

2016

“Missing a Crucial Asset”: Minoritized Students’ Experiences of Race and Racism During the Internship

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“MISSING A CRUCIAL ASSET”: MINORITIZED STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES
OF RACE AND RACISM DURING THE INTERNSHIP

BY

DIANA MOORE MARSHALL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

AND

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2016

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

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2016

ABSTRACT

The call for engaging undergraduate students in internships is getting louder, not fading away. Undergraduate students are increasingly faced with experiential learning requirements that complement their studies and provide real world experience to increase marketability when looking for a job. This qualitative research study explores the experience of interns from racially minoritized populations to gain understanding of how racial microaggressions are experienced at this unique time. Research has shown that racial microaggressions are experienced in school environments (Beasley as reported in Jones, 2013; Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and workplace environments (Flores, 2013; Gardner & Tyson, 1994), thus this research study assumed that racial microaggressions would occur during internships.

Using hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology, the researcher interviewed six participants twice to investigate their experiences with racism and racial microaggressions experienced during their internships. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to code and develop themes across participant descriptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Four prevalent themes emerged from the data: (1) subtle racial microaggressions, (2) environmental racial microaggressions, (3) microassaults, and (4) absence of racial microaggressions. The absence of racial microaggressions is included in the findings to include all participant experiences and provide another dimension into the intern experience. The theme of subtle racial microaggressions

includes two additional topics to address participant questioning and confusion: (1) attributional ambiguity and (2) intersectionality.

The findings of this research study have implications for the practice of intern programs: (1) internship seminar curricula changes to increase opportunities for interns from minoritized populations to explore how racial microaggressions experienced affect their sense of self and their experience; (2) training in identifying and responding to interns who have experienced racial microaggressions; and (3) training for internship supervisors to become more attuned to how racial microaggressions or issues of race may play out for interns from minoritized populations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro and my dissertation committee: Dr. Kathy Peno (URI), Dr. Stefan Battle (RIC), and Dr. David Brell (RIC). There are no words to describe how grateful I am to you for your support, collegiality, and kindness. I am not sure how I can ever repay you, except to promise to pay it forward.

To my colleagues and students from URI and County School: where would I be without your support, friendship and honesty? I am forever in your debt. Thank you for your hours of brainstorming and teamwork.

To all of my friends: I've missed you. I can't wait to resume our hours of laughter and adventure. There are too many of you to name, but please know that your support and kindness are a big part of my success.

To my family, especially my parents and sisters: This is all thanks to you. From you, I have learned everything I know. Because of you, I am able to achieve my dreams.

To Peter (T+B): I couldn't have done this with you. Thanks for 20+ years of love, honesty, dreaming, creativity, generosity, and laughter. Truly.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My Background and Interest in the Topic

I began my career as a public elementary school teacher in 2001 in a small, wealthy suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. While this town bore some similarities to my hometown, there were some facets with which I could never get comfortable. The treatment of students and families who identified racially as people of color was a particular area of discomfort.

The town participated in the METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) program, an initiative aimed at increasing educational opportunities for urban students and decreasing the racial isolation of suburban schools (www.doe.mass.edu/metco/) started in 1966. The parents and teachers in the town often viewed the students participating in the METCO program with a savior mentality, with assumptions that students from Boston had negligent or non-participatory parents, lived in poverty and violent neighborhoods, and achieved academically at lower levels than the students from the town.

The sense of otherness that students and families of color carried was further exacerbated by the racial composition of the town. In 2010, 85% of the population of this town reported White as their race, with 9% reporting Asian and only 2% reporting Black or African American (US Census, 2010). The racial climate of the school was divided: White students were assumed to be living in privilege and from the town; Boston students were assumed to be needy and neglected, not capable of much achievement. Parents and teachers alike expressed assumptions about the Boston

students' academic capabilities, level of parent care, and access to the tools necessary to reach the high levels of achievement required by the town and the state.

In 2001, the district began an initiative to encourage anti-racist, anti-biased teaching. This initiative was the administration's response to standardized test results that indicated that the majority of students not meeting academic expectations were students of color. As a result of this initiative, I was able to participate in several professional development opportunities that allowed me to look at my own teaching and personal experiences through a lens that highlighted race as a factor. It was through this initiative that I became interested in the different ways that school and school-based activities are experienced and available to students of color. I started to think critically about the racial environment in my school and question the culture. For 10 years I taught in the elementary school while also engaging in, creating, and facilitating professional development activities that encouraged my colleagues to look at race and racial climate through a critical lens. We investigated how we communicated with and advocated for students and families, different aspects of the curriculum and the literature we used, and how to create a reciprocal relationship between Boston and the suburban town.

After teaching public school for 10 years, I transitioned into a position in higher education supporting faculty, students, and community partners in engaging with experiential education. Through this position, I was able to continue to investigate my interests in access and equity in education, specifically with students of color. I encountered similar instructor and supervisor attitudes towards students of color as I did with the parents and teachers in my elementary role and came to the

realization that it was not only an issue of individual attitudes but the support of such attitudes by institutional norms and policies that perpetuate racism (Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

During my work in higher education, I was introduced to a term that encompasses what I had encountered in the elementary school and what I was encountering with college students: racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are subtle pieces of communication that seek to invalidate or otherwise “other” someone based on their perceived participation in a particular group (Sue, 2010b). Racial microaggressions stood out to me as being especially problematic, as they are subtle and thus difficult to identify and combat.

Part of my work in higher education is to teach an online internship seminar. In facilitating discussions and interacting with interns from several different majors and internships, I have found that many interns who identified as persons of color conveyed experiences of racial microaggressions during their internships. Most did not identify the exchanges as racial microaggressions, which is not surprising since it is an academic term. However, their descriptions seemed to reflect definitions of microaggressions found in the literature. This led me to think about racial microaggressions and the experience of interns from racially minoritized populations. There is a wealth of research on racism in higher education and the workplace but little research on the internship experience.

This study investigated racial microaggressions experienced during internship, at what can be considered the intersection of school and work. This study investigated the following research question:

How do former student interns from racially minoritized populations describe and make meaning of racial microaggressions at their internship sites?

Statement of the Problem

A Latina student intern at the New York Times recently fielded a comment from an editor: “I bet no one else has written for this editorial page whose parents didn’t speak English” (Hernandez, 2014, section 8, para. 2). She had several interactions with editors and coworkers throughout her internship that felt “odd somehow,” attributing this to “missing a crucial asset: a talent for talking to White men” (Hernandez, 2014, section 12, para. 3). A former intern who identifies as Black reported that “by the end of my internship, my supervisor has shattered my sense of who I was,” while “two White interns had the most blissful and carefree experience” (The First Time I Experienced Racism in Corporate America, 2013). To survive the experience with her identity intact, she “simply assimilated. I wore a mask” (The First Time I Experienced Racism in Corporate America, 2013). In 2013, a student at the [university] reported experiencing racial microaggressions at his internship site and requested to change his internship site due to his extreme discomfort with a particular colleague. These three students reported incidents that had a profound effect on their internship experiences, effects that will continue to shape who they are as individuals and professionals, the choices that they make, and the career paths they follow. These former interns interpreted each experience as racist, although not obvious or overt instances of racism.

While instances of overt racism may be less prevalent today, covert racism is still experienced by people in minoritized populations (Boske, 2010; Deitch, Barsky,

Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003; Mistry & Latoo, 2009; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capolilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Covert forms of racism are deeply ingrained in all aspects of society and culture and, therefore, are difficult to identify and correct (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010b). Covert racism, called microaggressions, often presents as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership” (Sue, 2010b, p. 24). These subtle insults are enacted upon a person with the intention, either consciously or subconsciously, to demean because of perceived or actual membership in a certain group(s) (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) and are damaging to an individual’s sense of self-worth, safety and health, and economic well-being (Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2007).

As individuals from minoritized populations travel through the lifespan, they report racial microaggressions and their effects at every level. In schools, racial microaggressions can lead students to feeling less capable and less competent, angry, and less likely to succeed on the standardized measures to which students are held accountable (Beasley as reported in Jones, 2013; Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). At work, racial microaggressions can result in competent employees being overlooked, spending time and energy angry at situations, not productively working, taking more sick time, and calling out of work (Flores, 2013; Gardner & Tyson, 1994). In all instances, racial microaggressions cause the individual to feel undervalued, disrespected, and disengaged, with the ultimate result of individuals not living and working to their potential (Chavez, Ornelas, Lyles, &

Williams, 2015; Flores, 2013; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Gardner & Tyson, 1994; Okechukwu, Souza, Davis, & de Castro, 2014). Sue et al. (2007) call for a deeper understanding of microaggressions: how they develop and manifest in the larger society, along with the impact that microaggressions have on people from minoritized populations. Huber and Solorzano (2015) note that racial microaggressions are particularly harmful and difficult to combat, perpetuating racism while simultaneously rendering it invisible.

Racial microaggressions are becoming increasingly understood and recognized, particularly by college-age individuals. With the prevalence of technology in sharing information and connecting with others, turning to popular culture and social media perhaps gives a good indication of this burgeoning understanding. MTV has recently begun a campaign, Look Different (www.lookdifferent.org), to promote understanding and awareness around racial and gender biases and discrimination. The blog, www.microaggressions.com, allows individuals to share their own experiences with the multitude of microaggressions. In 2014, Harvard undergraduates created a play entitled “I, Too, Am Harvard” that depicts several instances of racial microaggressions experienced by students on campus. The Tumblr account with the same name carries on the project. There is a Facebook page for Brown University students to share their experiences with microaggressions. Each of these examples is critical for the advancement for work in this area, as they allow individuals to share their concrete experiences.

The term “racially minoritized populations” is used in this study to describe groups of people traditionally thought of as racial minorities or people of color

(Gillborn, 2005; Harper 2012; Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, Nishi 2015). The term “racially minoritized,” as opposed to “students of color” or “minority students,” is intentionally used in this paper to highlight the idea that minority status is a culturally constructed concept and the direct result of systematic processes that keep people who are deemed to be in the cultural minority in a position of less power and influence (Benitez, 2012; Sarcedo et al., 2015; Stewart, 2013).

Significance of the Study

President Barack Obama, in his 2014 State of the Union address, put forth a directive to Vice President Joe Biden to review federal employment programs with the goal of creating programs that increasingly support employers in hiring qualified employees and prepare job-seekers for skills that employers have deemed as vital (White House, 2014). The resulting initiative, called Ready to Work, outlines several strategies and programs to increase the number of skilled job-seekers and employers ready to hire (White House, 2014). Ready to Work has affected higher education in a few ways with its call for more apprenticeships, also called internships, and an increase in support for high-impact innovations in higher education (White House, 2014). One way for institutions of higher education to respond to the Ready to Work initiative is to increase the number of students engaging in internships as part of a program of study.

The State of Rhode Island has responded to the federal Ready to Work initiative by encouraging employers and higher education partners to come together to create programs and incentives for hiring and training Rhode Island employees. The Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board has awarded \$1.73 million dollars in

Innovative Partnership grants to employers, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations to create programming to increase the skills and knowledge of Rhode Island's employees (Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board).

The [university] has responded to the initiatives and funding opportunities focused on increasing employee skills and knowledge in several ways. In 2013, the Center for Career and Experiential Education received an Innovative Partnership grant from the Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board to design and implement eight meetings to bring together employers and faculty to talk about and plan for internships. Across campus, degree-granting colleges are increasing their course offerings that incorporate experiential education, including internships and a variety of other courses that encourage students to think about career topics and develop professional skills. [University president] mentioned creating more career courses for students (March 15, 2015) and called internships a "powerful education strategy" (March 2, 2015) in his most recent blog posts.

Many students are required to complete internships as part of their degree requirements. Nationally, 61% of college graduates in 2014 completed an internship for college credit (NACE Class of 2014 Student Survey Report: Executive Summary, 2014). Roughly 50% of undergraduate interns in 2014 were hired as an employee at the completion of the internship (NACE 2014 Internship and Co-Op Survey: Executive Summary, 2014). At [university], 73% of graduates in 2015 reported receiving credit for engaging in an internship.

While many researchers have explored the importance of internships, racism in schools, and racism in the workplace (Cabrera et al., 1999; Carter, 2006; Deitch et al., 2003; Fischer, 2007; Mistry & Latoo, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014; Steele, 1992), to my knowledge no researcher has explored racism experienced during an internship or how racial microaggressions shape the experiences and identities of interns. This research on how former interns from racially minoritized populations describe and make meaning of racial microaggressions during the internship attempts to fill that gap.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historically, racism in the U.S. has been exhibited in overt and obvious acts against others based on the color of their skin (Hurtado, 1992). Although overt and obvious acts of racism still occur, covert racism is also currently prevalent in almost every facet of contemporary society in the U.S (Coates, 2008). Covert racism denotes subtle acts of power of one group over another enacted through governmental and institutional policies and societal norms (Coates, 2008).

Racism is a pervasive, crippling, and current issue in the U.S., despite the notion that the country has moved beyond the issues of the Civil Rights era of the 1960s (Embrick, 2015). The ripples of racism continue to affect individuals, families, and communities in ways that have profound effects on the opportunities available to people from minoritized populations. Individuals from racially minoritized populations have less access to quality healthcare and education (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Chavez, Ornelas, Lyles, & Williams, 2015), pay more for essential goods (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014), and are more likely to be underemployed and/or incarcerated (Blake, 2014; Gardner & Tyson, 1994; Haney & Hurtado, 1994; Okechukwu et al., 2014; Pager, 2003). The Brookings Institute (Rothwell, 2015) reports that some industries are quickly closing gaps in employment between Whites and Blacks, but the income gap persists and progress in income equality has not occurred since halting in 1991. These disparities perpetuate a cycle of having less: inferior health, less educational attainment, less exposure to opportunities and choices. While there is a plethora of research on racism in general, the nuances of racial

microaggressions continue to emerge in importance as more researchers have come to understand their prevalence.

Research has shown that racial microaggressions have occurred in school environments (Beasley as reported in Jones, 2013; Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and workplace environments (Flores, 2013; Gardner & Tyson, 1994). By researching the experience of interns, who are both employees and students, we will gain a better understanding of how racial microaggressions are experienced during this unique time in an individual's development.

In the following sections, I review literature in the topics of internships, microaggressions, race in higher education, racism in the workplace, racial identity theory, and intersectionality. First, I discuss the definition, theoretical importance, and benefits of internships. Next, I discuss the topic of microaggressions, both in general and as experienced by undergraduate students. Third, I discuss the prevalence of racism in higher education and current issues surrounding this topic. Fourth, I discuss the effects of racism in the workplace. Fifth, I define the core tenets of racial identity theory. Finally, I explore the concept of intersectionality and its effects on individuals.

Internships

While seemingly benign, the term 'internship' often sparks emotions in people, from students to parents to employers. Students are frantic to find the right internship with meaningful learning and without the intern abuse often sensationalized in the media, including movies. Parents are eager to get their children internships because it increases the likelihood of employment after graduation. Employers clamor to find an intern to support their work. Intense media attention given to internships during the

past 20 years could have a part in this. From headline-making internship scandals of the 1990's, to debates and litigation over internship pay, to fear of a scant job market, internships often play a foundational role in conversations regarding a variety of topics: higher education effectiveness and necessity, transition from college to career, the disconnect between employer needs and job candidate skills (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Ewell & Jones, 1996; Keller, 2012; Kuh, 2008; Sweitzer & King, 2014). Added to these controversial topics is the fact that the US is still recovering from a recession, and several US politicians, including President Obama, indicate that internships are critical to the job market due to increase the employability of job seekers.

For the purposes of this research, the term “internship” is defined as a context-based learning experience in which the student is actively engaged in bridging theory and practice, receives academic credit for work completed, is closely monitored by an approved worksite supervisor and university instructor, and works for at least eight hours per week over the course of 10 weeks (DiConti, 2004; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014; Sweitzer & King, 2014). A review of the research on internships produces several other terms that are seemingly used interchangeably with the term internship. Work-related learning, work-integrated learning, practicum, externship, apprenticeship, and cooperative education (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014) are just a few examples. These terms are generally related, often with one minute varying factor. Gardner and Bartkus (2014) caution against using these terms too stringently because, while “there may be distinct differences, they are all intended to meet similar goals and objectives” (p. 49), primarily that of engaging students in real world learning.

While elements of internships, more generally known as workplace learning, can be traced back in time as far as 600 BCE when the idea of working under the supervision of skilled craftsmen is first noted (Sides & Mrvica, 2007, p. 2), current theories about internships and learning can be traced back to John Dewey and other founders of modern educational thought. Because Dewey is often thought of as the founder of experiential education, the beginning tenets of internships can also be applied to his philosophy. Dewey (1938) believed that the relationship between experience and education is “intimate and necessary” (p. 20), one being dependent and intertwined with the other. Furthermore, Dewey (1938) posited that once individuals learn in the context of real world application, they are better able to transfer that learning to novel situations, an idea that aligns with the foundations of internships.

Lev Vygotsky (1980), a developmental psychologist, believed that experience encourages developmental processes in the learner and that these internal processes can only be awakened during interaction with peers and the environment. Additionally, Vygotsky (1980) felt that individuals “grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88), making the richness and intentionality of the learning environment extremely important.

Internships are increasingly included in undergraduate plans of study, as research indicates that engaging students in internships is an element of a powerful learning environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Internships are called a high impact practice by Ewell and Jones (1996) and Kuh (2008). High impact practices (Kuh, 2008) are teaching and student engagement strategies that research has shown to increase student retention and satisfaction. Research suggests that students who

engage in at least one internship during their undergraduate career better understands their career path and interests (Jones, 2002), have increased cultural capital, and become more confident in their abilities (Keller, 2012). Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) refers non-material assets that elevate an individual's social standing. Additionally, research suggests that undergraduate interns are more likely to increase their GPA by graduation (Kilgo, Parker III, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2014) and find employment after graduation (Pascarella, 2005).

Internships serve as a critical piece of undergraduate education, as they are often the first experience that students have with putting years of classroom learning into an intended career (Keller, 2012). Additionally, internships are uniquely positioned to encourage students to engage in critical thinking with regards to oppression and issues of power, as they inherently engage students in an active process of meaning-making based on experience and reflection (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003).

Research indicates that youth from racially minoritized populations are more likely to lack opportunities to develop career self-efficacy and career identities (Speight, Rosenthal, Jones, & Gastenveld, 1995), making the internship an imperative piece of a student's undergraduate work and professional development. Constantine, Erickson, Banks and Timberlake (1998) suggest that engaging students from racially minoritized populations in internships is a solution to this issue.

Racial Microaggressions

Microaggressions serve to communicate invalidating and insulting beliefs and attitudes to people from minoritized populations (Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Sue,

2010a; Sue et al., 2007). The term microaggression was first coined in the 1970s by Chester Pierce, who advocated that racism is not always “the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism” (1974, p. 516). Many researchers have conducted research on microaggressions since Pierce, including Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues. Sue (2010a) identifies three categories of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. With varying degrees of perpetrator intentionality, these three types of microaggressions, consciously or unconsciously, serve the same purpose: to offend, objectify, or otherwise oppress the recipient (Sue, 2010a).

Microassaults manifest as behaviors, actions, or situational cues (Burns, 2014; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). Perhaps the microaggression category with the highest degree of intentionality, “microassaults are conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit” (Sue, 2010a, p. 28) messages of offense and are similar in many ways to overt racism. Referring to someone as “colored” or “Oriental” are examples of microassaults. *Microinsults* are a slightly subtler form of microaggression through which attitudes and beliefs are conveyed through “stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity” (Sue, 2010a, p. 31) intended to demean the identity of the recipient. These insults, often not enacted through the perpetrator’s consciousness, blatantly portray the perpetrator’s feelings that the other person identifies with a group that is not valued (Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). Saying “you speak good English” to an Asian American person is an example of a microinsult. *Microinvalidations* can be the most confusing and difficult to decipher. These interpersonal communications or environmental cues “exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings,

or experiential reality” (Sue, 2010a, p. 37) of people from minoritized groups. With the denial of other people’s realities, Sue (2010a) calls microinvalidations “the most damaging form of the three microaggressions” (p. 37). An example of a microinvalidation is color blindness.

