Rebranding Diversity: Colorblind Racism Inside The U.S. Advertising Industry

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REBRANDING DIVERSITY:
COLORBLIND RACISM INSIDE THE U.S. ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER BOULTON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2012

Department of Communication
REBRANDING DIVERSITY:
COLORBLIND RACISM INSIDE THE U.S. ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER BOULTON

Approved as to style and content by:

________________________________
Emily West, Chair

________________________________
Sut Jhally, Member

________________________________
Julie Hemment, Member

________________________________
Anna Branch, Member

________________________________
Marty Norden, Acting Department Chair
Communication
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my participants. I may have concealed your identities with pseudonyms, but will never forget your good faith, sense of humor, and honesty. Thank you for inviting me into your agencies, coming to my focus groups, and trusting me with your stories. I hope the conversation continues.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, I’d like to thank my family: Matt, for that late-night conversation; Mom, for dropping me off and picking me up, not just this time, but every time; and Dad, ever the cheerleader—had you worried there for a while, eh?

I hope this makes you proud.
ABSTRACT

REBRANDING DIVERSITY:
COLORBLIND RACISM INSIDE THE U.S. ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

SEPTEMBER 2012

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Directed by: Emily West

This dissertation examines race inequality inside the United States advertising industry. Based on qualitative fieldwork conducted at three large agencies in New York City during the summer of 2010 (including ethnographic observations, affinity-based focus groups, in-depth interviews, and open-ended surveys), I argue that the industry’s good faith effort to diversify through internship-based affirmative action programs is overwhelmed by the more widespread material practices of closed network hiring—a system that advantages affluent Whites through referral hires, subjective notions of “chemistry” or “fit,” and outright nepotism through “must-hires.” Furthermore, the discriminatory nature of White affirmative action is hidden from view, masked by ideologies of color-blind meritocracy deployed by management and interns alike. I conclude that this disconnect between practice and ideology helps normalize and reproduce historic inequalities in the workplace by rebranding diversity as an aspect of individuality rather than a social problem best addressed at the group level.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Advertising?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Argument</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contribution</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method: Going Beyond (and Behind) the Text</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory: Critical Debates in Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising Cultures</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Whiteness</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Faced Racism</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Intervention</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdetermination</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Chapters</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. METHODS</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Numbers</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sites</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Overview</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations.................................................................56
My Position..................................................................................60
Ethnography..................................................................................62
Chance Discoveries........................................................................65
Analysis.........................................................................................68
NVivo 9.........................................................................................70

3. HISTORY: THE GHOSTS OF MAD MEN........................................76
   The Diversity Crisis......................................................................79
   The Gender Gap.........................................................................85
   The Boy's Club..........................................................................88
   Opting Out..................................................................................91
   Social Reproduction....................................................................94
   White Affirmative Action..........................................................99

4. MATERIAL PRACTICES: FAILED REFORMS AND MUST-HIRES.........107
   The Numbers...........................................................................107
   The Big Stick............................................................................110
   Client Pressure..........................................................................113
   Cashing In................................................................................119
   Must-Hires................................................................................125
   Blind Spot................................................................................129
   Durable Inequality....................................................................132
   Whiteness as Property..............................................................134
   Legacy Admissions...................................................................137

5. IDEOLOGICAL SCREENS: MERITOCRACY AND COLORBLINDNESS.....143
   White Interns............................................................................143
   “It’s All About Connections”......................................................144
   Anti-Affirmative Action Backlash.............................................151
   Race Trumps Class....................................................................158
Meritocracy .................................................................................................................. 160
MAIP Interns .................................................................................................................. 164

Flipping the Tortilla ...................................................................................................... 165
Playing Defense ............................................................................................................. 165
“But What About the Asians?” .................................................................................... 172
Relative Advantage ....................................................................................................... 174

White Privilege ............................................................................................................. 176

“People Don’t Think I’m Hispanic” ............................................................................ 177
Contingent Solidarity .................................................................................................... 180

Dress Codes .................................................................................................................. 183

The Cloak of Whiteness ............................................................................................... 187

Human Resources ......................................................................................................... 189

Meritocracy in Theory, Discrimination in Practice .................................................... 191
Colorblindness .............................................................................................................. 193

6. CASE STUDY: DIVERSITY AS INDIVIDUALITY ................................................. 202
Rebranding Diversity ..................................................................................................... 202

The Pitch Competition .................................................................................................. 205
Missing the Point .......................................................................................................... 215

The Context of Advertising .......................................................................................... 221

The Brief ......................................................................................................................... 223

7. BLACK IDENTITY: INTERSECTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS .................. 231
Intersections and Contradictions .................................................................................. 234

Ambivalent Opportunists ............................................................................................. 235
White Complexity ......................................................................................................... 237

What if They’re Right? (in Theory) ............................................................................. 238

Intersectionality ............................................................................................................ 240
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification and Representation</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m (Not) Lovin’ It</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Positive Realism”</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Switching</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Through Difference</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Fractions in the Race of Life</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality Revisited</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Where’s the Nod?”</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype Threat</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if They’re Right? (in Practice)</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Intervention</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reality</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. BEST PRACTICES</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. PARTICIPANTS RESPOND</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAIP Interns</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Interns</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Must-hires</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Voices</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. ACCESS NARRATIVE</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. IRB MATERIALS</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. RESEARCH PROPOSAL</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F. FOCUS GROUP SURVEYS ............................................................. 326

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................. 329
LIST OF FIGURES

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Johnson's (1986) “Circuit of Culture”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Circuits--From Capital to Culture</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intern Host Agencies</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intern Focus Group Participants Broken Down by Topic and Race</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intern Survey Participants Broken Down by Topic and Race</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Participant Pseudonyms</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Analytical Triangulation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Relative Percentage Coverage of Nodes for Race Focus Groups</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. HR Informants Compared by Number of Coding References</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nodes by Group Compared by Number of Coding References</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mad Men Themed Postcard</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The CLIO's 2011 Mad Men Theme</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Ad Age “2008 A-List” Illustration</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. MAIP Business Casual Visual Primer for Men</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Affirmative Action Cartoon</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. &quot;Dimensions of Diversity&quot; Slide Series</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. “The Spot” Sample Month</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Sad vs. Happy Faces</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Stills from Team Four’s Video Montage..........................................................232
21. Stills from McDonald’s “I’m lovin’ it” Commercial........................................247
22. Respondent Pseudonyms.............................................................................284
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In May of 2009, the CEO of Nike’s lead advertising agency (W+K), addressed a gathering of the 4A’s, the largest advertising trade group in the United States.

Though originally scheduled to speak on global brands, Dan Wieden (2009) took the opportunity to reflect on his legacy and offer up a very public confession:

Like it or not, in this business I essentially hire a bunch of White, middle-class kids, pay them enormous, enormous sums of money to do what? To create messages to the inner city, to kids who create the culture the White\(^\text{1}\) kids are trying like hell to emulate, but if you go into the inner city, odds are these kids aren’t even going to see advertising as a possibility, as an opportunity for them. And now that’s fucked up.

Citing statistics on minority underrepresentation across the advertising industry as a whole, Wieden criticized his own agency then chastised his competitors: “I thought, maybe, just maybe it might be more inspirational to hear from someone as screwed up as you are. And you are screwed up, aren’t you? I mean look at this room: how many Black faces do you see here?”\(^\text{2}\) (McMains, 2009; Parekh, 2009).

Though Wieden’s speech came as a surprise, racial inequality inside advertising is a familiar problem with both a long history and a disturbing present (Chambers, 2008; Dávila, 2001). Just months before Wieden’s speech, the NAACP

---

\(^{1}\) I capitalize the terms "Black" and "White" throughout this dissertation in order to signal their use as politicized racial constructs as opposed to natural skin color descriptors. For the sake of consistency, I also do so when quoting others.

\(^{2}\) Advertising Age reports that “roughly a half-dozen of the 150 or so attendees remaining in the audience in the waning hours of the conference could be described as people of color” (McMains, 2009).
had released the newest in a series of reports denouncing the advertising industry’s unique and persistent inability to integrate and diversify its workforce (Bendick & Egan, 2009).³ The next year, the NAACP released another study that coded the 52 major agency spots aired during the 2010 Super Bowl and found that 100% had White lead creative directors (Lapchick et al, 2010). At the press conference for the Super Bowl study,⁴ Laura Blackburne, the NAACP’s Interim General Counsel, warned that a lawsuit was imminent (Dolliver, 2010), leading Advertising Age to predict that the industry’s "dismally poor performance in diversity" would "hit a crescendo" in 2011 as "class action attorneys join the fray and push for reform" (Wood, 2010). Clifford Mulqueen, Deputy Commissioner General Counsel at the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR), concurred that advertising’s aversion to hiring minorities seemed so entrenched that "they have to do something to change

³ To demonstrate the specificity of the advertising sector’s race problem, Bendick & Egan (2009) compare it to 28 other "Communications and Persuasion" industries that "share advertising’s focus on persuasion and communications -- for example, publishers, lawyers, business and professional associations, advocacy groups, and graphic designers" (p. 22). Drawing on EEOC data from 2006, the authors calculate that African Americans averaged 8.4% of professionals and 6.6% of managers in these other "Communications and Persuasion" industries vs. 5.9% of professionals and 4.3% of managers in advertising. Comparisons with all other industries were even more dramatic: "the advertising industry is worse than the average of [all] other industries in the U.S....by a substantial margin -- in some cases more than double...that is, the advertising industry has racial employment problems more than one-third larger than the nation’s overall labor market....together these findings that the advertising industry is substantially behind the rest of the labor market and is steadily falling even further behind strongly suggest that national attention focusing on the advertising industry is appropriate, above and beyond the general attention addressing problems of race and employment in the U.S. labor market as a whole” (p. 36).

⁴ The press conference was held at the NAACP’s New York headquarters. Nancy Hill, president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A’s) was in attendance. The New York Times and ESPN covered the event along with ad industry trade publications Ad Age and Adweek.
the entire culture” (Bush, 2011). Thus, according to industry insiders like Wieden, the NAACP, the trade press, and governmental regulators, the business of advertising has a serious race problem. This dissertation asks why. What is it about the business and culture of advertising that reproduces an overwhelmingly White workforce?

**Why Advertising?**

Advertising is more than simply a means of employment or a technique to increase sales; it is also a storyteller, a ubiquitous and “privileged discourse” that has long played a central role in American society by offering up “images of well being” that represent people and cultures as either within or outside the norm (Leiss et al, 2005). This is what Lears (1994) calls “the unintended consequences of advertisers’ efforts to vend their wares: the creation of a symbolic universe where certain cultural values [are] sanctioned and others rendered marginal or invisible” (p. 3). Leach (2003) agrees that, over time, advertising has “raised to the fore only one vision of the good life and pushed out all others” (p. xv) to which Schudson (1986) adds, “advertising may shape our sense of values even where it does not greatly corrupt our buying habits” (p. 210). From this perspective, advertising is an institution—an instrument of socialization with an overarching ideological consistency that can span agencies, channels, and products. It promulgates stories

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5 Though discrimination is by no means unique to advertising, it seems to find safe harbor there. According to the report released just before Wieden’s speech (Bendick and Egan, 2009), advertising appears stuck in a vicious cycle that equivalent industries are breaking: “as employment discrimination has sharply diminished across the American labor market over recent decades, systemic barriers to equal opportunity in this $31 billion a year industry have remained largely intact” (p. ii).
that can impact social mores and cultural practices. Schudson (1986) describes the aesthetic as “capitalist realism,” which does not reflect society as it actually is but instead presents a vision of idealized types—people situated in timeless, idyllic settings living life as it should be lived (p. 215). For instance, Goffman (1979) argues that advertisements offer us a “hyper-ritualization” of actual behavior, idealizing iconic and highly restrictive gender roles, while Dávila (2001) and Sender (2004) describe how marketers segment, consolidate and thereby reinforce very limited stereotypes of Latino/a and Gay identities respectively. Moreover, if we grant that advertising can influence cultural notions of identity and belonging, it follows that we might ask critical questions about who makes the ads. How might the relatively hidden identities and worldviews of advertisement producers inflect the kind of texts they create behind closed doors that then later circulate in public?

We can see evidence of the (White) creator’s hand in commercial content over the course of the 20th Century. As the United States advertising industry matured and professionalized between the two World Wars, it continuously excluded African-Americans from the creative process while depicting them in stereotypical ways (Cortese, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; O’Barr, 1994; Riggs, 1987). Frank (1997) chronicles how advertising in the 1950’s tended to reflect the

---

6 Advertising also has a gender problem, which I address in Chapter 3.

7 In the context of advertising, authorship is only ever semi-autonomous. As “the bridge” between goods and culture, commerce and art, industry and media, advertising serves as a broker of compromise between product promotion and audience entertainment, thus playing a crucial role in mediating messages about selling (Leiss et al., 2005). Put another way, advertising has agency within structure; as a servant of capital, it is captive to the whims of its clients and the disciplining structure of the “brief,” a strategic document outlining and constraining the creative possibilities of any given campaign.
myopic perspective of the typical White male advertising executive commuting from suburban Connecticut to Madison Avenue in a “gray flannel suit.” Even the industry’s so-called “creative revolution,” while embracing the emerging 1960’s counter-culture, did little to challenge the dominance of White males in most agencies. For instance, “Art & Copy” (Beauchamp & Pray, 2009), a recent film commissioned by The One Club to pay homage to the “wisdom of some of the most influential advertising creatives of our time” (including “living legends” like Dan Wieden) featured eleven talking heads: nine men, two women, all White. This was no accident of history. The film’s producers had at least three options for interviewing African-Americans who ran successful ad agencies in the early 1970’s, but doing so would have forced them to explain how these smaller “ethnic shops” came about in reaction to racism within the larger “general market” agencies (Chambers, 2008). It is remarkable that this film, which premiered just three months after Dan Wieden’s speech at the 4A’s, would both ignore the racism of the past and rearticulate contemporary creativity with White masculinity. It also

8 Just two months after rolling out the multi-city premiere of a film rumored to have cost over $1 million dollars to produce, The One Club abruptly cancelled its “Adversi+y” diversity initiative—which by many accounts was making great strides—in the middle of a 2-year contract citing “financial reasons” (Van Hoven, 2009). Despite the supposed budget crunch, The One Club did not cancel any of its annual gala events (The One Show, One Show Design and One Show Interactive).

9 Byron Lewis founded UniWorld in 1969, Barbara Proctor launched the first agency owned and managed by an African-American woman in 1970 and was called “the Black Mary Wells” (Mary Wells was featured in “Art & Copy”), and Tom Burrell created the “Black Marlboro Man” and pioneered “positive realism” as a way to celebrate Black culture (Chambers, 2008). Harry Webber, whose career began in 1961, is a copywriter famous for slogans like “I Am Stuck On Band-Aid,” “A Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Waste,” and “Quality Is Job #1.”
suggests that we must, yet again, ask the question: who was/was not in the room when the producers made these decisions?

My Argument

Given the American advertising industry’s internal race problem and wider social influence in commercial culture, this dissertation project uses qualitative field methods to go behind the scenes and examine social relations at the point of production. After gaining access to three large agencies in New York City,\(^\text{10}\) I conducted a combination of ethnographic observations, affinity-based focus groups, in-depth interviews, and open-ended surveys. In what follows, I examine how White culture is reproduced in advertising agency settings. I suggest that the industry’s good faith effort to diversify through internship-based affirmative action programs is overwhelmed by the more widespread practices of closed network hiring—a system that advantages affluent Whites through referral hires, subjective notions of “chemistry” or “fit” and the outright nepotism of “must-hires.”\(^\text{11}\) Furthermore, I argue that the discriminatory nature of these industry norms is masked by meritocratic ideologies that justify all hiring decisions as fair and legitimate.

\(^\text{10}\) All three of these agencies have over 500 employees in their New York offices. Two are headquartered there. Two have international reach, with offices abroad. As a condition of access, I have granted the agencies anonymity and so will not name them here.

\(^\text{11}\) By affirmative action, I mean any ”government mandated or voluntary program that consists of activities specifically to identify, recruit, promote, and/or retain members of disadvantaged minority groups in order to overcome the results of past discrimination and to deter employers from engaging in discriminatory practices in the present” (Herring and Collins, 1995, p. 164).
As we will see, human resources managers insist they hire based on talent alone while interns of color also use merit-based arguments to avoid being perceived as tokens. White interns, many of whom directly benefit from the closed networks described above, use notions of color-blind meritocracy to defend their own privilege while arguing against affirmative action. I conclude that this disconnect between material practice and abstract ideology helps normalize and reproduce historic inequalities in the workplace by rebranding diversity as an aspect of individuality rather than a social problem best addressed at the group level. I will now argue that this study is important to the field of communication for three reasons: 1) it makes a methodological contribution through its analysis of the advertising at the point of production; 2) it pushes theory forward by testing a synthesis of political economy and cultural studies; and 3) it breaks new ground by focusing on the internship—a tender moment in the lives of students as they are initiated into the material practices and ideologies of corporate life.

The Contribution

While the study at hand asks how race functions within the advertising industry (i.e., who are making the ads and how did they get there), most communication scholars addressing race in advertising do so on the level of representation, analyzing the ads as texts (Cortese, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; O'Barr, 1994). This work, along with various content analyses, which count minority characters and evaluate the casting decisions and depictions in advertising (Bristor, Lee & Hunt 1995; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Merksin, 2008; Seiter, 1990) as well as primetime television (Fall Colors, 2003; Monk-Turner, Heiserman, Johnson,
Cotton, & Jackson, 2010; Signorielli, 2009), has demonstrated a clear and consistent bias towards White protagonists and stereotypical portrayals of minorities. Such accounts convey how media representations can create a cultural environment of inequality where some races are represented either more frequently and/or positively than others. For example, Mastro and Stern (2003) sampled one week of primetime television over 6 networks to compile a sample of 2,880 commercials and found that, according to census figures, Whites were over-represented (75.1%) while Latinos were grossly under-represented, making up only 1% of speaking roles many of which were highly sexualized. Drawing on Bandura's (1978) social cognitive theory on media influence and previous studies on audience identification, the authors (2003) conclude that the frequency and variety of White roles offer White viewers "social relevance and group legitimization," while Latino/a viewers could very well "develop harmful self-perceptions" due to the lack of positive representations of their race (p. 1). Studies like these can help quantify oppressive cultural norms and thus play an important policy role in helping advocates pressure advertisers and networks to cast their commercials and programs in ways that better reflect the diversity of the general population.

The quantitative approach of content analysis employs empirical statistical methods to generate the kinds of numbers and percentages that can be used as concrete measures of advertising's race problem. These numbers, in turn, establish a baseline against which future outcomes might be judged. For instance, the lead investigator of the Super Bowl study cited above, noting his past success in helping to diversify the management ranks of professional sports teams, promised he would
repeat the study on an annual basis to track the ad industry’s progress (Lapchick et al, 2010). And yet, these kinds of quantitative approaches to advertising’s race problem—whether in terms of representation or labor—only take us so far and suggest three important limitations concerning method and theory.

**Method: Going Beyond (and Behind) the Text**

A content analysis quantifying the underrepresentation of minorities in media can help make the case for reform, but there are limits to this approach. It is useful, for example, to count up the number of minorities in prime time television in order to pressure networks to increase minority representation (Fall Colors, 2003) or to document the racist tropes that exoticize women of color in fashion advertisements as a call for more positive depictions (Cortese, 1999). However, advocating for and achieving "better" media representation in the casting of characters in fictional settings can, in turn, lull the general public into a false sense of social integration and equality in the real world. Jhally and Lewis (1992), in their study of the Cosby Show, offer a case study of how this process works. The authors set up a series of focus groups using an episode of the show to spark discussions around race and class in America. They found that viewers (both Black and White) embraced the "positive" depiction of a Black middle class family, but for different reasons. While Blacks saw it as a means to undermine negative stereotypes, many Whites viewed the show as proof that affirmative action programs were no longer required; if Cosby can make it, anyone can. The authors dubbed this attitude "enlightened racism." To apply this idea to the context of advertising, we might consider a typical fast food commercial depicting a multicultural cast socializing
with each other over a meal of burgers and fries. Surely this would be a positive representation of America-as-melting-pot. But the risk here is two-fold. First, similar to “enlightened racism,” Kendall (2006) argues that such "balanced" images of race representation along with the proliferation of interracial television dramas and sitcoms where race is never a problem can undermine policies designed to combat the inequalities of structural segregation by suggesting that such efforts are now obsolete. Second, while the hypothetical fast food ad represents a diverse cast of characters, it also conceals its own production process. What we don’t see is that the client, agency head, creative director, and even the entire crew that is producing the commercial may, in fact, all be White. In this way, an integrated advertising text can represent a fictional form of diversity that conceals existing racial inequalities within the advertising workplace.

