee of the PR agency, participants evaluated their group-based emotions based on their social identities and cues related to the agency workforce's demographic characteristics and efforts for inclusive work environment and equitable policies on the agency's website. This indicates that participants' social identification and group membership affected forming their intragroup and intergroup attitudes.

Interestingly, perceived identity threat was significantly predicted in the low DEI condition by those who identify as marginalized in comparison with the high DEI condition. This demonstrates that those who do not identify as marginalized in high DEI condition do not feel as threatened as those who identify as marginalized in the low DEI condition. Why might that be? It could be because those who do not identify as marginalized know that there are many other American workplaces, particularly public relations agencies, where dominant social groups' identities are more represented and accepted even if the presented high DEI PR agency does not

appear to be inclusive and comfortable for them. Because their identities are less likely to be threatened in real world situations, they may not worry about identity threat as much as those identify as marginalized. However, this is contradicting to findings of other studies (Dover et al., 2016; E. Smith & Mackie, 2015), which suggested that dominant social group members might feel threatened when they view pro-diversity messages or other social groups. Thus, threat as a group-based emotion needs further investigation.

There is another reason to delve into perceived identity threat. Given that the manipulation was based on self-perception of being marginalized, there may be discrepancies between individuals' perceptions and historical understanding of marginalization. For instance, a study (Norton & Sommers, 2011) that reported that White Americans in 2000s view racism as a zero-sum game and they believed anti-White bias increased whereas anti-Black bias decreased. However, a recent follow-up study (Rasmussen et al., 2022) revealed that White Americans' political ideology moderate perceptions about whether they are losing or winning in the zero-sum game of racism. This indicates that other factors should be considered to explain how individuals perceive marginalization of their identities and whether they feel threatened by pro-diversity messages or other social groups.

In addition to perceived identity threat, the results showed that social fit and comfort and perceived group inclusion are critical group-based emotions in prediction of job pursuit intention. The results imply that social fit and comfort is one of the key explanatory variables, mediating the relationship between the interaction of one's social identification as a member of a historically marginalized social groups and level of DEI cues, and job pursuit intention. The present study is congruent with findings of previous studies that individuals with marginalized social identities suspect that they would not fit in many academic and professional settings where

their group members are underrepresented (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The feeling of “fitting in” can increase employees’ satisfaction (Boakye-Danquah et al., 2018) whereas the feeling that they would not fit in can increase stress and dissatisfaction (Lovelace & Rosen, 1996). Jobseekers with historically marginalized social identities, mostly BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals, reported the feeling that they do not fit in the agency where White, heterosexual, cisgender employees are overrepresented. In turn, this may suggest that public relations agencies can also find that BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ jobseekers do not fit in their organization (Gupta, 2021). Moreover, the results indicated that feeling of social fit and comfort can differ depending on contexts although social fit and comfort is a strong predictor of job pursuit intention. This was illustrated by dominant social group members reporting they do not feel comfortable or that they do not fit in at the public relations agency with high DEI cues. Given that social fit and comfort refers to how well employees’ expectations, interests, values, and beliefs align with organizations’ arrangements (Boakye-Danquah et al., 2018), it appears that the values, interests, expectations, and beliefs of the dominant social groups do not align with those of marginalized social groups. This explains why hiring for “fit” in professional workplaces in the United States where White, heterosexual, and cisgender individuals are overrepresented can be discriminatory for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

The present study also highlighted the importance of perceived group inclusion. Perceived group inclusion mediated the relationship between the interaction of one’s identification as a member of a historically marginalized social group and level of DEI cues, and job pursuit intention. The results affirmed that social identification is different from group inclusion because social identification indicates individuals’ connection or association with certain social groups and group inclusion refers to groups’ willingness to include different

individuals (Jansen et al., 2014). This may be related to identity transfer in that perceived group inclusion more relevant to creating an inclusive environment rather than being a member of the group, but further investigation is needed to generalize the findings.

Finally, the results have implications for social identity signaling theory in recruitment setting. The results revealed that DEI cues on websites can signal whether one's social identity will be threatened, included, or fitting in potential workplaces, predicting job pursuit intentions in turn. Although the effectiveness of the DEI cues as social identity signals in a fictitious PR agency was studied indirectly by measuring participants' group-based emotions and job pursuit intention, participants' responses to the open-ended questions probing why they want to pursue or do not want to pursue jobs at the agency complement the findings. For example, one participant who identified as marginalized in high DEI condition wrote:

“I would be interested in pursuing an application and accept an opportunity at this agency because I enjoyed their inclusivity. I also felt welcomed by their efforts in underrepresented communities, since I myself come from one. I am also a woman of color, so this is an agency I would feel welcomed at. Agency setting is not my first choice, but I am more than willing to apply for an agency that appears like this agency.”

Even though agency is not her ideal type of workplace in PR, she was willing to apply for a job at the agency because of social identity signals. On the other hand, participants who do not identify as marginalized in high DEI wrote:

“Although the featured PR agency seems extremely diverse, I do not believe that I would fit in as a white woman. This is due to the fact that there is a lack of white women on the website. It seems that the primary goal of the PR agency is to promote diversity rather than to practice public relations.”

“When I was looking through this agency, there were people that identified as "she/her" and I don't do that. I'm just a girl, like I don't really agree with people that identify as anything. You're either a boy or girl, it's

not that hard. But these people would treat me as an outsider because of the beliefs I have previously stated.”