According to Sue (2010a), perpetrators of microaggressions are most often well-meaning individuals that are unaware of subtle and hidden messages conveyed to a “socially devalued group” (p. 3). Because the perpetrators of microaggressions are often people who see themselves as fair or just individuals, they can be reluctant to see how their behaviors convey attitudes or beliefs that offend, oppress, or otherwise other socially devalue groups (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). This is also called “implicit bias” (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) and can make it more difficult for individuals who have been the victims of microaggressive acts to name the microaggression and advocate for themselves. According to Huber and Solorzano (2015), naming the microaggression is the first step in eradicating this type of behavior.

Identifying and naming microaggressive acts can be challenging due to their subtle and complex nature. “Attributional ambiguity” describes the complexity of receiving feedback for members of minoritized groups (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010b), where in victims of microaggressions are often unsure if the denigrating message received is due to the perpetrator’s belief in a stereotype or due to an actual opinion unrelated to assumptions and stereotypes about other groups (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010b). Attributional ambiguity leads

victims to question both the motive and perspective of the perpetrator, as well as their own interpretation of the microaggressive act. When victims of microaggressive acts reflect on the incident, they are often left questioning themselves, the event, and the perpetrator. This ambiguity makes the meaning-making of microaggressions multilayered and complex.

While many microaggressions often take the form of interpersonal communication, “environmental microaggressions” are subtle cues in an environment that indicate which cultures and groups are highly valued and which are not (Sue et al., 2007). A covert form of racism, environmental microaggressions can include the perpetuation of policies, regulations, and norms that allow the characteristics of one group to be considered the standard in society (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Haney & Hurtado, 1994). Sue et al. (2007) offer several examples of environmental microaggressions, including college campuses that name buildings only after White males, the lack representation of people in higher education faculty, and overcrowding of schools in high needs districts. Lack of people of color in positions of power, particularly in educational settings, can have detrimental effects on students of color (Sue et al., 2007). The result is that students of color see few “successful” people who look like them, leaving students of color with less access to role models and mentors of their race. Students of color report feeling that they do not belong in the classroom or on campus in general (Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, & Nishi; 2015), with some students considering leaving the university due to the racial climate on campus (Harwood, Choi, Orozco Villicaña, Huntt, & Mendenhall; 2015).

Several studies have shown the prevalence of racial microaggressions in higher education. A recent survey on racial microaggressions at the University of Illinois Urbana (Harwood et al., 2015) found that 51% of Black respondents reported stereotyping based on race in the classroom, and 27% reported having their classroom contributions dismissed or invalidated due to race. Additionally, students reported microaggressions in the forms of the whole taxonomy laid out by Sue (Harwood et al., 2015). Students reported feeling invisible and isolated (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), tokenized in class discussions, dismissed by faculty, and racially invalidated in the classroom (Harwood et al., 2015; Linder et al., 2015). Students from minoritized populations also reported that faculty had low expectations of their academic capabilities and achievements (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso; 2000), ignored racism in the classroom, and encouraged shallow class discussions on the topic of race (Linder et al, 2015). Allen (1992) posits that a student's success in higher education is largely determined by how he/she/hir perceives the college environment and responds to challenges and uncertainty. This is made all the more challenging when a student is confronted continually with racial microaggressions both in and out of the classroom.

Recent research strongly suggests that microaggressions occur in higher education classrooms at alarming rates. Suárez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cuellar, Smith and Dias (2015) conducted structured observations in three New York community colleges and found that microaggressions were observed in 28% of these classrooms, with 80% of those observations including between 2-10 instances of microaggressions. This in vivo research found that most of the microaggressions were aimed at students, with the majority of microaggressions

perpetrated by instructors (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2015). A study by Boysen (2012) found that instructors and students felt that a swift and direct response to microaggressions in the classroom was often the best action to take. However, it can be assumed that the likelihood of a swift and direct response to a microaggression in the classroom is low if the perpetrator is the professor. Allen (1992) posits that Black college students with stronger faculty relationships have higher academic achievement, which is problematic seeing as how college students who report racial microaggressions in the classroom also report the primary perpetrators of these incidents as being a faculty member.

There is a large body of research that has investigated how racial microaggressions are experienced by undergraduate students from minoritized populations, with a subset of this research focusing on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Huber and Solorzano (2015) note that the experience of racial microaggressions “takes a toll on bodies, minds, and spirits of People of Color over time” (p. 310). Students reported feeling “drained” due to the increased energy it takes to mediate microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso; 2000). Microaggressions experienced in educational and workplace settings have a particularly detrimental effect on individuals’ self-esteem (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff & Sriken, 2014) and have been linked to depression (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit & Rasmus, 2014) and feelings of isolation (Sarcedo et al., 2015). Research by Wang, Leu, and Shoda (2011) shows that there are intense negative emotions experienced when an individual perceives treatment due to race, even if the treatment is not negative.

According to Sue (2010a), individuals who experience microaggressions exhibit cognitive and behavioral effects as a result. The individual's sense of self may be damaged, as well the relationship with and to the perpetrator. Sue (2010a) also notes that there can be behavioral effects as a result of experiencing microaggressions. Suspicion in future encounters, anger towards others, despair, and hyper-awareness to possible microaggressions (Sue, 2010a) are all changes in behavior that individuals have reported as a result of experiencing microaggressions.

Race in Higher Education

College students have been protesting injustice and societal ills since the Vietnam War protests of the 1960s. Racism on college campuses is an issue that students continue to advocate against, and recent events of racism on college campuses, such as at Harvard Law School (Krantz, 2015) and Yale (Yale Students March Over Concerns of Racism, 2015), unfortunately illustrate the need for such activism. Several schools have responded with changes in structure and personnel, sometimes investing large amounts of funding towards diversity initiatives. The University of Missouri's president recently stepped down amid repeated claims of persistent, pervasive, and blatant racism on campus (Pearson, 2015). Brown University has recently pledged to invest \$100 million over the next 10 years to promote diversity and respect and combat racism and privilege, a move spurred on by displeasure voiced by students to the university regarding the racial climate on campus (DeCosta-Klipa, 2015). These are just a few examples of the current racial climate in higher education.

Students from minoritized populations have lower rates of college degree completion and higher dropout rates than White students (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Carter, 2006; Fischer, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Steele, 1992). Additionally, lower academic achievement and a significantly lower degree of involvement in the social environment are reported for students from racially minoritized populations attending predominantly White institutions (Allen, 1992).

Research has shown significant instances of racism in higher education classrooms, even in educational leadership programs (Boske, 2010) and classrooms dedicated to diversity and multicultural issues (Linder, 2015). Students report being silenced by faculty (Boske, 2010) and perceived as “predators, cheaters, personal threats, violence prone, and monolithic” from students and faculty alike (Smith et al., 2007, p. 573). Furthermore, a study by Cabrera et al. (1999) found that “exposure to a prejudiced campus climate clearly dominates African Americans’ commitments to the institution” (p. 152), indicating that student retention is impacted by racism on campus.

While researchers have found differences in the aspirations and career trajectories of students from minoritized populations, studies consistently find that students from racially minoritized populations do not achieve the same career status as White students (Allen, 1992; Goyette & Mullen, 2006). Allen (1992) found that “African American college students have aspirations similar to (or higher than) their White counterparts; however, they attain these aspirations less often than White students” (p. 28). Goyette and Mullen (2006) found that African American and Latino

students were more likely to seek out a vocational path, enticed by the promise of initial higher earnings. This is contrasted by their findings on the career path of White students, who were more likely to choose a major from the arts and sciences (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). Arts and sciences majors are associated with increased “cultural capital in the form of familiarity with high culture, sophisticated use of verbal and written language, and confidence in their broad knowledge of history, culture, and politics” (Goyette & Mullen, 2006, p. 526) and they are more likely to attend graduate school, which has been shown to lead to higher earnings (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). Pascarella’s (2005) research found “generally consistent evidence to suggest that as the amount of postsecondary education increases, workforce participation increases and the likelihood of being unemployed decreases” (p. 535). Findings also indicate that individuals with a bachelor’s degree make more, on average, than individuals with a high school diploma (Pascarella, 2005), making it all the more imperative to create inclusive higher education environments and promote success for all students.

Workplace Racism

Racism in the workplace is pervasive, detrimental to all, and difficult to identify (Deitch et al., 2003; Mistry & Latoo, 2009; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014). Research on workplace racism includes related phenomena, such as workplace harassment, workplace bullying, and incivility in the workplace. Research using these terms is included in this literature review if the findings were relevant to this study, particularly if the research identified race as a factor.

Workplace racism has deleterious effects on employees’ health. Employees that have experienced racism in the workplace report more days of poor mental health

(Roberts, Swanson, & Murphy, 2004), psychological distress (Krieger et al., 2008; Triana, Jayasinghe, & Pieper, 2015), and anxiety and depression (Fox and Stallworth, 2005; Hammond, Gillen, & Yen, 2010; Raver & Nishii, 2010), with some employees even reporting PTSD-like effects (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Workplace harassment has been associated with higher levels of alcohol abuse (Rospenda, Richman, & Shannon, 2008) and tobacco use (Okechukwu et al., 2010). Employees experiencing workplace racism report more absences due to illness (Gardiner & Tyson, 1994; Giga, Hoel, & Lewis, 2008).

Research suggests that discriminatory behavior results in lower job satisfaction and decreased productivity (Deitch et al., 2003). Fox and Stallworth (2005) found that employees that had experienced workplace racism have “higher levels of counterproductive work behavior (e.g., coming in late or leaving early)” (p. 452), which can decrease the credibility of the employee, decrease the likelihood of positive workplace relationships, and decrease the potential for advancement. Such employees report having less confidence in their abilities (Fox and Stallworth, 2005) and feeling ostracized or socially isolated (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007).

Fox and Stallworth (2005) found that supervisors perpetrate most workplace bullying, which is particularly problematic, as “aspects of power and retribution come into play” (p. 454). Creating safe and inclusive work environments is important because research has shown that work is a central aspect of life with effects felt at both the individual and community levels (Blustein, 2013; Chavez et al., 2015; Flores, 2013; Okechukwu et al., 2014; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2013).

Workplace bullying fits in well with the concept of microaggressions, as many incidents of workplace bullying can also be categorized as microaggressions. Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts (2007) noted several examples of workplace bullying that can also be considered microaggressions: being ignored, receiving hints or signals from coworkers that an employee should quit, and being assigned tasks or responsibilities that are well below an employee's capabilities. Fox and Stallworth (2005) also found a "troubling linkage between subtle, often unconscious and imperceptible episodes of incivility and a kind of interpersonal racism that escapes the scope of organizational mechanisms of redress, or even the scope of the law" (p. 453), clearly making a connection to the facet of microaggressions that is difficult to identify and name.

Racial Identity Theory

Racial identity theory posits that individuals that identify with racially minoritized groups experience differing levels of awareness and acceptance of the oppression and privilege that exists in U.S culture (Jernigan, Green, Helms, Perez-Gualdron & Henze, 2010). Through recognizing and processing internalized racism and other forms of oppression, individuals from minoritized populations might begin to understand how racism has affected their lives and address racism on a broader scale (Jernigan et al., 2010). Racial Identity Theory has been found to be a reliable measure of racism experienced and racial stress (Concepcion, Kohatsu & Yeh, 2013) and is used in this paper to provide context for this study regarding how participants understand the racism they have experienced and how it has shaped their outlook on life, work, and school.

The five stages of Black racial identity model outlined below are based on Cross's Nigrescence theory (1991) that describes the stages of becoming aware of what it means to be Black in current U.S. culture. The original theory is described as an identity change process, with Cross redefining the theory as a process of re-socializing in 1991.

Cross's (1991) five stages in the Black racial identity model are briefly discussed below.

Pre-encounter. In the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1991), an individual has internalized many White definitions and beliefs of Blackness, mostly likely unconsciously (Tatum, 1992). Acceptance by the dominant White culture is the individual's goal (Jernigan et al., 1992). The myth of meritocracy reigns supreme and individuals believe that hard work will be rewarded, despite any individual differences (Tatum, 1992). Oppression in current society is rarely acknowledged (Tatum, 1992) and individuals subscribe to being "color-blind" (Jernigan et al., 2010).

Encounter. Movement into Cross's (1991) encounter stage is usually pre-empted by an experience that illuminates the difference in power structures between the Black individual and the White dominant society (Tatum, 1992). The individual is "forced to acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life (Tatum, 1992, p. 10) and must face what this change in reality means for him/her/hir. An individual experiencing dissonance is likely to feel "confusion and ambivalence regarding previously held beliefs on race" (Concepcion, Kohatsu & Yeh, 2013, p. 136).

Immersion/emersion. In the immersion/emersion stage (Cross, 1991), Black individuals redefine their identity as a person of color and attempt to learn what it

means to identify with a particular racial group (Jernigan, Green, Helms, Perez-Gualdron & Henze, 2010). Disparaging Whiteness and White culture is often simultaneously displayed, along with the celebration of Black culture (Jernigan et al., 2010; Tatum, 1992).

Internalization. During the internalization stage (Cross, 1991), the individual feels more secure in his/her/hir Blackness (Jernigan, et al., 2010; Tatum, 1992). Because the individual feels more confident with his/her/hir own identity, the individual does not isolate himself, herself, or himself with others from the same racial category (Jernigan et al., 2010). The anger and outrage experienced in the Immersion/Emersion stage has usually dissipated. Peers are sought out based on mutual respect and understanding, not skin color.

Internalization-commitment. The psychological aspects experienced in the internalization-commitment stage (Cross, 1991) are similar to the Internalization stage. The main difference is that an individual in the Internalization-Commitment stage is ready to put forth a course of action to combat the racism that he/she/ze has acknowledged exists. Individuals are able to recognize that oppression and inequity affect individuals, and they can “model meaningful relationships with people from all racial groups” (Jernigan et al., 2010, p. 63).

This process is considered a continuing spiral, not a linear path with a beginning and an end. Individuals may travel through it to a particular stage, only to have an event in their life move them back to a stage through which they had already traveled (Tatum, 1992).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality highlights how membership with multiple marginalized groups can create a complex web of oppression that serves to disenfranchise individuals and communities in unique ways (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Crenshaw (1991) outlined three categories of intersectionality: structural, political, and representative. *Structural intersectionality* describes how societal processes and norms can disenfranchise individuals with membership in multiple oppressed groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Examples of structural intersectionality include language barriers that prevent immigrant women from reporting abuse, or that stop and frisk practices inordinately target young Black men living in urban neighborhoods. *Political intersectionality* references the complexity of identifying with multiple oppressed groups that have “conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252), an issue that Crenshaw (1991) further explains could have increasingly troubling consequences, as the acknowledgement of one political agenda often means denying the other political agenda. For example, traditional anti-racism efforts respond to the experiences of Black men. This is troublesome, as racism experienced by Black women can manifest differently. Thus, the female experience within the issue of racism is essentially not addressed within this system. Finally, the concept of *representational intersectionality* describes how individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups are portrayed in U.S. culture, both through tokenization or an absence of representation, and stripped of power based on these identities. An example of representational intersectionality is the view of Black women in the media as being exotic and sexualized, who are also degraded and demeaned for the same reasons.

Intersectionality can cause confusion in individuals who experience microaggressions, as they do not know how to get to the root of the problem. Experiencing the microaggression prompts the individual to question his/her/hir membership in marginalized group(s) and how that could have had an effect on the situation.

By reviewing literature in the topics of internships, racial microaggressions, race in higher education, racism in the workplace, racial identity theory, and intersectionality, I have provided a foundation for the current study. Combining literature on these topics helps to bring a gap in the literature around racial microaggressions and the experience of undergraduate interns to the surface.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to explore the internship experience of racially minoritized undergraduate students and how the participants describe racial microaggressions experienced at their internships sites.

In this chapter, I review the methodology followed for this study. The topics of phenomenological analysis and critical race theory are discussed, as well as why these two theories were well-suited to use together and the benefits of these two theories in examining the experience of undergraduate interns. Then I describe how this study was carried out, including setting, sampling procedures, collection of narratives, analysis of narratives, trustworthiness, and limitations.

Methodological Theory

Qualitative research is a way of looking at the experience of people through their own perspectives (Flick, 2009; Patton, 2002). Flick (2009) notes that “rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives” (p. 12). This results in the need for continually using a qualitative lens to investigate the world. Because the goal of this study was to capture how students described their own internship experiences, using qualitative methods was appropriate.

Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology is a qualitative research strategy in which the researcher uses deep inquiry to guide a small set of individuals in retrospective investigation of their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2009; Welman & Kruger as cited in Groenewald,

2004; Husserl, 1902; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). While the individuals involved are treated as separate units of analysis (Husserl, 1902), there is an assumed commonality between the individuals, either in perspective or experience (Husserl, 1902; Kohak, 1978; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Based on research showing the prevalence of racism in both educational and workplace settings, the assumed commonality was that undergraduate student interns from racially minoritized populations likely experienced racial microaggressions during their internships.

With philosophical roots that trace phenomenology back to numerous important philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Brentano, and Masaryk, Husserl is widely considered the father of phenomenology as the philosophical concept that we understand today (Ehrich, 2005; Groenewald, 2004; Vandenberg, 1997). The philosophical iteration of phenomenology “first emerged as a reaction against the then dominant scientific (positivist) view of philosophy and psychology” (Ehrich, 2005, p. 2) in the late 19th century. Phenomenology grew out of disagreement with the popular philosophical positivist notion that indicated that there is a separation between objects and experiences, valuing objective science over subjective experience (Ehrich, 2005). This separation of “mind from matter” was troubling to Husserl, who believed that experience is “a central feature of life” (Ehrich, 2005, p. 2), with concepts only existing in the conscious experience of individuals (Groenewald, 2004). Thus, according to Husserl, “anything outside immediate experience must be ignored” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 3). Husserl’s goal was a deep understanding of how individuals experienced and perceived the everyday occurrences in their lives with a

primary focus on “individual psychological processes, such as perception, awareness, and consciousness” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 16).

Philosophers Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger continued Husserl’s work and made contributions to the field, creating their own schools of phenomenology. Heidegger expanded on Husserl’s work by including a focus on not just the individual experience but also how the context of the individual’s relationship with the world and others affects his/her/hir interpretation of the experience, called intersubjectivity (Hein & Austin, 2001; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Merleau-Ponty is credited with identifying four key qualities (Ehrich, 2005, p. 2) of phenomenology: description, reduction, essences, and intentionality.

Eagleton (as cited in Groenewald, 2004) describes the beginnings of phenomenology in dramatic terms. “The social order of European capitalism had been shaken to its roots by the carnage of war” (Eagleton as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 3) after World War I. Flourishing after WWII but not yet able to take shape as a methodology, phenomenology was all but forgotten until a praxis was established in the 1970s (Groenewald, 2004). In the years since, there has “been the emergence of research methodologies that have drawn their insights from phenomenological philosophy” (Ehrich, 2005, p. 3). These methodologies have bridged phenomenology as a philosophy into phenomenology as a methodology (Creswell, 2009; Ehrich, 2005). There is not one prescribed phenomenological research method, with new processes in this area continually developing (Hein & Austin, 2001; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). However, there are 3 core tenets of phenomenology often cited in methodological writings. These are: ordinary experience, bracketing, and lifeworld.

Ordinary experience. Ordinary experience is the understanding of, and reflection on, the lived experience that provides foundational knowledge for what we know to be true (Kohak, 1978; Kvale, 1996). Often, the lived, ordinary experience is overlooked for the dissection of more complex individual and societal structures (Kohak, 1978). Sometimes described as mundane or ordinary, it is this essence of the lived experience, the everyday stories of people, that phenomenology tries to uncover (Natanson, 1974). Heidegger included in this his concept of “Dasein”, meaning how individuals are present and interact with their immediate surroundings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Bracketing. Bracketing is the process through which phenomenological researchers make every effort to suspend biases, presuppositions, prior knowledge, and assumptions to approach the investigation of a phenomenon in a manner that will let the phenomenon emerge purely through the participant’s experiences without interference from the researcher (Hein & Austin, 2001). Also called reduction, the researcher aims to set aside his/her/hir own experience and knowledge on the phenomenon to reduce the world in which the participant is reporting his/her/hir reflections and/or experience with the phenomenon so that the data gathered are closely based on the participant’s reflection and experience as can be (Hein & Austin, 2001). The intention behind bracketing is to create an environment in which the phenomenon can develop as purely as possible in the participant’s experience.