We can see a clear example of the limits of content analysis if we return to the Mastro and Stern (2003) study. Though the authors describe the virtual absence and stereotypical portrayals of Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans, they also report that, "Blacks are generally portrayed in a more diverse, equitable manner, and at a rate [12%] commensurate to the population" (p. 645). This finding sets up a troubling contradiction. On the level of representation, and by this I mean both the visual depiction of characters on screen as well as the sense in which these actors stand in for the wider population (Jhally, 1997), Mastro and Stern’s (2003) study suggests that Blacks are doing quite well on a symbolic level. And yet, as we can see from the reports released by the NAACP (Bendick & Egan, 2009; Lapchick et al,
Blacks are systematically under-represented in advertising on the material level of employment.12

I cite this example for two reasons. First, it neatly demonstrates how there is no necessary correlation between the racial identities of the ad makers and the content of the ads they make. This is important to keep in mind since many who call for increased diversity in advertising presume that this material change will also make a positive impact on the symbolic representation of minorities (Chambers, 2008; Dávila, 2001). Second, while quantitative data can give us a broader sense of what is happening and to whom and where, they cannot explain how and why. Such questions are best answered with a more interpretive approach. In that spirit, the study at hand aims to investigate race in advertising by following the lead of the NAACP in going beyond, and indeed behind, the text by locating its object of analysis within the field of production. Furthermore, it builds on the work of Jhally and Lewis (1992), along with Sender (2004) and Dávila (2001), to engage with issues of labor and identity in advertising on a more qualitative level. I locate my approach within the case study tradition in sociology, which conducts holistic, in-depth investigations of contemporary phenomena in lived contexts by drawing on multiple viewpoints through data source and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1984; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). In a departure from the random sampling of statistical generalization, I assess my empirical results in light of previously

12 I acknowledge that the presence of Black actors in any given ad is not strictly symbolic; they were paid to do a job. But, in material terms, this work-for-hire is highly contingent and subordinate. The actors are not on staff at the agency, nor do they make creative decisions.
developed theory in pursuit of analytic generalization that may, in turn, be applied to future cases (Yin, 1984). This move has significant theoretical implications for communication studies.

**Theory: Critical Debates in Communication**

In locating my object of analysis outside the text, I wish to intervene in a set of long-running debates within communication theory. Perhaps the most iconic instance of this polemic took place in a colloquy published in the Journal of Communication featuring a debate between Garnham (1995) and Grossberg (1995). At issue was whether political economy, a perspective that privileged the power of media owners to determine social relations, could be reconciled with cultural studies, which emphasized the relative autonomy of audience subjectivities. For Garnham, the answer was an emphatic "no." He argued that, by celebrating the consumption of popular media and ignoring the sphere of production, cultural studies missed the larger picture of domination, false consciousness, and class struggle. Grossberg countered that cultural studies, when done right, was an approach equally grounded in a Marxist critique of capitalism and, by engaging with the ideologies of the superstructure, helped expand the limited view of more economistic explanations of determination. Whether or not these perspectives can be reconciled has been explored elsewhere (Babe, 2010, Kellner, 1995; Meehan, 1999). More important to the argument at hand is what this ongoing debate reveals about how method impacts theory: it matters where we look.

Hall (1980) theorized how selecting an object of analysis often limits our view of the whole in his application of Marx's circuit of capital to the circulation of
culture. In this conception, Hall describes a cycle of capitalist production, circulation, distribution, and consumption of commodities and puts forth “false consciousness” as the distorted—or incomplete—view of the circuit, whereby we see only the market of free exchange and not the “hidden abode of production” where capitalists exploit workers through the appropriation of surplus value. Hall used this concept to build his theory of "encoding/decoding" which challenges the transmission/receiver model of more traditional communication research by suggesting a non-necessary correspondence between the encoder’s intent and the decoder’s reception of a message, while not losing sight of the relative power enjoyed by those with the technological means to transmit media messages.

Building on Hall, Johnson’s (1986) “circuit of culture” proposes that cultural studies should analyze communication throughout a continuous circuit divided into moments of 1) production, 2) texts, 3) readings, and 4) lived cultures respectively (see Figure 1). Johnson takes a “transdisciplinary” approach that, I argue, suggests methods associated with various disciplines for investigating different stages of the circuit (see Figure 2). Johnson’s circuit helps drive my project forward in two important ways. First, the model highlights how most media analyses privilege the text such that semiotics has become the academy’s dominant critical mode. This is certainly understandable, as media texts are both easy and inexpensive to access, but Johnson seeks to “decenter the text” and move the attention of cultural studies

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13 Hall’s (2001) own diagram did not include “lived cultures.” He later regretted this omission since he had intended “encoding/decoding” to challenge the sender/origin and receiver/terminus assumptions of mainstream communication research. Hall’s diagram depicted arrows pointing in only one direction and thus—at first blush—appeared to reinforce, instead of change, the transmission model.
back to the realm of production (p. 62). By conducting fieldwork within advertising agencies, I seek to make a contribution to the underdeveloped side of this circuit. Second, Johnson calls for cultural studies to take as its object the subjective side of “social forms” (what Marx meant by “ways of life” or how we understand our material conditions). In that spirit, I have developed a research design emphasizing focus groups as a means to collect and analyze interns’ accounts of their lived experiences within advertising internship programs. While the material conditions of their employment are important to consider, I will argue that they ultimately matter less than the interns’ understanding and subjective experience of those conditions.

Figure 1: Johnson’s (1986) “Circuit of Culture”
To date, most critical cultural studies analyses of advertising as communication have emphasized the Northeast quadrant of Johnson's circuit, focusing more on the ideology of texts and readings by specific audiences. In contrast, the Southwest quadrant, which includes both the lived cultures and production side of the circuit, remains underdeveloped (for some notable exceptions, see Frank, 1997; Mazzarella, 2003; Miller, 1997; Nixon, 2003; and Schudson, 1986). In general, as Hesmondhalgh (2007) observes, "even within the cultural industries approach, which is much more interested in the organizational dynamics of cultural production than the [critical political economy] tradition, there has been a lack of empirical attention to what happens in cultural industry organizations" (p. 37). There are practical reasons for this, ranging from the difficulty of gaining access to powerful and private corporate institutions to the extensive and expensive time commitment of fieldwork in urban settings.
Nevertheless, the effort is worth making. Since the symbolic ideology of advertisements can shield us from the more material realities of advertisement production, communication research that goes beyond (and indeed behind) the level of representation can provide new insights into the everyday life of labor in the creative industries. And yet, merely quantifying the existence of racial inequality in the advertising workplace only takes us so far. The project at hand seeks to better understand the subjectivity of producers and the stories they tell themselves about the world and their place in it. Indeed, I hope this analysis may offer insight into the kinds of stories they might then help create and circulate in the wider culture. As Hesmondhalgh (2007) puts it, cultural studies is most useful when it "explores the complex ways in which systems of aesthetic value feed into cultural power" and asks “whose voices are heard within a culture and whose voices are marginalized?” in order to better "assess the degree to which cultural production is organized in a socially just manner" (pp. 42, 37). In that spirit, this project aspires to bring attention to the voices behind advertising messages. Moreover, I envision my contribution to critical debates in communication as an effort to balance the scales, shifting the focus back towards institutions, albeit considered through qualitative methods at the level of the everyday. In a sense, this study seeks to get behind not just the ads, but also the numbers demonstrating the underrepresentation of minorities brought to light by the NAACP and others.

I locate the field of my inquiry in the realm of cultural production, an area that has been described with a variety of monikers, ranging from “critical production studies” (Caldwell, 2008) to “cultural economy” (du Gay & Pryke, 2002)
and the “production of culture” (Peterson & Anand, 2004) to “the cultural industries” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). I prefer Havens et al.'s (2009) attempt to synthesize this work under the framework “critical media industry studies” for three reasons. First, they challenge the traditional analytical and methodological division between political economy and cultural studies by focusing on agency and conceptualizing power as a “productive” form of knowledge in the Foucauldian (2003) sense; control is neither experienced nor exerted as univalent from the top down. Second, Havens et al. (2009) reject the notion that power is always coercive and instead deploy Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemonic “leadership” to explain the discursive structures of authority and consent. Third, they emphasize midlevel fieldwork as a way to get a more intimate view of how the social hierarchies of business culture can affect material practices. Moreover, arguing that the bulk of work on media industries has considered them on the institutional level, flying high overhead to gain an overview of the entire system, Havens et al. (2009) recommend that more work be done by “helicopter,” hovering closer to the ground to complement critical political economy analyses of the cultural industries by evaluating “the complexity and contradiction of power relations that are often obscured at jet-plane heights” (p. 239). My project seeks to train this closer perspective on the advertising industry with a particular focus on race.

In sum, this dissertation project focuses on the experience of student interns, both White and of color, working at the intersection of academic and corporate culture. In the pages that follow, I will conduct a critical examination of an industry’s attempt to self-regulate its race problem through internship-based affirmative
action programs. Throughout, I will consider both the structural constraints and material practices of the institution along with the agentive subjectivities and ideological screens of my participants.

**Literature Review**

Drawing on extensive fieldwork to analyze the culture of particular agencies from the inside, most of the ethnographic literature on advertising comes from British sociologists (Moeran, 1996; Miller, 1997; Mort, 1996; Nixon, 2003; Slater, 2002; Tunstall, 1964).¹⁴ I will now review three of the landmark studies in this tradition.

**Advertising Cultures**

Often cited as the first work of its kind, Tunstall’s (1964) ethnography of a London advertising agency is based on three months of fieldwork and 45 interviews with agency personnel—primarily in account services. He emphasizes how the division of labor within the organization (particularly between the creative "art/copy" departments and the account executives who interface with clients) creates stress and strain, rivalries and conflicting personal agendas.¹⁵ In contrast to

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¹⁴ Mort (1996), Nixon (2003), Slater (2002), and Tunstall (1964) analyze the British context while Moeran (1996) did most of his fieldwork in Japan and Miller (1997) conducted his ethnography in Trinidad. The paucity of work in the U.S. is curious, given that two of the four biggest holding companies (Interpublic and Omnicom) are headquartered in New York City. Though not ethnographies per se, there have also been several interview-based examinations of contemporary advertising practices in the United States ranging from the segmentation and consolidation of Latino/a identity (Dávila, 2001), the development of gay marketing (Sender, 2004), and the absence of female creative directors (Mallia, 2009).

¹⁵ Cronin (2004) provides a useful set of definitions for the principle roles within an agency: "Creatives are art directors or copywriters who produce the ideas for an advertising campaign and the images and the copy (written text)...Account Managers
Packard (1957) who presented agencies as pseudo-scientific laboratories where instrumental goals could be achieved with precise and highly effective tactics, Tunstall describes a chaotic environment of guess-work and inter-office politics where subjective standards for success cast doubt over the entire enterprise—which, in turn, undermines the respectability of the profession-at-large. This ethnography, then, serves as a corrective for the view of advertising as both a powerful tool for consumer manipulation and an institution of social control (Ewen, 1976).

Mazzarella’s (2003) ethnographic and historic account of “globalizing consumerism” from the perspective of Bombay ad agencies tells a similar tale of strategic compromise in the face of uneven development. He argues that cultural production in India must negotiate, on one hand, the tensions between local and international capital and, on the other, the emergence of middle-class values embracing both modernity and tradition. Mazzarella presents three case studies of campaigns from the 1990s that describe pushing Kama Sutra condoms in a prudish culture, leveraging nationalism for a Telecom company, and defending a local cola from the incursions of Coke. Throughout, he argues that advertising practitioners must walk a fine line between exploiting aspirations for Western lifestyles and affirming local values and cultural practices.

In contrast to Tunstall’s (1964) look at the account-side of advertising, Nixon’s (2003) study focuses on the creative-side: London-based art directors and deal with overall project management and finance, and mediate the agency’s everyday contact with the client. Media Buyers select and buy media space for the placement of advertisements.” (p. 366).
copywriters who are overwhelmingly male and enjoy more freedom—both in work method and personal affect—than their often female colleagues in account. At the same time, the “soft” nature of generating ideas (as opposed to the “hardness” of manufacturing material goods) along with the constant genuflection to clients also creates anxiety that creating ads is neither “manly” nor “independent” enough when compared to more blue-collar work. Nixon argues that male creatives tend to compensate by recuperating their manhood through blatant sexism and hedonistic consumerism.

Together, these ethnographies point to a work environment marked by rivalry, chaos, and perpetual cycles of self-justification at the institutional, departmental, and individual levels. We can see how practitioners maneuver for position vis-à-vis clients and colleagues, often deploying national and gender identities as forms of cultural capital. For instance, Mazzarella (2003) describes how a history of Western corporations overestimating the universal appeal of their campaigns encouraged marketers in Bombay to position themselves as indispensible consultants capable of interpreting the Indian market for multinational clients. In the United States, most large agencies (such as the three participating in this study) pitch themselves to big clients as the “agency of record” for the client’s “general market.” This means the agency will create broad campaigns for the general public (usually conceived as White) and then outsource more “niche markets” to smaller, boutique advertising shops that specialize in targeting African-
Americans, Latinos, Asians, Gays, etc (Dávila, 2001; Sender; 2004). Chambers (2008) suggests that this came about—like the situation in Bombay—at least partly through the opportunistic maneuvers of self-appointed cultural representatives who claimed that their particular subjectivities granted them special insight into their own market segment (see multicultural agencies such as UniWorld, Burrell, GlobalHue, etc.). Some of my informants counter that outsourcing “ethnic” markets to “ethnic” shops is a cynical device used by large agencies to grant clients’ requests for multicultural marketing strategies while avoiding integrating their own staff. This, in turn, reproduces the White culture of these agencies by marginalizing workers of color to smaller, so-called “ethnic” shops.

Ethnographies have shown us that power in advertising is not irreducible to the economic nature of the client—agency relationship. On the contrary, the organizational division of labor within agencies can pit creatives against account managers in an internal, and often gendered, struggle over legitimacy and authority. I will attempt to show how, in such a highly competitive environment, interns seek to reconcile race-based affirmative action programs with class privilege in assessing who deserves their slot, and who doesn’t. Given advertising’s anthropological role (researching, then representing the essential characteristics of valuable—but as yet unfamiliar—market segments to their corporate clients), diversity is often framed

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16 A recent example of this is DraftFCB, which won the lead on the $300 million U.S. Census account, while the multicultural agency Global Hue was awarded a fraction of that to reach African-American and Latino audiences (Elliot, 2010).

17 For an extended treatment of “Ethnic Advertising” campaigns, see Cortese, 1999, pp. 115-33.
as a competitive advantage. Consequently, many have advocated for agencies hiring more minorities on the assumption that their race would give them unique insight into their own market segment. As we shall see, views of race in advertising—along with rationales for diversity—are often contradictory and unstable. Therefore, I should take a moment to explain my own framework.

Race and Whiteness

As Hall (1997) has persuasively argued, race is a discursive category, not a scientific, biological, or genetic fact. This position is not meant to deny the very real physiological differences that vary among human beings, but rather to remind us that the meanings we ascribe to race are relational and therefore can never be fixed. Race does not correspond to culture; dark skin or curly hair, on their own, cannot predict group-based abilities such as intelligence or athleticism. Nevertheless, Hall argues, we use systems of thought and language to make sense of these physical traits—to classify and associate them with positive or negative attributes. Thus, physical differences acquire a kind of “common sense” once they are sorted into categories, enabling us to read the body as a text, inferring internal characteristics from superficial biology. Hall’s concern, then, is that this meaning is often deployed to justify relations of domination wherein only particular kinds of differences enjoy power while the rest suffer subordination. Like Hall, Bonilla-Silva (2010) acknowledges, as do most social scientists, that race, as a category, is constructed—has a history and is subject to change—and joins Hall in insisting that the category’s social reality nevertheless "produces real effects on the actors racialized as 'Black' or 'White’" (p. 9). In this way, even an artificial category produces real race effects
through systems and structures organized hierarchically to ascribe privilege to certain groups over others. Or, as hooks (2004) puts it, "even though legal racial apartheid no longer is a norm in the United States, the habits that uphold and maintain institutionalized White Supremacy linger" (p. 22).

The unreality of race, along with its all-too-real effects, puts the anti-racist researcher in a bind: how might we study a flawed category and still avoid reinforcing its essentialist claims? As Lewis (1996) argues, cultural studies “plays with words rather than numbers” but nevertheless must classify to analyze and therefore “is dependent upon categories and typicalities: educational levels, race, income, sexuality or gender may be constructions, but it is difficult to analyze society or history without them” (p. 87). Thus, when analyzing advertising through the lens of race, I follow Frankenberg (2001), who cites Paul Gilroy’s description of race as a “violent fiction,” an abstract construction that has shifted over time and yet wrought very material and lasting effects. Thus, despite its problematic associations with a biological basis, race remains a potent "organizing framework in the relations of oppression and exploitation" such that it is more a process than a thing, organized, along with gender and sexuality, under the key axes of class and nation (p. 72). With that in mind, I have opted to capitalize the terms Black and White throughout this dissertation to signal how these terms reference group membership loosely based on, but not strictly limited to, skin color. In other words, as Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues, our identities contain a range of variables that can mutually construct and even contradict each other. For instance, a poor White female’s experience of race privilege may be undermined by oppressions of classism.
and sexism. Likewise, the access and opportunities afforded to a wealthy Black male may be limited by the material obstacles of institutional racism.\footnote{18} Thus, according to this logic of intersectionality, there is no essential “Black” identity just as Whiteness, in spite of its relative invisibility, is also complex:

There are enormous variations of power amongst White people, to do with class, gender and other factors; goodwill is not unheard of in White people’s engagement with others. White power nonetheless reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as Whiteness...White people need to learn to see themselves as White, to see their particularity. In other words, Whiteness needs to be made strange. (Dyer, 2005, p. 12)

Following Dyer’s call, this project investigates race in advertising not only as a problem of “the other,” namely minorities who have been marginalized and discriminated against, but also as a problem of power granted through closed networks and rendered invisible through the articulation of Whiteness and class privilege. In other words, while most efforts to increase diversity in advertising have thus far focused their attention on uplifting people of color in general and Blacks in particular, I argue below that this spotlight places additional pressure on minorities and spurs resentment from White colleagues while deflecting focus from the systemic cronyism and nepotism conferring advantage to the well-connected under the cover of Whiteness. Moreover, as a biological category, White may be as “unreal” as “Black,” but when we fail to recognize White as a socio-cultural category it

\footnote{18} I follow Tatum (2004) who makes a distinction in her definition of racism between prejudice and racism. She defines racism as "a system of advantage based on race... because it allows us to see that racism, like other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (p. 127).
becomes the norm, against which the “other” is measured and inevitably assessed as inferior: “The point of seeing the racing of Whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, of all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world” (Dyer, 2005, p. 10).

Whiteness is all around us, yet rarely studied. As Pierce (2003) writes, "attention has yet to focus on how Whiteness operates within contemporary American workplaces and organizations" (p. 201). This is surprising, she argues, since the current backlash against affirmative action in the context of underrepresentation of people of color in professional careers makes such work both urgent and crucial. Furthermore, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) points out, there has been an overproduction of scholarly work seeking to trace the evolution of racial views over time. The problem here is, that for the sake of a longitudinal/trend analysis, researchers end up relying on questions conceived during the Jim Crow era," which “will, by default, produce a rosy picture of race relations that misses what is going on on the ground" (p. 5). In other words, while these surveys “suggest a growing liberalization of White racial attitudes,” they cannot explain Whites’ continued opposition to “public policies that are intended to bring about greater racial equality” (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003, p. 189). On the contrary, this contradiction between embracing the ideology of an integrated society and rejecting the material practices necessary for its implementation suggests that racism in the
United States is changing. It may now be unacceptable for Whites to openly disparage minorities, but most continue to live highly segregated lives. White college students arrive on campus largely unfamiliar with people of color and, according to the 2010 Census, urban Whites have few minority neighbors (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003; Logan & Stults, 2011, pp. 2-3). Moreover, even Whites who see no need for affirmative action perpetuate structural inequality in choosing to "live in predominantly white neighborhoods, work in racially segregated occupations, and, if given the opportunity, hire White employees rather than African-Americans" (Pierce, 2003, p. 198). Some sociologists have even suggested that this de facto form of racial isolation, masked by an ostensibly tolerant racial attitude constitutes a new form of "modern" (McConahay, 1986) or "symbolic" (Sears, 1988) racism. By

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19 As Lipsitz (2005) observes, "there has always been racism in the United States, but it has not always been the same racism. Political and cultural struggles over power have shaped the contours and dimensions of racism differently in different eras" (p. 69).

20 We can see further evidence of this apparent contradiction between liberal attitudes and conservative actions in Bonilla-Silva and Forman's (2001) comparative analysis of White college students' racial attitudes. While the study’s participants generally expressed positive attitudes towards minorities in response to survey questions, further probing during in-depth interviews elicited more racist comments. For instance, while 80 percent of the 451 White students surveyed approved interracial marriage, this dropped to only 30 percent among a smaller group of White students who were interviewed in depth on the subject. The students knew how to “whitewash” their racist attitudes for the survey, but later caved under questioning.