Because not everyone filled out this open-ended question, these responses were used to complement with significant statistical findings about signaling of DEI cues.

Strengths and Limitations

To my knowledge, this study is the first research investigation that explored the effects of the level of DEI cues in employee recruitment in a US public relations agency context and investigated the effectiveness of the cues in attracting PR students through communication via an agency’s website. The current study also answers to the call for more quantitative research recognizing the complexity of identities, as this effort is critical to “demonstrating the gravity of the problem” (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017, p. 334). Whereas experimental studies (Cundiff et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2009, 2012) on organizational diversity have often taken a binary approach to understand the role of social identity and group-based emotions by comparing Black individuals and White individuals or women and men, this study featured intersectionality, multiplicity, and fluidity of racial/ethnic and gender identities as well as sexual orientation including Black transgender and multiracial individuals.

However, there are some limitations of the study to note. This study only focused on racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity in the U.S. context. Future research can extend to different social identities including disabilities, nationalities, educational experiences, and socioeconomic status as well as different contexts because privileges and disadvantages of social groups can vary depending on contexts.

Furthermore, despite the effort to recognize the intersectionality of various social identities that impact individuals’ lived experiences, the current study still dichotomized people into two groups: one as those who identify as members of historically marginalized social groups

and the other as those who do not. Although quantifying differences among various social groups help identify the gaps more easily, quantitative researchers should use measures that capture breadth and depth of diversity and complexity of identities.

This study presented webpages of a fictitious PR agency's website with back and forward buttons by embedding screen-captured .png files in Qualtrics. Although this decision was made to ensure participants' exposure to every webpage, this may not be a realistic way of viewing a potential employer's website. Also, because headshots of the employees on the website are free images available to Wix.com users, it is plausible that participants may have seen the images before. Additionally, the pronouns of individuals featured on the webpages of the high DEI condition were fictitious, not necessarily corresponding to the individuals' gender identity and expression in their actual lives.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that there are many factors influencing one's job pursuit intention including salary, location, reputation of an organizations, etc. The current study asked participants not to consider those factors. In reality, the recruitment process involves many more interactions between employers and jobseekers beyond navigating the organization's website. This study did not take various interactions prior to recruitment such as job interviews, shadowing, and job fairs into account.

Lastly, this study relied on participants' self-reports. The possibility of social desirability bias should be noted especially given that the invitation of the study was shared through public relations course instructors and student organization advisors. To counterbalance this social desirability, future studies can incorporate other ways or biometric measures using eye-tracking to understand more specific workings of DEI cues or psychophysiology to delve into intergroup emotions.

Practical Implications

The Diversity Action Alliance (2021) reported that public relations agencies have lower levels of racial and ethnic diversity compared to public relations teams in corporations, nonprofits, and other professional services. As public relations seeks to increase representation of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners, this study highlights the role of PR agencies. The study also provides experimental evidence that PR students who identify as members of social groups that are historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity have higher job pursuit intention for PR agencies with high DEI cues. However, it is crucial to recognize that high DEI cues should also reflect the real efforts that PR agencies make. Otherwise, DEI cues only remain “cosmetic diversity” (Ford & Patterson, 2019), which harms members of marginalized communities and organizations’ reputations.

This study’s manipulation emphasizes that DEI cues include not only representation of diverse identities but also representation of inclusive work environments and equitable policies. To increase diversity of an organization, practices that enhance inclusion and equity should also be in place. The DEI cues, developed based on the DEI efforts shared by DEI professionals, on public relations agencies’ websites can be effective to recruit entry-level practitioners who identify as members of social groups that are historically marginalized on the basis of racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and/or gender nonconformity. In contrast, those who do not identify as such groups may be discouraged by the DEI cues to some extent, suggesting that dominant group members may be resistant to challenges to the status quo where they hold more powerful positions. Moreover, the results of this study suggest that it is significant for PR agencies to commit to DEI efforts and communicate those efforts with job seekers to recruit more entry-level practitioners with marginalized social identities.

Future Directions

Following up on the results, future studies can closely look at emotions and effectiveness of DEI cues by using psychophysiological and eye-tracking measures. To better understand emotional responses from the participants, researchers can examine participants' psychophysiological signals during the exposure to different stimuli to complement self-report measures. By using eye-tracking measures, researchers can identify which DEI cues were more effective in attracting different groups of prospective job applicants and how organizations can communicate their DEI efforts on websites.

Future studies can also expand on other dimensions of identities and diversity including socioeconomic status, languages spoken, nationalities, religions, and political orientations, and in different cultures and countries. Because different social identities impact individuals' perceptions and experiences in different ways based on contexts, this study design can be applied to understanding public relations agencies in different countries or how other types of DEI cues attract different groups of entry-level practitioners in the United States.