Researchers can attempt to bracket assumptions and biases by noting thoughts and impressions after interviews or observations with participants. Researchers will have new thoughts, opinions, and revelations to bracket after every stage of the

research. As the research develops, new biases and assumptions are uncovered in the researcher (Hein & Austin, 2001). For this reason, it is imperative that phenomenological researchers attempt to rigorously and routinely bracket assumptions through rigorous self-reflection (Hein & Austin, 2001).

Some researchers question if the complete setting aside of the researcher's experience is possible (Hein & Austin, 2001). Because an individual's experiences have shaped their biases and assumptions into a lens through which he/she/ze sees the world, to accept that an individual can fully set aside these biases and assumptions and become an impartial listener is likely not feasible. While this is likely true, I did my best to bracket my assumptions and biases during this study. For example, as a White researcher interviewing people of color, I felt that attempting to bracket my assumptions and biases and share these thoughts with the participants was important. To maintain a high level of respect and in an attempt to create a comfortable environment, I shared my assumptions and biases with participants at the outset of each interview. This allowed for conversation between myself and the participants, during which perspectives were discussed and confusions were cleared up.

In this study I identified and named my biases and assumptions with the goal of making them explicit to the participants in an attempt to bracket them. The broadest assumption that I have related to this research is that people of color experience racial microaggressions in work and school. Additionally, I strongly believe that structures exist in our culture that perpetuate racism because they benefit White people. It is my belief in the importance of keeping race at the forefront of all conversations regarding

issues of power and oppression that prompted me to engage in this research. It is my hope that, by doing so, racism will become extinct.

Lifeworld. Husserl's focus for phenomenology was consciousness-raising regarding ordinary, everyday experiences (Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Natanson, 1973; Schutz, 1973). In phenomenological research, common themes from each individual's everyday experiences are clarified and used to inform our understanding of the world, called the "lifeworld" (Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Husserl, 1902; Natanson, 1973; Patton, 2002; Schutz, 1973). In putting together these themes, phenomenologists are making sense of the lifeworld and developing worldviews (Patton, 2002). Researchers look for patterns and/or commonalities to inform the details of the phenomenon they are trying to name, called essences (Patton, 2002) or emergent themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is imperative for phenomenologists to understand the phenomenon through the experience and perspective of the individual: "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Critical race theory

For this study, phenomenological methods were employed along with a critical race theory (CRT) perspective. Phenomenology and CRT are particularly well-suited to be used together for this research because of the fundamental belief in both traditions that individual experience conveyed through first person narrative is the only truth (Bell, 1995; Kohak, 1978; Patton, 2002). It is for this reason that CRT is mentioned in the methodology section of this research. Additionally, this study uses CRT as an overlay through which to view intern experience. When talking about

issues of race, it is my belief that all conversations are fundamentally political and should include a critical lens (CRT), with the explicit focus on understanding experience through individual perspectives (phenomenology). According to Bell (1995), individuals speak from a particular point of view; “a neutral perspective does not, and cannot, exist” (Bell, 1995, p. 901), and

not all positioned perspectives are equally valued, equally heard, or equally included. From the perspective of critical race theory, some positions have historically been oppressed, distorted, ignored, silenced, destroyed, appropriated, commodified, and marginalized—and all of this, not accidentally. (Bell, 1995, p. 901)

The use of CRT in this research cannot be overlooked. Because this research is foundationally aimed at decoding student experiences with racial microaggressions, it is critical to use a framework that approaches “research and evaluation as fundamentally and explicitly political, and as change-oriented forms of engagement” (Patton, 2002, p. 131). CRT is an important framework to use when investigating education in general “because it simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63). It is an especially valuable theoretical paradigm for this study because it is focused on how participants name and make meaning of the phenomenon of racial microaggressions.

CRT grew from the frustration of stalled and slow progress of traditional civil rights legislation to produce meaningful and authentic racial reform in the 1970s. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that civil rights legislation went off course when it focused on human rights, not property rights, as property rights are the

foundation of the U.S. First formed as critical legal scholarship (CLS) to investigate the ways in which liberal legal education perpetuated racism embedded in all aspects of U.S. society (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Green, 1986), CRT was developed in the 1980s with a focus on evaluating and naming racism. Crenshaw (2011) offers a detailed description of the complex process through which CLS scholars determined that a new focus on race had to be undertaken and CRT was developed. Throughout the years since its inception, CRT has undergone many criticisms. Most recently, CRT scholars have had to defend themselves against claims that the U.S. is in a post-racial period based largely on the fact that we have a black president (Crenshaw, 2011).

As post-racial becomes the vehicle for a colorblind agenda, the material consequences of racial exploitation and social violence—including the persistence of educational inequity—the disproportionate racial patterns of criminalization and incarceration, and the deepening patterns of economic stratification—slide further into obscurity (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1326), a period that has strong similarities with the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s.

While critical race theory (CRT) is a multidimensional area of study with no one set of methodologies or rules in which CRT scholars must abide (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1995), there are themes and tenets commonly found amongst CRT writings and research. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) outline the central tenets of CRT. In the following paragraphs, these are discussed and interwoven with important themes highlighted by additional CRT researchers.

Racism is ordinary. Racism, both overt and covert, is a typical occurrence in the everyday experience of people from minoritized populations (Barnes, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 1998). Described by Bell (1992) as “a permanent component of American life” (p. 13), “racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27), resulting in a society that holds one group’s interests and culture as the norm to which all others should aspire. With the passing of many laws and the slow integration of people from minoritized populations in decision-making positions, overt acts of racism are becoming less frequent and now manifest more often in society as covert, or hidden, acts of oppression of people from minoritized populations (Hurtado, 1992).

Racism serves a purpose. Both people in power (White elites) and people not in power (people from minoritized populations) receive benefit from racist structures, policies, and societal norms in the United States (Bell, 1980; Brantlinger, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Many people in current society do not have motivation to abolish the structures, policies, and norms that perpetuate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). While White elites often benefit in material ways, individuals from racially minoritized populations sometimes experience benefits in the form of psychological advantages. An example of a psychological benefit that an individual from a racially minoritized population might experience is a feeling of achievement over and above what other individuals from the same racially minoritized population have achieved, even if it is not aligned with the achievement of White individuals.

CRT scholars believe that issues involving racism are addressed only when they align with the interests of the people in power (Bell, 1980; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor 1998). This is called interest convergence. As an example of this concept, Bell (1980) explained the benefits that the people in power received from the Brown vs. Board of Education decision;

1) “economic and political advances at home and abroad” and “immediate credibility to America’s struggle with Communist countries” (Bell, 1980, p. 524),

2) “reassurance to American blacks that the precepts of equality and freedom so heralded during World War II might yet be given meaning at home” (Bell, 1980, p. 524), and

3) “segregation was viewed as a barrier to further industrialization in the South” (Bell, 1980, p. 525).

Bell (1980) asserts that without these benefits for people in power, the outcome of this court decision would have been different. Ladson-Billings (1998) illustrates the idea of interest convergence with a compelling story about the state of Arizona canceling the Martin Luther King holiday one year due to the high cost to employers and the state, only to reinstate the holiday when professional sports teams threatened to pull national sports events from the state, which would have resulted in a significant loss of tourism and entertainment revenue. Furthermore, Bell (1980) cautions against blindly celebrating gains made in civil rights topics, as these gains are often not truly gains at all. For example, DeCuir and Dixon (2004) noted that “early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that had been enjoyed by

Whites for centuries” (p. 28). Similarly, Barnes (1990) wrote of people from minoritized populations “fighting for that to which whites feel entitled” (p. 1866). Victories in this area are often noted to be concessions, with the people in power bestowing additional benefits upon the people not in power, but not really giving anything up at all.

Race is socially constructed. Best said by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), racial categories are “not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 3). This racialization of different groups based on arbitrary factors is dangerous and detrimental, as it has ripple effects that reverberate and affect people and society for years to come. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970, 2005) discussed at length the idea that the people in power (oppressors) are also dehumanized when oppressing other groups. People from minoritized populations are “perpetually reminded that their lives, their existence, and their concerns are valued differently, when at all, by the white majority” (Barnes, 1990, p. 1866). Barnes (1990) calls this “dual consciousness” (p. 1866), meaning that people in power task people from minoritized populations with adhering to a different set of values and rules. Barnes’s (1990) concept of dual consciousness follows W.E.B DuBois’s (1903) concept of double consciousness, which describes how individuals from racially minoritized populations often see themselves through the perspective of the dominant culture and positions them as inferior.

Minoritized groups are racialized at the whim of dominant society. Often due to changing needs in the labor market, minoritized groups can be deemed essential

or irrelevant, intelligent or ignorant, capable or unskilled, kind or menacing by the people in power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; hooks, 2015). Both the minoritized group and the society at large internalize these dichotomous messages, perpetuated through governmental policies, community and society norms, and mass media, with detrimental and lasting effects to both. Greene (1986) cautions, “we need to recognize that what we single out as most deficient and oppressive is in part a function of perspectives created by our past” (p. 440). These perspectives and opinions are created by the people in power, and the decisions they make are detrimental for several reasons, the most important perhaps being that these perspectives build upon each other to create deep and complex systems of oppression.

Race is one factor in identity. An individual’s self cannot be reduced to one facet of his/her/hir identity. Gender, political ideology, familial role, profession, and cultural background are a few of the many pieces of identity that are patch-worked together to shape the preferences, thoughts, and opinions of any given individual. Delgado & Stefancic (2012) explain how “everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (p. 4), calling this concept intersectionality. (See Intersectionality in the Literature Review.)

The complex layering of multiple identities that identify with minoritized populations creates a woven picture of oppression, the roots of which are difficult to trace (Barnes, 1990).

Unique voice of people from minoritized groups. CRT scholars believe that telling the stories of oppressed people is the most powerful way to share experiences of oppression with the goal of changing the master narrative of current society. The

idea of having people from minoritized groups share their experiences is important because people who have lived through the nuances of oppression are able to express their histories and experiences to people in power in unique and meaningful ways (Barnes, 1990; Bell, 1980; Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Freire, 2005; Greene, 1986; hooks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda, 1995; Taylor, 1998; Williams, 1991). Additionally, stories add necessary “contextual contours to the seemingly ‘objectivity’ of positivist perspectives” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11), “a plurality of voices” (Barnes, 1990, p. 1870). While sharing stories of oppression is an important way to encourage understanding between people from minoritized populations and people in power, there is tension between the idea of sharing the unique voice of minoritized people and “essentializing” a particular group, which happens when the voices of people of color are only utilized as experts on what it means to be a person from a minoritized population (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The idea of anti-essentialism is important in CRT, as people from minoritized populations share their stories with the intention of encouraging understanding, not to be reduced to the role of spokesperson for all people from a particular minoritized population. To avoid essentialism, CRT scholars engage people from minoritized populations in the process of counter-storytelling (Matsuda, 1995; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012), a strategy through which people from minoritized populations can share stories of their experiences with the goal of “exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). These normalized dialogues share the experience of people in power and often perpetuate myths and assumptions so ingrained in the master narrative that people in power believe them to

be truths (hooks, 2015; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012). By engaging in counter-storytelling, people from minoritized populations control their own stories and experiences, “contradict the Othering process, and, thus, challenge the privileged discourses” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27) that they encounter. Additionally, counter-storytelling allows otherwise hidden themes of oppression and othering, often so ingrained in society that they are deemed as truths, to rise to the top of experiences (Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012). These themes often appear in seemingly race-neutral messages touting the “best interest” of the minoritized individual (Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012).

In addition to the tenets from Delgado & Stefancic (2012) listed above, the following three components are critical to understanding CRT.

Critique of liberalism. The foundation of liberal ideology is in direct conflict with the ideals upheld by CRT scholars (Bell, 1980; Taylor, 1998). Liberal ideology claims that the law is colorblind and neutral (Bell, 1980; Taylor, 1998). These claims are untenable to CRT scholars, as they believe that “the notion of colorblindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as Other” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). CRT scholars investigate intention and motivation in policymaking, institutional structures, and other means of spreading overarching oppressive beliefs. Labeling anything in American society as colorblind or racially neutral is essentially ignoring the history and experience of the entire country (Bell, 1980; Taylor, 1998).

Activism. CRT scholarship is underscored by a call to action with every uncovering of oppression. CRT scholars recognize that the only way to change the

oppressive attitudes, policies, and norms that are ingrained into the culture of the United States is to actively work towards a more just and equitable culture. This theme of CRT scholarship is closely tied to the tenet of counter-storytelling, discussed previously. By sharing the stories of oppression, the “pedagogy is forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (Freire, 2005, p. 48). Freire (2005) believed that people should not be integrated into oppressive structures, but supported in changing those structures.

Whiteness as property. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posit that US society is based on property rights and that the intersection of race and property rights is a key place to investigate racism and social inequality. The idea of whiteness as property and property rights being a foundational element in the history of the US can be traced back to the early years of our country’s history when only White landowners (men) had voting rights, essentially giving voice only to White men (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The topic of property has continued to be an important factor in investigations of equality, as school funding is based on property taxes, meaning that communities with the wealthiest students and families have more funding to support schools and students.

Another form of property, intellectual, is most often only available to students from the majority culture. In the form of curriculum in schools,

intellectual property delimits what is now called 'opportunity to learn'- the presumption that along with providing educational 'standards' that detail what students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus, intellectual property must be undergirded by

'real' property, that is, science labs, computers and other state of the art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54).

CRT and Higher Education

It is important to use CRT to investigate issues of equity and social justice in higher education. Because schools in general are understood to reproduce culture and societal norms (Greene, 1986; Hurtado, 1992), it is imperative to include a social justice focus in all aspects if the goal of becoming a more inclusive and just society is to be attained. Furthermore, because institutions such as schools perpetuate racism and inequity through the policies and norms that are upheld (Brantlinger, 2003; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Hurtado, 1992), it is important for schools to realize that they are not “colorblind” or neutral environments (Bell, 1980; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). According to Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2003), “critical education contends that, contrary to the traditional view, schools actually work against the class interests of those student who are most politically and economically vulnerable within society” (p. 11).

Teachers and schools have a unique opportunity to raise consciousness and awareness in all students (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Greene, 1986). Greene (1986) called for creating “reflective communities in the interstices of colleges and schools. Perhaps we can invent ways of freeing people to feel and express indignation, to break through opaqueness, to refuse the silences” (p. 441).

CRT and Internships

Internship programs in higher education institutions are uniquely situated and prepared for using CRT as a lens through which to examine student experience because of the active and reflective nature of experiential education. Dewey (2009) cautions against letting educational thought become isolated from concrete experiences situated in the real world. Traditionally, students involved in making meaning from learning experiences have been charged with reflecting on their position in society, how their actions impact society, and how society has impacted their actions (Dewey, 2009; Freire, 2005). In fact, Freire (2005) calls for students to act upon their world “in order to change it” (p. 79).

While CRT and internships are well-suited to work together to support students in learning, CRT has not yet been a widely used theory through which to capture student experience in internships. Because counter-storytelling has been used by CRT theorists in education many times (Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012) to portray student experience and uncover themes of oppression and power in education, it is my opinion that counter-storytelling and other CRT strategies will be allow practitioners to add understanding to the body of knowledge that we understand about how students make sense of their experiences.

Research Question

This study investigated the issue of racial microaggressions experienced during internship experiences, at what can be considered the intersection of school and work. Huber and Solorzano (2015) advocate for using the framework of racial microaggressions as a “tool for research on race, racism, and the everyday experiences of People of Color” (p. 298) because it allows researchers and practitioners to

foreground issues of pervasive and subtle racism experienced in the everyday lives of college students. This study investigated the following research question:

How do former student interns from racially minoritized populations describe and make meaning of racial microaggressions at their internship sites?

Setting

This research study was conducted at a mid-sized state university in the Northeast region of the United States. This university offers four locations: the main campus (suburban) houses the majority of the academic programs for both graduate and undergraduates (more than 80 majors across the nine degree-granting colleges), undergraduate and graduate housing, and university administrative offices; the second campus (urban) houses approximately 20 academic programs and a variety of other certificate and non-credit bearing programs; a third campus is located on the coast and supports the work of the university, community organizations and government agencies with research facilities and equipment to support the work of and research in marine science; and the fourth location is in a rural setting and hosts events and environmental programs. Out of 577 faculty members, 17% are faculty from a racially minoritized population (Just the Facts, Fall 2015). As reported in fall 2015, 19.6% of the total student body of 16,831 reported to be students from racially minoritized populations (Just the Facts, Fall 2015). The recent alumni survey yielded 73% respondents who reported completing at least one internship (Survey of Recent Graduates, 2013). While it is unknown how many majors require, encourage, or allow undergraduate students to participate in internships, students from every major are involved in experiential learning in some aspect. Experiential learning is noted as one

of the university president's transformational goals, noting the importance of the expansion of internship programs in the 2010-2015 academic plan for the university (Charting Our Path to the Future: Toward a Renewed Culture of Achievement, 2010).

Sampling Procedures

This study followed a non-probability purposive sampling design (Seidman, 2012) aimed at engaging participants who had received credit and support for a similar academic endeavor, an internship, in addition to identifying as a person from a racially minoritized category. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), participants should be chosen based on the insight they can provide as to the researched phenomenon. My goal for the current study was to gather participants to illuminate the internship experience from the perspective of an individual from a racially minoritized population.

The sample population for this study was former undergraduate student interns from minoritized populations who earned 3-12 credits for an internship experience between 2013-2015. While students can enroll in a variety of department-based internships, I selected only students who registered for the university-wide internship course with the internship code ITR. In addition to internship site experiences, students also earn three ITR free elective credits for the concurrent online internship seminar that provides university supervision to ensure that the interns accomplish academic goals during the internship. All ITR credits are 300 level credits, meaning that they fulfill credits within a major instead of fulfilling general education requirements. In total, interns have the opportunity to earn 6-15 credits for the internship experience (3 for the online seminar and 3-12 for the internship experience).

Earning 15 credits is equivalent to taking 5 traditional classes (3 credits each) and, for most students, is a full semester.

Being accepted into the ITR program indicates that each student has earned at least 60 credits through his/her/hir degree granting college. Thus, interns are typically in his/her/hir third undergraduate year, a significant point in an undergraduate's academic career as they have two years of academic preparation in higher education and maturity to support their work in the field.

Because the ITR program is offered across campus, participants represent a variety of majors, internship sites and workplace environments. Additionally, students who earn ITR credit may intern across the United States, due to the flexibility of the online seminar. This study included five participants who had interned in the same Northeast state as the university, with one intern who had fulfilled the internship experience out-of-state. Six total former interns were interviewed.

Using only former students from the ITR program (semesters: fall 2013, spring 2014, summer 2014, fall 2014, spring 2015, summer 2015) ensured that each participant interviewed experienced the same internship seminar curriculum and level of support through the ITR program.

This study utilized retrospective analysis, interviewing students after their internship experience. This is an important aspect of this research, as it eliminates some risk for participants as they had already received their grades for the internship experience and seminar. Additionally, I assured each participant that data collected through this study would not be shared with internship supervisors, ITR instructors, or

other university faculty and staff until themes were identified and the data could be shared without reference to a particular participant.

After receiving IRB approval, I obtained a list of students who had received ITR credit from the ITR registration grids located in the shared H-Drive of the ITR advisors and instructors. I aimed to gather between 6-10 participants (Creswell, 1998), as this range includes enough participants to illuminate themes across individuals but not too big where the data becomes unmanageable and superficial (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin; 2009). As the goal of phenomenology is to provide a rich description of a phenomenon, a small of participants is sufficient because it allows the researcher to dig deep into individuals' experiences and perspectives to create themes that represent the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin; 2009). Many qualitative researchers hesitate to put parameters around the number of participants that is sufficient as there are many factors to consider (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2012).

The first recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent to 343 students and graduates who had received ITR credit from fall 2013 through summer 2015. With the permission of the ITR instructors, the name of the students' ITR instructor was included in the subject line of the email for recognition and is framed as a referral from the instructor. Because this purposive sample was specific in participant characteristics, using gatekeepers (Kvale, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to provide access and credibility to potential participants was important.