21 After analyzing the 2010 census results for 367 metropolitan areas across the United States, Logan and Stults (2011) found that while "the typical White lives in a neighborhood that is 75% White…the experience of minorities is very different…the typical Black lives in a neighborhood that is 45% Black, 35% White, 15% Hispanic, and 4% Asian" (p. 2). Summing up, the authors conclude that, "the basic message here is that whites live in neighborhoods with low minority representation. Blacks and Hispanics live in neighborhoods with high minority representation, and relatively few White neighbors" (p. 3).
publicly disclaiming any animus towards minorities, enlightened Whites can return to the relentless pursuit of their own family's best interest with a clear conscience—leaving minorities behind in the process:

It may be a mistake to continue laying the blame for racial segregation on the stereotypical rural southern white Bubba in a pickup truck flying the Confederate flag. Today, the chief enemy of racial integration and minority progress may be the well-educated, SUV-driving suburban soccer mom who professes not to have a racist bone in her body and to be motivated only by the love of her kids....the most powerful stratifying force out there may be residential segregation, which determines what kind of neighborhood environments kids grow up in and where most go to school. Parents shield children from contact with other races and classes simply by choosing to live in communities inhabited by their own kind. (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 42, 43)

Whites continue to congregate in more homogenous ways than other racial group and often use all-White networks to advance each other's careers (Feagin, 2010, p. 94). This is precisely what affirmative action aimed to interrupt:

Hiring through social networks is one of the ways in which gender and racial inequalities are maintained in organizations. Affirmative action programs altered hiring practices in many organizations, requiring open advertising for positions and selection based on gender- and race-neutral criteria of competence, rather than selection based on an old boy (White) network. (Acker, 2006, p. 450)

The U.S. government established "affirmative action" in 1965, a program requiring federal contractors to take measurable steps towards opening employment opportunities to all candidates, regardless of race, religion, gender or ethnicity (Branch, 2011, p. 137).\(^{22}\) As Ratcliffe (2004) observes, affirmative action

\(^{22}\) While this dissertation deploys the term "affirmative action" in its more colloquial sense, referencing voluntary private sector efforts to recruit and hire more minority employees, the initial meaning of the term was much more expansive. President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246 in 1965 to ensure that federal contractors followed equal opportunity practices. Section 202 stated that, “the contractor will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The contractor will take affirmative action…such action
was put forward as a more radical alternative to the incremental contract compliance changes of previous administrations that achieved little tangible progress through gentle persuasion. Even so, active desegregation of the workplace, whether through the enforcement of affirmative action or other means, declined dramatically after the 1970’s and has remained sporadic, shifting with the political winds (Branch, 2011, p. 139). Interestingly, despite having helped White women more than any other group (Wise, 1998), affirmative action has sparked widespread backlash amongst Whites (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003; Frankenberg, 2001; Gallagher, 1997; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Wise, 2005). For instance, in analyzing the results of a national survey (N=417) of Black and White Americans, Norton and Sommers (2011) found that Whites saw racism as a "zero-sum game that they are now losing" and viewed anti-White bias "as more prevalent than anti-Black bias" (pp. 215-16). Thus, it would seem that the polarity has shifted. Whites may be more outwardly accepting of Blacks, but resist affirmative action by claiming that now they are the victims of a racist society. Put another way, White racism has been sublimated. Targeting people is no longer polite, but policy is fair game.

shall include, but not be limited to the following: employment, upgrading, demotion, or transfer; recruitment or recruitment advertising; layoff or termination; rates of pay or other forms of compensation; and selection for training, including apprenticeship” (quoted in Branch, 2011, p. 137). Nevertheless, Sweeney and González (2008) point out that the definition of the term “affirmative action” remains fluid since "it is not a single policy, law or program. It varies at the federal, state and local level, and does not have a precise definition" (p. 136). The authors track the initiative’s origin back to the 1935 National Labor Relations Act and through President John F. Kennedy's 1961 Executive Order 10925 "ordering employers under contract with the federal government not to discriminate and to take 'affirmative action' to ensure that all employees were treated without regard to race, creed, color or national origin" (ibid.).
Two-Faced Racism

Given the “modern” or “symbolic” racism of the current era, some sociologists have gone beyond the survey instrument and developed more invasive methodologies designed to infiltrate the all-White spaces where racist attitudes—long suppressed in public—might finally come to the surface. For Eliasoph (1999), these daily discursive interactions between White friends, relatives, and colleagues are "not just microscopically fascinating, sad or outrageous, but are the muscles and tendons that make the bones of social structural racism move" (p. 484). In order to get a closer look at "White fright" of minorities, Myers (2003) enlisted 22 "participants as observers" to secretly record 282 incidents of casual race talk by Whites in their daily encounters. She defined race talk as denigration or celebration based on race and, in her analysis, marked loaded terms such as 'welfare mother" or "ghetto" along with generalizations like "Mexicans always get pulled over" or denials of the importance of race such as "I'm not racist but..." or "I'm colorblind" (p. 131). She described her findings thusly:

Although people publicly claimed to be colorblind and antiracist, examining their private talk reveals a different reality. Indeed, this research indicates that 'old' racism has not died out -- it has simply gone underground and become more nuanced. Whites now keep such talk private. Although cautious about saying racist things in 'mixed company,' Whites talked freely among themselves. Talkers assumed that the content was acceptable to the participants in conversations. Indeed, having White skin itself served as a 'ticket' to race talk. Covert participant observation provided access to this talk that until now has not been captured. (p. 143)

In a similar—though much larger—study, Picca and Feagin (2007) collected journals from 626 White students attending 28 colleges and universities described as "historically white campus settings" primarily in the South and Midwest regions
of the United States (pp. 38-39). During the 2002-2003 school year, the students recorded 9000 first-hand accounts of "racial events," any situation that they felt reflected "racial issues, images, and understandings" (p. 39). Of these, roughly 75% “involved clearly racist commentary, framing, inclinations, and actions” by Whites which the authors then mapped onto a “spatial ecology of racial performances” (pp. 15, 31). In public "frontstage" settings, Whites were generally on their best behavior, exhibiting exaggerated politeness towards people of color or simply avoiding them altogether. In more private "backstage" settings, however, Whites were more frank and crude, using humor to evoke negative racial stereotypes. In a public talk based on these findings, Feagin (2011) read journal entries aloud, reciting several shockingly racist jokes that had originally been delivered by Whites with a whisper or lowered voice precisely, Feagin argued, "because they know it's wrong." He described this dynamic as “two-faced” racism: Whites may know how to act correctly in public, but indulge in racist group-solidarity-enhancing performances whilst amongst other Whites. Moreover, he concluded that the research "blows out of the water" any notion of Whites not being racist and called for more anti-racist education on the history and contemporary reality of racism.24

23 The authors also collected journals from 308 students of color that reported 4000 accounts of racial incidents targeting minorities. In order to avoid over reporting in their students' journals, they recommended awarding extra credit for the quality, not quantity, of each event descriptions (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 41).

24 Feagin's (2011) list of suggestions for what historically White colleges should do in response to his study was as follows: 1. Increase anti-racist education (on history and contemporary reality of racism); 2. Reduce hostile, racist environment; 3. Recruit more faculty and staff of color; 4. Recruit more students of color; 5. Offer more mentoring for
While both Myers (2003) and Picca and Feagin (2007) have made a valuable contribution to the sociological study of race by getting underneath the surface of survey research and digging into more naturalistic "backstage" settings, their approach presents two sets of problems regarding methods and conclusions. First, their covert approach to data collection raises serious ethical questions. As Picca and Feagin (2007) explain: “regular journals kept by ordinary people allow the researcher to see into and understand places and spaces that necessarily exclude the presence of an active researcher” (p. 31). This approach infiltrates backstage settings by deputizing students as undeclared freelance ethnographers observing and recording their friends’ behavior without their knowledge—violating the principal of informed consent long central to the best practices of qualitative research methods (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 90-92). While covert surveillance certainly offers several practical advantages including instant rapport, wider reach, and greater agility while navigating evolving social scenes in the field, conscripting research subjects through espionage should give us pause, particularly when taught to undergraduates as a viable method of social science in action. To be blunt, even alleged racists have rights.

Furthermore, as Hurtado and Stewart (2004) argue, the reporting of sensational racial performances may make for compelling prose by exposing the secret lives of those privileged by the current racial hierarchy, but such moves do not just shame the perpetrators: "quoting hate-filled sentiments puts scholars in the students, faculty, and staff of color; 6. Organize large-scale social justice movements. Nevertheless, "cradle-to-grave re-education on racial matters" has long been the centerpiece of his proposed solutions (Sutton, 2006, p. 1).
position of giving those sentiments more 'air time' then they already have.... the repetition of certain opinions will, in itself, inflict pain on some who read them; that pain must be justified by a gain in understanding being provided by explication and critique” (p. 326). Given the risks involved, we might well ask who is the intended audience for such studies. If, as Myers (2003) and Picca and Feagin (2007) suggest, racist discourse is widespread amongst Whites, then their revelations may be redundant to White readers while reinforcing minority apprehension about integrating White spaces. And while Picca and Feagin’s (2007) monograph may offer enough "explication and critique" to justify the repetition of hateful speech, Feagin’s (2011) public presentations deploy the data as self-evident displays of unvarnished racism.25 In pulling back the curtain to expose the White backstage to his more diverse frontstage audiences, Feagin would do well to remind them that his data are, after all, performances with unpredictable intentions. For instance, in her own study of racial discourse amongst Whites, Eliasoph (1999) found that men told racist jokes as a deliberate means to violate a social taboo: "rude male members foisted [race talk] on others, hoping to display their irreverent independence from pious rules; it was an emblem of 'freedom,' as they defined it” (p. 497). Moreover, an utterance may have motives outside the sincere expression of deeply held beliefs. Feagin (2011) loses sight of this when he implies that his covert method has uncovered a heretofore hidden truth about what Whites really think. On the contrary, by his own logic, Feagin could well argue that the homogenous racial environments exert their

25 Though I only personally attended Feagin’s talk at UMass Amherst on March 28, 2011, he gave a virtually identical presentation at Eastern Michigan University on October 20, 2011: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5b6FWaC1glo
own kinds of pressure on individual behaviors—the segregated space makes them possible. To wit, even the avowed anti-racists in his study were largely quiet, and thus apparently complicit, while in the all-White audience of a racist performance. As always, subjectivities remain elusive.

The second set of problems emerges when we consider Feagin’s (2011) proposed solution of increased anti-racist education. Of course, this may help; Sweeney and González (2008) cite research suggesting that White people tend not to support preferential racial policies in job hiring and college admissions but, at the same time, do tend to support compensatory policies for past discrimination. Thus, teaching more history and raising more awareness about the need for affirmative action could very well increase White support. However, this misrecognizes the disease diagnosed by Picca and Feagin’s (2007) own findings. Since Whites modified their racial performances depending on their audience, they must already know that racism is wrong, and yet express it anyway—as circumstance allows. This strikes me as a fundamentally structural analysis based in the material practice of White association and thus calls for a policy response to social segregation. In contrast, education redirects our attention back to challenging ideologies of White supremacy—a noble goal to be sure but a potential distraction when pursued in the abstract for at least two reasons. First, the wrongness of racism is a lesson that has already been learned all-to-well by two-faced racists; further shaming will likely lead to ever deeper sublimation and more complicated coding. Second, consciousness raising through information, rather than experience, risks replicating the “rosy picture” of the racial attitude surveys reviewed above. Again, this was
suggested by the author's own results. They found that Whites were less apt to object to racist performances on principle than "to protect intimate friends or relatives who are people of color" (p. 260). In other words, it was affiliations of association that spurred them to action.

**My Intervention**

This project takes the position that, barring physical violence, racism is most powerful in its *institutional* form of discrimination, advancing or inhibiting the material well-being of minorities vis-à-vis Whites. Consequently, my intervention proposes an alternative way forward: a more transparent methodology of triangulation incorporating multiple races and focusing squarely on the life chances of employment scenarios. While I share Myers (2003) and Picca and Feagin's (2007) interest in the injuries wrought by the discourses of White ideological domination, I am more interested in the operations and justifications of material power. Thus, in the pages that follow, I do not examine the advertising industry in order to ferret out the closet racists standing at the gates secretly hoping to bar entry to people of color. Nor do I seek to adjudicate which ad campaigns are, or are not, racist. Instead, I examine the fundamental contradiction between White opportunity hoarding and meritocratic values to argue that racism functions more through preference than prejudice—amounting to a de facto policy of White affirmative action. I ask how wealthy and well-connected Whites explain their position vis-a-vis minorities in light of what those Whites actually do to preserve their position and how this relates to who they know. In this effort, I follow the lead of Fine (2004), who, in a clever
reference to McIntosh's (2000) iconic image of the White privilege knapsack, focuses her work on the so-called "merit" that "accumulates within the hue of 'Whiteness'...the micro-practices by which White youth, varied by class and gender, stuff their academic and social pickup trucks with goodies not otherwise available to people of color" (p. 245). Casual racism is a scourge enabled by two-faced and otherwise cowardly Whites. Right knowledge about past and present oppression would likely help stem its expression through racist performances but ultimately do very little to wrest White power from White hands. The next section outlines my understanding of how this power operates behind ideological screens of determination and articulation.

**Ideology**

Marxist theory, throughout its various applications and interpretations, has remained centrally concerned with questions of power and determination. According to Hall (1986), Marx developed his theory of historical materialism in response to Hegel's proposal that ideas drove history. Instead, Marx argued that the economic mode of production, which he named the "base," conditioned the dominant ideas, or social consciousness, of the political and legal institutions, or "superstructure," at any given historical conjuncture. This led to his famous formulation in *The German Ideology*:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling

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26 McIntosh (1988) recounted the contents of the knapsack as a long list of taken-for-granted privileges such as easy access to appropriate hair care products, presumed innocence when entering a store, and the freedom to be rude without having this behavior attributed to your race.
intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. (Marx & Engels, 2004, p. 64)

Ideology is thus an explanation of the world that justifies the interests of the powerful. It is a view of social relations from the perspective of the owners and bosses that control the material and economic resources necessary for the production of commodities and contraction of labor. In this way, not only is the working class subject to their employer in the physical sense, in terms of wages and time, but also in the intellectual sense, in terms of how they make sense of their circumstance. This can result in a profound disconnect between ideology and material conditions. For instance, in the United States, the ideology of meritocracy—that anyone can succeed if they try hard enough—serves the interests of the powerful in (at least) three ways.

First, it legitimizes their private accumulation of property as earned exclusively through their own, individual effort while simultaneously dismissing any complaints of social inequality with a simple explanation: the rich are industrious and the poor are lazy. Second, this very idea of success, also known as "The American Dream," is based on a premise of competition: climbing a ladder, moving up a hierarchy, or "getting ahead" of others. This metaphor of winners and losers offers "the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" in a capitalist society; the existence of a ruling class is not questioned but instead celebrated as an aspirational goal towards which everyone, regardless of class, can strive. Finally, and most importantly, the ideology of meritocracy covers up an inconvenient truth:
it simply isn’t true. In telling a story of singular cause and effect—effort, or the lack thereof, determines outcome—meritocracy provides us with an incomplete, and therefore inadequate, view of the material world. This is not to say that effort and outcome are unrelated, but rather to insist that one cannot be read off the other; lack of success is not necessarily correlated to sloth, nor are the successful necessarily industrious. Moreover, ideology constructs an oversimplified narrative of uni-variately causation, bracketing off other potentially determining factors as externalities (Resnick & Wolff, 1987).

**Overdetermination**

Althusser (1969) developed an alternative theory of *multidirectional* determination in response to the base/superstructure model, arguing that the orthodox interpretation of Marx—which held that the base, and only the base, determined the superstructure—simply replaced one unidirectional line of causation with another—constructing a “mirror image of the Hegelian dialectic” (p. 108). Instead, Althusser proposed that the existing ideologies of "common sense" were not just a product of the base, but rather, in themselves, constituted material forces of determination—in addition to the base. Put another way, if Marx and Engel’s (2004) "ruling class" is the "ruling intellectual force" that controls "the means of mental production" in society, then it follows that the members of that ruling class need not always resort to force or coercion to protect their power (p. 64). While it’s certainly true that what Althusser (1972) termed the Repressive State Apparatuses (army, police, and prisons) are ready to protect private property and thus preserve existing socio-economic hierarchies, it is the subject’s more immediate and constant
interpellation within the formative education of the Ideological State Apparatuses (school, church, politics) that manufactures consent to ruling class ideas such as obedience to authority, meritocracy, and the assumption of equal opportunity and fairness. Thus, for Althusser, we are all born into, and overdetermined by, an "always already" ideological system that represents our imaginary relations to our actual material conditions. In other words, ideology constitutes a fundamental misrecognition—a story we tell ourselves to help us cope—and a form of “double alienation” from both the means of production and our own class status.

As we can see in the example of meritocracy, an ideology can be "real" in so far that it helps bring social consciousness and institutions in line with the interests of the ruling class, but remains "false" in its strict limitation to the surface forms of the capitalist circuit. As Marx (1915) argues in Capital, the ideology of the "free market" holds that the open and autonomous exchange of equivalents among self-interested individuals reflects the "very Eden of the innate rights of man," even as "this noisy sphere where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all" effectively masks capital’s exploitation of labor through the extraction of surplus value inside the more "hidden abode of production" (p. 195). Put another way, ideologies of consumer freedom in the market conceal wage slavery in the factory. As a result, the phenomenological sphere of exchange, rather than the material practice of class domination, becomes the mechanism for the "mental production" of society. For Laclau (1977), this "non-necessary correspondence" between the superstructure of the thought and the base of experience helps explain how global capitalism has proved so resilient; history demonstrates that class status is not a
reliable predictor of behavior since oppressed groups often ally with their oppressor. In other words, ideology matters because it can put forward stories of determination that appeal to the "common sense" of social actors even as its material application undermines the class interests of those very same actors. For example, a job candidate may openly espouse an ideology of fairness and equal opportunity when it comes to hiring practices, even as they secretly exploit their own advantages over others, whether won through social networks, class status, or eligibility for Affirmative Action programs. In sum, the practical application of their ideology would threaten to undermine both the efficacy of their hustling tactics and the legitimacy of their potential achievement.

**Articulation**

Hall (1985) further develops the non-necessary correspondence between ideology and class interests through his theory of articulation, a term meant to evoke both an articulated utterance in discourse and an articulated lorry (or truck) that is detachable from its rear container. He argues that ideological discourses and material outcomes can be connected to make a ‘unity’ under certain conditions or disconnected and/or reconnected under other conditions. Drawing on Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemonic struggle, Hall argues that an articulation is a moment of arbitrary closure and thus “has to be constructed through practice precisely because it is not guaranteed by how those forces are constituted in the first place” (Hall, 1985, pp. 94-95). And yet, he stops short of proposing a totally open discursive field, where meanings might be detached and reattached at will. Rather, social actors must contend with the already existing structures that effectively set the ideological
"limits or horizons" for debate. Thus, Hall (1996b) redefines determination as the power of the economic to limit and constrain the "repertoire of categories" or the "raw materials" of thought "in the first instance" (pp. 44-45). So, while hegemony's ongoing process of flexible rule may render ideological articulations inherently unstable, the range of possibilities is already delimited by the structures of previous practice. Or, as Marx (1913) famously put it, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 15).

In what follows, I use Hall's (1985) notion of articulation to analyze data collected through affinity-based focus groups and open-ended surveys. I argue that, on one hand, most of the interns, regardless of race, converged around the belief that employment decisions should be based on a person's qualifications and nothing more. And yet, on the other hand, despite the consensus around conferring a merit-based legitimacy onto their current position, the two groups did so for very different reasons. Being in the majority, Whites tended to minimize any sense in which their race or class status may have opened doors by insisting that they had earned their positions through hard work. In contrast, many of the interns of color in the MAIP program were wary of the perception that they were only there because they were a minority. Therefore, they often pointed to MAIP's multi-stage interview and selection process as a competitive sorting process based solely on merit.

Of course, the existence of a true "meritocracy" is more wish than reality, more philosophical than empirical. It is a powerful ideal, a comforting story of by-
the-boot-straps economic uplift, and a defense against corruption, both real and perceived. As a moral principle, it recalls Martin Luther King's (1992) dream that his children would "one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." The trouble comes when this principle is used to overlay, and thereby conceal, the concrete practices underneath. My argument will seek to demonstrate that the consensus around meritocracy amongst interns signals a wider sense of colorblindness in the advertising industry in general--not the kind of colorblindness King dreamed of, but rather the refusal to see a decidedly unequal playing field where nepotism and cronyism ease the burden of entry for well-connected Whites.

**Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter 2 outlines both the underlying logic and more quotidian logistics of my qualitative approach, describing in detail my field sites and data collection methodologies along with various ethical considerations, chance discoveries, and the iterative nature of my analytical process. Chapter 3 traces advertising’s race and gender inequalities back to the *Mad Men* era and uses the AMC drama as a foil to examine the reproduction of White male culture inside agencies today. HR practitioners describe an informal hiring process largely based on personal referrals from White employees and “chemistry” and “fit” within White teams. Chapter 4, also drawing on interviews with HR practitioners, begins by chronicling a series of failed attempts to increase racial diversity within advertising agencies through internal and external pressure mechanisms. It then concludes with a description of the “must-hire” system, whereby White agency executives and powerful clients bypass
the application process and directly place personal friends and relatives into highly sought after internship slots. Chapter 5 introduces my extensive analysis of affinity-based focus groups with agency interns, both White and of color. In a section on White “must-hires” I consider the intersections of race and class alongside the widespread acceptance of employment through “connections” in the midst of meritocratic rejections of affirmative action. Turning to the MAIP interns of color, I weigh the often-contradictory rationales for minority scholarships and even racial identity before turning to a critique of how colorblindness leads to meritocracy in theory, but discrimination in practice. Chapter 6 describes how interns tasked with “rebranding” their own agency’s internal diversity initiative simply redefined the term to mean “individuality” and thus include everyone. I suggest that, in spite of their apparent misapprehension of race inequality in the advertising industry, the ideological consensus amongst six separate intern teams is worth taking seriously. Chapter 7 does just that by taking a closer look at the intersections and contradictions of Black identity before developing an elaboration of intersectionality, identification, and representation. Chapter 8 restates and concludes my argument, acknowledging limitations and suggesting some promising directions for future research. The Appendices include a list of policy recommendations, a forum where I’ve given my research subjects a chance to respond to my analysis, a narrative of my process negotiating access to private corporations, and various instruments from my fieldwork.
CHAPTER 2

METHODS

This chapter overviews my fieldwork sites in New York City, the data I
collected through various methods, and my approach to protecting my participants.
I then describe how a pair of chance discoveries sent my research in some
surprising new directions before turning to a description of my analysis.