Finally, future research can replicate this study to examine the effectiveness of the DEI cues in attracting senior-level PR practitioners and keeping them in the profession, as it is not enough to have diversity at the lower levels, but also at the upper levels of the profession. Because this study was specific to understanding perceptions and affect among PR students in colleges and universities, who are more likely to enter the industry as entry-level practitioners, the findings cannot be generalized to other populations. Furthermore, this approach may be helpful to understand generational differences or experiential differences in perceptions and attitude toward DEI cues.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

This chapter combines the findings of the in-depth interviews and the experimental study. I revisit research questions and hypotheses this dissertation evaluated. As this dissertation involves both qualitative and quantitative research, they provide complementary understandings of the contemporary DEI discourse and how DEI practices and processes at PR agencies have implications for recruitment of entry-level PR practitioners with marginalized racial and ethnic identities as well as queer identities. By synthesizing the insights from both studies, I draw meaningful conclusions for scholars, educators, students, and industry practitioners and leaders.

In this dissertation I explored DEI in public relations by performing discourse analysis based on in-depth interviews and conducting an experiment. The discourse analysis revealed public relations agencies' primary foci were on racial and ethnic diversity, then gender identities and sexual orientations. I developed DEI cues based on the descriptions of agencies' efforts to reach BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ practitioners and communities. The effectiveness of the cues was evaluated through the experiment. In the experiment, the level of cues was manipulated (low or high DEI cues) and I embedded them in a fictitious public relations agency's website. The experimental results indicated that the DEI efforts discussed by DEI professionals at public relations agencies appear to be effective to recruit entry-level practitioners with marginalized racial and ethnic identities as well as queer identities.

The discourse analysis indicated that practitioners with marginalized social identities, particularly BIPOC practitioners, play important roles in public relations agencies and their

representation in the workforce should reflect that of the U.S. population. This is due to the significant underrepresentation of practitioners with marginalized social identities in the public relations industry, growing racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population, and demands for social justice in the United States. However, the experiment revealed hesitancy or resistance among dominant social group members in working in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace featuring majority-minority composition of employees. In the high-DEI condition, dominant social group members reported lower levels of social fit and comfort, perceived group inclusion, and job pursuit intention compared to marginalized social group members. In the low-DEI condition, marginalized social group members reported a higher level of perceived identity threat and lower levels of social fit and comfort, perceived group inclusion, and job pursuit intention in comparison with dominant social group members. This suggests that individuals, at least students who study public relations at colleges and universities in the United States, want to work at workplaces that appear to be more willing to include their social identities.

Furthermore, the discourse analysis showed the exclusion of dominant social groups in the diversity discourse. The term “diverse” was used to describe those who deviate from whiteness and cisheteronormativity. This was also evident in the experiment given that dominant social group members in the high-DEI condition reported the lowest level of job pursuit intention of the four groups in the experiment. This was lower than the level of job pursuit intention of marginalized social groups members in low-DEI condition. This may be because marginalized social groups members are more used to underrepresentation of their social groups than dominant social groups members. To add, one of the participants in the experimental study who do not identify as marginalized in the high-DEI condition wrote:

“I think this is a very inclusive agency. I feel like I would grow as a professional and as a human in this space. I am worried that I am not "diverse enough" to really embrace all of the opportunities this company has.”

The findings demonstrate the complexity of representation of social identities and power relations that are cognitive yet social. White supremacy and cisheteronormativity have dominated US workplaces for a long time (Cumberbatch, 2021), particularly among white-collar professions. Public relations is no different. Because the profession has powerful social location as producers of meanings and culture (Motion & Leitch, 2015) and often serves interests of dominant social groups (Edwards, 2006; Motion & Weaver, 2005), public relations agencies are more likely to hire those who are from dominant social groups and intensify the interests of those who are already privileged (Edwards, 2006). Even though we all have cognitive bias, systemic discrimination entrenches discriminatory practice against already marginalized identities because the system privileges bias among dominant social members.

Answers to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in public relations might be found in dominant social groups. Dominant social groups should be part of the DEI discourse and efforts at least as much as marginalized social groups. The experimental study suggests that certain emotions can increase job pursuit intentions. Higher levels of emotions such as psychological safety, social fit and comfort as well as perceived group inclusion led to higher levels of job pursuit intention. The results implied that these three emotions are separate from social identification. This means that individuals would pursue a job as long as they feel safe, comfortable, included, and do not feel threatened regardless of who they are and the level of DEI cues. Therefore, dominant social groups should be part of the DEI narrative and DEI should be at the core of every organization to ensure that everyone makes up diversity and is responsible for creating inclusive and equitable workplaces.

Finally, both studies emphasize the importance of emotions. Emotions are critical constructs to understand behavioral intentions and behaviors. This suggests that measuring emotions at public relations workplaces are critical to understand agency-practitioner relationships. Moreover, considering that individuals feel group-based emotions based on their social identities, public relations agencies should pay more attention to employees' emotions at workplaces by incorporating measures on feelings of inclusion at workplaces. Because of whiteness and cisheteronormativity in PR agencies, it is plausible that practitioners experience different group-based emotions depending on who they are, how much DEI effort the agency makes, and who they work with. Thus, agencies can benefit from evaluating employees' emotions and using the insights to improve DEI. For instance, if group-based differences exist in employee's emotions at workplaces, it helps identify the issue with inclusion and provide equitable measures to reduce such discrepancies. Inclusion was defined as Group-based emotions can be helpful to evaluate outcomes of DEI efforts.