The first recruitment email netted four participants that qualified for the study, with a total of 35 responses. 31 respondents were not eligible for the study because

they indicated that they are White. I then consulted with the ITR instructors to create a list of former interns who belong to racially minoritized groups. These former interns were sent a follow-up recruitment email (see Appendix B) that was shorter in length and also used the name of the ITR instructor for a referral in the subject line. This second email netted three additional participants that qualified for the study.

Both recruitment emails included a link to a pre-study survey (see Appendix C) administered through SurveyMonkey that helped me select the purposive sample for the study, as well as collect demographic and other basic data. The pre-study survey served to provide some basic information on former interns, such as racial category and preferred time and method of contact. Because I recruited participants from a targeted list (students who had received ITR credit), I only had to look for participants that identified with a racially minoritized category. The pre-study survey also asked about racism experienced during the internship; I included this question to give myself some understanding of the student's experience, not as a qualifier for participation. I chose to include individuals who answered no to the pre-study survey question about experiencing racism during the internship because previous research has shown that the subtle nature of racial microaggressions may lead the victim second guessing the meaning of the experience (Crocker & Major, 2003; Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010a). Knowing that individuals may identify racial microaggressions only upon reflection on experiences, I wanted to include individuals from racially minoritized populations even if they initially did not report experiencing racial microaggressions during the internship.

See Table one below or Appendix D for a list of participant demographics as collected through the pre-study survey. See Appendix E for a complete list of the responses collected through the pre-study survey.

I then corresponded with the participants by phone and email to secure a day, time, and location for the first interview. Of the seven individuals who qualified for the study, six were still interested in participating at this stage. One participant was not able to meet face to face, so phone interview times were scheduled. All of the other participants preferred to meet at the urban campus for convenience.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Pseudo	Racism in internship	# of credit	Internship semester	Racial or ethnic group	Graduation date	Major
Caroline	No	12	summer 2015	Black/African American	2016	Psychology
Ariana	No	3	summer 2015	Hispanic	2016	Journalism and Spanish
Erin	Yes	12	fall 2014	Black/African American	2015	Communication Studies
Megan	Yes	12	spring 2014	Black/African American	2014	Film
Beth	No	12	spring 2015	Black/African American	2015	Sociology and Communications
Keith	No	3	spring 2014	Black/African American	2014	Sociology and Africana Studies

Collection of Narratives

This study followed Seidman’s (2012) structure for thematic interviews, although this study used two interviews to collect data as opposed to the three interviews that Seidman suggests. Seidman’s (2012) interview structure was modified

for several reasons. Two interviews were used to minimize the time and effort asked of a regularly over studied minoritized population. Moreover, the narrowness of the research question lends itself to two protocols versus three. While this research study does follow Seidman's (2012) structure for interview one, a focused life history and interview two, the details of the experience, I decided to weave the structure of Seidman's third interview, reflection on the meaning, into the first two interviews as I did not believe it would be possible to discuss a topic as emotionally-charged as racism and not discuss the meaning and interpretation that the participant assigned to each instance. Additionally, Seidman (2012) concedes that, as long as participants are allowed to describe and reflect on their lives, a researcher may modify the structure of the interviews as is necessary.

According to Seidman (2012), an "individual's consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people" (p. 1), hence the importance of purposeful interviewing. Starting with the research question (Kvale, 1996), I framed two more narrow questions to guide each interview which I treated as sub-questions: (1) Describe a time when you felt that someone acted or reacted towards you in a specific way due to your race and/or ethnicity; and (2) In what ways did race or racism play out in your internship (see Appendix F). Thus, the overall theme of the first interview was racism in general and the theme of the second interview was racism experienced during the internship. I then built off of the two guiding sub-questions to craft more narrow questions to inquire about some of the details of the individual's experiences, before and after the two sub-questions in the

interview. The first interview included seven main questions with several prompts and the second interview includes five questions with several prompts. This is approximately aligned with the number of questions in an interview that Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) have deemed appropriate for a 90-minute interview (6-10 open-ended questions).

The flow of the interviews was intentionally conversation-like to encourage trust and a comfortable atmosphere (Kvale, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), although I created an interview schedule (see Appendix F) beforehand with questions that I hoped to address and assumed would come up in the conversation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin; 2009). The interview schedule helped ensure that I address all of the topics that I intended. Additionally, the interview schedule included open-ended questions designed to let the participants share life experiences and guide the conversation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin; 2000).

The length of time between each participant's interviews was exactly one week. I aimed to schedule the second interviews between 7-14 days after the first interview to encourage deeper level of comfort between the participant and myself. Additionally, scheduling the interviews in close succession helped the participants recognize connections between interviews and built upon insights from one interview to the next (Seidman, 2012). Fortunately, each participant was available exactly one week after the first interview.

Each interview was recorded with the participant's permission, followed the recommended 90 minute timeframe, and had a set beginning, middle, and end flow (Seidman, 2012) to guide participants purposefully. Each audio recording was

emailed to a professional transcribing company who transcribed the interviews and returned them to me within a week.

Five interviews were conducted in person, with one participant requesting a phone interview as she was overseas. While a face-to-face interview was the ideal situation, doing a phone interview for this student was the only way that she would be able to participate. According to Seidman (2012), interviewing by phone requires the researcher to take on additional considerations, such as how to reinforce that the interview is not a casual phone chat but follows a structure and how to build the trust of the participant when there is a visual disconnect. I was able to address both issues with the participant by staying on topic while also following her lead throughout the interview. We began the phone interview with a few minutes of conversation regarding her current academic setting overseas to increase her comfort with me. We then discussed the consent form. While each first interview began with a discussion of the consent form, the phone interview discussion of the consent form was decidedly different as I read the form to the participant to ensure that we both understood the document. While I was reading the consent form, the participant was reading it on her own computer. She verbally consented to the research, which I have on her first audio file and in transcription. During the face to face interviews, we discussed the form in generalities and then each participant read the form on his/her/hir own and was given time to ask any questions before signing the form.

Before beginning the first interview, I also shared a personal statement (see Appendix G) with each participant. I did this to attempt to bracket my own personal assumptions and biases. Additionally, I discussed the possible flow of the

conversation and my potential feedback and behavior (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I was explicit that I may not give any verbal feedback as I did not want to interrupt the participant. I also noted that I may look at my watch or the audio recorder to make sure that we are on schedule and the technology is working. I also intentionally mentioned how I may explore topics further during the interview, as well as check for my understanding, by asking clarifying follow-up questions. I was upfront about this as I did not want participants to feel as though I was questioning or second-guessing their descriptions.

The first interview (see Appendix F) focused on the life history of the individual (Seidman, 2012) as it relates to the topic of experiencing racism and racial microaggressions. By asking participants questions regarding racism and racial microaggressions, I was able to gauge the participant's recognition, understanding, and experience with racism and racial microaggressions. Participants were encouraged to share stories, along with personal interpretations and reflections. Participants were guided to think about experiences throughout their lifespan and in all settings (work, school, socially, etc.), eventually discussing racial microaggressions.

The first interview began with a general question that allowed the participant to give details into his/her/hir experience and perception of racism. The interview in this way allowed me to follow the participant's lead, which added trust and depth. I followed up with probing questions such as "can you tell me more about that?," "how did that feel?," "where did that (feeling, realization, understanding, attitude, etc.) come from?" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This allowed participants to lead the conversation and add more details, while being guided by my questioning if it was

needed to draw out details. I realized during the first interview with the first participant that we would not have enough time to go over each question and sub-question. Because I wanted to be respectful of the participants' time, I only asked questions and follow-up, probing sub-questions that naturally built off of the topics that the participant brought up naturally. This added to the level of trust and comfort in each interview as listening actively showed that I understood what the participant was saying and valued his/her/hir perspective (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2012; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Each participant was open to talking about the racism that he/she/ze had or had not experienced and each interview flowed easily. Because of this, each interview had a slightly different focus. However, it was important to me to stay true to the lead of the participants, as the rhythm of the interview was truly theirs (Smith, Flowers & Larkin; 2009). I followed this structure during the second interview, as well. We concluded each first interview by scheduling the second interview one week later.

Because the participants understood the focus of the study to be about internships, a few began by answering the general questions on racism with examples from their internships. Because I wanted to get more in-depth with their internship experience during the second interview, my first inclination was to steer the conversation to a more general conversation about racism. However, I continued to let the conversation be driven by the participants when this happened because I wanted them to feel comfortable. I changed the course of the conversation when there was a natural moment to do so, always telling the participant that we would get back to the internship experience in more detail during the second interview.

In the week between the first and second interviews, I reviewed my notes, audio files, and memos from the first interviews and prepared the topics that I wanted to share with each participant at the beginning of the second interview. I looked for topics that I thought might be a foundational piece to his/her/hir racial perceptions or history and thus I wanted to make sure that my understanding was correct, topics that I had also heard from other participants, and any other areas in which I needed clarity. Unfortunately, I was not able review the written transcripts of each interview because the transcription company took approximately one week to go through the transcription process. With each second interview within 1 week of the first interview, this was not enough time to review the written transcripts.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) “interviewing is a craft: It does not follow content- and context-free rules of method, but rests on the judgments of a qualified researcher” (p. 105). I memoed my understandings and reflections after each interview to record any observations and impressions that are relevant to the study. Memoing in this way captured some of the context of the interviews. As a White middle class woman with four parents with multiple advanced degrees, I have not experienced racial microaggressions. Through memoing and consistent member checking, I minimized my perspective and assumptions, allowing the phenomenon of racial microaggressions experienced in internships to rise to the surface of participant awareness (Ehrich, 2005; Groenewald, 2004). Additional trustworthiness strategies are discussed in the Trustworthiness section (p. 62) and noted in Appendix I.

Additionally, I used bracketing techniques to identify and name my own biases and assumptions, with the goal of making them explicit. Hermeneutic

phenomenologists do not believe that the researcher can set aside his/her/hir beliefs, assumptions, and biases; instead, researchers bracket by acknowledging beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Ehrich, 2005; Hammersley, 2000; Hein & Austin, 2001). The most prevalent bias that I uncovered at several points during the research was the theme of racism existing in every interaction between people. This is important to note, particularly as four of the participants did not initially report experiencing racism during the internship, one of whom resisted the idea of race and racism affecting her internship despite realizing upon reflection that she had experienced racial microaggressions. Assuming that the participants had attributed racism to specific instances when they had not indicated that racism played a part in the interaction is harmful to the trustworthiness of the research. This is a bias of which I was aware and influenced every part of this research project, from choosing CRT as a theoretical framework to designing the interview schedule to analyzing and interpreting the data. By presenting this bias as such, my own personal bias, upfront with participants before the first interview in my personal statement (see Appendix G) and as it came up during the interviews, I acknowledged it and then attempted to put it aside to be present during each interview. Immediately after each interview, I reflected on the interview in three categories: the comments or topics that stuck out for me, what those comments or topics meant to me within the larger picture of the research, and how I came to the conclusions that I did. The last category led me to ask: were my conclusions based on my assumptions or from evidence that the participant provided? I shared themes from my memos and bracketing from the first interview at the beginning of the second interview for member checking purposes. Participants were

open to helping me think through my biases and how my biases related to what they described. Each participant added more explanation to their perspectives and experiences when hearing my biases and interpretations of their interviews.

The second interview (see Appendix F) focused “on the concrete details of the participants’ present experience in the topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2012, p. 12). During this interview, the participant described his/her/hir internship. Details such as culture of the internship site, relationships with his/her/hir supervisor and colleagues, and tasks completed or responsibilities were the focus. Participants were asked to provide details of experiences where they felt as though they were targeted because of race during the internship. For the four participants that responded “no” to experiencing racism in the internship, this topic required some exploration and additional questioning. At this point, if the participant responded no to questioning on the impact of his/her/hir race during the internship, we moved on quickly to questions about specific racial microaggressions. Finally, the participants were asked to think about how racial microaggressions experienced during their internships affected their lives and career paths. According to Sue (2010), it is imperative to define, recognize, and deconstruct the meaning of microaggressions in order to combat the covert racism that individuals from racially minoritized populations face. By asking participants about specific racial microaggressions, I was able to tap into the experience of each participant in a way that, for a few participants, the discussion had not yet addressed.

There was some slight discomfort exhibited by a few participants during both interviews. In the second interview, one individual noted that my questioning during the first interview brought up memories of the overt racism that she experienced in a

former job. These instances of racism were traumatizing and extreme, ultimately ending in litigation and the loss of her employment. It had taken 10 years for her to process what happened at her former job and she noted that, if this interview had been any earlier, she would not have been able to discuss the racism that she experienced. She was emotional but appreciative, glad to share her story as it might help someone else avoid what she experienced. Two other participants mentioned that they questioned their original interpretation of the internship experience after believing that they had not experienced racism in the internship. This discomfort was expected, as the topic of racism is deeply personal. Because the U.S. is deeply ingrained with racism, the interview questions encouraged participants, particularly the individuals who indicated that they did not experience racism in their internships, to realize racism experienced without the awareness of the participant. Zinga and Gordon (2014) found that some students interviewed “demonstrated internalized stereotypes, internalized racism, and an acceptance of the position that their issues occupied” (p. 23-24). When this realization occurred, I followed the lead of the participant, asking additional questions and probing into the topic only when or if he/she/ze is feeling more comfortable moving forward (Seidman, 2012; Zinga & Gordon, 2014). However, I did my best to remain as neutral as possible in my role as the interviewer, as Seidman (2012) cautions against “changing the interviewing relationship into a therapeutic one” (p. 91).

Maintaining organization and confidentiality was crucial throughout the data collection process (Seidman, 2012). Each participant was given a unique code and all documents were de-identified from each individual. Consent forms were kept in a

separate file from all interviews and notes. All paper files were maintained in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. All audio files were maintained in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.

Analysis of Narratives

Conducting analysis within hermeneutic phenomenology provides an in-depth look into a particular phenomenon. The research takes the shape of what researchers call the "hermeneutic circle" (Rennie, 2012, p. 388), meaning that the whole is being analyzed in relation to the parts and each part is being analyzed in relation to the whole. This happens simultaneously: "the meaning of a whole text informs the meaning of its parts, and the meanings of the parts illuminate the meaning of the whole" (Rennie, 2012, p. 388).

I analyzed the data using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to code and develop themes across participant experience as outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). This process occurs in two stages: single case analyses and cross-case analysis.

The IPA process begins with a deep analysis of a single case. First, I read through the transcripts of the first and second interviews for a single participant multiple times in an effort to immerse myself in the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Reading and rereading through each transcript, in addition to listening to the recordings of the interviews, illuminated the participant's experience and ensure that the participant remains the focus of the analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In dealing with so much data (approximately 480 pages of interview transcript), it was imperative to immerse myself in one case at a time to honor the experience of each

participant and to try and minimize any cross-contamination of participants' experience at this stage of analysis. Isolating individual experiences at this stage allowed for each individual's experience to rise to the surface of my understanding.

After becoming familiar with the transcripts for a single case, I read through the transcripts closely and marked passages and statements that appear to be important to the participant's experience with race and racism, with the goal of creating a detailed report of the important themes and topics to the participant (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I determined which passages were important based on the relevance to the research question and if the passage appeared to be a fair representation of the two interviews from the participant. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) call this "exploratory commenting" (p. 84) and includes descriptive, linguistic and conceptual commenting. Descriptive commenting, perhaps the most superficial level of commenting, required noting times when the participants mentioned something that I interpreted as meaningful to the research (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Descriptive commenting was a good place for me to begin to determine what was important from each interview as it was relatively clear cut and did not require too much interpretation or reflection on my part. Linguistic commenting required me to note any pieces of the passage that included interesting word choice or other linguistic aspects (pausing, inflection, tone, etc.). These comments were noted with an asterisk. Conceptual commenting required me to begin to interpret the participant's statements, reflect on their meanings and check-in with my own biases. During this stage, I consulted with my reflective journal notes when I felt as though I needed to verify my understanding of the passage or reflect on my own biases. I approached each written

transcript and audio file with an open mind (Seidman, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to allow the participant's voice to come through.

To manage the data at this step, I created a chart (see Appendix H) to note my initial comments for each participant with three columns: the first column indicates the themes (filled in after the middle and last column were identified), the middle column includes the highlighted passages, and the last column highlights my exploratory commenting and any questions or thoughts that I have regarding the highlighted sections. I continued to use this chart during the next step in the IPA process.

These passages and statements were then translated into themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), noted in the first column of my initial comments chart (see Appendix H). These themes grew from words or phrases that captured the essence of the passage. Each theme is connected to a focus of the research study, either racism or racial microaggressions. This complex process required me to reflect on the meaning of each important passage as it related to the overall essence of the interview, requiring me to consider the whole interview and the parts (important passages) at the same time (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Themes were conceptualized in short phrases that captured the general feeling of the passage (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This was a particularly challenging step in the process as I continually had to check-in with my assumptions and biases to ensure that the participant's views were coming forth, not my own.

I then looked at all of the themes for connections between themes as a way to consolidate the analysis. This is still done within the single case analysis stage. Doing so allowed me to see the relationships between themes. I used abstraction to identify

superordinate themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This process included me printing and cutting out each theme so that I could move around the themes to see which logically went together (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Once I had the themes categorized into larger groups, I came up with a phrase by which to name the super-ordinate theme. With each step, I am using my interpretation and understanding of the participant's experience while moving farther away from the verbatim transcript.

Once all of the above stages were completed for one participant, I then began the process again with another participant's transcripts. This is an important transition to note, as it is easy for cross case contamination to occur at this point, meaning that the themes uncovered during the analysis of a previous case influence how the themes emerge during the analysis of subsequent analyses (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). To attempt to avoid this, I rigidly followed the steps outlined above, reading and rereading participant's interviews and listening to the audio files multiple times before beginning the step of identifying important passages (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The second stage of IPA analysis is to look for patterns across participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I looked at the themes that emerged from each participant and made connections to provide a deeper picture of how interns make sense of racism experienced during the internship. This allowed for passages from across the interviews with related themes to be compiled, thus highlighting the strength or relevance of themes that have emerged. When a theme seemed unclear but some of the passages seem related, I memoed my impressions and understandings of

the passages to see if I could create some clarity and discover what I believe is the common theme among the passages.

Trustworthiness

According to Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina (2006), there are many challenges confronting qualitative research from proponents of scientifically based models of research. Perhaps the most upsetting to positivists is the topic of evidence. Considered both a political and procedural problem, the topic of evidence is used as a point of weakness in qualitative research. Positivist researchers have even used the term “fiction” to describe the work that qualitative researchers do, as qualitative researchers cannot prove that they have uncovered truths (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006).

Because it is based on the lived experience of individuals, phenomenology cannot be generalized, nor is generalization the point of qualitative research. For this purpose, trustworthiness, or the degree to which the data and analysis can be believed, is employed with qualitative research. A researcher must ensure that data is collected and analyzed in a rigorous and ethical manner to elicit results and a discussion that accurately represent the experience of the participants (Yin, 2013). There are several methods that qualitative researchers can use to indicate the trustworthiness of the research.

I followed the Issues of Trustworthiness matrix by Shenton (2004) and Marshall and Rossman (1995) to address the topics of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. See Appendix H for the matrix.

Credibility

Member checking. Participants were asked several times both formally and informally for feedback on my understanding. Interviewing methods that include restating the participant's answer in new terms and connecting ideas within the interview were used during interviewing to informally gather verification from the participant that I was interpreting the information correctly. Formally, each participant was asked to review brief notes to verify my understanding and synthesis of the interview at the beginning of the second interview and over email after the second interview. Participants were also emailed with themes from across all of the interviews during the analysis phase of research. Each participant was emailed the results of his/her/hir individual analysis and the cross case analysis and asked to provide feedback.

Transferability

Thick description of phenomenon. Giving detailed, in-depth descriptions of the participants' experiences of racism and racial microaggressions during the internship adds to the credibility of the research by providing enough information and insights for others to review the data and determine if the results appear plausible (Shenton, 2004). While the findings of this study will not be generalizable to other populations, through a thick description of the participants' experiences the findings may be transferrable to other situations (Shenton, 2004).