Beyond Numbers

The quantitative studies cited in the introduction are certainly useful
(Bendick & Egan, 2009; Lapchick et al, 2010). They point to the problem of racism in
advertising by giving us a broader sense of what is happening and to whom and
where; but what they can't do is explain how and why. Put another way, descriptive
statistics provide an expansive overview of the general terrain, but an
understanding of the dynamics on the ground calls for a more interpretive or
qualitative approach. Such efforts tend to be more ethnographic in nature, trading
breadth for depth and relying on participant observation and in-depth interviews to
provide “rich descriptions” of specific sites (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Geertz, 1973).
As such, qualitative methods tend to avoid the quantitative claims of causation or
correlation in favor of a more nuanced consideration of the social and material
contradictions of daily life. The social sciences have established a de facto division of
labor for the two methods with the traditional order of events now positioning
qualitative researchers as an advance team, scouting out a small portion of terrain,
then reporting back. The quantitative team then fashions these findings into
hypotheses to be tested by a survey instrument with the scope and reach to map the
entire territory. Or, as Lewis (1996) puts it, “the conventional wisdom regarding qualitative and quantitative methodology is that the former allows us to explore and the latter allows us to confirm” (p. 91). The study at hand, however, reverses this order, taking the quantitative evidence of race inequality in advertising as its point of departure. Thus, while the numbers certainly got my attention, I remain well aware of their limitations.

As mentioned in the introduction, my methodological approach to this project derives from a critical theoretical framework grounded in the tradition of “critical media industry studies” (Havens et al. 2009). As such, I conceptualize power as a set of material pressures and practices within which subjects may experience varying degrees of subjectivity and agency (Williams, 1977). To better understand how this dynamic might affect race inequality within the advertising industry, whether it be through the asymmetries of organizational hierarchies or the ideologies of common sense (Gramsci, 1971), I drew on the qualitative methods of ethnographic fieldwork, a move commensurate with interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies (Lewis, 1996). Put another way, I conducted on site observations, focus groups, surveys, and interviews that I hoped would address the following research question: What is the role of ideology in the material reproduction of White labor in advertising agencies?

The Sites

In response to the long-standing diversity crisis in advertising, the American Association of Advertising Agencies’ (the 4A’s) first established the Multicultural Advertising Intern Program (MAIP) in 1973—an effort which they say has since
“helped jumpstart the careers of more than 2,000 African-American, Asian-American, Latino-American, Native-American, multiracial and multiethnic aspiring advertising professionals” (4A’s, 2010). Industry leaders acknowledge that diversity continues to be a problem and programs like MAIP remain the go-to solution (Hill & Liodice, 2009; Wheaton, 2008). Various other “diversity” programs exist, but none rivals the high profile and reach of MAIP which now recruits and screens around 140 students of color every year from all over the country, then places them in agencies willing to pay 70% of their travel and rent (in addition to the standard stipend) during their own 8-10 week summer internship programs.

I gained MAIP’s full cooperation for my study and spent the entire summer of 2010 in New York City, attending the MAIP orientation, weekly evening seminars, social events, and graduation ceremonies. I also secured access to three of MAIP’s host agencies, all of which had over 500 employees in their New York Offices, visiting each once a week for the duration of their internship programs. This was important, since the agency-based program constitutes the bulk of the MAIP experience. In other words, MAIP is, on one level, a recruiting vehicle, entry-point, intermittent gathering place, closing activity, and post-internship alumni network for the interns of color in the program. But during the summer, MAIP interns spent

27 Some other examples of industry-sponsored diversity initiatives include the American Advertising Federation’s (AAF) Mosaic Center and Most Promising Minority Students Program, the 4A’s sponsored Center for Excellence in Advertising at Howard University, and the AdColor Industry Coalition supported by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the Advertising Club of New York, the AAF, the 4A’s, Arnold Worldwide and Omnicom Group. The Multi-cultural Advertising Trainee program (MAT) was founded by TBWA/Chiat/Day and has placed 500 interns since 1992.

28 This was not easy. For more details, see Appendix C.
most of their time working at their assigned agency, in their assigned department, often in relative isolation from each other. Each intern, along with the rest of their cohort, would typically be responsible for two main assignments at their agency. First, they would join an existing agency department team of full time staff (typically working on a particular client product) and be expected to assist in whatever capacity was needed, whether it be distributing a market research survey to their friends over Facebook or compiling a "competitive deck" summarizing the ad campaigns of a client’s competitive rivals. Second, all the interns would be assembled into teams of 5-8 members for a pitch competition where each team develops a campaign to be presented at the end of the summer in front of a panel of judges from their agency (typically upper management). This is often a very popular, and time consuming, aspect of the internship. As one HR director told me, the interns at her agency “get totally into the group project,” coming in on weekends, staying up all night, and even creating decoy memos to “leave on the copier” in order to throw off their opponents. Though the interns also spend time assisting a real agency department assigned to real accounts with real clients, the group project is largely a drill—contrived to provide a start-to-finish campaign experience within the allotted time frame. In sum, my activities at my three host agencies included observing a weekly “lunch-and-learn” seminar (where department heads from within the agency addressed all the interns as a group), sitting in on the “group projects” where interns prepared for the pitch competition culminating at the end of the summer, and shadowing individual interns as they went about their duties.
Approaching the advertising industry from the perspective of the MAIP program offered several advantages to my study. First, it ensured that my analysis included a wide variety of perspectives from people of color. Second, the MAIP interns were placed at agencies all over the city and so their participation in my study greatly expanded the reach of my data beyond my three host agencies. Finally, MAIP’s centralized housing enabled a convenient and comfortable gathering place for focus group discussions.

**Data Overview**

This study includes a total of 109 unique informants that participated in 21 focus groups, filled out 149 surveys, and granted 30 interviews. I also took handwritten notes while conducting ethnographic observation at my agencies, which I later wrote up as 120 pages of field notes. The next section will go over each of these methods in more detail. (For focus group structure, survey instruments, and interview schedules, etc. please see Appendix D.)

**Focus Groups**

61 interns participated in at least one of my focus groups. Together, they represented 19 different advertising agencies in New York City: DDB, Deutsch, Draftfcb, Euro RSCG, G2, Gotham, Grey Group, Horizon Media, Kaplan Thaler Group, Kirshenbaum Bond Senecal + Partners, McCann Erickson, McGarryBowen, MEC, Mediacom, Merkley + Partners, Ogilvy & Mather, PHD Worldwide, Publicis, TBWA\'Chiat\'Day (see Figure 3). As a whole, my sample of 61 interns was largely female (72%) and comprised almost entirely of undergraduates (college juniors and
seniors). Thirty-six were MAIP interns (59%) and 25 were White interns (41%). I recruited each of these two groups in different ways.

![Intern Host Agencies](image)

**Figure 3: Intern Host Agencies**

During MAIP’s orientation weekend in New York City, I introduced myself in front of an assembly of all 93 interns of color, explained my interest in race inequality in advertising, and then used the occasion to invite them to join focus groups. Of the 36 MAIP interns that agreed to participate in this study, their self-identified race affiliations broke down as follows: 12 Black/African American, 11

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29 My sample of 36 MAIP interns thus represented 39% of the New York City MAIP population and 25% of the National MAIP program as a whole, which totaled 140 interns and was spread throughout the country in other major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, San Francisco, and Atlanta.
Hispanic/Latino, 7 Asian/Asian American, and 6 Mixed/Multiracial. Given this distribution, I organized the focus groups by race affinity based on the MAIP categories, and again, the interns self-selected resulting in 6 groups: 2 Black/African American, 2 Hispanic/Latino, 1 Asian/Asian American, and 1 Mixed/Multiracial. I met with each of the groups twice over the course of the summer in June and July. We met for a third time in August, but due to scheduling conflicts, those sessions had a different configuration: one Black focus group and then two others with members from the rest of the groups combined. Each session had a particular focus: we discussed race in June, class in July, and gender in August.

All of the groups typically met in the evening, and would last at least 90 minutes though some went a good deal longer when, after dismissal, some interns would opt to stay and keep talking. Since I was staying next door to the Clark Residence, which housed all of the MAIP interns, I was able to host the focus groups in a private conference room conveniently located on site. I supplied cold drinks and snacks during each session and would open the proceedings with a preamble explaining the study, my intent to audio record, and commitment to anonymity along with ground rules of confidentiality and issues of informed consent (see Appendix D). I would then break the ice with an open-ended check-in, often using a general probe like “What are you telling your friends back home?” before getting into that night’s topic. Throughout the session, we would periodically pause to fill

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30 Two caveats: 1) these relative numbers are not representative of MAIP as a whole, since the majority of the group was Asian/Asian American; 2) MAIP also offered a category of American Indian/Native American, but the only relevant participant said she identified more as White and thus would feel more comfortable in the Mixed/Multiracial group.
out portions of a written survey, then open up the floor.\textsuperscript{31} Towards the end, depending on the timing, I often had the participants rank the questions on the survey that they would most like to discuss as a group. We then tallied the results and focused our attention on the most popular questions for the remainder. During the last round of focus groups, which centered around gender, I set aside time for a paraphrase check as a way for me to reflect back what I was hearing, float some preliminary findings, and ask "does that sound right to you?" This was a helpful step for testing the validity of my findings. Attendance varied, but, as a whole, 24 of my 36 MAIP participants attended at least one of the in-person focus groups and, of those, 15 came to at least two sessions and 12 came to all three (see Figure 4).\textsuperscript{32}

![Figure 4: Intern Focus Group Participants Broken Down by Topic and Race](image)

\textsuperscript{31} The questions covered topics ranging from workplace controversies and ethical dilemmas to feelings of excitement and jealousy on the job: what are you telling your friends about this week? were there times when you felt uncomfortable? or like you didn’t belong? did you learn any “unwritten rules” of working in advertising this week? how do you think the events of this week would have been experienced by people of a different race than you? Gender? Class background? In order to get to class, I also asked questions like: what are your friends doing this summer? was there any financial hardship for you to get here? how do you define “success” for yourself? And to explore race and gender identities, I will solicited identifications, probed sensitivity to White privilege and patriarchy, and tested whether their sense of identity includes essential differences or unique insights based on sex or skin color. (For more details, see Appendix F)

\textsuperscript{32} Those who couldn’t attend filled out surveys over email or Facebook.
I took a different tack when recruiting my White intern participants. As I was already ensconced within three major advertising firms to observe their internship programs, I made contact with White interns in those settings and invited them to join focus groups sessions that I would host in a private conference room on the campus of NYU within the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication. Though I had designed these focus groups to be White-only, I did not foreground this fact, instead telling the interns that I would be splitting them up according to gender. I used a similar pretext to recruit must-hires (interns with family connections, all of whom were White) for these same sessions.33 This resulted in two focus group sessions for each topic (race, class, and gender), totalling six in all. As further incentive, I offered a small stipend ($10) to cover subway fare and a sandwich. The White focus groups mirrored the MAIP sessions in length, structure, and topic. For those Whites that did come, attendance varied: 16 out of 25 came at least once, 9 came at least twice, and 3 came to all three focus group sessions.34

33 I justify this deception in three ways. First, it is common social science practice to misdirect the participant and thereby mitigate the effect of social desirability. Second, while my interest in MAIP made the race question self-evident, it would have been awkward to directly ask White interns to discuss their White experience, something they are rarely, if ever, asked to do. Indeed, this is part of what the current study interrogates and tries to make strange—the invisibility of Whiteness. Finally, as concerning the must-hires, there was no way for me to express my interest in this aspect of their identity without putting my agency gatekeepers, often located within Human Resources, at risk. After all, these interns were, by definition, connected to very powerful people both within and without the agency.

34 Again, those who couldn’t attend filled out surveys over email or Facebook.
Surveys

I used surveys to create a space inside the focus groups for participants to collect their thoughts individually -- in order to counter the momentum of groupthink and capture sentiments that may not have been represented in spoken conversation. After all, as Dávila (2001) points out, for all their advantages, focus groups do tend to create an internal group dynamic: "while the structure does provide space for spontaneous exchange and is most revealing of social dynamics that may emerge across participants, it can also hinder individuals from expressing views that may contradict those of the others" (p. 189). Most of the surveys were taken live with paper and pencil, usually during designated pauses in the focus group session where respondents would answer a group of questions. Others were delivered over e-mail or Facebook to participants who could not attend the live session. Of these, I was pleasantly surprised by how many of the interns wrote several paragraphs of rich and elaborate responses; I did not anticipate that students would put so much time and effort into reflecting upon their experience without the peer pressure of others or my vigilant eye. As you can see in Figure 5, the relatively inconvenient location meant that, in contrast to my MAIP participants, my White participants were more likely to fill out a survey than attend a focus group. Overall, I collected a total of 149 surveys: 88 filled out on paper during a focus group session and 61 over email or Facebook after-the-fact.
The surveys suggested that the interns, whether White or of color, held much in common as a group. For instance, most tended to be liberal on social issues, especially gay marriage. They often described their "dream job" as a "fun" place to work, with flexible hours, casual dress codes (no suits!), and creative tasks (no numbers!). Most wanted to make funny and memorable commercials that their friends would watch on YouTube and hoped to avoid pharmaceutical advertising either for creative reasons (too many regulatory restrictions) or ethical reasons (deceptive techniques). And while none had taken any classes critical of advertising, most said they would also refuse to advertise for cigarette companies.35 Almost all thought that society was racist, but did not think they were, themselves, with most claiming to have had grown up with friends from different races and ethnicities.36

35 While few gave specific reasons, this anti-cigarette sentiment may have been cultivated by The Truth, a highly effective youth-oriented anti-smoking campaign satirizing how tobacco executives try to fool the public. The effort was launched in Florida in 1998 and later went national with funding by the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (http://www.thetruth.com/about/).

36 Though I did not press this point, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) did, by finding out how close these friendships actually were (pp. 110-111), the responses to the next question were suggestive: interns of color said they been called names because of their race, while
The surveys also suggested an interesting axis of unequal advantage. Though Whites were under half of my total sample, they represented almost all (15 out of 19) of the Greek-affiliated interns (10 in sororities and 5 in fraternities). This matters for two reasons. First, the Greek System creates social networks on campus that often serve to buttress future professional and political careers. For example, Dukcevich (2003) estimates that "about a quarter of all chief executives on the Forbes Super 500 list of America's largest corporations were members of college fraternities" and that once Greek-affiliated students graduate, "they can tap into the network of past fraternity brothers or sisters who litter all tiers of corporate America" (p. 1). In other words, Greek affiliation can help create the necessary conditions for referral hires through closed social networks. Second, since most "fraternities and sororities are segregated," post-collegiate professional networking further inhibits cross-racial socialization (Jensen, 2005, p. 20). This has serious implications for the advertising industry since it is a highly social and very relationship-dependent business. One final difference bears mentioning. While most Whites interns did not. I would argue that name-calling indicates a multi-racial environment, while the lack of racial insults towards Whites suggests racial homogeneity or perhaps an overwhelming sense of White dominance. For instance, prior research has found that White respondents overwhelmingly approve an interracial lifestyle, yet do not interact with Black people on a daily basis such that that less than 10% of Whites have close Black friends creating "the apparent 'paradox' between White's commitment to the principle of interracialism and their mostly White pattern of association" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p.105). In addition, all of my mixed/multiracial informants noted that they were not called names, often because they passed for White, a further indication of minorities adapting to predominantly White spaces.

37 The Greek system has also "spawned 48% of all U.S. presidents, 42% of U.S. senators, 30% of U.S. congressmen, and 40% of U.S. Supreme Court justices" (Dukcevich, 2003, p. 1).
of the interns were majoring in communication, advertising, or marketing, and thus studying in a field directly relevant to their internships, there were several that came from finance, business, and accounting. Of the latter group, all were White, and of those, almost all were must-hires. As such, on the level of academic preparation, it would appear that several of the White must-hires were actually less qualified for their internship slots than their contemporaries of color. As one HR practitioner told me, for many must-hire interns, the experience is a lark; while for MAIP interns, it’s serious business:

You still have the situation where White interns may be like the client’s daughter or the president’s nephew -- that kind of thing, where it’s not -- it’s kind of more of like a job for the summer rather than -- the students who go through MAIP are really seeing it as a stepping stone to getting a career in the industry.

**Interviews**

I formally interviewed eleven HR managers and diversity officers from six large advertising agencies with headquarters in Manhattan. I also spoke to a dozen more in more informal and off-the-record settings along with several advertising practitioners working in the disciplines of creative, planning, and account management at other large agencies. In all cases, I either audio recorded the conversation and/or took handwritten notes. Almost all interviews took place on-site, typically in the informant’s office. Despite the relative lack of privacy, most of my interviewees were comfortable enough to make comments critical of their own agency and, sometimes, even their colleagues just down the hall. Although, as we will soon see, there were also times when doors were closed and voices lowered. Moreover, I didn’t think it necessary to conduct these interviews off-site. Compared
to the interns, who I believed would benefit from a more neutral focus group environment, most of my interviewees were much more senior and relatively secure in their positions—not only within their own agencies, but in the wider field of advertising human resources. They were, in Dávila's (2001) words, “corporate intellectuals” who, despite working at rival agencies, attended conferences, socialized together, and sat on the same boards—thus forming "a small network of key players... involved in the creation and circulation of knowledge...and belonging to common networks and occupying similar positions within corporate America" (p. 18). In fact, the group was so tight that it was only a matter of days before they all figured out the names of my other host agencies, which brings me to the steps I took to conceal the identities of my participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

Approaching the advertising industry as a research site presented several obstacles. Nader (1999), in her call for anthropologists in the United States to “study up” the ladder of social influence at home, counts “advertising” as among the central institutions “which most people on the street know have played a major role in forming modern American society” (p. 292). And yet, ethnographies of advertising agencies are very rare in the United States--likely due to issues of “access, attitudes, ethics, and methodology” (p. 301). In other words, as Gusterson (1997) observes, the powerful do not wish to be studied:

Participant observation is a research technique that does not travel well up the social structure...where ethnographic access is by permission of people with careers at stake, where loitering strangers with notebooks are rarely welcome, and where potential informants are too busy to chat (pp. 115-16).
In addition, I was investigating a potentially explosive topic—race discrimination—in the midst of a possible class action lawsuit from the NAACP. Given these logistical constraints and legal liabilities, I devised a 2-page research proposal carefully outlining: 1) possible benefits and risks to the agency; 2) how I would maintain anonymity of all individuals and institutions; and 3) the steps I would take to protect proprietary information. I also attached a letter of recommendation from my advisor and a resume emphasizing my background in television production. More specifically, the proposal promised the gatekeepers at my potential host agencies that I would take three steps:

First, I would sign a non-disclosure agreement and take care to excise any proprietary information or other trade secrets when I publish or present my research in public. Second, I will keep the name of your agency anonymous. I also understand that the advertising world is a small one and, despite my best efforts, word might spread. Therefore, I am taking the extra precaution of including multiple intern cohorts and agencies in my study. This will make it much more difficult to trace statements or events back to particular individuals or institutions. (For complete proposal, please see Appendix E)

Opting to study three agencies was a good move, since industry insiders soon traded notes on the researcher in their midst. Thus, while an inner-circle may now know the names of the host agencies involved in my study, the redundancy of generic titles and positions has added an extra layer of protection. After a long process, this document ultimately helped me to achieve access to my three host agencies along with the full cooperation of the MAIP program and IRB approval from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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38 For more details, please see Appendix C.
Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter at hand, I assigned pseudonyms to everyone that I spoke with directly—even those who might have given me permission to use their name, so as to not provide clues that might identify their colleagues who wished to remain anonymous. Exceptions to this would be people who I observed speaking to large groups in public spaces. In those cases, I initially identified the speaker by both first and last name, then by last name only. In contrast, all pseudonyms are first name only. For example, while “Tiffany Warren” is a real name, “Darius” is a pseudonym. I have included a map of my quoted participants’ pseudonyms below in Figure 6. The map sorts the names into two groups: HR and other advertising practitioners on the left, and interns divided by race on the right (must-hires are underlined). The majority of pseudonyms in this study are based on the most common first names for either males or females in the United States according to the 1990 US Census, though I also gave the interns in my focus groups the option of choosing their own. I have also changed other identifying information when and where appropriate: I reference clients only through general product categories rather than specific brands, agencies with alphabetical letters (Agency A, Agency B, etc.), and positions or relationships (e.g., CEO and Father) with approximate equivalents (e.g., President and Aunt).

39 I directly quoted 65 of my 109 total informants.

40 Several interns were disappointed to learn that their actual names would not appear in print. Though only about a third of the interns opted to choose their own pseudonym, those that did seemed to appreciate the gesture: “I want to be named something tight -- no Mary or Molly or anything like that… I want a Swahili name!”
Regarding my interviews with HR practitioners, the high number of female names rightly suggest the overwhelming gender bias of human resources departments in general and my sample in particular (95% female), but also obscure the race/ethnicity of any individual informant (my total sample was approximately 60 percent White—all of whom worked in HR—and 40 percent people of color—most of whom worked on diversity issues, often within HR departments). I opted not to identify the race/ethnicity of my HR informants for two reasons. First, I did not ask my informants to self-identify and so would have felt uncomfortable doing so on their behalf. Second, since people of color are in the extreme minority within agencies, too much specificity in this area could make these informants more
susceptible to identification and therefore potentially put them at risk of retaliation from colleagues or supervisors.