Future research can address how to make the DEI discourse relevant to everyone, including dominant social groups, by providing education on the history on structural discrimination on marginalized communities and role of public relations in society, increasing their sociocultural participation and exposure to cultural narratives, and reducing cognitive bias. Thus, action-based research or pedagogical research in anti-bias can provide practical insights to solve the deep-seated problem in public relations practice and education. For instance, studies can explore benefits and challenges in cross-identity mentorship to see if the mentorship enhances mentorship participants' sociocultural participation and exposure to cultural narratives as well as reduces their cognitive bias in public relations agency or education settings.

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APPENDIX A

TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

(Elkins & King, 2006; *GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016; Green & Maurer, 2015; Hale, 2009; Marks & Jones, 2020; Read-Bullock, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)

- **Race:** “Bodily identity that may or may not manifest in phenotypes” (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 43); “The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture. People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race” (Marks & Jones, 2020)
 - **Black or African American (including African, African American, African Caribbean, Afro-Latina/o/x, other):** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
 - **American Indian or Alaska Native:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
 - **Asian American or Asian (including East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Filipina/o/x):** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
 - **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
 - **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
- **Ethnicity:** “Cultural identity” (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 15)
 - **Hispanic or Latino/a/x (Mexican/Mexican American, Central American, Caribbean, Other):** A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. People who identify as Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish may be any race (Marks & Jones, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
 - **Middle Eastern, Arab, or Arab American**

Note: “Race and ethnicity are often conflated because some ethnicities are sometimes associated with phenotypes that allow race to function as a proxy for ethnicity” (Alcoff, 2006 as cited in (Read-Bullock, 2018, p. 15)

- **Sex:** The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the

birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).

- **Intersex:** An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD.) Avoid the outdated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite." While some people can have an intersex condition and also identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated. (For more information, visit interactyouth.org.) (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
- **Gender identity:** “A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below. Unlike gender expression (see below) gender identity is not visible to others” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Gender expression:** “External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Cisgender:** “A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of "trans-." A more widely understood way to describe people who are not transgender is simply to say non-transgender people” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Transgender:** “An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including transgender. Some of those terms are defined below. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Transgender man:** “People who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as a man may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans man. (Note: trans man, not "transman.") Some may also use FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male. Some may prefer to simply be called men, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Transgender woman:** “People who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as a woman may use this term to describe themselves.

They may shorten it to trans woman. (Note: trans woman, not "transwoman.") Some may also use MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female. Some may prefer to simply be called female, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).

- **Gender Non-Conforming:** "A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming. Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
- **Gender non-binary and/or genderqueer:** "Non-binary and/or genderqueer Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
- **Sexual orientation:** "Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Straight:** "meaning heterosexual, is classed as slang by some dictionaries and standard by others. Avoid any use that conveys an in-group flavor. But use the term freely (adj. only) in phrases drawing a contrast with gay: The film attracted gay and straight audiences alike" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Lesbian:** "A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Gay:** "The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). Sometimes lesbian (n. or adj.) is the preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as "homosexuals" an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people" (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
 - **Bisexual:** "A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetime. Bisexual people need not have had specific sexual experiences to be bisexual; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual. Do not use a hyphen in the word "bisexual," and only capitalize bisexual

when used at the beginning of a sentence” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).

- **Queer:** “An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g. queer person, queer woman). Typically, for those who identify as queer, the terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don't apply to them. Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below). Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community. When Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it typically means queer and, less often, questioning” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).
- **Asexual:** “An adjective used to describe people who do not experience sexual attraction (e.g., asexual person). A person can also be aromantic, meaning they do not experience romantic attraction” (For more information, visit asexuality.org.)” (*GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, 2016).

APPENDIX B

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewee backgrounds

1. What's your title?
2. How long have you been working as full-time in the PR industry?
3. How long have you been working for the current PR agency?
4. What are your responsibilities at the agency in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion work?

Agency backgrounds

1. How many employees are working for your agency?
 - a. How many of them are PR practitioners?
 - b. How do you classify the levels within your organization (they may have a (organization) chart on positions and progression they give to prospective employees)?
2. How big/influential is your organization in the industry?
3. How do you perceive your agencies' influence on DEI in the PR industry?
4. Could you share your agency's annual fee income?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In this section, I will be asking questions related to each concept associated with DEI: diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Diversity

1. How does your agency define diversity?
2. What are the dimensions of diversity that your agency values?
3. *What types of efforts is the agency making to enhance diversity?
 - a. Hiring (e.g., Working with outside firms or recruiters, Recruiting from HBCUs and MSIs, Who is going to visit those places? etc.)
 - b. Retaining (e.g., Promoting employees with diverse backgrounds?)
 - c. Other
4. What have been some of the most successful/least successful examples of those efforts?

Equity

1. How does your agency define equity?
2. *What types of efforts is the agency making to enhance equity?
 - a. Hiring (e.g., Policies, pay equity, paid internship for individuals)
 - b. Retaining (e.g., Policies, pay equity, specific health care benefits for individuals with marginalized sexual orientations and racial, ethnic, and gender identities)
 - c. Other

3. What have been some of the most successful/least successful examples of those efforts?

Inclusion

1. How does your agency define inclusion?
2. *What types of efforts is the agency making to enhance inclusion?
 - a. Hiring (e.g., hiring DEI professionals for the organizations)
 - b. Retaining (e.g., celebrating diverse holidays, affinity groups, professional development programs, mentorship, DEI-related trainings, etc.)
 - c. Other (e.g., process of assigning practitioners to DEI-related projects or clients serving populations with marginalized social identities)
3. What have been some of the most successful/least successful examples of those efforts?