Purposive sampling. In determining the criteria for selecting the participants for this study, there were several things to consider. I wanted participants who had experienced racism or racial microaggressions first hand, not witnessed or perpetrated racism or racial microaggressions. Another important consideration for potential

participants was the internship experience. The internship environment is less predictable as interns are in a variety of industries and sites. Because of this, I wanted to ensure that interns had received comparable on-campus support.

Dependability

In-depth methodological description. By providing a detailed description of the methods used, another researcher should be able to replicate this study. While the focus of quantitative research is to ultimately obtain the same results, this is not the case with qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Because the focus of qualitative research is on the lived experience, replicating the method will not necessarily garner identical results. However, by providing an in-depth description of the method employed for this study, the research can be deemed confirmable. Yin (2011) calls this “methodic-ness” (p. 20), meaning that the in-depth description the process followed describes a carefully-followed and orderly procedure.

Dependability audit (documentation, reflective journal, field notes). By engaging in varying types of documentation that indicate my understanding and reflections during the research and analysis process, I was able to member-check for clarity when appropriate and have accurate records of impressions and reflections from each interview and analysis session. Taking notes during each interview, along with reflective journaling afterwards gave me a good foundation of my interpretations of the participants’ insights.

Confirmability

Admission of researcher’s beliefs and assumptions. In being upfront with my beliefs and assumptions, I attempted to put them aside during the interviews. I

told each participant about the prior experiences that I have had that led me to want to do this type of research and led me to the beliefs and assumptions that I currently hold. I believe that being honest in this way was another way to build trust between myself and the participants.

Limitations

Perhaps the most glaring limitation of this study is the reality that human perception, particularly when trying to recall an event or experience that was a year or more ago, is flawed. There was no way to corroborate any of the information given by the participants, although this also was not the point of the study. Additionally, the demographic participant data (credits, internship semester, etc.) was not verified with the university. This was not viewed as necessary as the purposive sampling methods ensured that participants successfully completed the ITR program.

Another limitation of this study is that the participant gender and racial demographics are relatively homogeneous. Out of six participants, only one identified as a male and only one identified as a racial category other than Black/African American.

Another limitation of this study is that I am not a member of a racially minoritized population. I consider this a limitation, particularly because race and racism is such a personal topic, and I cannot help but wonder if this study would have yielded different results if the interviewer was a person from a racially minoritized population. Because of this, it was periodically my impression that the participants felt like my probing questions were a sign of me “not getting it,” an impression that I got not from any statements made by participants but from nonverbal cues such as

sighing or repeating themselves after being asked a different question. My White identity may also have prevented some potential participants from responding to the pre-study survey. My picture is on my Gmail account. Other potential participants may have not opted to participate due to fatigue in discussing the topic of racism and a lack of interest in teaching White people about racism, as Keith mentioned in his interview.

Because qualitative research does not follow a rigid procedure that can be replicated and duplicated, positivists consider qualitative methods less valid than quantitative methods (Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina, 2006; Kvale, 1996). Additionally, positivists often feel that the small number of participants in qualitative research yields less reliable results (Kvale, 1996). For these reasons, this research may be deemed less valuable by positivists due to the small number of participants and the subjective nature of qualitative data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Issues of race played a role for each participant during the internship. Three themes related to racial microaggressions emerged from the data: subtle racial microaggressions, environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. The topics of attributional ambiguity and intersectionality are included in the section describing subtle racial microaggressions. Additionally, two participants who interned with social justice organizations that focused on programming for students of color noted an absence of racial microaggressions. This is included in the findings as well.

I begin this chapter with brief participant biographies to give context to each participant's experience. Then the findings are reported organized by emergent theme: subtle racial microaggressions (including attributional ambiguity and intersectionality), environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. A description of the absence of racial microaggressions is also included.

Participant Biographies

Each participant had unique experiences in their internships that can be traced back to a number of factors, both within their internships and in their previous history with racism. To give the reader context into the participants' experiences, brief biographies have been provided. See the chart on page 50 or in Appendix D for an overview of all six participants.

Erin. Erin was former undergraduate intern who identified as Black/African American. While Erin did not note her age, she did reference being “an older woman” several times. A communication studies major, Erin completed her internship hours at

a community assistance agency that supported community members living in poverty with heating and food assistance and home weatherization services.

Erin experienced racial microaggressions in her internship. While she was initially asked to participate in an extra project due to her advanced skills in public speaking, this extra project was ultimately perceived by other interns as an advantage and ended up being the impetus of some of her strife with colleagues. She struggled to connect with most of her colleagues and reported physical and psychological affects from her experience. She noted several times that her age and her gender could also have played a part in the treatment she received at her internship. Erin also reported experiencing significant workplace racism in a former professional job. These prior experiences influenced her perceptions of her internship, which was evident in her continuous reference to these experiences while describing her internship.

Megan. Megan was a 48-year-old former undergraduate intern who identified as Black/African American. She was a film major with significant prior experience in the field. She interned with a growing company and supported the marketing team in producing commercials.

Megan reported experiencing racial microaggressions during her internship, in addition to describing a generally tense work environment due to significant staffing and structural changes during her time with the company. This tense environment impacted her internship experience significantly. Megan also reported experiencing targeted and significant racism in a previous professional position, which likely influenced her current perspectives.

Ariana. Ariana was a 22 year old former undergraduate intern with a double major in journalism and communications. Ariana identified as Hispanic on the pre-study survey. Ariana's internship was with a regional magazine where she acted as a staff reporter. Ariana reported to being invigorated and inspired by her internship and reported having a great relationship with her colleagues and supervisors.

While Ariana did not report experiencing racial microaggressions during her internship on the pre-study survey, her experiences with racial microaggressions in her internship emerged during the interviews. In fact, Ariana resisted discussing issues of race or racism during her interviews at all. When asked about race or racism, Ariana steered her answer to discuss other issues of power, such as her positionality as an intern and witnessing the bullying of a student with special needs in high school. The only participant who did not identify as Black/African American, Ariana reported her ethnicity as Hispanic, although she mentioned several times that she does not connect or identify with her Peruvian heritage at all.

Caroline. Caroline was a 22 year old former undergraduate intern who identified as Black/African American. She was a psychology major and interned with the local state office of a national child abuse prevention organization. Caroline's primary internship responsibilities were to provide marketing support. Caroline enjoyed her internship but did not feel overly connected to her colleagues. While Caroline did not indicate experiencing racial microaggressions at her internship on the pre-study survey, her experiences with racial microaggressions during her internship emerged during the interviews.

Caroline experienced significant racism in high school school. Additionally, her parents taught Caroline and her brother explicitly about race and the specific considerations people of color must make in U.S. culture. While Caroline described a desire to avoid conflict and debate, she felt a sense of responsibility to enlighten others with regards to race. In general, Caroline described educating herself on current issues of race and racism and helping to educate others by spreading her ideas and knowledge through social media.

Keith. Keith was a 26 year old former undergraduate intern who completed his internship hours with an on-campus organization for students of color. Keith identified as Black/African American on the pre-study survey. His primary responsibility was to research mentoring programs of similar organizations. While Keith had a strong relationship with his supervisor, a woman of color, he did not interact with other colleagues during this internship. Keith did not report experiencing racial microaggressions during this internship.

Keith double-majored in sociology and Africana studies. He described being enlightened by his coursework in both majors, an enlightening experience that gave him a greater understanding of how racism and issues of race affect people and systems. Keith was not interested in discussing racism experienced on an individual level; he wanted to think about racism in a larger context, often mentioning structural and institutional racism. Keith discussed how racism on a larger scale continues to be perpetuated in societal structures. Keith had also participated in an advocacy program in high school that engaged students around the theme of racism and justice.

Beth. Beth was a 22 year old former undergraduate intern. Beth identified as Black/African American on the pre-study survey. A double major in sociology and communication studies, Beth interned with a charter school in an inner city that supported individuals who had been kicked out of a traditional school. Beth supported the program that provided information to students on college and career.

Beth did not report experiencing racial microaggressions during her internship. This could be due to the culture of the school. She described the culture of the school as very open, with teachers and students alike discussing topics such as race, privilege, and oppression. Teachers received significant training on the topic of privilege and identity. Beth reported that most of the staff and teachers were people of color, with a small minority of White teachers. Beth also participated in an advocacy group in high school that focused on race and racial identity.

Racial Microaggressions

As mentioned, the racial microaggressions described by participants fell into three categories: subtle racial microaggressions, environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. The topics of attributional ambiguity and intersectionality are included as subthemes in the section describing subtle racial microaggressions.

Two participants did not describe racial microaggressions during their internships. Their descriptions of their internships are included below in the section Absence of Racial Microaggressions. These experiences are included in this study because the context of the internship sites provided interesting insight into the intern experience. These two participants interned with organizations that provided

resources and programming to support students of color succeed and thrive in school environments. Not only were these two sites focused on providing stellar and inclusive educational environments for students of color, including the interns; these two sites also consisted primarily of employees from racially minoritized populations.

Subtle Racial Microaggressions

Subtle racial microaggressions were described by four participants. These subtle racial microaggressions were reported through insulting, dismissive, and isolating messages during the internship that the recipient attributed to race.

Megan reported feeling competition from a colleague based on Megan's former job and her race. This sense of competition impacted Megan's opportunity at her internship as she described:

So, when I came in and I was an advertising producer, she thought I was there for her job. And no matter how many times I told her I'm not here to stay, she wasn't comfortable. She was that nice nasty, where you're very – somebody, but you will exclude them purposely. And I think hers was just because she lacked the confidence.

Megan continued:

And I had to be very aggressive about getting information. And I don't feel like I really need to go –if I'm an intern, you should automatically want me to be there anyway because interns do the grunt work, which is another reason why when she gave me the dumb work. I didn't mind because I knew as an intern I also had to do grunt work. But you should automatically want me to be there anyway. She didn't tell me anything. And I would just go in. And it was

like, “Oh, okay. I’ll be there. No problem. What time? Okay.” And that’s what I would do. So it’s kind of like being very aggressive.

Megan also experienced subtly dismissive attitudes from colleagues that she felt lessened her productivity and ability to perform in the internship. She described some of her colleagues as “not nice, meaning just in conversation, just not taking like my advice. I can’t really describe it. It’s just an attitude that they had.” Megan elaborated on her interactions with colleagues:

I don’t know what they would have said while I wasn’t there, but I just feel like there was a cleaner version of their conversation... Very awkward. They weren’t really inviting in their conversation. Sometimes it would be a little awkward because I felt like it was a conversation with the three of them and – and I was kind of left out, I think.

Megan brought this point to light by describing a particular situation with a colleague:

The vice president had given me a task to do. And in that task, I had to go and speak to one of their editors. And I recommended something to the vice president, like how he should go about doing it, like numbering it ‘cause that’s what we would do with the agency. So, he says, “Oh, that’s great. I like that idea. Go and tell the editor on how we should go about doing that.” Me going in and telling him –and he had to be all of 23. And I go in there and I suggested –I didn’t even go in there and tell him. I suggested. I said, “I spoke to Dan about this already and I just offered to suggest this to you.” And he came back with a snide remark. Now, I was in there with two editors – one was a female and one was a male. And she agreed with me and he just made this very flip

comment. No. Honestly, I could have said something, but I didn't. I rephrased and we came very professional.

In addition to struggling to connect with colleagues, Megan was ignored and dismissed by a member of the management team. Megan began by describing the situation:

There was a – I think he was the Vice President. He wouldn't even introduce himself to me, and I thought it was quite strange. So then I went to the CEO, who had pulled me aside, who happened to be a Black man. And I pulled him aside and I said – I'm a professional and have held a director's position, so it alarms me when someone who sits in a higher position doesn't come over and introduce himself to an intern. So he said – he wasn't surprised, but he said – “Yeah, he's like that.” So what does “he's like that” mean? So I had to keep observing him and I realized that he would throw little things out there in terms of race, and that's what kind of made me clear. I don't just take it at face value. I sit back and I watch you to see where you're coming from. And so when he decides to throw little undercover digs in terms of race, and him being Italian, and him going and saying he was foreign, sizing himself up with other people of his culture against other people, then that's a problem for me.

Megan elaborated:

They sound like they're cultural comparisons between – not mentioning one particular race, but placing his race above all races – “Well, you know, we're Italians, and we do it better.” Or, yeah – he's an Italian guy. You kind of know it. I'm sorry if I'm not explaining this very clearly. It's just that when you are a

minority and hear things like this, in your heart and in your gut, you know that it's not positive. You just know this. And you've dealt with it for such a long time, you have ways of putting up a barrier and keep moving on.

Through Megan's description of her discriminatory treatment at her internship, the impact of her prior experiences with workplace racism is evident. Megan described this particular colleague's reaction to her presence several times during the interviews, indicating that it had a significant impact on her experience. She struggled to understand where this person was coming from:

It took him a long time to even acknowledge I was even there. It's not like it was a huge business. It's almost like walking next door. That's how many people. Walking into the what you call an office. It's not even a lot of people there. So, if you see a new face – and I just felt like you're upper management. You should be able to come over and say, "Hey, welcome aboard. Glad to have you here."

Megan attempted to make sense of the behavior, positing:

So it's not like I'm asking for something completely foreign. He wouldn't do that. And he wouldn't acknowledge me. He wouldn't talk to me. You would see him watching me out of the corner of his eye, but still not coming over and making any kind of introduction or saying anything for that matter. And then like, again, the slick comments. Unnecessary. You just don't do that.

Megan described the impact of this treatment:

It puts a guard up, and it doesn't allow you to move about freely because you do know that there's someone there, and you don't necessarily know who else

sides with him, but you do know that there's someone there who has this disdain towards you, and the color of your skin or your culture.

The impact of this treatment was significant to Megan. Megan felt like she had to hide her true self to function in the internship environment.

Employing a different strategy, when faced with a negative work environment that she perceived to be rooted in racism, Erin tried to take herself out of the tense situation. Unfortunately, she reported that this backfired for her and resulted in an even more negative relationship with her colleagues:

Even in the end, it seemed like the more I tried to stay out of it, the more I kept getting lumped back into it. I said, "What is with you people? I'm over in the corner minding my business." That became a problem. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know where to go with it. I'm trying to stay away, trying to withdraw, stay out of it, and then, "There she goes again. She thinks she's better than us."

The effects of this treatment on Erin were dire. Erin explained "because I felt that I was already stereotyped so now let's keep them guessing now to wonder who I really am or what I really am." She elaborated

When I first started going there I would dress business casual, but you didn't have to. I started wearing jeans. I wore a hat on my head all the time with the hat down like this [drawn down over face]. I sat in the corner all the time trying to stay out of everything.

Erin also noted psychological effects from her treatment at the internship; "I went into a depression." Erin noted both physical and psychological effects from her internship.

While Ariana and Caroline’s overall internship experiences were positive, they gleaned dismissive and biased attitudes from their colleagues through both actions and statements. Caroline described a conversation about politics where a colleague

kept saying “they”—they, they, they, and she was talking about, primarily she was talking about Mexican immigrants. And just, like, “they” and some of the things that she was saying, I was just, you know, it’s not like I wanted to combat everything that she was saying, it’s just, certain things, I was just like, “Well, if you look at it maybe from this point of view as opposed to just that, through that one lens, then you might see it a little differently,”

This conversation impacted Caroline, as she noted “my parents are immigrants.”

Additionally, Caroline described her supervisor as being outwardly open to everyone, while harboring an attitude of colorblindness that stripped groups of historical context. Caroline elaborated “she never really—you know, she made a point of saying, ‘We’re all people.’ So that was kind of her thing, like, ‘We’re all people,’ so it was pretty easy to make that assumption.” When asked about her reaction, Caroline gave further insight into her perspective:

It was casual conversation. I just wanted to remain, like, almost as objective as possible, you know, and just kind of let her know where I was coming from without making it seem like I was taking it personally. So that it didn’t seem like I was trying to have a debate or anything like that, I didn’t want it to turn into a heated [racial] debate, because that’s not what I was there for.

Similarly, Ariana described her first encounter with her supervisor as one that left her questioning her supervisor’s true perception of her. She explained:

I had an over-the-phone interview and was given a position right on the spot, which I was extremely excited about, which I accepted right on the spot. And then a few days later, I was in the area conducting an informational interview, and I had finished early, and thought, "Oh, why don't I go to my new internship a day before, just kind of introduce myself?" And I'm in the area – why not? And I remember I came in late – not late, because I didn't have... But I came in at a time that everybody's leaving, so I kind of had to stand like sketchily at the door and just wait for someone to open it and kind of watch from the outside. And I remember one came out – she was leaving to go to her car – and she had to stop and was like, "Can I help you?" And I was like, "Oh, hi. I'm your new intern. I'm looking for Jen, and she doesn't know I'm coming, but I just wanted to introduce myself before I started this internship." And she's like, "Oh, sure. Come in." And I walked in, and this was my second internship, but it was the most exciting offer that I'd gotten to that point, so I was extremely excited. And I sounded excited on the phone, and you know it was very obvious. And I walked into their office, and they kind of brought her over to me, and she just looked at me, and was like, "Hi." And I was just like, "Hi, I'm [Ari], I'm your new intern. I'm so excited to meet you. Thank you so much for everything, like this opportunity." And she was like, "You're my new – [Ari] – you're my – oh my gosh, [Ari]." It was just kind of like she seemed very shocked to see me, which is kind of weird, 'because I was like, "Should I send you a picture?" It was kind of odd. She was like, "Oh my gosh, your energy, you're great."

Ariana continued:

And my internship with them, it was beyond incredible, and it was great. I didn't ever feel like she ever regretted offering me a position, but I just remember that one time, when I really thought that she had genuinely thought I was gonna look different, because she had put a [White] face to my voice [during the phone interview].

Ariana described a reoccurring assumption made about her during the internship that has been repeated to her throughout her work towards degrees in journalism and Spanish:

When we discussed my aspirations to be an on-camera reporter, a lot of people will ask me if I have heard of Univision [Spanish language television station], which is 110% because I am Spanish. Take that back, 110% because I speak Spanish. I don't find it offensive. I have never and will not ever apply to a job at Univision. That's just because I don't want to work for Univision. But I have, every single time that job aspiration comes, every single person that I've spoken to asks me if I know about Univision. Yeah, I don't like Univision.

Ariana explained:

It's not offensive because I understand that they – being on camera and reporting is being on camera reporting, whether you're doing it in Chinese, in Spanish, in Portuguese. Whatever it is, it's reporting on camera. I don't think it's offensive. I think they're just trying to – I had one person tell me, "Play up your assets," which I understand that's where they're coming from. It is a skill to be bilingual, to be fluently bilingual, and they just want me to play up on my

assets. Fine. I do not want my way in TV to be through Spanish. That's not what I anticipated when I was doing journalism. It's not what I had anticipated. If I wanted to intern or apply at Univision, I would've done it by now. I would've been all over it, but it's not what I want to do.

These subtle messages of otherness impacted participants' experiences and relationships.

Attributional Ambiguity. Sue (2010b) describes one aspect of the complex effects of racial microaggressions as attributional ambiguity. The concept of attributional ambiguity brings to light the complicated questioning that recipients of racial microaggressions undertake to make sense of the event and the perpetrator's motives (Crocker & Major, 1989; Sue, 2010b). Participants of this study sometimes questioned their interpretations of the subtle microaggressions that they experienced and/or the motives of the perpetrator. This questioning appeared to be a way for participants to make sense of the situation.

In an effort to make sense of the perpetrator's actions, Erin and Megan questioned motives. Erin wondered, "Why would a person do this, why? Because I didn't know how deep it went. You always think of prejudice as somebody will write nigger on your door." Similarly, after receiving a snide comment from a colleague, Megan questioned her colleague's motives by asking herself "Why did you say it? Why did you feel like you needed to make the comment? Where were you going with that? And what did you expect me to do with that?"

Caroline described questioning others' perceptions of her at an event with her supervisor. She explained:

It's always that curiosity, you know, "Are they looking at me? Are they kind of saying, 'What is she doing here?'" I think that once I sat down, because initially I was looking for the table, I didn't really know where to go. I think once I sat down at the table with her and they knew who I was with, there wasn't really an issue. Nobody made any comments or anything like that. Did people look at me? Yes, but maybe it's because they thought I was lost, who knows?