**My Position**

My own position vis-à-vis this project carried with it a particular set of opportunities and limitations. As a middle-class, and highly educated, 36-year-old White male, my physical characteristics, social attributes, and cultural capital created axes of affinity and difference with my informants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 142). In at least one case, my age seemed to help. As one White gatekeeper put it, “You're not like a big, scary, old guy. You're like a youthful, nice person with an interest in what the interns are doing.” Her supervisor agreed, noting I wasn’t "so far away from [the interns] that it would be like, 'Who's this awkward adult dude?'"

This recalls Dávila’s (2001) understanding of how her own position helped open up doors at Hispanic ad agencies: “The fact that I could present myself as a university professor who would be writing a book on this industry and am an educated, Spanish-speaking, light-skinned Latina, close to the ideal ‘Latin look’ (discussed later), also facilitated my entry into their circles” (pp. 18-19). In my case, following Dyer (1997), I suspect my White identity helped me blend in with the White majority of my host agencies since “Whiteness” gains much of its power from its ubiquity in representation; it is everywhere, yet nowhere (pp. 2-3). I am confident that my own Whiteness encouraged other Whites to let down their guard when
discussing issues around race and diversity—particularly in all-White focus group settings.41

On the other hand, my age, gender, and ethnicity also presented several limitations. First, when speaking with HR practitioners, I found that Whites tended to be quite forthcoming, confessional even, when compared to my interviewees of color, who were generally more cautious and circumspect in their remarks. Moreover, I suspect that, were I Black for instance, this dynamic could have very well operated in the reverse. That being said, there was certainly more at stake for the practitioners of color in my study; all of them were specifically tasked to work on diversity initiatives at their agencies. In contrast, the White practitioners tended to have a broader range of responsibilities and, for that matter, more seniority, which could have encouraged a more casual and transparent stance. Second, almost all of my interviewees in HR were women. Thus, had I been a women, I might have been able to achieve a deeper level of rapport.

Finally, I encountered a somewhat converse dynamic when interacting with the interns in my study. On one hand, the multiple combinations of various identities and scenarios are far too numerous and complex to account for here in any systematic way. Nevertheless, some interesting patterns emerged that merit mention. First, while my Whiteness likely facilitated the expressions of backlash against affirmative action in many of my White focus groups, I wouldn’t say that it

41 While I did, on occasion, push back, I stopped short of what Okolie (2005) describes as "interventive in-depth interviewing" which pursues anti-racist goals by deploying questions "in a theoretically grounded manner that not only seeks factual information, but also informs the subjects in a theoretically framed manner in order to help conscientize them" in real time (p. 254).
created a deeper rapport when compared with my focus groups of color. On the contrary, my earlier affiliation with the MAIP program and physical presence in the same building complex likely contributed to a more loose and friendly focus group atmosphere when compared to the White sessions, which felt more tight and formal. In addition, all the MAIP interns knew each other already, while the White focus participants came from different agencies and thus hadn’t yet met. And while my interactions with MAIP interns often positioned me as a curious outsider, my participants were often bemused and gracious in their explanations, likely sensing that, given my focus on identities of inequality, I was, after all, rooting for the “underdog” and, therefore likely to be “on their side” (Becker, 1967; Nader, 1972). Finally, both of my Black focus groups had the most consistent and robust attendance over the series of three sessions, which, in turn, created a palpable sense of continuity along with mutual trust and affection.

Ethnography

When I began developing this project, I initially considered actually doing an internship myself but, like Dávila (2001), ultimately decided against it. Besides being difficult to pull off because of my age (I was 36 at the time, and most of the interns were in their early twenties), this kind of participant observation would have limited me to one site thus removing the additional anonymity protection enabled by multiple sites. As Grindstaff (2002) notes, reflecting on her work on the sets of television talk shows, total immersion has other drawbacks:

Being just an intern was trying at times. It meant always having to defer to others, accept unquestioningly any task no matter how small or menial, tolerate assumptions about one’s worth, intellect, ability, and never show anger when people canceled or refused meetings or interviews. The very lack
of status that advantaged me in certain ways [in terms of access] also meant sacrificing whatever opportunities might have come my way had I emphasized the more prestigious, official role of researcher. (p. 283)

Moreover, since the bulk of my time in the field was going to be limited to one summer, I wanted to avoid any busy work not germane to my research questions. Besides, it would also have been difficult for me to “fit in” with the other interns if I had been transparent about my status as a researcher. The alternative, pretending to be a “real” intern, would have involved concocting a long series of lies, which in addition to raising ethical questions, would simply have been exhausting and distracting—especially given the close quarters interns tend to keep both on the job and off. Even if I could have resolved this issue, I still would have had to decide whether to accept the paid stipend from my host agency and justify occupying a position that could have been allocated to a student hoping to break into the industry. In light of this long list of cons, I decided to engage my hosts as an academic researcher and interact with each agency’s internship program as an outside observer. To remind my participants of this status, I carried a small notebook with me at all times, making frequent notations to signal my researcher status.

In sum, I do not consider this study to be a proper ethnography; my time in the field was both much too short and spread across too many sites. However, I did draw on ethnographic methods—albeit more observational than participatory—similar to how Ho (2009) combined “immersion with movement” and developed a method “broad enough to access Wall Street worldviews and practices, yet particular enough to understand how such norms were constituted on a daily basis
within particular institutions” (pp. 18 – 19). The multiple sites in my study also helped check validity, allowing for greater generalizability in terms of relating my analysis to the advertising industry as a whole. To keep track of my observations, I frequently audio recorded voice memos and took “head notes” on site as a “permanent record” that helped concretize moments and events that were “situated, ambiguous, and fleeting” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 159-160). Whenever possible, I also tried to be as objective as possible when assessing a scene by asking, “What is going on here?” then proceeding to the “who, when, where, and how,” while postponing the “why” until later stages of analysis (p. 162).

Most of my time inside the agencies was fairly uneventful. The interns that I shadowed spent most of the day sitting in their cubicles—doing data entry or killing time on Facebook. And while sitting in on the intern group projects and “lunch-and-learn” sessions did provide me with a useful overview of the advertising industry’s common sense around its own modus operandi, much of the data I collected on site at the agencies did not directly pertain to the topic of my inquiry: the role of ideology in the reproduction of White labor. On the other hand, my consistent presence at my host agencies was absolutely crucial for developing the necessary rapport with the White interns I would eventually recruit to join my focus groups. Being there week-after-week also increased my odds for serendipitous moments of insight. For instance, the more often I spoke to my hosts, the lower their guard became, which eventually led to a surprising moment of unscripted exasperation—a tip that would become a central focus of my analysis.
Chance Discoveries

Before entering the field, I was unaware that must-hires were so prevalent throughout the advertising industry’s internship programs. Indeed, I had never even heard of the term. Thus, I lacked the vocabulary to inquire about what would eventually become a central organizing construct of my dissertation. I first stumbled upon the must-hire phenomenon during an informational interview with an HR Director. I asked her about the most challenging part of her job, and she didn’t hesitate:

The need to take ‘must takes.’ The nepotism factor is really, really tough -- like the lengths you need to go to say ‘no’ and the number of people who you cannot say ‘no’ to...We’ve had kids who are terrible, like ‘must-hires’ who literally don’t come, who surf the Internet and look for porn, who do online shopping, or are just really offensively bad and it’s embarrassing to then say, 'But he was a must-hire,' which is not something I would ever really say...a lot of, like, must-takes -- it’s really funny -- they’re like Russian literature majors who are like 'Well, what am I going to do with a Russian Literature major? I’m gonna’ call my Dad’s best friend and he’s gonna’ get me a job!'

Armed with the technical term, I was now able to ask a variety of other HR practitioners about “must-hires” more directly. They were ready to talk:

We had this one intern, and he was just—we had to hire him—he was a client’s kid...and we’d be in a seminar and he’d be on his Blackberry or he’d take a nap! Or he’d be reading the newspaper...so I went up the account person whose client it was and said ‘I’m firing him.’ And she said, you can’t do that!

I’d say we have a handful that are pretty much like--in quotations--like ‘must hires’ every summer, ’cause it’s like, I mean, in any industry, really the CEO’s assistant’s step-daughter or so-and-so’s best friend, the client’s kid, you know, whatever. We do a lot of full-time hires -- but for the most part, they’ve always worked out pretty well because people who know someone in the industry just, they end up--they usually end up doing a good job. And at such a young level it’s like, really, you just have to be smart and eager to learn.

It will be the CEO saying 'This person, this person, this person, this person, this person, this person, and this person.' It will be the President saying two people from
his alma mater...friends of friends of friends and cousins of whoever...client referrals, great, and then it will be me picking the kids from the various [diversity] programs that I work with to make sure they have this opportunity...A big head-honcho from another agency reached out to our President -- the program had already started -- and said, 'So-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so's kid need an internship,' Fffft! 'FYI -- take another' because no one here has the balls to say, 'No, we can't. We have no space.' No one. My manager? No. Doesn't speak up. Won't say no. I'll say no!

One HR practitioner even speculated that the presence of must-hires might explain why other agencies might have rejected my requests for access:

At the end of the day, internship programs, you know, you get the asks -- you absolutely get the asks...Many of the internship programs at many of the big agencies -- like anything else in life -- have kind of the 'must-take' candidates, so maybe that particular agency hadn't developed the full complement of who was going to be in their program and maybe they had, you know, two kids from very senior clients. and they thought, 'You know what? We don't want this person going home to their Dad or Mom, who's the client, and saying, 'Yeah, they've got this PhD student in there too asking all kinds of questions.'

When I proposed to yet another HR director that, given the race crisis in advertising, her agency's internship program could be "all diversity, all the time," her response was frank: "Good luck with that. Your clients want -- you know, 'You have to take this kid' or Corporate says 'We've got three kids we need you to take,' so that's already four kids and your CEO says, 'I've got two kids from my alma mater,' and someone else says, 'I have two kids.'" Of course, all of this has serious class implications. For instance, at another agency, I was told that one of the interns actually bought their slot by offering the highest bid at a fundraising auction for a private high school. The unfolding of these revelations was made possible by my immersion in the field, which, over time, built up familiarity and trust and thereby opened up opportunities to triangulate trends—indeed, even the common use of the
very term “must-hire”— resulting in my systematic critique outlined below in Chapter 4.

The second surprising moment of discovery also came about through a happy coincidence; except, this time, it was during a MAIP focus group and the roles were reversed when Kioni figured out that she was in the right place at the right time to help point my research in a new direction. She even invited me to come to her agency and see for myself. I took her up on the offer, gaining access to Agency D—where the intern group project pitch competition would be dedicated to a rebranding of the agency’s own internal diversity initiative. I conduct a close reading of these intern presentations--along with the judges’ reactions--and examine the attendant ideological assumptions, below in Chapter 6.42

I would argue that these two instances of new discoveries both point towards the importance of qualitative fieldwork for critical media industry studies (Havens et al., 2009). Indeed, if it weren’t for my in situ contact with dozens of HR practitioners or my repeated focus group sessions with Kioni, it’s unlikely that I would have discovered either the widespread nature of must-hires or such an appropriate and relevant case study for my project. Moreover, both of these developments shifted my priorities whilst still in the field. In a sense, this is to be expected, since the inherent flux of situated research means that “plans sometimes change, and adjustments in methods and problem focus may continue right up to the time that one leaves the field” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 65). After all, as Miller

42 Since this involved a single-day of observation, I did not assign pseudonyms to the interns or judges at Agency D, instead referring to them through descriptions of their race, sex and/or role.
(2003) argues, “methodology in anthropology is part of the research findings...because we don't even know what we are studying until we have nearly finished studying it” (p. 77). In sum, by stumbling upon 1) must-hires as a material practice and 2) the ideological process of “rebranding” diversity, I was able to formulate the central organizing structure of my analysis of how the ideological screens of colorblind meritocracy help conceal the material practices that advantage Whites inside advertising agencies. This new direction ultimately turned me to sociological literatures on race and labor to help me think through my data upon my return (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Royster, 2003).

Analysis

Drawing on some of the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), my analytical frame is both iterative and emergent--toggling between induction and deduction in a constant comparative process of triangulation between my own observations, the rhetoric of informants, and the extant literature:

![Figure 7: Analytical Triangulation](image)

I followed the model further elaborated by Glaser (1978), which holds that data sampling, analysis, and theory development should remain open and emergent throughout the research process. For Glaser, data is an all-inclusive category that
can include personal experiences, popular culture, and even academic literature—all of which can be categorized, compared, and sorted in a process of flexible and open coding. These codes are refined as more data is collected until more substantive themes emerge. Selective coding then delimits the study and begins to narrow the analyst’s focus towards a central variable. This, in turn, leads to “memoing” (writing to generate key concepts and theoretical explanations) which the analyst then sorts to further refine the central variable and create a framework for the formal write-up. Thus, grounded theory seeks to free the analyst of preconceptions by postponing both the literature review and hypothesis formation until well after data collection has begun. This expands the traditional notion of validity to how well the resulting concepts fit the incidents they represent. Grounded theory also asks: is the study relevant to the concerns of the participants? does it transcend academic purposes?

While grounded theory, along with qualitative methods in general, has been accused of lacking the rigor, replicability, and falsifiability of more deductive and quantitative methods, Becker (2009) points out that many “research classics” in sociology, such as the work of Erving Goffman (1959, 1979), did not construct firewalls between theory, data, and analysis, but rather moved between them throughout the process, refining their research questions along the way (Becker, 2009, p. 548). In my own case, I generated audio memos, headnotes, field notes, concept maps, and research memos both during and immediately following my period of fieldwork. These writings pursued a mode of representation that sought to 1) interpret the flow of social discourse, 2) discern the meaningful “said” of such discourse “from its perishing occasions” and 3) fix it in “perusable terms” for later
analysis (Geertz, 1973, p. 20). This process also served as a way for me to think through the data as I was collecting it in order “to produce a more focused research question” and “to push the question forward” by reflecting on “the overall goals of the project, the theoretical question, the data, and the remaining gaps” (Lareau, 1996, p. 227). Thus, my research question did not descend fully formed from heaven; it was rather a product of grounded theory’s constant comparative method–a circular process of observation and analysis that put my own observations in dialogue with previous work and the idiosyncratic opportunities of access to informants afforded by networking.43

**NVivo 9**

In my analysis of data collected through focus groups sessions, written surveys, in-person interviews, and ethnographic observations, I used NVivo 9, a widely respected computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program well suited for handling large amounts of information (Hutchinson, Johnston & Breckon, 2009; Murthy, 2008; Sweeney & González, 2008).44 First, I entered the relevant audio transcriptions, survey results, and field notes into the program.45 Then I read

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43 For more on the process of gaining access to my field sites, please see Appendix C.

44 I would argue that programs such as NVivo are both more efficient and more valid than the process of printing, cutting, and shuffling note cards since its non-linear, networked capacity allows me to assign multiple tags to single data points and instantly review any pull quote within the surrounding context.

45 I reviewed all my data on paper before importing the digital files into NVivo. For instance, I read all the surveys twice: first underlining everything of interest then highlighting only those passages relating directly to racism (typically on the topics of affirmative action, White privilege and minority scholarships). In the second round, and across all my data sources throughout this project, I paid most attention to passages that seemed representative of my sample as a whole– and, of those, favored the pithy,
through them, pausing along the way to code passages, sentences, and even individual phrases by highlighting-then-tagging them with digital “nodes.” This process was, in turn, both deductive and inductive.

On one hand, much of my original round of coding was meant to categorize and label topics that I initially brought to the study; these were things I expected to find. An example of this would be a survey question that I asked of all of my focus group participants, such as their opinion on “affirmative action” (to see all of my surveys, please see Appendix D). In this instance, I would use NVivo to code each response to this question with the node “affirmative action.” Once this was done, I could then call up all of the responses tagged “affirmative action” in one document where I could review them as a group of references to see what sorts of patterns emerged. If I had a question about the surrounding context of any given reference, NVivo also provided hyper-links that would send me back to the corresponding surrounding context of the original transcript. I went through this same process for all of the relevant questions from my survey instruments—converting topics to nodes, which I would then use to tag relevant references. Figure 8 offers a bar graph visualization of the twenty most popular nodes (out of a total of 48 nodes applied to 313 references) that I used when coding my focus groups on race, listed in descending order of coverage percentage. As we can see, the node “affirmative

creative, vivid, and/or anecdotal. When transcribing, I stayed true to the spoken speech as much as possible, occasionally removing any overly cumbersome clutter (e.g., repeated use of the verbal tick “like”).

71
“action” covered 17% of the race focus groups transcript, which means that 17% of the text was highlighted and tagged with that node.\textsuperscript{46}

![Race Focus Groups - Coding by Node](image)

**Figure 8: Relative Percentage Coverage of Nodes for Race Focus Groups**

Looked at another way, Figure 9 is a “tree map” that demonstrates how, in applying nodes to my interview data, I generated a set of references for each of my HR participants. The map includes the first-name-only pseudonym of each participant (sometimes interviewed in pairs) and the total number of references (passages tagged with a node) and is organized into boxes and a color gradient representing relative size: the larger the box and greener the color, the higher the number of references.

![HR Informants Compared by Number of Coding References](image)

**Figure 9: HR Informants Compared by Number of Coding References**

\textsuperscript{46} The percentages in Figure 8 do not add up to 100% because a single passage from the original transcript can either be tagged with multiple nodes (and thus constitute multiple references in *NVivo*) or not tagged at all.
On the other hand, while the above aspect of my coding process was fairly stable, systematic, and deductive in its application, I did not use a strict or exhaustive coding protocol at any stage of this project, neither entering nor exiting the field with a particular theory in mind that I wished to test. Instead, my research question emerged through, and was refined by, my iterative and therefore *inductive* analysis of the data. For instance, while I initially looked for the topics stemming directly from my survey questions, I also noted the kinds of stories my informants told to explain their material circumstances such as “meritocracy,” “colorblindness,” and “individuality.” These, in turn, became nodes that I could apply to other aspects of my data such as the observations of a case study that I describe in Chapter 6. In this way, some nodes became more important while others faded into the background. In sum, I generated 150 nodes in all, but, over time, narrowed and collapsed them down to 68 that I organized into seven groups: Material Practices, Numbers, Meritocracy, Fun, Method, Identity, and Gender. Again, Figure 10 depicts a “tree map” of all of my nodes broken up according to group and relative size, this time calculating the total number of the node with the largest number of references in each group.
In describing my fieldwork sites, data collection techniques, ethical considerations, and analytical process, this chapter has argued that the methods behind the argument that follows were both deliberate and rigorous. Throughout this dissertation, I have engaged with all of my material—whether gained through a focus group, survey, interview, or observation—in order to go beyond numbers and tap into the subjectivities of my participants. This was neither a “clean” nor straightforward process, but I mobilized the constant comparative approach of grounded theory throughout my analysis in order to check my own biases and, whenever possible, let the data discipline my findings. In the pages that follow, I make a spirited argument but do not claim my own conclusion to be either inevitable or necessarily final. Indeed, following Gramsci (1971), we can expect the role of ideology in the material reproduction of White labor inside advertising agencies to evolve over time, flexing and adapting to new pressures. My intervention is thus contingent on the current period; and yet, as we shall see, race inequality inside advertising is a long-standing problem. The next chapter considers how a contemporary television drama set in America’s recent past casts new light on what the ad men, and women,
of today still have yet to overcome.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORY: THE GHOSTS OF MAD MEN

At the 2009 MAIP graduation ceremony, keynote speaker David Prince, Senior Vice President of Talent Development at the 4A's, addressed a room full of students of color who had just completed summer internships in agencies all over the country. Gesturing to an all-White cast photo of Mad Men, the popular AMC drama set in a fictional Manhattan advertising agency in the 1960s, Prince declared "these days are over!" As a rhetorical device, the show provided him a convenient baseline against which the current level of diversity in advertising could be favorably compared and a good strategy for boosting the morale of a room full of potential hires, many of whom, with freshly updated resumes under their arms, were about to walk next door to a diversity job fair where upwards of 40 major agencies would be recruiting them. Given this context, it would certainly be reassuring to be told that you wouldn't, on your own, be integrating an all-White agency nor would those White people have any interest in keeping it White.

Furthermore, as other MAIP speakers would argue the following summer, interns of color could actually be at an advantage given the increasing percentages (and therefore buying power) of the country's minority populations. But to say that "these days are over" is to flatter the present in light of the relatively backwards past while ignoring the very material vestiges of racial segregation that still remain along with the sexist enclaves of old boys' clubs. As we will see, plenty of important business deals, insider information trading, and networking/relationship forming still takes place outside the office in the context of closed social networks, such as...
the kinds of promotion opportunities that are disclosed, and even offered, during weekend barbecues up in the Hamptons where Whites tend to socialize amongst themselves. Such mono-racial settings of privilege, while common in the fictional world of *Mad Men*, are no longer considered to be socially acceptable and widely believed to be in decline.