DEI

1. Beside of DEI, are there any other terms you use to refer to the efforts to achieve social justice and diminish disparities existing in organizations or society? (e.g., IDEA referring to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access)
 - a. If yes, why did you choose the term and how it is different from other terms?
2. What are the goals and objectives related to DEI at your agency?
 - a. Do you have any examples?
 - b. What are the examples of goals and objectives your agency achieved?
 - c. What are the examples of goals and objectives your agency was not able to achieve?
3. How do you measure the achievements of the goals and objectives related to DEI? (formally or informally)
4. *How do you communicate your DEI efforts to employees and partner stakeholders if at all?
 - a. Can you give me examples (e.g., newsletters, recognitions/awards, on websites, events, participating in DEI related events/webinars/info sessions open to public, etc.)?
5. Do you have a budget dedicated to working on issues of DEI (e.g., programs)?
 - a. Who authorizes the budget?
 - b. How much autonomy do you have with the budget?
6. *Are there ways that your agency would like to expand its efforts? Can you tell me more about that?
7. Are you a part of industry-wide DEI efforts?
 - a. If yes, could you please tell me about them?
 - b. If no, is there any particular industry-wide DEI efforts that you would like to join?

Hiring/Recruitment

1. What is the most common ways of recruiting PR practitioners? (e.g., employee referrals, from the interns, campus job fairs, agency websites, job search engines, etc.)
2. What has been the most successful ways of recruiting PR practitioners?
3. What has been the most successful ways of recruiting PR practitioners with diverse backgrounds (especially practitioners with marginalized gender, racial/ethnic identities and sexual orientations)?

4. *What is the typical process of the decision making in hiring? Who participates in the process? (e.g., HR)
 - a. How do you interact with the HR personnel in hiring?
 - b. Who do you say has more influence on how jobs are advertised? The hiring department or Central HR?
5. What do you see beneficial to recruit employees with diverse backgrounds?
6. What have you done beneficial to recruit employees with diverse backgrounds?
7. *Why do you think employees with diverse backgrounds choose to work with your agency?
8. *Why do you think employees with diverse backgrounds turn down your agency?
9. What kinds of questions have you received in information sessions from prospective job applicants in events such as campus visits or job fairs?
10. *What kinds of questions have you received in information sessions from prospective job applicants with diverse backgrounds?
11. *What are the expectations that diverse talents are having, but you don't have?

Website-related

1. Do you intentionally think about using your agency's website to signal the company's DEI programs/efforts?
2. *What types of information do you have available on your agency's website to signal diversity, equity, and inclusion programs/efforts?
3. What types of information do you seek to change (add or remove) on your agency's website to attract practitioners with diverse backgrounds?

Wrapping up

1. Before we wrap up, do you have any comments or questions?
2. Is there any senior-level DEI professional you recommend me to reach out to?
3. Could you please provide your agency's one-sheet?

APPENDIX C

MEASUREMENTS FOR EXPERIMENT STUDY

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (7-point Likert scale: 1=Very negative, 7=Very positive)

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups.
3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
9. It would be good if groups could be equal. (Reverse-coded)
10. Group equality should be our ideal. (Reverse-coded)
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life. (Reverse-coded)
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups. (Reverse-coded)
13. Increased social equality. (Reverse-coded)
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally. (Reverse-coded)
15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible. (Reverse-coded)
16. No one group should dominate in society. (Reverse-coded)

Job search variable.

Have you secured an employment after the graduation? (Yes/No/I am not sure.)

Willingness to accept a job with a PR agency (7-point Likert scale, 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree)

1. I think I would enjoy working at a public relations agency.
2. I would pursue employment with a public relations agency.
3. If given the chance, I would try to get a job with a public relations agency.

Identification status (6-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 6=Strongly agree)

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“Identification as a member of a social group with historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and/or gender identities or sexual orientation in the United States.”

Perceived identity threat (7-point Likert scale: 1=Not at all, 7=Extremely)

1. How much might you worry that you won't belong in this PR agency?
2. How much might you worry that others will not respect you at this PR agency?
3. How much might you worry that others will not value your opinion or contributions at this PR agency?

4. How much might you worry that you cannot be your true self at this PR agency?
5. How much might you worry about being left out or marginalized at this PR agency?
6. How much might you worry about being stereotyped because of your identity at this PR agency?

Psychological safety (7-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree)

1. If you make a mistake in this PR agency, it will be held against you. (reverse-coded)
2. Employees of this PR agency appear to be able to bring up problems and tough issues.
3. People in this PR agency will reject others for being different. (reverse-coded)
4. It appears to be safe to take a risk in this PR agency.
5. It appears to be difficult to ask other employees of this PR agency for help. (reverse-coded)
6. No one in this PR agency appear to deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
7. Working with members of this PR agency, my unique skills and talents will be valued and utilized.

Social fit and comfort (7-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree)

1. I feel like I would fit in at this PR agency.
2. I feel like I could be myself at this PR agency.
3. I would like to work at this PR agency.
4. I think I would enjoy working in a work environment like that of this PR agency.
5. I would recommend this PR agency to a friend who specializes in this industry.
6. I feel like I could succeed at this PR agency.
7. I think the environment at this PR agency would inspire me to do the very best job that I can.