Caroline described this type of thinking starting in high school as a result of racism that she experienced among peers:

You almost wonder if they [peers] are thinking that [racist assumptions and thoughts] and perhaps maybe their parents think that, so if their parents are thinking that... [you] walk in somewhere, an interview or a classroom or what have you, that an adult might be thinking that.

Caroline used her prior experience with racism to speculate about others' perceptions of her racial identity. These experiences clearly had an impact on her.

Ariana sometimes used questioning to propose alternative reasoning, besides racism, for her perpetrator's behavior. In reflecting on her supervisor's surprise during their initial meeting, Ariana stated:

I got in my car and I was just like, "What could've shocked her?" I wasn't dressed funny. I had just come from an informational interview, so I was dressed fine. Maybe I surprised her because I came in to say hi. I don't really know, and then I just thought to myself, "Well, I've had many people tell me I have a very good phone voice." That I speak very differently on the phone, and that when they think of me on the telephone, my face isn't the first thing they

think of. I was just like, "Maybe she wasn't expecting me. Maybe she thought I was gonna look different, or maybe she thought that I wasn't gonna look like this [a person of color]."

Ariana elaborated:

I kind of just convinced myself that she just wasn't expecting me. I was just kind of like, "Yeah, I mean that's probably not it. Like she was just probably caught off-guard, because no intern's ever come in a day early to say hi." So that's just what I convinced myself that it was. And like I said, my internship experience from then on out was fine, so I didn't think that maybe what my original thought had been, maybe that was incorrect, and maybe she didn't feel that way. Maybe I had just taken her body language and interpreted it wrongly. That's just what I thought.

The reactions and questioning noted in the participants' responses are aligned with Sue's (2010b) descriptions of attributional ambiguity. People of color often try to explain away the racism that they experienced as a way to cope with the pain and trauma of the event (Sue, 2010b).

Intersectionality. While research on microaggressions initially focused on racial microaggressions, other marginalized societal identities, such as gender and age, have been identified as the impetus for microaggressions. This concept is called intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Sue, 2010b). People who identify with multiple marginalized groups often question the reason they experience microaggressions and are unable to tease out the motives or perspectives of the

perpetrator, adding another dimension of confusion for the recipient of the microaggression (Sue, 2010b).

Both Megan and Erin questioned the root of the microaggressions that they experienced. While both posited that it was due to race, Megan and Erin also indicated that other facets to their identities could have elicited the microaggressions that they experienced. Erin explained, “I experienced three kinds of prejudices in there. I feel that I had a – that feministic thing, and then I think I had an age thing in there, and then I had a color thing.” Megan felt like her identities of gender and race also impacted how her colleagues treated her, describing reactions from colleagues as “Who are you to come in here? I don’t want to be told what to do by a woman. I certainly don’t want to be told what to do by a black woman.”

Erin offered a specific example of how her age and/or educational level also possibly affected her relationships with colleagues:

So I tried to explain that to the male boss. I said “it’s not that.” I said, “it’s just there’s a difference in the age.” So he didn’t see that the age discrimination was against me. He thought I wasn’t trying to be with that group; so that’s where that age discrimination came in at. Then where the prejudice came in more so is with them permanent people that were there. Like I said, a lot of them felt they weren’t educated enough, because actually including the boss—the middle boss— she never went to school either. So they would say things to me like, “Don’t you think you’re a little old to be going back to school?” and things like that. Then, if I said something that they thought was intellectual, they would say, “Excuse me.” So then it started slipping into “Where are you

from anyway?” Then it really – they really start getting into the prejudicial part with them.

Erin and Megan’s explanation of how their identities in multiple oppressed groups had an effect on their treatment during their internships highlight the complexity of identity and perception.

Environmental racial microaggressions

Environmental racial microaggressions subtly convey which cultures or groups are valued in an environment by highlighting who is included or excluded (Sue, 2010b). Some examples of environmental racial microaggressions are the overrepresentation of White males in higher education administration and faculty, the overcrowding and underfunding of schools in urban areas that primarily serve students of color, and the prevalence of school buildings that are named after White males (Sue, 2010b). At the most basic level environmental racial microaggressions take the shape of who is represented or not represented, with a clear message of who will be successful in an environment and who will not be successful. Each of the four participants that indicated experiencing racial microaggressions during the internship described the environment at their internships in terms that align with the literature on environmental microaggressions.

When asked about the climate at her internship site for people of color, Caroline laughingly said, “Well, I was the only Black person.” Furthermore, Caroline was only person of color at events for her internship site, describing “I was the only Black person there. The area that we were in, I think, like the neighborhoods and that, just the area, I think, it was predominantly White.” Caroline described feeling a

discomfort with her status as the only person of color. This led her to question the motives and perspectives of others around her. Caroline explained, “It’s always that curiosity, you know, ‘Are they looking at me? Are they kind of saying, ‘What is she doing here?’” This questioning is also described in the Findings section on Attributional Ambiguity on page 80.

When describing her internship site, Ariana reflected and said, “I can’t think of another face that was of a different culture or ethnicity.” Ariana reported this fact in a matter-of-fact manner that did not convey any discomfort or sign that she thought this situation was unusual.

Similarly, Megan noted, “I was the only Black person there other than the CEO. That would be it. It was just the two of us.” She further explained:

As far as my race is concerned, let me just put it this way, you know it’s there. It’s like the elephant in the room especially, here because there aren’t that many – there are not that many Black faces here.

Megan received the message loud and clear: people of color do not experience success in this environment. In fact, at one point Megan reported that her supervisor wanted to hire her permanently and said, “I think you’re doing a wonderful job. You’re very, very helpful. We need you. And I want to see if you could stay. And I want to see if I can get you in.” Megan expressed her skepticism at his statement, noting about her internship site:

I mean, there aren't any Blacks. Maybe I might have seen two, so there aren't that many Black faces – but there's a certain look that they have. So when I

walked in there, I walked in there. I looked around and I said – they ain't hiring me.

At Erin's internship site, the racial composition was carefully constructed by her supervisor. She stated:

The male – the AmeriCorps; he got a person of each ethnicity and he said he did it on purpose... So he had a Spanish person, a Black person, a person that was Chinese, a person that was Vietnamese, and another girl – she was from South America, but I can't remember. No she wasn't, she was something else too. She was of maybe Mexican or something, some kind of descent like that. He said he did it on purpose, and then there was one White girl.

Erin described her supervisor's actions in hiring with disdain. Her tone of voice conveyed being offended at his intentional racial composition of the intern staff.

Each participant noted a lack of racial representation in their internship, aligning with the literature on environmental microaggressions.

Microassaults

Microassaults are similar to traditional, overt racism: deliberate and demeaning messages of offense and disdain (Burns, 2014; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). Both Erin and Megan reported experiencing microassaults during the internship.

Megan's microassault came during a staff meeting intended to boost morale. The vice president who, as previously described, would not recognize her in the office nor would he introduce himself to her, finally addressed Megan at this meeting.

Megan described the situation:

I remember they had started having these meetings in the beginning of – Monday morning meetings. You would come. You would sit at the table. And they wanted to start to kind of get everybody more familiar with each other. Not that they weren't already. I don't know why they made us do this. But, anyways. So they started going around and said, "We're going to try something different. Let's see if we know everybody the way we think we do." And he said, "For each person, tell us something about yourself that you don't think that we know." Well, they didn't know me at all. So it came around to me. And I had told them that I design jewelry. First time this vice president said something to me. He said, "Oh, you tell us now." Okay. What does that mean? And I know what it meant because it's like if they had known, they wouldn't have fired me or they wouldn't have bought me in because to them that would have probably been a conflict of interest... But that was the only time that he really had anything to say directly to me. "Oh, so now you tell us. If we had known that..." Those were his words.

Megan was astounded that a colleague at the management level would blatantly degrade an intern in this way. Add this to the fact that up to this point he had ignored her, Megan received his message: you are not welcome, you do not belong here.

Erin's supervisor blamed her for the strife with her colleagues, describing: Then the boss came to me, one of the other bosses, and said, "You're not being a part of the group. You're acting different from them." So that's where the prejudice came in at, because if it wasn't prejudice he would have said, "What's going on here? The kids are starting to feel ..." Like I told him, I said,

“They’re just feeling that way because you sent me to do something else, that recruiting job. Now you need to speak to them, because there’s no sense in being jealous about that or take me away from doing this recruiting.” He told me that I was totally wrong, that it was me. I didn’t want to be bothered. I was selfish. I was individualized. I didn’t want to be a part of the group. That’s where it went, and it stayed that way the whole time I was there. It was awful.

Erin’s internship supervisor attributed tension between interns solely to Erin’s behavior and did not attempt to see other possibilities as to the root of the problem.

Erin attributed this to her race, explaining:

I believe if I was a White woman and I had said that to the boss, he would have actually sat us all down together and said, "What seems to be the problem here?" What he did, he automatically assumed it was me and I hadn't done a thing. I said, "Well I'm not complaining about them." "That's just my point," he said, "You're not complaining about them because you're the one that's in the wrong." I said, "Really?"

The supervisor’s reaction is aligned with what previous research has shown: people of color are assumed to be inferior and bad, not worthy of the benefit of doubt or explanation (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010b).

Erin also experienced two microassaults at the end of her internship, the result of three months of the buildup of tension. Erin described the two conversations:

Then at the very end I was talking to one of the girls. I was like, "I'm so glad I'm getting out of here. I'm done." It was my last day. I had signed the paperwork. I was decked out because we had an exit interview. One of the

young girls said to me, "We're glad you're going too because we can't stand you." So I lost my temper. I didn't scream. I said in the same tone I'm saying to you now, "I'm gonna tell you something right now. I don't give a damn about you or no one else in this place. And I think that's the problem, because you're not important to me." I started laughing and I walked out the door... So they had a party the next day. I was supposed to be there. The boss called me. He said, "You're not invited to the party." You know what I said? I said, "Thank you so much." I was happy. I didn't want to go back. That's how bad it was. I said, "Thank you so much." He said, "What?" I said, "Thank you." He said, "I need this paper." I said, "Well it's there already." He said, "I need this." I said, "It's there already." I said, "Hello? Are you there?" "Good-bye," and he was pissed because I was happy. Isn't that a strange place?

Both Erin and Megan describe receiving overt messages that clearly convey attitudes of mistrust, disdain and otherness. Due to the explicit nature of these messages, Erin and Megan could not ignore the hostile environment of their internships.

Absence of racial microaggressions

This section describes an unintended area of findings in this study: internship sites that did not elicit any racial microaggressions for the participants of the study. I thought that it was important to include these unintentional findings here to give a full picture of participants' experiences and to inspire future research.

Both Keith and Beth interned with organizations that run programs to support racially minoritized students to succeed in school. Keith described the organization:

So the goal of the program is to just kind of be a – acts as like a social club and academic club for folks who – for folks of color in the Seeds for underrepresented folks in the STEM fields. So obviously, the – you know the STEM fields are dominated by like by White folks, by the White men mainly, so I think it's a space where folks who aren't that can come together and either get work done, maybe like find out okay we take the same classes partner up.

Keith further explained the philosophy of his internship site by describing a supportive and inclusive community dedicated to supporting student success. He described the educational services provided to students of color:

We know this is difficult. We know a lot of people even that come from really well-educated backgrounds have a hard time with this stuff, so we're going to help you as much as we can you know whether it be connecting you with other students, collecting you with like upper classmen who might've taken the class before or just like if you want to come to this meeting and vent about you know that nutrition exam that you failed or like organic chemistry exam that you failed. Yeah and then on top of that during their meetings they would just have other programs, like internship stuff, like summer opportunities, other job opportunities come in and talk to them about you know what they're offering – what those programs are offering folks who are in STEM fields which is like which was like a frickin' amazing part of it, 'cause like the amount of people that came like every meeting it was almost overwhelming, so a part of me was like I don't even know what – yeah, yeah.

Beth described the culture at her internship site as “really inspirational” and a place where

there was so much comfortability and like everyone kind of felt welcome and people actually enjoyed going to school and the teachers actually cared about the students and like they really had a deep connection with the students. Like, it was so amazing just to see how people interacted there.

Beth further described the culture, saying

even in like the break room there was a poster with White privilege and how it is and being Black and a lot of the employees knew their identity. Like, I don't know, I can't explain it, but you could tell just by the way they talk in the classes that they were fully aware that they did not come from the same places that the students and oftentimes there was – you could just tell.

Keith described the purpose of the program in which he interned as a response to racism by saying “so, you know, the whole reason that the program exists, I guess, is we can attribute it to — we can attribute it to like racism,” a description that could also be applied to Beth’s internship site.

Both Beth and Keith attributed their hiring to their race. At Beth’s internship, employees and interns are hired with the explicit goal of making sure that students of color will see themselves reflected in the school. According to Beth, it was important for teachers to have “experienced the same environment as the students.” Keith attributed being hired at his internship to his race, saying “I guess the way I got the internship is a big piece,” when asked about how race played out in his internship. Keith explained that his supervisor intentionally hired him as an intern, “just like

looking at like at a Black kid [Keith] and being like I'm gonna help this kid out. You know what I mean?" Keith further explained what this meant to him:

It felt good to kind of see that work out for folks of color and I think that — I thought that was really nice and just noting that it was like somebody doing a favor and a solid for me and looking out for me was really, it was a great feeling. She was willing to really do me that favor and make something happen for me.

Beth and Keith reflected on their academic journeys when asked about prior racism experienced. Both participants were involved in activism as high school students and majored in college programs that included in-depth investigation into identity. Beth began:

So in high school I was part of this non-profit organization that was focused on activism and advocacy, and it kind of made me realize a lot of things. But I think in college, taking sociology classes and reading my articles about how Black women are perceived, I think it eventually was then that I realized that these kind of big issues are crucial to know about.

Beth continued:

I guess that really effected me largely to be more informed, being more aware of my identity. And I think also as I was just about my senior year of college, I was just like, "What am I learning? What's the point of my education?" I kind of wanted to seek more information of how it effects me, and I think that I just started reading more. And I – like I said, I wanted to learn to – I wanted to

learn about sociology. I wanted to learn education. So I think getting politics and the whole picture of things is important to going into that work.

Furthermore, Beth stated, “I wasn’t too aware about it [racism] and then went to college and then I became more aware about it.”

Keith called the advocacy program in which he participated in high school an “amazing program and in terms of like me becoming a little more self-aware that definitely was like the first step.” Keith’s self awareness journey “happened” for him in college:

I mean it was kind of immediate just because at the time so like when I, you know the whole idea of like waking up like becoming conscious or like becoming more self-aware like it was a very gradual thing for me but like when it happened it just happened. So it was at that point I was just hungry for like any – any African history, and like Africana Studies stuff I could find, so taking the classes were helping me with that. So yeah, it felt pretty immediately satisfying when I was just getting that information and having those conversations. Yeah, because that was what I was really eager to do, because I was just watching a ton of like videos – a ton of like lectures on YouTube. I was reading tons of stuff, reading a bunch of different articles, so all the information I was getting I just wanted to throw it back out. So like in classroom discussions I was like super-eager to just talk and just yeah, yeah.

Summary

Participants reported varying degrees and instances of racial microaggressions. Three themes emerged from the findings: subtle racial microaggressions,

environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. Instances of attributional ambiguity and intersectionality are included within the subtle racial microaggressions theme. Additionally, a section on the absence of racial microaggressions is included to highlight two specific examples of interns who did not experience racial microaggressions, perhaps due to the unique internship settings and academic experience with investigating race. While only four of the six interns reported experiencing racial microaggressions during the internship, race was clearly a factor all six internships.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

There is significant research that suggests that individuals from racially minoritized populations experience racism and racial microaggressions both in school and at work (Cabrera et al., 1999; Carter, 2006; Deitch et al., 2003; Fischer, 2007; Mistry & Latoo, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014; Steele, 1992). The current research study attempted to add to these bodies of research by gathering information regarding the experience of students from racially minoritized populations in internships, at what can be considered the intersection of school and work.

This phenomenological study on the impact of racial microaggressions experienced during an undergraduate internship provides insight into this experience for students. Through interviewing six participants on the impacts of racism in general, their internships, and the racial microaggressions experienced during their internships, I collected data on intern experiences with racial microaggressions. It is from this data that I will craft general implications for practice, with the main idea that race and racism must be explicitly addressed during the internship process, both in curricula and advising. Moreover, all faculty and staff acting as intern support must be aware of how to help interns struggling with questions and confusion around issues of race and racism.

In Chapter five, I present a discussion of the findings based on the themes, implications for practice, the value of the study and reflections on methodology, and implications for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding how former interns from racially minoritized populations described and made meaning of racial microaggressions experienced during the internship. In this section, how participants described and made meaning of racial microaggressions experienced during an internship is discussed, in addition to other factors that appear to have an impact on how participants made meaning of racial microaggressions experienced during the internship.

Because related research suggests that people from racially minoritized populations experience racial microaggressions in both school and work settings (Deitch et al., 20013; Harwood et al., 2015; Mistry & Latoo, 2009; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015), it was assumed for the purposes of the current study that racial microaggressions would also be experienced during an internship experience, the intersection between school and work. Six former interns who identify as people of color were interviewed on their internship experience, both in general and specifically with regards to race.

Four participants were found to have experienced racial microaggressions during their internships. Two respondents, Erin and Megan, reported experiencing racial microaggressions during their internships on the pre-study survey and described experiencing subtle racial microaggressions, environmental racial microaggressions,

and microassaults during the internship. The other two respondents, Ariana and Caroline, initially answered no on the pre-study survey. When asked about racism and issues of race in their internships, they described several instances of experiencing subtle and environmental racial microaggressions during the internship. Ariana and Caroline were included in the study due to my belief that issues of race and racial microaggressions occur in virtually all interactions, regardless of recognition of the parties involved. Using a lens that forefronts race when investigating experiences is important to me; hence my inclusion of CRT as the theoretical framework for this research study. Due to the subtle nature and complexity of racial microaggressions, some recipients of these denigrating messages do not recognize them initially and/or question their understanding of the occurrences (Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sue, 2010a). It is because of this understanding that I included Ariana and Caroline in the study, believing that racial microaggressions would be uncovered during the interviews. I was found to be correct in this belief as both Ariana and Caroline described multiple instances of subtle racial microaggressions during their internships.

Two participants, Beth and Keith, did not report experiencing racial microaggressions during their internship on the pre-study survey or during the interviews. Both Beth and Keith interned with organizations that were created to provide programming and support for students of color and included elements of social justice as part of their work. Beth's and Keith's internship experiences are included in the findings and discussion because their experiences do include issues of race that could inform future work and research on the impact of race and racism on undergraduate interns, despite lacking instances of racial microaggressions.

The following discussion provides insight into how the findings align with current literature. The following sections are organized by theme: subtle racial microaggressions including attributional ambiguity and intersectionality, environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. A discussion of the topic of absence of racial microaggressions is also included here.

Subtle racial microaggressions

Subtle racial microaggressions were described by four participants during the interviews. While their experiences varied in degree and type, all four participants expressed discomfort while recounting these stories. The data often aligned with the literature on racial microaggressions (Allen, 1992; Burns, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harwood et al., 2015; Linder et al., 2015; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010a; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2007) and workplace racism (Deitch et al., 2003; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007). As is noted in the literature review, many examples of workplace bullying can also be classified as racial microaggressions (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007).

People of color often report being underestimated or assumed to be of lesser intelligence or capabilities due to their race (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Tracy & Alberts, 2007). Erin and Megan described colleagues and supervisors questioning their capabilities and motives early on in their internships. The ultimate consequence of these insults and demeaning comments were that both participants felt as though they were not able to contribute to the internship in the way that they intended. Megan described experiencing decreased productivity (Deitch et al., 2003; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000), a result of Megan being excluded from

projects due to a sense of competition from a colleague. Not able to work to her full potential, Megan “had to be very aggressive about getting information” on assignments in the internship, as her colleague tried to exclude her from projects. Erin, to cope with her mistreatment, displayed counterproductive work behaviors (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Sarcedo et al., 2015) by “trying to stay away, trying to withdraw” to avoid a toxic environment. This separation ultimately backfired on Erin, as it caused her supervisor and colleagues to then target her with increasingly negative messages. The exclusion and isolation that Erin and Megan described are common themes in the literature on racial microaggressions and workplace racism (Deitch et al., 2003; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Sarcedo et al., 2015; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Tracy & Alberts, 2007; Sue, 2010a).