And yet, even in the post-civil rights era, the United States has continued to marginalize people of color within social, educational, and economic institutions thereby linking Whiteness to the governing managerial class (Lipsitz, 1995; Wise, 2005). In similar fashion, despite significant advances won in the 1970’s, women who choose to work outside the home are still steered towards “feminine” professions like teaching, nursing, and administrative support roles (assistant/receptionist/secretary) in corporate settings such as advertising (Alvesson, 1998; Leuze & Strauss, 2009; Levanon et al, 2009). As a result, most White middle-class men can still presume their entitlement to the economic capital that rewards authority in the workplace. This chapter will argue that the twin specters of sexism and racism in *Mad Men*, far from merely flattering the present by condemning a less-than-enlightened past, point towards the structural roots of contemporary problems that continue to haunt the advertising industry today. To do so, I will summarize a body of work quantifying advertising’s current race- and sex-based disparities, then draw on interviews with human resources practitioners and others working inside the industry to explore how race and gender function and intersect on the level of the everyday.
As Havens et al (2009) observe, most critical examinations of media industries are conducted through the lens of political economy and thus emphasize the “macrolevel structural issues of regulatory regimes, concentration of media ownership, historical change, and their larger connection to capital interests” while neglecting the “quotidian practices and competing goals, which are not subject to direct and regular oversight by corporate owners, and which define the experiences of those working in the industry” (pp. 234, 236). Following Foucault (2003) and Gramsci (1971), the authors see power as not merely coercive or hierarchical but also as a “form of leadership constructed through discourse” and made manifest in the “micropolitics of everyday meaning making” and the “seemingly irrefutable logics of how systems should operate, thereby bringing to the forefront the material consequences of industrial ‘common-sense’...the way in which institutional discourses are internalized and acted upon by cultural workers” (pp. 237, 238, 247).

And yet, as Hesmondhalgh (2007) notes, there is a general “lack of empirical attention to what happens in cultural industry organizations” and even “the application of cultural studies approaches...have been relatively sparse" (pp. 37, 42).

In that spirit, this project does not treat the statistical inequalities of race and gender as sufficient evidence of malicious intent. They, alone, do not prove the racist or sexist motives of either the agency owners or the human resources professionals who recruit and hire new employees on a daily basis. Rather, these numbers suggest “a cultural system with its own tacit and explicit, yet contested, rules” deployed and negotiated by workers with variable degrees of autonomy (Havens et al., 2009, pp. 236, 248). This is not to discount the role of determination, but rather to theorize it
as dialectical—emanating both from within and without. Giddens (1979) explains this dynamic through his theory of “structuration,” or “the mutual dependence of structure and agency” in social life (p. 69). He holds that while we might make some choices in a thoughtful, reflective, or deliberate manner, these instances are relatively rare; most of our daily “decisions” occur below our level of awareness through the momentum of habit and routine. These habits, in turn, are developed, reinforced, and internalized over time in response to existing social norms. Moreover, human agency is not simply a response to external structures or regulations but also sustained and modified through social action. In my analysis, I attend to the subjectivities behind the numbers in an attempt to answer Hesmondhalgh’s (2007) call to examine "how prevailing patterns of cultural behavior are reflected in the cultural industries themselves" by focusing on "questions of power and inequality, including ethnicity and gender” so that we might better "understand how difficult social change might be to achieve and where it might be possible" (pp. 43, 48). I conclude that, despite various efforts to increase racial diversity and promote women within advertising, entrenched social networks essentially function as affirmative action for White men.

The Diversity Crisis

"It’s a terrific show. I watch it religiously.”
(Mullen CEO Joe Grimaldi, quoted in Diaz, 2011)

Apparently, lots of Ad Men like Mad Men. According to one industry observer, 2008 was the year of the Mad Men video holiday card, with agencies mashing up animation and music from the opening credit sequence with the names of their own executives (Robertson, 2009). In another instance, an agency spoofed the popular
television show in a postcard, dressing up as the cast (see Figure 1). Though clearly intended as a harmless retro-chic homage to an imagined past, this photo, as we will soon see, presents a remarkably accurate depiction of the industry’s current leadership structure: all White, mostly men." Other Mad Men tributes have created similarly awkward moments of truth telling. One of my Black informants recounts how, when his agency invited staff to come watch the season premiere and dress up as a character from the show, "a couple of the minorities had a little issue with that" and sarcastically asked one another, "Should we find some janitors' uniforms for this party?"
Though some have criticized *Mad Men* for not featuring any significant characters of color, for Winfrey Harris (2010), this is precisely the point. The show’s "unyielding Whiteness and casual racism" illustrates Ralph Ellison’s notion of Black invisibility: “the way race is there, but not there in the lives of [the] White protagonists" whether it be a minstrel at a garden party, the janitor in the office, or a Black maid at home. Race in *Mad Men* is like a telltale heart, often out of sight, yet always beating just below the surface. Matthew Weiner, *Mad Men’s* creator and head writer, contends that the show’s depiction of race is not only true to its own time, but still reflects advertising today:

> It changes socially. It does not change in advertising. It still has not changed. I defy any of these companies outside of their corporate retreat photos to show me people of color in positions of power. And those people who are out there, who have positions of power, who are of color, I have been in contact with and none of them think there should be more Black faces in that office. (Weiner quoted in Itzkoff, 2010, p. 1)

Matthew Weiner is not the only one calling attention to the persistence of racial inequality within advertising. In what may have been an unintentionally honest moment of self-branding, the 2011 CLIO Awards, "the world’s most recognized global awards competition for advertising" (CLIO Awards, 2011), chose a *Mad Men* theme featuring images of four White men (see Figure 12). Like the *Mad Men* holiday cards and costume parties, the CLIO Awards’ high profile exclusion of both women and people of color from their promotional campaign is oddly fitting given the current context of a long brewing diversity crisis rapidly coming to a head.
Mad Men’s third season is set in 1963. In that same year, the Urban League of Greater New York released a three-year study condemning systematic race discrimination within the ten largest advertising agencies based in New York City. The NAACP’s Roy Wilkins even threatened to launch a boycott. Four years later, in 1967, the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) conducted an investigation and found that people of color represented only 5 percent of advertising industry employees versus 25 percent of the city’s total labor force. In 1975, Vernon Jordan argued that agencies should embrace affirmative action in order to better serve the 25 million Blacks in the United States spending $60 billion annually (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). In 1978, the NYCCHR criticized the industry’s

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47 Kern-Foxworth (1994) describes how the NYCCHR held hearings in 1966 and 1967 where "emphasis was placed on getting Blacks into agencies, because in these capacities they could have an influence on the number of Black models used in advertising as well as the manner in which they were portrayed" (p. 117).
chronic failure to employ African Americans and issued a call for government intervention. Finally, after almost three decades of broken promises and failed reforms, the NYCCHR tried a new tactic: shame. In 2006, the Commission subpoenaed top advertising executives to testify before a public hearing on the diversity crisis in the middle of Advertising Week, a high-profile annual marketing convention based in New York City. In order to avoid appearing, sixteen agencies entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission, pledging to meet diversity hiring goals in professional and management positions over the next three years (Chambers 2008, pp. 128-164). By 2008, the pressure was building, inspiring the trade journal Advertising Age to opine: "No one should be surprised if they do take the next step they've been threatening for the last 40 years: lawsuits and regulation. Agency execs, you can't say you weren't warned" (Wheaton, 2008, p. 1).

In January of 2009, the NAACP stepped into the fray. Partnering with Cyrus Mehri, a civil rights lawyer who has won hundreds of millions of dollars in class-action race discrimination settlements from Texaco, Coca-Cola, and Smith Barney (Helm, 2010), they launched the Madison Avenue Project to pressure the industry through litigation. At the opening press conference, Mehri released a new report detailing how the industry's underpayment, under-hiring, and underutilization of

48 “The 16 advertising agencies that signed [the] diversity agreement with the NYC Commission on Human Rights in September 2006 are: Arnold Worldwide, Avrett, Free & Ginsberg; BBDO; DDB; Draft New York; Euro RSCG Worldwide; FCB New York; Gotham, Inc.; Grey Direct; Grey Interactive; Kaplan Thaler Group, LTD; Merkley + Partners; Ogilvy & Mather; PHD USA; Saatchi & Saatchi; and Young & Rubicam” (NYCCHR, 2006).
African Americans has led to a Black-White gap that is 38 percent larger than the labor market in general—a divergence that has doubled over the past 30 years (Bendick and Egan, 2009, p. ii). Blacks in advertising now earn $.80 on the dollar when compared to equally-qualified Whites and represent only 5.3 percent of managers and professionals instead of the expected 9.6 percent according to numbers from the US Census Bureau and US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—a shortfall which amounts to 7,200 “missing” Black advertising professionals and managers. The report also charts patterns of “occupational segregation” resulting in both “glass ceilings” that limit advancement and “glass walls” that disproportionately place Blacks in less prestigious support functions (p. 33). In sum, the report condemns the industry’s four decades of seeking to “expand the pipeline” of Black employees through small, targeted scholarships and internships as a failed strategy and calls instead for management to look in the mirror, confront their own biases and “change their behavior as employers” (p. 51).

As one observer put it, the diversity numbers in the Madison Avenue Project report are so similar to the NYCCHR’s 1967 study that "you could have swapped out the executive summaries." Mehri describes the phenomena as “a freeze frame,” imagining that if “an anthropologist wanted to come back and see what discrimination [was] like in 1970, you’ve got it right here in the ad industry” (Mehri quoted in Chow, 2010, p. 1). To paraphrase Matthew Weiner, nothing has changed.

Or, as Susan, an HR manager put it, “You walk into agencies and it’s still Mad Men, you know?”
The Gender Gap

In a thought-provoking column entitled “Mad Men and Society's Race Problem,” Winfrey Harris (2010) recounts a scene from the show. Peggy Olson, an up-and-coming copywriter, is on a date with Abe, a radical activist, when the conversation turns to politics. Abe criticizes Peggy’s agency for taking on Fillmore Auto Parts, a company that won’t hire Blacks in the South. Annoyed by the patronizing tone of Abe’s civil rights lecture, Peggy decides to teach him a lesson about sexism. It doesn’t go well:

Peggy: I know. But I have to say, most of the things Negroes can’t do, I can’t do either. And nobody seems to care.
Abe: What are you talking about?
Peggy: [exasperated] Half of the meetings take place over golf, tennis and a bunch of clubs where I’m not allowed to be a member—or even enter! The University Club said the only way I could eat dinner there was if I arrived in a cake.
Abe: There’s no Negro copywriters you know.
Peggy: I’m sure they could fight their way in like I did; believe me, nobody wanted me there.
Abe: [sarcastically] Alright Peggy, we'll have a, uh, civil rights march for women! [Peggy takes her purse, makes an excuse, and exits.]
(Uppendahl, 2011)

In contrasting Abe’s inability to recognize glass ceilings with Peggy’s naïveté regarding her own White privilege, this scene nicely illustrates how a show that ostensibly represents the 1960s can also critique overlapping inequalities that persist some forty years hence, both in advertising and society-at-large.

At first blush, it would appear that the figure of Peggy Olson has come a long way. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women in advertising actually outnumber men, accounting for 66 percent of the total workforce in agencies with 100 or more employees (Bosman, 2005a). But all is not
well and, again, *Mad Men* provides material to dramatize the problem. For instance, echoing Peggy’s complaint, one of my female informants recounts how top management at her agency held a business meeting in a men’s club where women were not admitted without a date. In another example, *Advertising Age* commissioned a cover-page “portrait” of figureheads from the top ten ad agencies (see Figure 13). As though the preponderance of ad *men* weren’t obvious enough, the artist placed them in a mid-century modern setting complete with tumblers and cigars. For Linda Sawyer, CEO of Deutsch, Inc., and the lone woman in the picture, the reference was crystal clear:

As part of the publication’s concept to showcase the top 10 agencies, it used the trendy *Mad Men* theme to illustrate the point that as much as things may have changed since 1961, much has not...If Ad Age was trying to highlight the void and lack of diversity, I am happy to help. (Sawyer quoted in Niles, 2009, p. 1)

Figure 13: Ad Age “2008 A-List” Illustration (Eley, 2009)
Despite strong gains in advertising over several decades, "the status of women declines with each step up the corporate ladder" with women holding 76 percent of all clerical positions in advertising but only 47 percent of mid-upper level management positions (Bosman 2005a, p. 2). The trend is also visible in Britain. A recent study by the trade group Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) found that females were about half of the total workforce but only occupied 22 percent of management positions (Sweney, 2011). In the United States, men outnumber women in creative at a rate of over 2-1 and the director level is over 80 percent male (Broyles and Grow, 2008; Mallia, 2009). As Bosman (2005a) points out, "the dominance of men on the creative side of the business is even more striking, considering that women commonly make up to 80 percent of household purchasing decisions." Indeed, a recent study found that 94 percent of the lead creative directors of Super Bowl commercials were male, despite women making up 45 percent of the game’s viewing audience (Lapchick et al, 2010; Nielsenwire, 2010). For Carol Evans, president of the Advertising Women of New York, "there’s still rampant sexism in our business...there is a problem in women creatives not getting the spotlight" (Bosman, 2005b). Cindy Gallop, former chairwoman of BBH New York, concurred, saying flatly, "Senior female creatives are virtually nonexistent...It’s an incontrovertible fact" (p. 2).

Thus far we have seen how the legacies of racism and sexism in advertising have helped perpetuate systematic inequalities that still plague the industry today. I have argued that Mad Men may indeed point us back toward a sordid past, but also toward a complacent present of denial, where agencies can embrace the show’s
nostalgic world of White male privilege even while in the midst of a contemporary
diversity crisis. Moreover, the quantitative evidence suggests that, despite some
notable advances for women, discrimination based on race and gender is alive and
well in the American advertising industry. But while the numbers can help us to
understand what is happening and to whom, what they can’t do is tell us how or
why. The next section will argue that contemporary forms of discrimination in
advertising may not be as direct, or punitive, as it was in the Mad Men era, but the
power of patriarchy and White supremacy in the workplace is still active, albeit in
the form of what Giddens’ (1979) calls “structuration,” a kind of “common sense”
that drives most of our daily “decisions” and occurs below our level of awareness
through the momentum of habit and routine. These habits, in turn, are developed,
reinforced, and internalized over time in response to existing social norms. To get a
better sense of the subjective, day-to-day experience of these norms, I now turn to
my interviews with advertising industry practitioners. Most of my informants are
women and work in Human Resources, a highly gendered department often tasked
with hiring more candidates of color to improve their agency’s diversity numbers.
As a group, they are uniquely positioned to shed new light on the overlapping
inequalities of race and sex in advertising.

The Boy’s Club

Though the gender gap is certainly not unique to advertising,49 the industry
tends to structure sex inequalities along the departmental split between account

49 To be sure, the gender gap is not limited to advertising. Women in the United States
still earn 77 cents on the dollar when compared to men, are only 3 percent of Fortune 500
CEOs and less than a quarter of law partners and politicians (Bennet, Ellison, and Ball
and creative—an infamous rivalry cultivated by management and agency personnel alike (Cronin 2004). While the account management aspect of advertising—which interfaces directly with the client—has become increasingly gendered as a female space over time, creative—which generates the ideas for campaigns—has remained stubbornly male. As O’Leary (2010) observes, "it is particularly strange that the industry’s creative corridors, seemingly the most open of agency departments to personal expression, remain one of its most homogeneous bastions of white males" (p. 1). According to my informants the creative/account split hinges on traditional gender roles: men make the product (creative) while women do the paperwork (account).  

My subjects often described this relationship in maternal terms, with female account executives having to continually “nag” the male creatives to meet deadlines and even show up at meetings. Rachel, a mid-level account manager, estimated that her large agency had only one senior female creative and said, “there is no question that there’s a gender bias in that department.” Heather, who worked in HR, reported similar numbers, noting that all six of her agency’s Executive

2010). Furthermore, recent sex discrimination lawsuits against companies ranging from the New York Post, Toshiba, ESPN, Walmart, and Morgan-Stanley suggest that women in the workplace continue to be chronically underpaid and seldom promoted across a variety of sectors.

50 My informants told me that women also dominate other support roles that, while vital to the running of an agency, are not generally celebrated as such: human resources and project management. For instance, Dorothy estimated that the HR role in advertising in general is about 80 or 90 percent female. She then mused about how most diversity officers are housed within HR and, again, most are women: "Across or outside of this industry. Every single one. The woman coming from AOL, there’s somebody from Campbell's that I read about. They are all women."
Creative Directors were White men. Joe, a strategist, summed up the dynamic as a
network of favoritism and social reproduction, harkening back to the Mad Men era:

I think it was easier for women to transition from the roles of secretaries and
assistants in whatever the sixties or seventies to, you know, the account side...the creative side is more male dominated...I mean, look at Mad Men, it’s a boy’s club, it’s been a boy’s club, it will always be a boy’s club until something drastic happens....it works like this: I get my Executive Creative position at an agency, so what do I do? I hire all my boys, so it will be a fun atmosphere, you know? So that’s what happens. Everyone hires their boys, those boys go somewhere else and they hire their boys and they hire the juniors that they liked.

Gregory (2009) argues that the predominance of men in ad agency creative
departments cultivates an exclusive locker-room style of homosociability,
reminiscent of old boys’ networks, where men bond through humor and banter.
Nixon (2003) describes the culture of creatives as marked by "laddish" behavior
that is both willfully immature and hyper-masculine. In such an environment,
managers treat the creative department as a "Never Neverland" where women are
not welcome lest they “force the young male creatives to grow up and thus erode the
esential juvenility” of their creative role (p. 105).

One of the consequences of gendered office roles is how they can encourage
men to treat women, no matter their function or title, like glorified secretaries. In a
poignant moment, I observed several interns pause from a group project to watch
the Saturday Night Live Mad Men spoof: “Don Draper’s Guide to Picking Up Women.”
When they resumed working, Alyssa (from Account) was sitting at the computer
while Carl (from Creative) dictated revision ideas. Walking away, Carl bellowed,
“Send it!” prompting Alyssa to mutter sarcastically, “I’m just a secretary.” For
Rachel, this played out on the job in the minutiae of the everyday; men came in late
to meetings, put their feet up on the table, interrupted when women were speaking and then expected them to clean up afterwards: "Very rarely do they have notebooks, very rarely do they write anything down...and they say, 'So you’re taking all the notes, right?’" Crucially, these notions of “common sense” were not just imposed from without; some emerged from within. Many of my female informants promulgated clichéd gender essentialisms, arguing that women were naturally “less competitive,” “better organized” and “more collaborative” than men—a set of “soft” skills that made them better suited for account and project management functions, not to mention HR (for another example, see Kennelly, 2002). Thus, in contrast to the more explicit chauvinism depicted in Mad Men, gender roles in advertising now tend to be more internalized than enforced, though some sexist assumptions are still simply stated outright. For example, a junior advertising executive told me about a male/female art and copy (creative) team who went in to interview at an agency and were told, “I can’t hire you because women aren’t funny.” According to my informants, the widespread belief that women can’t do creative, combined with the common expectation that women will choose motherhood over their career, made male domination of creative and management appear to be both inevitable and perfectly natural.

**Opting Out**

When I asked my mostly female informants to explain the lack of women in creative and upper-management positions, many suggested that this was less the product of sexist discrimination than a process of self-selection. Rachel described how she and many of her female colleagues chose to avoid meetings with senior
leadership at her agency because they didn’t feel comfortable around loud, aggressive men who yell and bang on the table—adding that, “women who do have a seat at the table have very similar personality types.” This sets up a complex dynamic. On one hand, the very presence of women in these senior settings suggests a degree of agency in determining one’s own life chances: women are free to “opt-in” and climb the corporate ladder, or “opt-out” and seek a more “comfortable” career path. On the other hand, the more blatant discrimination of the Mad Men era has built up a durable gender role infrastructure, whereby upper-management remains a “male space” not merely due to its population, but also the tacit rules and cultural norms that have developed over time. This creates a setting that simultaneously advantages men who have been socialized to perform this role without a second thought while disadvantaging women who, as we saw above, must work to overcome the presumption that their gender makes them more naturally suited for secretarial functions.

Another clear theme emerged around motherhood. Many of my informants noted that the unpredictable and often long hours of advertising forced most junior ad executives to postpone children -- especially if they were women. And when they did have kids, women tended to either leave the industry or avoid roles that required excessive travel. Citing herself as an example, Elizabeth, a Senior HR Director, says she decided to be "a mom first" and passed on opportunities for career advancement to spend more time with her daughter. Of course, this choice is not always so freely made since the responsibilities of the home and housework remain highly gendered. According to the recent report by the U.S. Government...
(Women In America, 2011), “employed wives spend more time in household activities [including childcare] than employed husbands” (p. 35). Along similar lines, a recent study of the European Union reports an entrenched “lifestyle divide” where the burden of domestic duties prevents women from advancing their careers and “creates a vicious circle as they are then less able to work the long hours needed to win top jobs” and therefore “earn less and are reinforced as responsible for household tasks” (Ward, 2007). Mallia (2009), in her investigation of the lack of female creative directors in advertising, concludes that "the incompatibility between motherhood and agency creative jobs" means that most successful women are either “the ‘secondary’ parent [with another at home] or not a parent at all" (p. 1). In other words, for a woman to succeed at work, she must forgo children, pay for childcare, and/or find a supportive spouse. As Acker (2006) notes:

The unencumbered male worker as the model for the organization of daily work and the model of the excellent employee seems to have been strengthened. Professionals and managers, in particular, work long hours and often are evaluated on their ‘face time’ at work and their willingness to put work and the organization before family and friends...such often excessive or unpredictable demands are easier to meet for those without daily family responsibilities (pp. 458-59).

Thus, despite egalitarian platitudes at work, or even the accommodations of a flexible work schedule, the rigidity of gender roles in the home can force mothers to self-select out of key roles at the office.