Perceived group inclusion scale (7-point Likert scale: 1=Extremely unlikely, 7=Extremely likely)

When 1=Extremely unlikely and 7=Extremely likely, this PR agency...

1. ...will give me the feeling that I belong.
2. ...will give me the feeling that I am part of this group.
3. ...will give me the feeling that I fit in.
4. ...will treat me as an insider.
5. ...will like me.
6. ...will appreciate me.
7. ...will be pleased with me.
8. ...will care about me.
9. ...will allow me to be authentic.
10. ...will allow me to be who I am.
11. ...will allow me to express my authentic self.
12. ...will allow me to present myself the way I am.
13. ...will encourage me to be authentic
14. ...will encourage me to be who I am.
15. ...will encourage me to express my authentic self.
16. ...will encourage me to present myself the way I am.

Job Pursuit Intention

1. If I was offered a job at this PR agency, I would accept the job offer considering it meets all of my personal needs (location, salary, etc.).
2. If I were looking for a job, a job at this PR agency would be very appealing.
3. If I were looking for a job, I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this PR agency.
4. After viewing this PR agency's website, I would no longer be interested in working for this agency except as a last resort. (Reverse-coded)
5. If I were looking for a job, I would be interested in pursuing an application with this PR agency assuming it meets my personal needs (location, salary, etc.).

Open-Ended Question

Please describe why you have chosen the answers as you did above in detail.

Demographic information

Please indicate which of the following best reflects your racial and/or ethnic identity. Select all that apply.

1. White
2. Black or African American
3. Hispanic or Latina/o/x
4. Asian or Asian American
5. Middle Eastern, Arab or Arab American
6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
7. American Indian and Alaskan Native
8. Multiracial
9. Self-identify (Please specify)
10. Prefer not to answer

What is your gender identity?

1. Man
2. Woman
3. Gender non-conforming (including gender queer, gender non-binary, gender fluid)
4. Self-identify (Please specify)
5. Prefer not to answer

“Transgender” is an umbrella term that refers to people whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated their assigned sex at birth. Do you identify as transgender?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to answer

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

1. Straight
2. Lesbian
3. Gay
4. Bisexual

5. Queer
6. Questioning
7. Self-identify (Please specify)
8. Prefer not to answer

What is your citizenship status in the United States?

1. U.S. citizen
2. Non-U.S. citizen
3. I don't know.
4. Prefer not to answer

Are you affiliated with any religion?

1. Yes, if so _____
2. No
3. Prefer not to answer

In terms of politics, where would you place yourself on the following scale? (1=Very liberal, 7=Very conservative)

Do you consider yourself a first-generation student or graduate to academia? While there are many definitions of the term, first-generation students are often defined as those who are the first in their family to attend college.

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know.
4. Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree you are seeking at your school?

1. Bachelor's degree
2. Master's degree
3. Doctoral degree
4. Professional degree
5. Other (Please specify)
6. Prefer not to answer

What year are you in your current degree program?

1. 1st year
2. 2nd year
3. 3rd year
4. 4th year
5. 5th year
6. 6th year
7. 7th+ year

What is your enrollment status?

1. Full-time student

2. Part-time student
3. Other (Please specify)
4. Prefer not to answer

Are you a public relations major?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Other (Please specify)

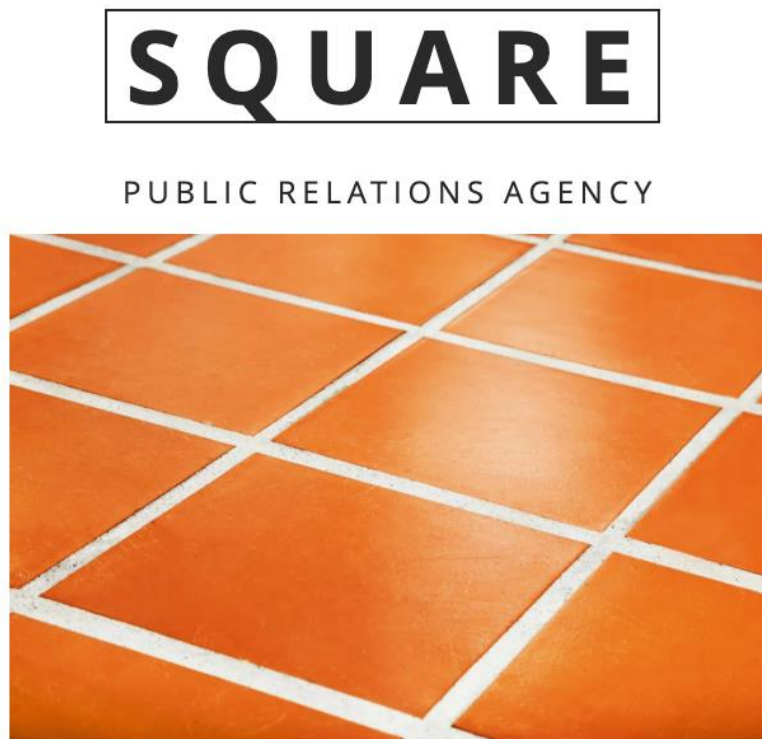
APPENDIX D

EXPERIMENT STIMULI

In the following pages, you will be viewing webpages of a public relations agency. Please take your time to evaluate the public relations agency as a place you are considering working. You can use the back and forward buttons while viewing the webpages.