Additionally, Megan described several instances of being dismissed by her colleagues. Whether it be through a “snide remark,” awkward conversations that left her feeling “like it was a conversation with the three of them and — and I was kind of left out,” or ignored by a colleague in senior management, Megan was significantly affected by these instances, as is evidenced by her descriptions of them in great detail. Feeling ostracized and socially isolated (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007; Sarcedo et al., 2015; Sue 2010a) is a common result of racial microaggressions and workplace racism.

Ariana and Caroline originally answered no on the pre-study survey when asked if they had experienced racism or issues of race in their internships. However, when asked specific probing questions and given time to reflect on their experiences, both participants described subtle instances of racial microaggressions that left them

feeling out-of-sorts. Caroline described her supervisor using the term “they” over and over when talking about immigrant groups. By using the term “they” to lump together groups of people, particularly when talking about hot-button political issues such as immigration, an attitude of otherness is conveyed along with the group being devalued (Sue 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, Caroline indicated discomfort upon reporting her supervisor’s attitude of “we’re all people” when hearing about other group’s histories, indicating that Caroline’s supervisor ascribed to the notion of being colorblind (Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007) and did not value differences in people and groups. Caroline also conveyed liking her supervisor and called the conversation in question “casual.” Caroline’s general affinity for her supervisor indicates that her supervisor is a well-meaning individual, making it likely that she does not realize that she had just conveyed an oppressive and demeaning comment (Dovidio, Kwakami & Gaertner, 2002; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). Ariana recounted feeling as though her supervisor was surprised to see that she was not a White woman, a reaction that positions Whiteness as the norm and other ethnicities as lesser (Sue, 2010a). Additionally, she reported hearing only “Have you heard of Univision?” when discussing her career path, a microinvalidation (Sue, 2010a) that devalued Ariana into a single identity as a Spanish speaker. Both Ariana and Caroline did not confront their colleagues when faced with these comments because, as Ariana stated, “I understood where they were coming from.” Of one of her conversations, Caroline explained, “It was casual conversation.” This denial of or resistance to recognizing the true meaning of the racial microaggression in the moment is often due to the complex and confusing

nature of racial microaggressions (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007). This is discussed further below in the section on attributional ambiguity.

Including racial identity theory (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995) to this discussion provides further insight into how participants recognized and made sense of microaggressions during the internship. Racial identity theory includes experiences of racism as the impetus for moving from one stage of development to the next (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995). Because prior experience with racism in a professional setting could be a factor in how interns from racially minoritized populations recognize and make meaning of racial microaggressions, including racial identity theory here is important.

Erin and Megan both reported experiencing racial microaggressions during the internship and in prior professional employment, two factors that could indicate that they would be more inclined to recognize and attempt to make meaning of the racial microaggressions they experienced (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995). While it is not possible to definitively identify which stage of racial identity theory Erin and Megan are in, they appear to be largely in the Internalization stage (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995), as they both appear to recognize the major impact that racism has had on their lives but do not let these significant and damaging experiences impact how they move forward.

Contrastingly, Ariana and Caroline only conceded to experiencing racial microaggressions after being asked specific and guided questions on the topic, indicating that they perhaps had not yet reflected on the incidents and did not yet truly recognize the incidents as acts of racism. Perhaps their lack of experience in reflection

on this topic is the reason. Ariana and Caroline would appear to be largely in the Pre-Encounter stage (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995).

Interestingly, all four participants who indicated that they had experienced racial microaggressions during their internships described the perpetrator as being either their direct supervisor or a colleague at the management level. Unfortunately, this finding is also reflected in the research as the perpetrators of microaggressions experienced in school are most often cited as being faculty (Allen, 1992; Harwood et al., 2015; Linder et al., 2015; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) and perpetrators of workplace racism and bullying are most often cited as being supervisors (Fox & Stallworth, 2005).

Attributional ambiguity. Attributional ambiguity describes the complex nature of racial microaggressions and how people of color make sense of racial microaggressions (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007). All four participants that described racial microaggressions during their internships also described questioning the motive of the perpetrator or their understanding of the situation.

Erin, Megan, and Ariana described how questioning helped each of them attempt to make sense of the microaggression experienced. Erin wondered, “Why would a person do this? Why?” and Megan reflected on a colleague’s behavior by asking herself, “Why did you feel like you needed to make that comment?” Both Erin and Megan were trying to make sense of a colleague’s motives in a particular situation. Ariana asked, “What could have shocked her?” when thinking about the look of surprise on her supervisor’s face at their initial meeting. By asking this, Ariana was attempting to understand her supervisor’s point of view, eventually

coming back to the conclusion that her supervisor assumed that she was White. Assumption of Whiteness is a racial microaggression often experience by people of color (Sue, 2010a).

Caroline used questioning to anticipate and speculate about others' perceptions of herself in the internship. By asking, "Are they looking at me?" when walking into an event with all White people in attendance, Caroline was drawing on her previous experiences to anticipate how others would receive her (Sue, 2010a).

While both Ariana and Caroline described having overall positive experiences in their internships, when prompted, both reflected on several seemingly innocuous events that left them questioning others' motives and their own perceptions. This could be attributed to the truly ambiguous nature of some racial microaggressions (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007). Both Ariana and Caroline received messages that made them feel devalued and uneasy but dismissed the messages because of the larger context of the conversation. Because they perceived the message to come from a well-meaning individual, Ariana and Caroline showed difficulty and reluctance in interpreting a different meaning to the message until looking back on the interaction during the interview.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality describes the unique and complex web of intersecting identities that combines to create how people define themselves (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The prevalence of intersectionality as a topic among study participants is a finding supported by recent research on intersectionality and microaggressions. Nadal et al. (2015) found that participants identified microaggressions due to multiple aspects of identity, even when asked about

microaggressions against a singular aspect of identity. Sarcedo et al. (2015) found that microaggressions enacted on individuals that belong to multiple oppressed groups, and who attribute microaggressions to their belonging to multiple oppressed groups, feel attacked on multiple levels and are affected on a deeper emotional level as a result. Sarcedo et al. (2015) calls this “intensified impact” (p. 11).

Two of the four participants who indicated that they experienced racial microaggressions during the internship also described questioning how their identities in other minoritized groups, such as age and gender, resulted in microaggressions during their internships. Both Erin and Megan mentioned the possibility of their identities as older Black women as the impetus for some of their treatment. This was particularly evident when Erin and Megan described their relationships with colleagues. Megan reported that colleagues resisted her suggestions and input, noting that they reacted as “I don’t want to be told what to do by a woman. I certainly don’t want to be told what to do by a Black woman.” Erin described experiencing “three kinds of prejudices” with colleagues: “a feministic thing,” “an age thing,” and “a color thing.” Both Erin and Megan described an inability to tease out the root of the microaggressions that they experienced due to their belonging to multiple minoritized populations.

Environmental racial microaggressions

Environmental racial microaggressions are messages that are subtly sent through environmental cues to convey a culture where one racial identity is held to be more valuable than others (Sue, 2010b). These environmental cues can include representation of only one race in positions of power or even the absence of people of

color at all (Sue, 2010a). Each of the four participants that described racial microaggressions during the interview indicated that race played a part in the environment at their internship site. While three of the participants, Megan, Ariana, and Caroline reported being either the only person of color or one of two people of color at the site, the fourth participant described how her internship site had carefully hired interns to fill quotas of interns who ascribe to particular racial identities.

Both Ariana and Caroline were the only people of color at their internships. Interestingly, they were also the only two participants in this study that reported experiencing racial microaggressions in the internship while also having an overwhelmingly positive internship experience. While Ariana did not identify this as an area of discomfort for her during this internship, noting that she was the only person of color in an office of approximately 30 people is important as it is directly aligns with literature that indicates that a lack of racial representation serves a message of otherness (Sue, 2010b). Ariana's lack of discomfort at being the only person of color at her internship could be in part because she spent only 9 hours per week at the internship site, during which she primarily interacted with her supervisor and did not have enough exposure to the office culture with the rest of the staff. As is stated in Ariana's participant biography on page 69, Ariana showed resistance in discussing factors that might be attributed to race. Perhaps her lack of discomfort at being the only person of color at her internship site is due to this. Caroline initially also did not convey discomfort at being the only person of color at her internship, laughing while she reported this fact. However, upon reflection, Caroline did describe feeling uneasy in the environment, wondering at one point, "Are they kind of saying, 'What is she

doing here?” The underrepresentation of people of color at Caroline’s internship left her wondering if others felt as though she did not belong, a phenomenon that people of color often experience (Sue, 2010b).

Similarly, Megan described being one of two people of color at her internship. While the other person of color at her internship was a person at the management level, Megan still described a climate where people of color were not welcome. She noted this in the lack of representation of people of color in the company overall, saying, “There’s a certain look that they have. So when I walked in there, I walked in there. I looked around and I said – they ain’t hiring me.” Megan gleaned that one of the prerequisites for being hired at the site was identifying as White from the racial representation of the company. Again, another message that the racial identity of Whiteness was the norm (Sue, 2010b).

Erin described a hostile environment for people of color at her internship. Erin reported that her supervisor “got a person of each ethnicity, and he said he did it on purpose” to create an environment that appeared to be representative of many racial groups. Erin reported this fact with disdain, likely because she experienced an environment in her internship that was anything but inclusive. In fact, Erin stated that her supervisor called her “selfish. I was individualized. I didn’t want to be a part of the group,” when he blamed her for strife among the interns. Erin interpreted her supervisor’s efforts to hire a diverse group of interns as superficial.

Evidence of race impacting the environment of each internship is evident in the participants’ descriptions.

Microassaults

Microassaults can be easier to identify as they tend to be more aggressive and overt than subtle or environmental racial microaggressions (Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). The difference between a microassault and a subtle racial microaggression is the nature of the exchange or comment. The overt and explicit message of a microassault is not hidden, as subtle racial microaggressions tend to be (Sue, 2010a). The perpetrator intends for the recipient to understand the meaning of the microassault, and the recipient understands the message.

Both Erin and Megan received messages that can be classified as racial microassaults. Messages of otherness and disdain were clearly communicated by colleagues and supervisors, often in front of others with the intention of demeaning and ridiculing the recipient. For example, one of Megan's colleagues entirely ignored her until they were in front of the whole staff and he attempted to demean her by saying "Oh, now you tell us. If we had known that..." after she shared personal information. One of Erin's colleagues, upon hearing that it was her last day of the internship, said, "We're glad you're going, too, because we can't stand you."

Interestingly, Erin and Megan were the only two participants to answer yes to experiencing racial microaggressions on the pre-study survey, and they were the only two to describe instances of microassaults. Ariana and Caroline, despite also experiencing racial microaggressions during the internship, answered no on the pre-study survey but recounted stories of subtle microaggressions during the interview. While it cannot be determined without further research on the topic, this could indicate that experiencing the overt nature of a microassault makes it easier to identify racial microaggressions. Additionally, it is likely easier to describe these incidents to a

researcher, particularly a White researcher, due to the overt and obvious nature of the incidents.

Absence of racial microaggressions

As has already been noted, Keith and Beth did not report experiencing racial microaggressions on the pre-study survey, nor did they describe experiencing racial microaggressions during the interviews. Their experiences offer interesting insight into the experience for interns from racially minoritized populations, specifically with regards to specific internship site characteristics and the intern's history with racism and issues of race. Keith and Beth offered several interesting similarities in both their internships and their own understanding of and experience with issues of race.

Beth and Keith appeared to take an academic approach to thinking about racism. Both Keith and Beth were members of nonprofit organizations in high school geared towards engaging youth in activism on social justice issues and both still reflect on their participation with these organizations as transformative. Keith and Beth both double-majored, with one major being Sociology. This is relevant as both referenced their classes as being one of the avenues through which their perspectives widened with regards to racism and could be the reason that Keith and Beth discussed racism on a systemic and institutional level, rarely describing person-to-person racism. Keith and Beth used specific terminology with regards to racism, including microaggressions (without prompting), code switching, and institutional racism, indicating that they both had thought about the topic in-depth and perhaps from an academic perspective. While Keith and Beth reported several instances of racism experienced in their pasts, they both preferred to discuss racism from a wider

perspective. In fact, when both participants described racism that they had experienced, they both situated their individual experiences with racism within a larger context of systematic or institutional racism. For example, when Keith described an instance of receiving a racist comment from a local business owner, he reacted, “If we were to restructure institutions and things like that, then something like that wouldn’t be able to happen or someone like that wouldn’t be able to even own a business.”

Beth’s and Keith’s seemingly academic approach to racism could have had an effect on which internships they chose. Knowing the academic histories of Beth and Keith and understanding their perspectives on race, it is not surprising that they both engaged in internships with organizations that advocate for the support and education of students from racially minoritized populations.

While a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn, it is likely that Keith and Beth did not report experiencing racial microaggressions in their internships because of the nature of the organization and the focus on both organizations to support students from racially minoritized populations in developing as individuals. Additionally, interning at organizations that primarily employ individuals from similar racial identities and in organizational cultures that encourage racial identity development could also be reasons that Beth and Keith did not experience racial microaggressions.

While it is impossible to determine connections between these factors, both student narratives indicate that Beth and Keith were more inclined to recognize and respond to racism, albeit perhaps from a systematic, not individual, perspective.

Race was clearly a factor for all six participants during the internship. While four participants experienced racial microaggressions, two did not, most likely due to the organizational cultures of social justice and equity for students of color at their internships. The themes that emerged from the data were: subtle racial microaggressions including attributional ambiguity and intersectionality, environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults.

Implications for Practice

The aforementioned findings could impact the experience of future undergraduate interns from racially minoritized populations in several ways. In this section, I outline potential changes that could have a positive effect on the experience of interns from racially minoritized populations and enhance the experience of interns in general. I suggest three recommendations for practice: (1) internship seminar curricula changes to increase opportunities for interns from minoritized populations to explore how racial microaggressions experienced effects their sense of self and their experience; (2) training in identifying and responding to interns who have experienced racial microaggression training, and (3) training for internship supervisors to become more attuned to how racial microaggressions or issues of race may play out for interns from minoritized populations.

Internship seminar curricula

Based on the findings of this research, I propose that internship curricula need to change drastically. Currently, most internship seminars include curricula on the development of the intern as an employee (Sweitzer & King, 2014), while this research suggests that including curricula that encourages deep self-reflection on

relationships and the environment in a critical way could be beneficial. Changing internship seminar curricula to include specific and guided reflection on racial microaggressions experienced would allow interns from racially minoritized populations to explore how these experiences affect their sense of self.

Navigating the waters of racial microaggressions can be challenging and confusing. Sue et al. (2007) describe the “catch-22” (p.279) of responding to microaggressions. First individuals need to figure out if a response is warranted (Sue et al., 2007). This moment most often is accompanied by attributional ambiguity; “did that just happen?” Then, the individual must decide how to respond (Sue et al., 2007). While anger may be the first emotion felt, a response in anger will often only elicit an angry counter-response from the perpetrator, thus setting off a negative cycle. The process of identifying and responding to racial microaggressions can be precarious, for interns in particular, as they are not full-time employees. Intern advisors and internship seminar instructors need to be ready to support interns from minoritized populations going through this process.

It is imperative that the internship seminar curriculum allow the intern to unpack incidents of discomfort and otherness, while providing support and resources for the intern. While this will be important for interns from minoritized populations experiencing microassaults and environmental racial microaggressions, it is perhaps most important for interns experiencing subtle racial microaggressions. The subtlety of the incidents can make identifying the racial microaggression difficult (Burns, 2014; Davila, 2014; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2007). This is particularly true for interns who may not recognize having experienced racial microaggressions before in a

professional setting. In the cases of Ariana and Caroline, subtle racial microaggressions were experienced and resulted in feelings of discomfort in the moment. However, Ariana and Caroline did not reflect on the meaning of the incidents until asked about specific examples of racial microaggressions during the interview. Instead, they both questioned themselves and the motives of the perpetrator in a way that highlighted the complexity of racial microaggressions, often called attributional ambiguity (Crocker & Major, 2003; Sue et al., 2007). This could be problematic for some interns, as they recognize feeling discomfort but do not have the opportunity to truly explore the result of the subtle racial microaggression. Perhaps concretizing examples of racial microaggressions through case studies or other activities will support students in unpacking the subtle and ambiguous nature of racial microaggressions.

The data gathered during the current research study also brought to light the challenge of intersectionality for interns while trying to describe and make sense of racial microaggressions experienced during the internship. When interns identify with multiple groups of oppressed populations, determining the root cause of the microaggression can be difficult and confusing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Sue, 2010a). This adds another layer of complexity to the intern experience. Interns need to be given the opportunity to reflect on these incidents and receive feedback, support, and scaffolding to attempt to make sense of any racial microaggressions experienced.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits for interns from minoritized populations, White interns might benefit from the inclusion of deep and specific reflection on identity to uncover how issues of race play out in their internships as

well, perhaps through racial microaggressions that they have witnessed or through unpacking their own assumptions and beliefs.

Intern advisor and internship seminar instructor training

The intern advisor and the internship seminar instructor work directly with interns in a one-on-one setting and, because of this, could have a strong impact on how interns understand and make meaning of racial microaggressions experienced during the internship. From pre-internship advising through the internship seminar, advisors and instructors will have to be attuned to potential opportunities for interns from racially minoritized populations to experience racial microaggressions.

During advising sessions prior to starting the internship, the intern advisor should discuss the racial environment of the internship site with the intern and listen closely for any reservations or hesitations. This would have been helpful for Caroline, as she indicated questioning others' perceptions of her prior to and during the experience. The internship seminar instructor would also be attuned to listening for issues of environmental racial microaggressions, as issues may come up as the internship progresses and the intern becomes more involved in the culture of the internship site.

The current research study also gathered data on an unanticipated experience for interns from racially minoritized populations: the absence of racial microaggressions. The findings on this topic could have an impact on the work that intern advisors and internship seminar instructors engage in with students and internship sites. Keith and Beth did not report experiencing racial microaggressions in any form during their internships. This may be due to two similarities between the

two participants and their internship sites: the nature of the internship site and their prior academic work with identity and race. Both Keith and Beth interned with sites that had a mission to support students of color in schools and included explicit messages of identity and social justice. Additionally, both Keith and Beth also engaged in advocacy and academic work with regards to race in both high school and college. Knowing that these factors could impact an intern's experience, advisors and instructors could better serve possible interns by creating relationships with sites that include similar missions. If intern advisors are attuned to listening closely for an indication from students that they have studied identity and race and the intern advisor already has created relationships with social justice organizations that work with communities of color, connecting an interested student with an organization could be an important part of setting the student up for a successful internship experience.

The topic of negotiating relationships with internship supervisors could also be important to discuss during this important initial meeting and throughout the internship seminar, as the current research findings indicate that the supervisor or a person at the management level were the perpetrators of racial microaggressions for the four participants who experienced racial microaggressions during the internship. This is a topic that is already a focus in most internship seminar curricula, as supervisor-intern relationships, along with relationships with colleagues, are often defining aspects of the internship experience (Kolb, 1984; Sweitzer & King, 2014). However, providing explicit training to intern advisors and internship seminar instructors on how to listen for the nuances of racial microaggressions is crucial in encouraging advisors and instructors to become truly supportive to all students.

The majority of higher education faculty and staff identify as White (Linder et al., 2015). Knowing this, it is safe to assume that interns from racially minoritized populations will have internship instructors and internship advisors who are White. This makes it even more imperative for academic internship programs to educate intern advisors and internship seminar instructors on the deleterious effects and nuances of racial microaggressions and how to support interns that might encounter these incidents.

Internship supervisor training

Research on the topics of racial microaggressions in schools (Allen, 1992; Harwood et al., 2015; Linder et al., 2015; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) and workplace bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) indicate that most perpetrators are people in power, either faculty in classrooms or supervisors in employment. Unfortunately, this mirrors the findings of the current research. The four participants that reported experiencing racial microaggressions identified their supervisors or, in one case, an upper level manager as the perpetrator of the racial microaggressions experienced. The two participants that did not experience racial microaggressions during the internship equated the welcoming racial environment in part to their supervisors. These findings seemed to indicate that internship supervisors play a critical role in the intern's experience.