Again, the contemporary situation recalls Mad Men’s fictional past. Late in the fourth season, Dr. Faye Miller, a psychologist and market researcher, tells Don Draper, the agency’s lead creative and series protagonist, that she loves children but “chose” not to have any of her own in order to pursue her career (Coontz, 2010). But
this was hardly a choice since “Faye’s sacrifice was one that women with professional aspirations were often forced to make in 1965: Employers, after all, were well within their legal rights to fire women who had babies” (p. 1). And though current legislation now affords mothers certain protections in the workplace, the structure of gender norms and tacit expectations persists, directing women to rank their priorities (e.g., “mom first”) in ways that rarely apply to men. Indeed, for men who choose to be fathers, success in advertising begins at home; a spouse leaving work early allows them to stay late. And so the vicious circle takes another turn: the irregular hours that career advancement requires produce a general neglect of home life, and custom makes this neglect more permissible for men who then advance, thus reinforcing the male gendered spaces of upper-management and creative. So, while there may be more Peggy Olsons working in creative departments today, they are rarely in charge. And while the Faye Millers of the world can now gain entrance to the boardroom, they will still need to adapt to the social norms of a mostly male space.

Social Reproduction

And yet, being a woman in advertising can have its advantages, especially if you’re White. As Patricia Hill Collins (2004) reminds us, race, class, and gender tend to form junctures of “intersectionality” that can mutually construct each other in unexpected ways. For example, a woman might be simultaneously oppressed by one intersection of her identity (living under patriarchy) and yet privileged by another (being White and affluent). Though Collins often writes about how such intersections can further marginalize women of color, we can also see a clear
example of this dynamic in the case of two young Black men in advertising. Darius and Bill worked as junior executives in account management departments dominated by White women. In the following passage, Darius tells Bill about his colleague Angela. At the time, both Angela and Darius reported to White female account supervisors. But while Darius’ supervisor was very formal with him (“She pretty much told me what to do and I did it and that was pretty much the extent of our relationship.”), Angela, who was White, seemed to be the best of friends with her boss:

Darius: [Angela] would go to [her boss’] house.
Bill: They hung out?
Darius: I’m talking about go to someone’s house and hang with them at their house, like come on now!
Bill: Yeah, I would never do that--never even think to do that!
Darius: No, so check this out, one time [Angela]’s talking 'blah-blah-blah-you’re such a bitch!' And then she gets off the phone, and I’m like, ‘Who you talking to?’ She was talking to her boss! You would call your own boss ‘a bitch’ jokingly?
Darius: Man, I can’t do that.
Bill: Yeah you can’t.
Darius: Just the fact that [Angela] had such a close relationship with [her] boss and I had the complete opposite of that.

This anecdote demonstrates how a male identity could prove advantageous in certain spheres (such as upper-management and creative) while also inhibiting affiliation and solidarity in more female spaces, especially when that gender identity intersects with racial difference. In the case of Darius, his Black male identity created a sense of double-alienation from his supervisor through the micropolitics of informal, everyday social relations. Put another way, Darius experienced the feminization of account management as a barrier that opened up exclusive networking opportunities for White women. In the Mad Men scene that opens this
chapter, this is precisely what Peggy fails to see while arguing with Abe in the bar: that she is both the victim of sexism and the beneficiary of White female privilege. True, Peggy is the lone female copywriter in her office, but not the only woman; the secretarial pool is so thoroughly feminized that it doubles as a (White) female affinity group and on-site social support network. Thus, when Abe reminds her that there are no Black copywriters, he actually understates the case. In Peggy’s fictional agency, there are no Blacks period, save the janitorial staff that cleans the office after hours.

Of course, as Winfrey Harris (2010) points out, Abe and Peggy both miss the experience of women of color, who must confront two intersecting forms of oppression at the same time. We can see a contemporary example of this through the experience of “Dominique,” a young woman of color who’s worked for two advertising agencies. On one level, the very act of her hiring is living proof that things have changed since the mid-1960’s, both for women and people of color. However, Dominique’s account also illustrates how gaining access to the female space of account management comes with strings attached—social ties that tend to benefit, and thereby reproduce, White employees.

While initially drawn to the “hip” agency setting where everyone is young and well-dressed, Dominique soon tired of her agency’s heavy emphasis on socializing, with frequent and sometimes mandatory happy hours, chatty cliques, and a general culture of “forced cool.” It wasn’t enough to simply do her job; she was also expected to mix and mingle: “it was very important that you fit in to the environment. It was a really big deal...you had to look the part...it was very much
like a sorority." In fact, Dominique, who doesn’t drink, was actually warned by her supervisor that appearing anti-social “could reflect poorly on my review.” HR manager Heather concurred that socializing is central. She remembered going out every night with her co-workers when she first started and says that now she prefers to hire gregarious/popular candidates that people want to talk to and invite to lunch. Barbara, also an HR manager, explained that this urge to be social meant wanting to work with “people who know each other, look like each other – hangout...and that’s where the diversity barriers come up." Thus, while Angela may be fully in the habit of presuming rapport with other young, White women and thus perfectly comfortable teasing her boss by calling her “a bitch,” Darius and Dominique might be more circumspect, given the structuration of social spheres outside the workplace. For Betty, an ad agency diversity recruiter, herein lies the rub:

Social segregation is the problem. So even if you work [in advertising], you’re not socializing and when you go out on Saturday night, to the barbecue or you go to the Hamptons -- that’s where the deals are done! That’s where people get those jobs. It’s that social piece that’s part of your lifestyle -- especially in this business!....A lot of people-- whether they’re Black, Hispanic or Asian or Indian, are really not that interested in socially kind of hanging out with the little blonde chick from Connecticut. So what do you do once they’re in [advertising]? What you do, what you like, where you summer vacation, go out -- for people of color, it’s work!

Bonilla-Silva (2010) echoes Betty’s point on social segregation, only this time from the perspective of Whites. In a study based on in-depth interviews and surveys of students from three different universities and a random sample from Detroit, Bonilla-Silva found that most of his White informants professed to have Black friends, yet reported lives largely lived in racial isolation. Pointing out how White
respondents overwhelmingly approved an interracial lifestyle, yet do not interact with Black people on a daily basis, or have close Black friends, or choose to date Black people, Bonilla-Silva’s findings were consistent with a body of research on interracial friendship that has typically found less than 10 percent of Whites to have close Black friends. His contribution broke new ground in uncovering "the apparent 'paradox' between White's commitment to the principle of interracialism and their mostly White pattern of association" (p. 105). For instance, when pressed, it became clear that most of his White informants’ so-called interracial friendships did not include mutual confiding or any relationship that went “beyond the place or situation of formal contact (classroom, assigned roommates, or job)” and the friendship would “always disappear after the reason for the formal interaction ends -- taking a class, rooming, playing in a band, on a sports team, working in the same company” (p. 111). Put another way, a White person may have a Black friend at work, but they don’t go out together on the weekend.

As Bonilla-Silva argues, affinity and affection require the kind of familiarity that comes through shared activities and geographic proximity. Racial isolation interrupts this prospect such that an individual may very well support cross-racial relationships in theory while having precious few opportunities for creating those personal associations in practice. For instance, in the case of my HR informants, both Mary and Patricia grew up in White neighborhoods and lamented that fact that almost all of their current friends are White—private lives that likely advantaged their professional positioning in a “relationships business” like advertising. Social segregation thus prevents both Blacks and Whites from undergoing the kind of
interracial socialization that might crack open the kinds of closed social networks that so benefit Whites.

**White Affirmative Action**

As a whole, my interviews with HR managers and other agency practitioners suggest that, left to its own devices, the advertising industry tends to reproduce itself by hiring its own. Without external pressure to meet diversity quotas, new employees often mirror the racial make-up of the current staff. This frequently occurs through the commonplace practices of referral hires (where current staff recommend friends for open positions) and hiring for specific teams, rather than for the agency as a whole--a dynamic that tends to privilege subjective notions of "fit" over more concrete evaluations of experience and qualifications. For example, Maria conducts most of her hiring from referrals or "someone's someone, so it's not like I must-hire but it's like a must-bring-in for an informational interview but we do end up taking a lot of those people."

The benefits and conveniences of referral hires are manifold. First, they can potentially save the agency thousands of dollars in headhunting charges. One HR manager even told me that her agency would pay a staff member half of the $5,000 dollar headhunting fee if they made a successful referral. Second, hiring friends of current staff can improve morale and make long hours less onerous, without costing the agency an extra dime. Finally, there is still another potential upside--the doling out of referral hires as perks to senior staff and even clients who have friends or relatives hoping to break into advertising. I will discuss this practice in more detail in Chapter 4. For the moment, suffice it say that team chemistry is very important.
For example, Heather described the interview process of introducing a candidate to potential colleagues as more like a sorority rush:

I think people feel comfort with hiring someone who is just like them, 'I identify with that, that's what I was like I was in this business. Look at me now, if I could do it, they could do it.' And if you look at teams here, they're very similar...they all go to the same gym, they all love dogs, they're vegetarians--'fit' is a huge thing.

Barbara made a similar point about the importance of matching a potential candidate's personality with the existing culture of any given team:

So if you're a good ole boy, sure -- you're gonna' click with a group that's all guys. If you're this quiet, quiet person -- are people going to be like 'Can I work with this person eight hours a day? Are they just going to want to be a worker bee? Are they going to socialize? Are they going to want to laugh?'

For Patricia, head of HR at her agency, such "birds of a feather, flock together" homogeneity functions as a kind of insidious common sense that exacerbates racial inequalities beneath our level of awareness: "I don't think people are intentionally hiring non-diverse people, I just don't. But I think they're hiring people like them and we have a lot more White people here that are hiring people that are similar." Patricia's admission was consistent with research indicating "a tendency for Whites to spot merit most quickly in someone who reminds them of themselves...White's over-remember stereotype-confirming behavior or tendencies"

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51 Maria echoed these same sentiments, almost verbatim: “It's like a subconscious thing, that like, when you're hiring people, you think about teams, you think about like chemistry and...a lot of times it is just easier to be like, 'That person reminds me of me. Like 10 years ago, I was in the same spot. They'll do a good job.'"

52 Fit also applies to body size. Heather cited examples of how important it is in advertising to look the part, ranging from general attractiveness to needing to be slim in order to get on a fashion account or get on the team pitching for a pharmaceutical client.
in applicants of color, and ignore the same traits in other Whites” (Wise, 2010, p. 93). In short, Whites prefer other Whites. Thus, in advertising, like hires like.53

All things being equal, euphemisms of “fit” and “chemistry” conceal advertising’s structural system of White affirmative action. We can see evidence of this in how teams resist HR’s diversity efforts. Patricia described how it works: even if two out of the three finalists were of color, “the one that’s not will be hired—will be looked at more favorably, for whatever reason, when they’re all equally qualified.” The excuses for such rejections tend to be vague: "doesn’t fit” or “something’s off, I can't put my finger on it, might be better for a different account.”

A team at Barbara’s agency even rejected an African-American candidate because he "didn't laugh enough." When I told Heather about a study that showed applicants with “White-sounding” names were 50 percent more likely to get called for interviews than equally qualified applicants with “Black-sounding names” (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2003), she nodded, saying, “I believe it.” Some of my informants insisted they push back and ask for more objective rationales for hiring decisions, but, as Heather explained, such interventions can be tricky:

It’s a weird thing to talk about because you don’t want to say, ‘I know you liked Latonya Prince and you liked Cindy Johnson...I think we should move forward with Latonya Prince, if you really liked her, let’s hire her -- we have enough Cindy Johnson’s in the office.’ But that’s a conversation that is not had.

53 Of course, this is not limited to advertising. As Jensen (2004) observes: "When I seek admission to university, apply for a job, or hunt for an apartment, I don't look threatening. Almost all of the people evaluating me for those things look like me -- they are White. They see in me a reflection of themselves -- and in a racist world, that is an advantage. I smile. I am White. I am one of them" (p. 116).
Self-censorship is understandable, given that raising diversity questions could imply that one’s boss is racist. And yet, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues, such “individual psychological dispositions”—whether they be explicitly prejudicial or not—are largely irrelevant to the successful reproduction of White privilege (p. 8). Rather, as Royster (2003) explains, the problem is structural since “personal ties and affiliations as a mechanism for employment referrals, access, and mobility” occur within “persistent patterns of segregation -- equivalent to an American apartheid” (pp. 179, 184). Other sociologists have made similar observations of how the color line is reproduced through racialized informal social networks (Das Gupta, 1996; Vallas, 2003). Royster (2003) describes this process as a form of “embeddedness” whereby any given job has a pool of qualified candidates, but “the person who is most likely to be alerted to the opportunity and selected will be the one who has the most efficacious personal, group-based, or institutional contacts, and not necessarily the most skilled person” (p. 28). In other words, getting hired depends not only on what you know, but also who you know, and how. To get ahead requires being in the right place in the right time, and Whites’ life chances in advertising are ever increased by their frequent access to those right places.

In such an environment, tone-deaf tributes to the “good old days” of Mad Men strike the wrong note precisely because they hit so close to home. Nostalgia works best when its object is long dead and buried, but the ghosts of Madison Avenue live on through race and gender inequalities that continue to reproduce themselves through closed social networks. Asking whether individual men in advertising today still discriminate against individual women will not get us very far towards
understanding the structural determinations of gender roles both at work and at home. Nor will looking only at the statistics of attrition fully explain women’s processes of self-selection. Since the 1960’s, the glass ceiling has been cracked then broken—but only technically. Sexism now operates with a revolving door. The men are still in power, and the women are always free to leave. Similarly, racism in advertising is less the result of "individual psychological dispositions" than a system of social segregation that continues to advantage White men. Social norms still privilege male creativity and leadership. Tacit rules still allow Whites to hire other Whites on the basis of in-group “fit,” familiarity, and even friendship. Many of these practices are hard to see. It’s only during a Mad Men costume party, when women dress up as secretaries and Blacks have no role, that the ghosts come out of the mid-century modern woodwork to remind us just how strange things still are in the present.

The very first scene of Mad Men’s premiere episode is set in a smoky bar filled with all White, mostly male patrons. Don Draper sits alone, scribbling on a napkin. Sam, an older Black waiter, approaches. Don asks for a light then notices his brand of cigarettes.

   Don: Old Gold man, huh?
[Sam looks surprised, says nothing.]
   Don: Lucky Strike here.
[Sam stays silent.]
   Don: Can I ask you a question, why do you smoke Old Gold?
[An White headwaiter approaches the table.]
   Headwaiter: I’m sorry sir, is Sam here bothering you? [turning to Sam with menace] He can be a little chatty.
   Don: No, we’re actually just having a conversation. Is that OK?
   Headwaiter: [chastened] Can I get you another drink?
(Weiner & Taylor, 2008)
Given the racial dynamics of this scene, it is tempting here to vilify the Headwaiter’s bigotry and lionize Don for treating his waiter with respect. But, of course, this is not just a “conversation.” This is work. Don would not dream of hiring Sam, and yet does not hesitate to politely extract some free market research from a subordinate for his own benefit. Similarly, as the client in this scenario, Don holds all the power and risks nothing by putting the Headwaiter back in his place. However, when the roles are reversed, Don is quick to pander to Fillmore Auto parts, a racist client. What makes this scene with the Black waiter so instructive is less the dialogue and more the setting. This is where Whites socialize, where networks are formed, and where deals are done. This is where embeddedness thrives—in a structured ecosystem of social segregation. Don may exercise his agency by treating his waiter well, but he likely ended up in that particular bar as a matter of habit. And that is how structuration works; it sets up rules for social action that we follow without a thought, until we are interrupted.

Finally, let’s return for a moment to the *Mad Men* scene that opens this chapter. The morning after Abe and Peggy quarrel about her agency taking on a racist client, Abe shows up at Peggy’s office to apologize. As a peace offering, he

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54 In season three, Pete Campbell, an ambitious account executive, has a similar “conversation” with Hollis, a Black elevator operator in his office building. Like Don, Pete’s initial approach is breezy, casually quizzing Hollis on why “Negroes” buy televisions. But when Hollis resists, Pete stops the elevator and exerts his authority: “Do you think I’m a bigot? I just want to know why you bought your TV.” This scene can be viewed here: [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v011/media/11.4.o-barr_video17.mp4](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v011/media/11.4.o-barr_video17.mp4)
gives her a story he wrote entitled "Nuremburg on Madison Avenue." Peggy, flattered, walks inside. Moments later, she returns in a rage:

Peggy: Are you serious with this?! Everybody knows who represents Fillmore Auto Parts. We’re the agency of record.
Abe: But I was defending you. We have a religion in this country and its business. You’re not a priest; you’re just another congregant.
Peggy: So, I’m not a war criminal.
...
Peggy: If you publish this, I’ll lose my job.
Abe: Maybe you’re better than this.
Peggy: [tearing up the paper] I’m not a political person. I don’t have to defend myself.
Abe: You’re political whether you like it or not.
(Weiner & Uppendahl, 2011)

Later that day, Peggy takes Abe’s criticism to heart and suggests the popular Black singer Harry Belafonte for a Fillmore Auto Parts jingle. Her two White male colleagues gently mock her naiveté while Don Draper looks on, concerned. Then Peggy, at great professional risk, pushes back, “Well, why are we doing business for someone who doesn’t hire Negroes?” Today, under pressure from both the NYCCHR and the Madison Avenue Project, many of my informants are asking a similar question about their own industry: why is advertising so bad at hiring and promoting people of color?

While Sexism remains a persistent problem in advertising, not only in the male-dominated arenas of upper-management and creative, but also in the female "ghettos" of human resources departments and the gendered secretarial functions of account management and project management, the fact that (White) women now make up the majority of employees in advertising makes sex discrimination at the point of entry very hard to prove. Perhaps this is why, to date, there has been no Madison Avenue Project equivalent for addressing gender disparities in advertising.
Therefore, what follows will focus on the higher-profile problem of minority underrepresentation. More specifically, the next chapter will examine two very different—and contradictory—types of material practice inside advertising: 1) diversity advocates leveraging numbers to exert external pressure on management and 2) powerful Whites calling in favors to hoard opportunities for their friends and families.
CHAPTER 4

MATERIAL PRACTICES: FAILED REFORMS AND MUST-HIRES

Numbers help advocates and regulatory agencies from the NAACP to the NYCCHR to hold corporate power accountable through appeals to statistics and social justice. And yet, solving advertising’s race problem has proved more complicated than simply pressuring top executives to hire more minorities. Attempts to close the numbers gap have been hampered by mitigating factors throughout the agency hierarchy, ranging from tactical conflicts and client pressures to contradictory rationales and casual hiring practices. I will argue below that advertising’s attempts to self-regulate its race problem demonstrate how the political economy of the industry, though structured in hierarchies of authority and dominance, can only be partially understood through a top-down model of determination. Rather, following Hesmondhalgh (2007), I found that power in this setting is better understood “in its non-reductionist sense of setting limits and exerting pressures, rather than that of an external force, or forces, that leads inevitably to something happening” (p. 48). In other words, while economic factors do play an important role, they also interact with other more cultural processes. Moreover, attempts to diversify the industry are often thwarted from below through material practices whereby White employees distribute and collect favors amongst themselves through a system of opportunity hoarding (Royster, 2003).

The Numbers

We looked at our numbers because we were like, 'No, no! We’re hiring diversity!' Well, we looked at them a year ago and we weren’t. It was very minimal. We had very little diversity in the AAE hires [Assistant Account Executives]. And so Mary and I were like, 'Shit! I thought we were hiring
diversity! Until we saw the numbers and so 'shame on us!' And we made a conscious effort, a real conscious effort to track. (Patricia, HR)

Numbers can provide a useful corrective to the very best of intentions. As we can see from Patricia’s example above, where the careful consideration of hiring statistics provided a wake-up call for the HR staff at a large agency, some recent efforts to keep better track of diverse hires have come about in response to new pressures from external regulatory bodies. However, this paints a deceptive picture of institutional naïveté, since, at least in terms of internal record-keeping, any business with over 100 employees has had to file EEO-1 Private Sector Reports with the Equal Opportunity Commission since 1966.55 Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter, the Urban League of Greater New York, the NAACP, and the New York City Commission on Human Rights have repeatedly protested the systematic exclusion of African-Americans from the U.S. advertising industry over the course of the last four decades: conducting studies, releasing reports, initiating complaints, and even levying formal charges of discrimination (Bendick and Egan, 2009; Chambers, 2008). Given this context, Patricia’s surprise is, in itself, surprising.

One possible explanation is that while the annual EEO-1 measures overall diversity numbers among current employees, it does not measure the diversity of job applicants or the race distribution of new hires. To fill this gap, Patricia’s agency now has an automated tracking system in place that asks prospective employees to self-identify according to variables such as race and gender. This process helps establish an "applicant flow" that can be used to measure the rate at which

minorities and women are interviewed and hired. For Patricia, such a system was both hard-won and long overdue: "the biggest thing that was driving [applicant flow] was affirmative-action because we couldn’t get our numbers....what gets measured gets results; and this industry didn’t measure [applicant flow]." Dorothy, another HR professional, concurred with this assessment, noting that, barring a subpoena from a regulatory agency, such tracking systems are still much more common on the client-side then the agency-side. And even when the agency is keeping track, the data is often kept under lock and key. For instance, Dorothy complained that she was denied access to her own agency’s diversity numbers: "They wouldn’t even let me share it internally...like, I’m the head of HR!...they know the numbers are bad [so I said] “The secret is out. So, can we talk about this so we can fix it?”"