Note: Please be aware that you will not be able to return to these pages once you exit the viewing mode.

Home (Same for both low and high DEI conditions)



[Home](#) [About](#) [Services](#) [Culture](#) [Careers](#) [Contact](#)

About (low vs. high DEI condition)

SQUARE

PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

We are a full-service award-winning public relations agency, providing strategic and creative communication services to meet your goals. We create impacts that support businesses in achieving their communication goals. For the past 30 years, we have provided focused, creative, and strategic vision to our clients. Learn more about how we go above and beyond your expectations!

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS
 2020-2021 PRWeek Media's PR agency of the year
 2019-2021 PR weekly Excellence Awards
 2018 Forster America's Best PR Firms
 2016-2021 PRDaily's Best Places to work for employees

Meet the Team



Charlie Schultz f | w | in
Co-founder, CEO

Damon Morgan f | w | in
Co-founder, President



Julie Howard f | w | in
Vice President

Dominic Johnson f | w | in
Vice President



Barbara Bessard f | w | in
Co-director of Public Relations

Victoria Cole f | w | in
Co-director of Public Relations



Rob Howard f | w | in
Senior Account Manager

Lid Delamare f | w | in
Senior Account Manager



Mitch Powell f | w | in
Senior Account Manager

Malissa Greene f | w | in
Senior Account Coordinator



Imogen Corney f | w | in
Senior Account Coordinator

Shawn Dixon f | w | in
Account Coordinator



Rachael Diaz f | w | in
Account Coordinator

Annie Jackson f | w | in
Account Coordinator



John Williams f | w | in
Account Coordinator

Jessica Moore f | w | in
Account Coordinator



Kaleigh Purvis f | w | in
Intern

Paula Gross f | w | in
Human Resources Specialist

SQUARE

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AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS
 2020-2021 PRWeek Media's PR agency of the year
 2019-2021 PR weekly Excellence Awards
 2018 Forster America's Best PR Firms
 2016-2021 PRDaily's Best Places to work for LGBTQ employees

Meet the Team



Tanya Miller (She/Her) f | w | in
Co-founder, CEO

Luis Sandoval (He/Him) f | w | in
Co-founder, President



Vera Tan (She/Her) f | w | in
Vice President

Tim Hottelgawerth (He/Him) f | w | in
Vice President



Vickie Turner (She/Her) f | w | in
Co-director of Public Relations

Juan Cortes (He/Him) f | w | in
Co-director of Public Relations



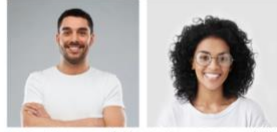
Brian Holcomb (He/Him) f | w | in
Senior Account Manager

Claire Marshall (She/Her) f | w | in
Senior Account Manager



Simon Francisco (He/Him) f | w | in
Senior Account Manager

Leticia Rojas (She/Her) f | w | in
Senior Account Manager



Mark Brown (He/Him) f | w | in
Senior Account Manager

Isabel Demoura (She/Her) f | w | in
Account Coordinator



Justin Yarn (He/Him) f | w | in
Account Coordinator

Victor Moral (He/Him) f | w | in
Account Coordinator



Kevin Hye (He/Him) f | w | in
Account Coordinator

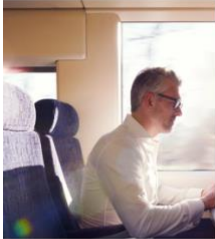









Kristina Baderich (She/Her) f | w | in
Account Coordinator



Alex Young (She/They) f | w | in
Intern

Oly Aweedi (She/Her) f | w | in
Human Resources Specialist

Services (low vs. high DEI condition)

 <p>AmTrak</p> <p>We expanded AmTrak's outreach to its business professional consumer base.</p>		 <p>AmTrak</p> <p>We expanded Amtrak's outreach to its LGBTQ customer base.</p>	
<p>Droppps</p> <p>We partnered with social media influencers to share Dropps' eco-friendly and powerful house cleaning products.</p>	 <p>FRIENDLY.</p>	<p>Droppps</p> <p>We partnered with social media influencers to share Dropps' eco-friendly and powerful house cleaning products.</p>	 <p>FRIENDLY.</p>
 <p>National Park Service</p> <p>We developed the agency's safety campaign so visitors can enjoy the urban to wilderness adventures that national parks have to offer.</p>	 <p>National Park Service</p> <p>We developed the agency's diverse visitors outreach campaign so visitors can enjoy the urban to wilderness adventures that national parks have to offer.</p>		
<p>iRobot</p> <p>We elevated the possibilities of iRobot's home intelligence adjusting to working from home.</p>	<p>iRobot</p> <p>Roomba Robot Vacuum</p> <p>Change the way you clean – forever.</p> <p>Roomba® i7 and i7+ Robot Vacuums</p>	<p>iRobot</p> <p>We elevated the possibilities of iRobot's home intelligence adjusting to working from home.</p>	<p>iRobot</p> <p>Roomba Robot Vacuum</p> <p>Change the way you clean – forever.</p> <p>Roomba® i7 and i7+ Robot Vacuums</p>
 <p>Nissan Dream Drive</p> <p>We introduced Nissan's environmentally conscious and family-friendly vehicle to the world.</p>	 <p>Nissan Dream Drive</p> <p>We introduced Nissan's environmentally conscious and family-friendly vehicle.</p>		
<p>2020 Census</p> <p>We raised awareness of the 2020 Census to American households to enhance representation.</p>	 <p>2020 Census</p> <p>We raised awareness of the 2020 Census to Hispanic/Latino.a.x households to enhance representation.</p>		
<p>Home About Services Culture Careers Contact</p>		<p>Home About Services Culture Careers Contact</p>	