Academic internship programs need to create strong and honest relationships with internship supervisors, in addition to providing training on best practices in working with interns from racially minoritized populations. It is unlikely that this training will undo years of internalized opinions and beliefs about race and culture.

However, prompting supervisors to think about how these issues, such as being the only person of color as an intern, can affect interns could have beneficial effects for interns, as their supervisors may be more understanding and cognizant of the overall environment. This work exists within a constant cycle of building relationships between the academic internship program and the internship supervisor. It is not easy and it does not end.

It is important for the academic internship program to work closely with the site supervisors of interns from minoritized populations to educate site supervisors on how to work with interns from minoritized populations.

Value of the Study

The call for engaging undergraduate students in internships is getting louder, not fading away. Undergraduate students are increasingly faced with experiential learning requirements that complement their studies and give them real world experience to increase their marketability when looking for a job. As these calls get louder, it becomes imperative that practitioners create opportunities for all students to be successful in their internships. This means remaining sensitive to the experience and needs of all students, particularly students from minoritized populations.

There is significant research that suggests that individuals from racially minoritized populations experience racism and racial microaggressions during both school and work. The current research study attempted to add to these bodies of research by gathering information regarding the experience of students from racially minoritized populations in internships, at what can be considered the intersection of

school and work. This study begins to fill some gaps in the literature regarding the experience of interns from racially minoritized populations.

Important insights were gathered through this research on intern identity and experience with racial microaggressions. Four participants experienced subtle racial microaggressions including attributional ambiguity and intersectionality, environmental racial microaggressions, and microassaults. Two participants did not experience racial microaggressions in their internships due to specific issues concerning race at their organizations and their own elevated understanding and reflection on racism and racial microaggressions. This unintended finding also has the potential to add to the literature in this area as positive school and work environments are rarely the focus of research on the experience of people from minoritized populations.

Reflections on Methodology and Implications for Future Research

The current research study employed hermeneutic phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001) to investigate the experience of former interns from racially minoritized populations and how they described racial microaggressions experienced during the internship. Employing hermeneutic phenomenology was a logical choice for this research, as the goal was to gather descriptions on the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Huber and Solorzano (2015) advocate for using the framework of racial microaggressions as a “tool for research on race, racism, and the everyday experiences of People of Color” (p. 298) because it allows researchers and practitioners to foreground issues of pervasive and subtle racism experienced in the everyday lives of

college students. While the current research study indicated that interns from racially minoritized populations often experience racial microaggressions, further investigation into this topic is necessary to provide a complete picture of what this experience looks like for interns. Further research is also needed to describe positive internship environments where racial microaggressions are not a daily occurrence. This research showed that the context of the organization has an impact on the intern's experience.

The current research study offers the perspectives and experiences of six undergraduate interns from racially minoritized populations, with the defining factor for participation being the identity of belonging to a racially minoritized population. However, it became apparent during data analysis that there were several other factors (gender, age, internship site, etc.) that could have an effect on how interns described or recognized microaggressions during the internship. Perhaps one of the biggest takeaways from the current research is the complexity of how additional factors like other identities and intersectionality affect the internship experience. Future research that isolates some of these additional factors and identities would be a good way to document the complete picture of what microaggressions, exclusion, and inclusion look like in internship settings.

Because most of the data aligned with the literature on workplace racism and microaggressions, perhaps another opportunity for future research is to look into this phenomenon. While the current research included background and literature on workplace racism, the focus was on higher education, as this is the perspective of the researcher. Perhaps in the future more research can be done to investigate the

supervisors and the internship sites for the effects of racism and racial microaggressions to further our understanding of both on interns.

I am a new researcher and interviewer. While I thoroughly enjoyed the interviewing process, I am sure that there are ways that the interview questions could have been better crafted. One example of this is the interview structure, which, upon reflection, did not provide me with the depth of data that I intended. The first interview focused on racism in general while the second focused on the internship and microaggressions. My intention with this interview design was to gather a general sense of how participants made sense of the racism that they had already experienced as a way to give me insight into their own racial development. I now realize that, because my goal was to gather information on how participants made sense of racial microaggressions at internship sites, that I should have focused on racial microaggressions during both interviews.

Additionally, I look forward to investigating how my identity as a White researcher impacts my future research on the topics of race and racism. Whiteness is a topic that I have resisted researching in the past. It is one of my areas of privilege and, because of that, I have hesitated to recognize the impact that my White identity has on my research. According to Bergerson (2003), this resistance is another form of racism and privilege. This resistance positions “Whiteness [as] neutral, and all other colors are considered relative to whiteness” (Bergerson, 2003). Because it is my pure intention to have a positive impact on the body of understanding around racism, I recognize that it is my duty to unpack and understand the privileges that my Whiteness

has afforded me. Helms (1993) calls for White individuals to create healthy White identities through this understanding.

Conclusion

This study both confirmed my previous beliefs on how interns from racially minoritized populations experience racial microaggressions in their internships and inspired me to ask additional questions on the topic. While I am happy to have added to the body of literature on the general topic of intern development and undergraduate experience, I am eager to continue on with this research to discover improvements that can be made to the process and structure of intern programs.

Ultimately, this research aimed to understand how interns made sense of racism and racial microaggressions. The voices of student interns from minoritized populations, whose voices have been “oppressed, distorted, ignored, silenced, destroyed, appropriated, commodified, and marginalized” (Bell, 1995, p. 901) due to their dual positioning as a person without power as both an intern and a person from a racially minoritized population, had their voices and experiences recognized. It was difficult to listen to the realities that many of our students face, not only in their internships but also in our culture in general. While the current research study indicates that interns from racially minoritized populations often experience racial microaggressions, this was not always the case. Further investigation into this topic is necessary to address other factors that most likely influence this as well.

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Email

Subject Line: [ITR Advisor] ([university] ITR) Referral

Dear [student],

You are invited to participate in a research study on undergraduate student internship experiences. You have been chosen to receive this invitation because you earned ITR credit for your internship.

My name is Diana Marshall. I am a PhD in Education student at the [university]. I am also an experiential education coordinator at [university] and work in the Center for Career and Experiential Education.

My dissertation research is a study to explore the experiences of undergraduate student interns who participate in the ITR program. Specifically, *I am investigating how undergraduate interns make sense of racism experienced in their internships.*

Please follow the link below to complete the 5 minute pre-study survey to ensure that you meet the qualifications of the research. I will contact you if you are accepted to participate in the study. If accepted into the study, you will be interviewed two times during the fall 2015 semester on your internship experiences. These two 90 minute interviews will either occur on campus or off-campus and will be scheduled according to your availability.

Link to pre-study survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WM7WFLX>

Thank you for your participation in and consideration of this research. Please contact me with any questions or concerns. Additionally, Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro (principal investigator), the person mainly responsible for this study, is available to discuss your questions or concerns. Dr. Vaccaro can be reached at XXX or XXX.

All the best,

Diana

APPENDIX B: Follow-Up Recruitment Email

Subject Line: [ITR Advisor] ([university] ITR) Referral

Dear [student],

You received the original research invitation email (below) a few weeks ago. The original invitation may have gone to your [university] email- I apologize for this delay. I am still looking for participants for this study.

While your time commitment is minimal (two 90 minute interviews in October or November), your reflections and experiences are crucial to the success of this project. This research on how undergraduate interns make sense of racism experienced during internships is going to add to the body of work that we have on student experience in higher education, as well as what we know about the transition from student to career and the experience of people at work. Additionally, I hope that this study will influence future internship seminar curriculum and how we work with supervisors. Please participate so that your voice and experience can be recognized!

To respond to this invitation, please complete the pre-study survey so that I can gather some basic information. I sincerely appreciate your consideration of my request.

Have a wonderful day,

Diana

Original invitation email:

You are invited to participate in a research study on undergraduate student internship experiences. You have been chosen to receive this invitation because you earned ITR credit for your internship.

My name is Diana Marshall. I am a PhD in Education student at the [university]. I am also an experiential education coordinator at [university] and work in the Center for Career and Experiential Education.

My dissertation research is a study to explore the experiences of undergraduate student interns who participate in the ITR program. Specifically, *I am investigating how undergraduate interns make sense of racism experienced in their internships.*

Please follow the link below to complete the 5 minute pre-study survey to ensure that you meet the qualifications of the research. I will contact you if you are accepted to participate in the study. If accepted into the study, you will be interviewed two times during the fall 2015 semester on your internship experiences. These two 90 minute interviews will either occur on campus or off-campus and will be scheduled according to your availability.

Link to pre-study survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WM7WFLX>

Thank you for your participation in and consideration of this research. Please contact me with any questions or concerns. Additionally, Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro (principal investigator), the person mainly responsible for this study, is available to discuss your questions or concerns. Dr. Vaccaro can be reached at XXX or XXX.

All the best, Diana

APPENDIX C: Pre-Study Survey Through SurveyMonkey

Page 1

Thank you for completing this pre-study survey. Your answers will determine if you are eligible to participate in a study investigating how undergraduate students at [university] describe and make sense of racism experienced during an internship.

This survey is confidential and will be used only to determine your eligibility. The results of this survey will not be shared with any of your instructors, faculty, advisors, internship supervisors, or anyone involved with your internship site or internship class.

If you have questions, please contact Diana Marshall (XXX, XXX) or Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro (XXX, XXX).

1. Please provide your name.
2. Provide your phone number and the best time to contact you.

Page 2

3. Did you experience issues of race or racism at your internship?

Yes

No

I'm not sure.

Other (please specify)

4. Are you available for two 90 minute interviews on your internship experience during fall 2015?

Yes

No

I want to participate but cannot meet face to face.

Page 3

5. Indicate the number of credits you earned for your internship:

3 credits- Fall/Spring (8 hours per week) or Summer (10 hours per week)

6 credits- Fall/Spring (16 hours per week) or Summer (20 hours per week)

9 credits- Fall/Spring (24 hours per week) or Summer (30 hours per week)

12 credits- Fall/Spring (32 hours per week) or Summer (40 hours per week)

6. Semester in which you earned ITR credit for your internship.

Fall 2013

Spring 2014

Summer 2014

Spring 2015

Summer 2015

Other (please specify)

Page 4

7. With which racial or ethnic group(s) do identify?

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

3. Indicate your graduation date.

4. Indicate your major.

Page 5

Thank you for your time in completing this pre-study survey. You will be contacted by Diana Marshall if you are eligible for the study. If you would like further information or have questions regarding this study, please contact:

Diana Marshall

XXX

XXX

Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro

XXX

XXX

APPENDIX D: Participant Demographics

The following chart outlines basic characteristics of the participants based on the pre-study survey that each participant completed on SurveyMonkey. This chart is also included on page 48, Table 1: *Participant Demographics*.

Pseudo	Racism in internship	# of credit	Internship semester	Racial or ethnic group	Graduation date	Major
Caroline	No	12	summer 2015	Black/African American	2016	Psychology
Ariana	No	3	summer 2015	Hispanic	2016	Journalism and Spanish
Erin	Yes	12	fall 2014	Black/African American	2015	Communication Studies
Megan	Yes	12	spring 2014	Black/African American	2014	Film
Beth	No	12	spring 2015	Black/African American	2015	Sociology and Communications
Keith	No	3	spring 2014	Black/African American	2014	Sociology and Africana Studies

APPENDIX E: Partial List of Pre-Study Survey Responses

The following chart is a partial list of the responses received from the pre-study survey. Particular responses were omitted from this chart to protect respondent privacy (name, phone number and email) and because the response category did not have any bearing on the research (Are you available for two 90 minute interviews on your internship experience during the fall 2015 semester, Indicate your graduation date).

survey response number	Did you experience issues of race or racism in your internship?	Indicate the number of credits you earned for your internship.	Indicate the semester in which you earned ITR credit for your internship.	With which racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify?	Indicate your major.
	I am not sure	6	summer 2014	White	Biology
	No	3	summer 2014	White	Health Studies
	Not to me directly, but I did see it with the children I worked with	9	summer 2015	White	Human Development and Family Studies
	No	6	spring 2015	White	Public Relations
	No	3	spring 2014	Black or African American	Sociology and Africana Studies
	No	12	spring 2015	Black or African American	Sociology and Communications
	I'm white, but I noticed that there were few people of color in my office.	3	spring 2014	White	English

	No	6	spring 2015	White	Gerontology
	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question
	No	12	spring 2014	White	Anthropology
	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question
	I'm not sure.	9	spring 2014	White	Psychology
	No	6	spring 2014	White	Journalism
	No	3	spring 2015	White	Psychology
	No	9	spring 2014	White	Psychology
	No	6	spring 2014	White	Communication Studies
	No	12	summer 2015	White	History
	No	12	fall 2013	White	Film Media
	No	6	fall 2014	White	Journalism
	No	9	summer 2015	White	English
	No	3	summer 2014	White	Public Relations and Writing & Rhetoric
	Yes	12	spring 2014	Black or African American	Film Media
	Yes	12	fall 2014	Black or African American	Communication Studies
	No	3	summer 2015	Hispanic	Journalism and Spanish
	No	9	summer 2014	White	Writing & Rhetoric and Communication Studies
	Yes	9	fall 2013	Asian	Psychology

	No	6	summer 2015	White	Human Development and Family Studies
	No	3	spring 2014	White	Marine Affairs
	No	9	fall 2014	White	Health Studies
	No	6	spring 2015	American, I don't identify with one group	English and History
	No	6	summer 2014	White	Communication Studies
	No	12	summer 2015	White	Communication Studies
	No	12	summer 2015	White	Communication Studies
	Yes	6	spring 2014	White	Psychology
	No	6	summer 2014	White	Communication Studies and Public Relations
	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question	skipped question
	No	12	summer 2015	Black or African American	Psychology

APPENDIX F: Interview Questions

Interview 1

Today we are going to talk about identity, specifically how you identify in regards to race and/or ethnicity. This is to set a foundation of understanding for myself around how you define and embody particular identities. We may focus on your internship if time permits, but I'd like to get to know you deeply in this interview.

In what groups do you identify?

What identity(ies) shape you most profoundly?

How do these important identities play out in your life? How do they affect you?

How did these identities come to be? How did other people have a hand in influencing these identities?

You identify as _____ racially/ethnically.

What does this identity mean to you?

How has this identity shaped or affected your choices, interactions, etc.?

Where does this identify come from?

Describe a time when you felt that someone acted or reacted towards you in a specific way due to your race and/or ethnicity.

Why did you feel this interaction was due to race/ethnicity?

What are the details of this interaction?

How did this interaction make you feel?

How does this interaction continue to affect your life?

Describe a time when you experienced racism. This is a broad question. The purpose is to provide some insight into your prior experiences with issues of race and racism.

What setting were you in (work, school, community, family event, etc.)?

How did you know you experienced racism?

What were the important aspects of the encounter for you?

How did the experience make you feel?

How did the experience change you and your outlook?

Do you reflect on or think about this experience to this day? Why does this event in particular stick out in your memory?

How did the other people involved in this event react? Do these other people, to your knowledge, continue to reflect on this event? How do you know?

How did this make you feel?

What short or long term impacts did it have on you?

You identify as _____. How did this identity play out for you in your internship?

Describe a time when you felt that someone acted or reacted towards you in a specific way due to your race during your internship.

How did you know that this interaction was due to race?

What are the details of this interaction?

How did this interaction make you feel?

How does this interaction continue to affect your life?

Describe a time when you experienced racism in your internship.

How did you know you experienced racism?

What were the important aspects of the encounter for you?

How did the experience make you feel?

How did the experience change you and your outlook?

Why does this event in particular stick out in your memory? Do you reflect on or think about this experience to this day?

How did the other people involved in this event react? Do these other people, to your knowledge, continue to reflect on this event? How do you know?

Interview 2

The purpose of our interview today is to gather details, impressions, and feelings about your recent internship experience. You might want to describe subtle occurrences or more overt instances of racism. There are no right or wrong answers. This is your opportunity to have your voice heard. Your participation in this research study could potentially influence internship seminar curriculum and employer trainings in the future, in addition to giving a better understanding of how students and employees make sense of racism.

Tell me about your internship.

Setting, coworkers, tasks/responsibilities

Why did you choose to do this internship? Both at this specific site and in general?

How did your supervisor/coworkers orient you to the work environment?

How did this internship relate to your overall career ambitions?

How did going to this internship make you feel every day?

What was the best part of this internship? The worst part of the internship?

What was the culture of this internship site?

Who did you go to for help during this internship?

Describe your relationship with your supervisor.

Tell me about your supervisor.

How did he/she give feedback?

How could you tell if you were performing to his/her standards?

How did your relationship with your supervisor affect your overall satisfaction with your internship?

Describe your relationship with and between your coworkers.

How did your co-workers act with and around you?

How did your co workers act with and around each other?

How did your relationships with coworkers make you feel?

How did your relationships with coworkers affect your overall satisfaction with your internship?

In our last interview, you described _____. In what other ways did race or racism play out during your internship?

What was the climate like for people of color in your internship?

I'm going to ask you some specific questions regarding instances in your internship.

These topics are specific examples of racism that people of color often report.

Did you ever feel as though someone assumed that you did not belong in the internship due to your race/ethnicity?

Can you describe that for me?

Did your supervisor or coworkers make assumptions about you or your capabilities/performance based on your race and/or ethnicity?

Can you describe that for me?

Did you feel like someone at your internship ascribed to being “color blind” as a way of accepting people from different backgrounds?

Can you describe that for me?

APPENDIX G: Personal Statement

Diana Marshall

Internships and Race

Personal Statement

I started teaching 15 years ago in East Providence. Since then, I have taught in both urban and suburban settings with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Interacting with students and families from different neighborhoods, racial identities, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and views on education, as well as working in communities with various levels of resources, spurred my motivation to investigate access and equity in education. It is my experience that the factors listed in the previous sentence often affect the school environment, access to particular curricula, and teaching strategies. While education is thought to “level the playing field”, it is my opinion that education often perpetuates the structures in American culture that oppress particular groups of people, particularly with issues of race and racism.

While working as a classroom teacher, I focused on anti-racist, anti-biased teaching. It was during this work that the complexities of institutional oppression and racism became concrete to me. Seeing how the students and families from racially minoritized populations that I worked with were made to feel inadequate and powerless by an unfair system made me angry and continues to motivate me. I strive to honor their experiences and work towards more understanding of the impacts of racism in education. In particular, I am interested in how racial microaggressions affect individuals.

I currently work at [university]. My role is to support faculty in providing experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students. I also teach a section of the ITR (internship) seminar to support undergraduate students with career development. It is through teaching with the ITR program that I have come to design this research project.

Current Research

This research is a qualitative study, designed to capture your story and experience. Storytelling is a priority for me, as I think the best way to learn about education is through the experience of individuals and communities. This work will not be generalizable, although it may provide information with which we can modify curriculum, policies, and best practices. I will share the information gathered in this study with my colleagues at [university], as well as colleagues across the experiential learning field.

There is a plethora of research that has indicated that race and culture have an impact on an individual's educational journey. There is a large and growing body of research that investigates the presence and effects of racism in the workplace. This research study will add to both of these areas, as I am looking at a unique moment in a student/employee's life: the intersection of school and work.

Through this interview you may recall overt experiences of racism, but also ask you to think about covert instances of racism where you may have felt slighted, unsure of the other person's motivation, or otherwise uncomfortable and attributed this discomfort to issues of race and racism. I greatly appreciate your honesty and candor.

This research project is being conducted in fulfillment of my PhD studies. In the future, I hope to affect policy with my research on access, equity, and inclusion in education.

APPENDIX H: Initial Comments Chart

Emerging Themes	Interesting Passages	Exploratory Commenting

APPENDIX I: Issues of Trustworthiness in a Qualitative Study

	Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
Member Checking	X			
Thick Description of Phenomenon		X		
Admission of Researcher's Beliefs and Assumptions				X
Purposive Sampling		X		
In-depth methodological description			X	
Dependability Audit (documentation, reflective journal, field notes)			X	

I utilized the methods above to address issues of trustworthiness in this study as outlined by Shenton (2004) and Marshall and Rossman (1995).

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