Culture (low vs. high DEI condition)



PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

Culture

We believe that creativity and innovation result primarily from cooperation between people with unique experiences, perspectives, and talents/skillsets. We respect and honor all employees for their unique contribution to our agency.



Our commitment

For our employees

Employee Socials: We have employee socials and outings including *Trivia nights*, *scavenger hunt challenges* and annual *cook-offs*.

From *Wacky Wednesdays* to *Casual Fridays*, our celebrations go beyond the office happy hour.

We conduct *annual pay audits* to ensure that *our long-term employees are rewarded for their loyalty*.

For the PR industry

We provide *mentorship* and *paid Internship* opportunities for *local college students*.

We work with *professional and educational organizations* including *PRSSA* to create a network with future professionals.

For the community

We volunteer for *disaster relief* organizations, and donate to *children's hospitals*.

We also *match our employees' donations* to select nonprofits.

We work with *local business owners* to raise awareness of the importance of PR.

[Home](#) [About](#) [Services](#) [Culture](#) [Careers](#) [Contact](#)



PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

Culture

We believe that creativity and innovation result primarily from cooperation between people with diverse experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. We respect and honor employees of all races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations.



Our commitment

For our employees

ERGs (Employee Resource Groups): We have *resource groups* for BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ employees.

From *Black History Month* to *Pride Month*, our celebrations go beyond the office happy hour.

We conduct *annual pay audits* to ensure *fair pay for all* races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

For the PR industry

We provide *mentorship* and *paid Internship* opportunities for *underrepresented college students*.

We work with *professional and educational organizations* including *The LAGRANT Foundation* to create a network with future professionals.

For the community

We volunteer for organizations supporting *transgender women of color*, and donate to *Historically Black Colleges and Universities*.

We also *match our employees' donations* to social justice nonprofits.

We work with *BIPOC business owners* to raise awareness of the importance of PR.

[Home](#) [About](#) [Services](#) [Culture](#) [Careers](#) [Contact](#)

Careers (low vs. high DEI condition)



PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

We are hiring!

We are looking for employees who understand the various demands of a global marketplace, who contribute to our agency, and who thrive in an agency culture where individuality is valued.

Benefits

Benefit 1. Work & Life Balance

401K with employer match; paid maternity and paternity leave; flexible work hours, and remote working options.

Paid time off combines your vacation, personal and sick days together giving you more flexibility to manage work and life.

We observe 10 federal holidays including Independence Day and the Columbus Day.

Benefit 2. Health Benefits

Health care, dental, and vision insurances for employees and their spouses

Benefit 3. Career Development

We offer workshops for PR strategy and APR (Accreditation in Public Relations) certificates as well as organization-wide trainings on AI, emerging media, and industry's best leadership practices.

We provide professional memberships including PRSA (Public Relations Society of America), IABC (International Association of Business Communicators), PR Council, etc.



Liz Delamare
Senior Account Manager

What separates Square PR from other agencies is that Square PR strives continuously to ensure employees excel in both their professional and personal lives.



Jalen Williams
Account Coordinator

Square PR truly values its employees and culture, and that enables us as employees to grow and feel passionate about our careers.



Annie Jackson
Account Coordinator

What makes Square PR unique is the inclusive and caring culture that is not only reflected across all levels within the organization, but also echoed by clients.



Brian Holcomb
He/His, Senior Account Manager

What separates Square PR from other agencies is that Square PR strives continuously to ensure employees excel in both their professional and personal lives.



Kristen Bazarich
She/Her, Account Coordinator

Square PR truly values its employees and culture, and that enables us as employees to grow and feel passionate about our careers.



Victor Morel
She/Her, Account Coordinator

What makes Square PR unique is the inclusive and caring culture that is not only reflected across all levels within the organization, but also echoed by clients.



Careers

Paula Grace
Human Resources Specialist
paulagrace@square.pr

First Name Last Name

Email *

Message

Send

Careers

Ola Aswandi, She/Her
Human Resources Specialist
olaaswandi@square.pr

Full Name Pronouns

Email *

Message

Send

Contact (low vs. high DEI condition)

SQUARE
PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

Contact

678-622-1854
info@square.pr
f t in @

Business Hours
Mon - Fri 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Email * _____

Message _____

Send

SQUARE

Contact

678-622-1854
info@square.pr
f t in @

Business Hours
Mon - Fri 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Full Name _____ Pronouns _____

Email * _____

Message _____

Send

Home About Services Culture Careers **Contact**

Home About Services Culture Careers **Contact**

End of the viewing mode: You are about to exit the viewing mode of the webpages. Once you click the forward button on the bottom right, you will not be able to view the webpages again. If you are finished viewing the webpages, please proceed to the next section of the study by clicking the forward button.