On separate occasions, both Dorothy and Linda warned me against asking any of my host agencies to disclose their diversity numbers since such a sensitive request would almost certainly be turned down and put my research access in jeopardy. Of course, as gatekeepers who helped me secure that access through their agencies, such a request on my part could also prove embarrassing—or worse—to them. In any case, these statistics are a closely guarded secret within agencies and their holding companies such that they are not even available to the 4A’s, the largest trade organization for the American advertising industry. The lack of a central clearinghouse for establishing a baseline makes industry-wide progress on diversity difficult to measure. Indeed, agencies may be reluctant to publicize their diversity numbers because they are so low and could risk embarrassment or even encourage
litigation. Moreover, Bendick and Egan’s (2009) report (based on information secured through the EEOC), suggests that the results of MAIP and similar diversity programs over the past 40 years have been, on the whole, underwhelming.56 Such efforts have been criticized as too-little-too-late or, worse, a high-profile public relations strategy more concerned with repairing the industry’s reputation with a positive image than in producing, measuring, and reporting actual results.

**The Big Stick**

We have had 40 years of pious pronouncements by the leaders of the industry, 40 years of investigations, reports and obfuscation, 40 years of denying the significance of the Black consumer market. It is time to return the favor. It is time to make the CEOs of the holding companies pay a price with their own money, to affect their compensation packages and their company’s stock price. (Moore, 2009)

One of the loudest critics of diversity programs within advertising is Sanford Moore, a former industry insider and long-time civil rights activist who first approached Cyrus Mehri to lay the initial groundwork for the Madison Avenue

56 There are at least two reasons to question the accuracy of the EEOC numbers cited in Bendick & Egan's (2009) report. First, I received conflicting stories from HR managers on how they treated employees who self-identified on the EEO-1 form as "other." Some said they "scrubbed" the forms, making sure all employees self-identified as part of a racial group, while others said they weren't allowed to count these employees and this, in turn, "depressed" their diversity numbers. In point of fact, the EEOC stipulates that, though self-identification is preferred, the employer may step in to fill in the blank: "If an employee declines to self-identify, employment records or observer identification may be used" (http://www.eeoc.gov/employers/eeo1survey/2007instructions.cfm). Second, the EEO-1 categories have been criticized for conflating race with ethnicity through a "two-question format" that prevents anyone that selects Hispanic or Latino/a as their ethnicity from selecting a racial identification, while others are allowed to choose one of six racial categories or "two of more races" (Loehrke, 2010). Despite these limitations, it is important to note that the advertising industry has not formally contested the EEOC findings, nor collected and published their own numbers. Therefore, the EEOC has compiled the most reliable quantitative measure we have to go on at this point. As Nancy Hill, president-CEO of the 4A’s, put it after reading Bendick & Egan's (2009) report: "The numbers speak for themselves" (Hill quoted in Parekh, 2009).
Project (Parekh, 2009). Writing in Adweek, Moore (2009) condemned Madison Avenue's refusal to lift the "cotton curtain" of discrimination and declared that “it's time to get agencies where it counts -- their wallets....it's all about the Benjamins.” Later, in an interview with Ad Age, Moore compared the industry to a plantation and promised "before it's over, Madison Avenue will pay the price for its historical discrimination" (Parekh, 2009). Moore's inflammatory rhetoric has led to great consternation amongst diversity officers, often women of color located within the human resources departments. According to Patricia, Moore sees her and her HR colleagues as collaborators with "the last bastion of apartheid" where "the Black man is still 3/5 of a person." From her perspective, Moore’s confrontational tactics threaten to backfire and undermine her more pragmatic, reformist approach. While Patricia prefers to couch diversity in positive terms emphasizing the benefit to the agency's bottom line, she says "these people [like Moore] that we are up against are about aggressive, loud, and unpleasant and ugly -- and they are happy to say, 'We're coming for you!'...If you're trying to be the big stick because you want to make people pay, money -- that's not change."

Despite the apparent antagonism between outside activists like Moore and diversity officers working to change the industry from the inside, there also seems to be a certain symbiosis at work. For instance, on the day before the Madison Avenue Project press conference, Omnicom, the second largest advertising holding company in the world, suddenly announced the appointment of Tiffany Warren, the widely respected former director of MAIP and founder of the “AdColor Awards”
program,\textsuperscript{57} to the newly created high-level position of Chief Diversity Officer. While it may be impossible to prove that it was the impending pressure from Moore, Mehri, and the NAACP that actually forced Omnicom to make a preemptive move, there are other examples that point to how the “big stick” of possible fines or litigation led to recent increases in diversity efforts inside agencies. In October of 2006, just a month after 16 agencies dodged public hearings by signing a "memorandum of understanding" with the NYCHRC, Patricia's agency hired a new diversity officer. As her colleague Mary recalled, “at the time it was more of just 'our numbers are low, fix it!' And [this new diversity officer hire] was brought in to fix it!” Since that time, MAIP has quadrupled in size—a spike unprecedented in its nearly 40-year history. And though Susan's agency was not named in the memorandum, she says that upper-management remains eager to stay off the list: "we actually have to deliver numbers and report in on numbers....somehow we haven't had the scrutiny that other agencies have had but it's still something that we want to address." These examples suggest that the threat of a multi-million dollar settlement has, perhaps unsurprisingly, motivated the advertising industry to make deeper investments in diversity staffing and programs.

My HR informants, despite their misgivings about Moore's style, generally concurred that the "big stick" of a class action lawsuit represents the kind of financial leverage that will get top advertising executives to make hiring African

\textsuperscript{57} The AdColor Awards is a red-carpet style annual gala that honors “legends,” “rising stars,” and other people of color and “diversity champions” within the industry. It was launched in 2007 and the 2011 event was supported by the industry’s major trade organizations along with Arnold Worldwide, Omnicom Group, CNN, Deutsch, Gotham and Wieden + Kennedy. (http://2011.adcolor.org/about/)
Americans a top priority. As Elizabeth put it, "You know, this is an age-old problem and nothing's been done; until I shoot you in the temple with a big lawsuit, nothing's gonna' change." According to Karey, agency CEO's only start to notice the race problem when it affects the bottom line: "seven digits gets their attention" and then they start to want to know "how much is this going to cost us?" Barbara describes a similar top-down dynamic where accountability on diversity comes from her agency's holding company: "We're audited quarterly. They want to see numbers. They want to see percentages….I have to do reports that will say how many people of color have been hired, how many women have been promoted, how many you have retained." Finally, Patricia explains that beyond a potential multi-million dollar settlement, the Madison Avenue Project threatens to further expose a very embarrassing situation: "Hey, come on! We're in advertising. We're not going to look bad and we were looking bad." Thus, while the big stick can intimidate top management when brandished to inflict a financial wound, it can also shame when used to point, directing external attention to advertising's internal race problem. But while this tactic conceives power as determined by economic penalties and public relations, advertising is also beholden to clients. This dependency presents both opportunities and obstacles for diversity advocates working inside the industry.

Client Pressure

The behavior documented in the [Bendick & Egan] report is illegal, and we are sure that Procter & Gamble does not wish to be associated in any way with illegal behavior. The behavior documented in the report is not only illegal but also clearly out of step with the moral climate of the times, and again we are sure that Procter and Gamble would not want in any way to be so out of step with the times. (Ciccolo, 2009, p. 3)
In March of 2009, on the heels of the Madison Avenue Project’s widely reported press conference, Angela Ciccolo, Interim General Counsel for the NAACP, sent a letter to Procter & Gamble (P&G) along with 24 other leading national advertisers. Dismissing the advertising industry’s previous diversity efforts as woefully inadequate and, in some cases, even counterproductive, the letter implored the companies to use their leverage as valuable clients to require their advertising agencies "to use diverse teams in creative and account-management positions" (p. 3). Citing P&G’s own stated commitment to supplier diversity practices, the letter closed with a stern warning: "now that we have brought to your attention the gross failures of your advertising suppliers to live up to your standards, we are confident that you will be addressing it as forcefully and effectively as its importance to your firm and nation requires" (p. 4).

Working through clients in order to pressure agencies to increase diversity follows the logic of a market-based solution and the results have been mixed. On the one hand, according to many of my informants, the scrutiny of the NAACP did increase the number of clients demanding to see reports on agency diversity. And many agencies reacted accordingly. For instance, Dorothy was assigned diversity responsibilities just in time to field the first inquiry:

And it was just timely because it was right before--right as the Madison Avenue project was happening -- like right before that -- in fact, days before that, one of our clients said, 'How are you doing in terms of diversity?' ...Then it spoke well of [my] agency that [we] had this person that was so linked-in handling this program. Even though our numbers were bad, we had a plan, we had a person, whatever.
This case, along with Warren’s appointment at Omnicom, give the impression that at least some of the agencies reacted to the prospect of increased scrutiny from clients by quickly shuffling staff to save face.

In writing to clients, the NAACP sought to expand a regime already in place for government clients. This policy, in compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 11246, requires all agencies to submit, as part of their bid for new business, a report on the diversity of internal staff as well as outside vendors along with an affirmative action plan. For instance, when Patricia’s agency pitched for a large government account, "we had to give them volumes of what we do, who our people are, what nationality they are...when you pitch business like that, they can ask whatever they want." As Dorothy put it, working for the federal government means "they own you" since the contract will be regulated by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program (OFCCP) housed within the U.S. Department of Labor--"it's huge, and they can kill ya."58 Although the NAACP hoped its letter would encourage more of the private sector to require its agencies to follow government guidelines on diversity, my informants agreed that as the negative publicity eventually faded, so did the client's will to follow through. In sum,

58 The passage of Title VII in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an executive agency with the authority to investigate allegations of discrimination. This was strengthened in its enforcement powers in 1972 to allow the EEOC to bring federal court action. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) is even more powerful: federal contractors are required to submit a written affirmative-action plan with numerical goals and timetables for achieving these goals for hiring and promoting women, blacks and other designated groups. (Ratcliffe, 2004)

115
client pressure creates fear but precious little accountability. There are several reasons for this.

First, clients are conservative and risk-averse. Donna, who works in HR and on diversity issues, describes how clients often insist that agencies only assign staff to their account with previous experience with the client and/or product category. For instance, a client might seek to meddle in the agency hiring process at the mid-level or above by insisting that the candidate already have experience marketing in specific areas such as consumer packaged goods, financial, or pharmaceuticals.

Elizabeth recounts how, when hiring at the more senior levels, "it's a typical request where our clients will say 'Well, I'd be happy to see the final two,'...but yeah, if you allowed them in at that level, yes they would pick your candidate... some have tried and some have done." Heather concurs that, in this environment, it is hard to "sell in" a new employee to the client if they are perceived as an outsider who is new to the business. This, in turn, creates incentives for agencies to promote from within—a dynamic which tends to benefit advertising's mostly White internal labor pool. It also makes it more difficult for agencies to hire mid-level people of color from equivalent industries. For Donna, this reveals an interesting dilemma for HR that "everyone knows about" but few openly acknowledge:

As we have more and more pressure from our clients from the diversity standpoint, at the same time, they're so open to diversity they look to us to be the continuity. They look to us to be the people to train them to be savvy marketers because you're working with a pharmaceutical company that took somebody from research and sales and suddenly they're in a marketing job and they don't know how to market anything. So we're the ones that have to help them along the way. So, in a way, kind of, we're sacrificing so they can be more grandiose--and like they haven't figured out training programs to help people become smarter marketers, they take somebody from sales and say like 'go into marketing' and then we feel the pain -- not because that person
is diverse -- but because that person isn’t trained, so it’s more important for us to have the experience that their people may not have. That happens a lot. A lot. They pass the buck a little bit. I can tell you that in my 10 years in this business...I think people are much more hesitant to pick someone who is, like, different.

Another reason why client pressure has failed to increase diversity stems from the relentless drive towards increasing profits. Recruiting and training diverse candidates is expensive and, as Susan complains, "we’re being squeezed by clients to deliver more for less." Elizabeth concurs, noting that it’s not enough for clients to simply ask for more diversity; they have to be willing to foot the bill: "Are our clients gonna’ say, 'We’re going to give you a slush fund? You know? Are we going to get paid differently? Where’s the budget for invention? Where’s the extra body? Clients squeeze us...we get paid on cost of labor plus a percent." The consensus amongst my informants was that client pressure doesn’t work because there is no clear incentive for solving someone else’s problem. In other words, a client may be motivated to invest in their own in-house diversity programs, programs that seek to repair and/or burnish the reputation of their corporate brand. But as for the handlers of that brand, the client’s partner ad agencies, they are hired for one reason only. As Dorothy explains:

The most important thing is the clients are getting money. That’s why, with the Madison Avenue Project, the objective was to get the clients to say [diversity] was important to them. But, at the end of the day -- and I’m not saying it’s not important to clients, but if it was that important to clients, you would’ve seen a change...they would’ve called the [agency] CEO to say 'You better send me something in 90 days or we’ll get somewhere else to go.' But really, what’s important to clients is their revenue...'Oh and P.S., some dude named Cyrus Mehri called me -- are you taking care of that?’ 'Yeah, we got it.' 'Good.' [Laughter] And that’s the end of that damn discussion [claps her hands]!
As Dorothy notes, clients have yet to demonstrate a willingness to sanction or otherwise punish their agencies for discriminatory hiring practices. Nor have many insisted on the implementation of a plan complete with baselines, benchmarks and hiring targets. It would appear that, as long as the agency is making the client money, then both parties can rest assured that the business relationship is secure. Thus, market-based solutions to advertising’s race problem must ultimately contend with more strategic and structural interests. Put another way, effective pressure requires a clear consequence. As long as clients are not willing to sever ties with offending agencies by finding “somewhere else to go,” those agencies will continue to seek to minimize the cost of increasing diversity. The potential Madison Avenue Project lawsuit presents a threat because lead counsel Cyrus Mehri has a track record of winning large, race discrimination class action lawsuits from corporations like Texaco and Coca-Cola. In contrast, I know of no instance of a client actually divesting from their agency to protest that agency’s lack of diversity. Until that happens, client “pressure” will remain a weak form of leverage.

Clients may make casual inquiries into agency diversity, but most “pass the buck” by insisting on a) experienced staff selected from the largely White existing labor pool, b) lower fees that inhibit spending on diversity programs, and c) continuity in general. Because of advertising’s subservience to capital, they tend to mirror the behavior of their clients, whether they be risk-averse and/or profit-driven. This is unlikely to change until clients are held more directly responsible, either through litigation or public humiliation, for the internal behavior of their outside vendors. Stern letters from the NAACP notwithstanding, as long as
advertising remains an externality, the evidence suggests that clients will continue
to outsource practices—perhaps even discriminatory ones—that do not live up to
their own internal standards.

**Cashing In**

Given the limitations of the "big stick" and "client pressure" approaches, both
of which pursue diversity as a form of justice—a human or civil rights initiative that
seeks to undo past and present discriminatory practices—many HR managers and
Diversity Executives have sought to reframe diversity as simply a matter of "good
business." For Patricia, the logic is straightforward: when possible, agency staff
should reflect and embody the target so that, rather than rely solely on market
research, they can also leverage any insights gained through personal experience. In
other words, "you need to have a diverse population creating ads that speak to a
diverse audience." Thus, while the goal is similar to that of the Madison Avenue
Project—that the advertising workplace should better reflect the general
population—the rationale is different. Susan sums up this view by positioning
diversity as a means to reach lucrative markets:

Where's the Black voice? Where's the Asian voice? And that's where the
buying power is coming from. So that's why, you know, society is changing,
why aren't we mimicking that? How are we getting their voice? How are we
selling to them? Their buying power is up. How are we marketing to them
differently? How is technology different, you know, in each socioeconomic
group within diversity, it's fascinating how you target and get through to them.

According to this logic, minority employees have inside knowledge that agencies can
parlay into profits. And this provides diversity efforts a compelling “reason for
being” in a corporate setting. For Barbara, this means insisting "it’s not a Black,
brown, or White issue -- it's a green issue. You need to invest in diversity and it needs to be tied to a business initiative." Or, as Karey put it, "we're not going to sit around and sing Cumbaya. It's not about liking people, it's about making money."

If only it were that simple. As Dávila (2001) has pointed out, the move to position candidates of color as ambassadors to niche markets can quickly slip into essentialist notions of identity based on a troubling premise: ethnicity as destiny. Chambers (2008), in his historical account of the development of Black-owned advertising agencies, explains that while White agencies often discriminated against Black applicants:

...it is also true that Black agency owners made claims based on their own racial background about their special expertise or insight into the Black consumer market. Of course, most owners only meant this to be an initial marketing angle, an economic on-ramp, not a detour. In creating a unique position and rationale for existence, Black agency owners provided clients with reasons to not employ them to reach White customers....If mainstream agencies did not incorporate Black professionals into the fabric of company life, or Black agencies primarily crafted advertising to Black consumers, some argued, the pattern of segregation had simply evolved to a different form. (p. 255)

Turow (1997) makes a similar observation, noting how African-American marketers often insisted on their culture's difference in order to then claim it as a unique constituency that they might represent: "they argued that they wanted to be treated the same way the ad industry was beginning to treat Hispanic Americans: as ethnics whose culture counted as a primary category for analysis in an age of segmentation" (p. 87). And while Hispanic and Asian marketers have used (non-English) language as a pretext for assuming an interpreter/translator role, they have also—in contrast to Blacks—successfully established themselves as cultural ambassadors, uniquely positioned to broker and mediate "pre-existing hierarchies of representation...
meet both the expectations of their corporate clients and those of their prospective audience of consumers" (Dávila, 2001, p. 7). This relative success, however, comes with a cost. The very act of consolidating populations into the fictional categories of “Hispanic” and “Asian” is predicated on a presumption of something “essential” that all group members share in common, in stark contrast to Whites who are not segmented by race. For instance, recounting how one Hispanic advertising executive emphasized "that only a Hispanic can really understand our culture, our way of being and feeling, to produce a truly compelling and relevant campaign," Dávila observes that "Hispanic ad professionals thus become both victims of U.S. 'othering' practices, homogenized into the marginal category of Hispanic regardless of their class or educational background and their lack of identification with most Hispanics, as well as key 'tropicalizers'" seeking out market share "by circulating dominant representations of Latinidad that draw on the exotic and the essential characteristics of the 'other'" (p. 42). As Turow (1998) points out, the logic of market segmentation made difference profitable and Blacks wanted to cash in:

In view of the history of race in America, and in the ad industry in particular, it is ironic that Black agency executives pressed for that fractionalization of the Black population by income, gender, age, and other categories in order to make a case for its ethnic importance. Clearly, they understood a key principle of the new media world: the more a population in US society could be shown as distinctive, and the more it could be divided against itself and others, the more likely marketers were to consider it important. (p. 88)

As we can see, the articulation of skin color with the expertise of cultural insight (and, in turn, increased revenues) may help my informants to make diversity more attractive to management, but it also carries with it the danger of reinforcing the racist assumption that Black people only understand other Black people. For, as
Chambers suggests, if Blacks are hired to advertise to other Blacks, then it would follow that Whites would be most qualified to advertise to Whites, or what the industry euphemistically refers to as the "general market." According to Linda, this sets up a trap for minorities who choose to start out in a "multi-cultural" or "ethnic" advertising agency. She often hears that, later in their careers, when these minorities seek jobs at larger agencies, they are considered too niche, too specialized, and unable to handle the larger "general market" accounts that come with bigger budgets. So, while being a minority can open some doors, it can close others. On-ramp turns to detour. Detour turns to exit.

Despite the hazards of articulating racial identities with unique market insights, MAIP, the advertising industry's flagship diversity program, continues to sell the benefit of minority employees in economic terms. For instance, during the 2010 summer orientation, 4A's Executive Vice President Michael Donahue (2010) addressed a cohort of 89 interns of color set to begin internships at dozens of agencies around New York City. In his remarks, Donahue praised the recent growth of the MAIP program and quoted Stedman Graham,59 who once said that although doing diversity has "always been the right thing to do, now it's the smart thing to do." Noting that multicultural people will represent half of the population in United States by 2050, Donahue added the proviso that "we’d probably do [diversity] even if it was only the right thing" but quickly added that now it's both right and smart (in terms of capturing emerging markets).

59 Graham is CEO of a marketing and consulting firm, but more widely known as Oprah Winfrey's long-time romantic partner.
In using money as an incentive, though this time not as penalty but as reward, both Donahue and Graham propose a win-win by trusting that the wisdom of the market will bring about social change through the common sense of capitalism's profit-motive. Bowser (2007) outlines the idea thusly:

African Americans and other nonWhites are an increasing proportion of the nation's population and of businesses' potential consumer base. To effectively market to an increasingly diverse consumer base, one's workforce has to be equally diverse. At least a symbolic Black presence has become important to businesses' financial bottom line. (p. 107)

Diversity as the "smart thing" to do has long history. Kern-Foxworth (1994) describes how Wally Snyder, president and CEO of the American Advertising Federation (AAF) argued in 1993 that the increase of multicultural populations meant that a diversified workplace was "no longer simply a moral choice; it is a business imperative" (Snyder quoted in Kern-Foxworth, p. 119). Kendall (2006) concurs that, "many in the business world are very clear that all white companies are not financially expedient because they are less able to meet the needs of a diverse client base" (p. 26). In this case, to stay in business, agencies must help their clients to seek out new, diverse markets and will, the logic goes, in turn, want to hire similarly diverse employees. Though oft-repeated in my interviews, this assumption that the market will increase diversity within advertising is a dubious one, especially given Dan Wieden's (2009) confession that his agency (W+K) has long employed "White, middle-class kids" to market brands like Nike to kids in “the inner city” who “aren’t even going to see advertising as a possibility.” Dávila (2001) goes even further, arguing that the prominence of African-Americans in advertising campaigns "has presented its own set of contradictions: the more 'hip-hop rules,'
the more Black agencies have had to struggle to maintain their niche market” (p. 221). This is precisely what infuriates activists like Sanford Moore. Not only has advertising not hired Blacks in proportion to their buying power, which Moore (2009) estimates at just under $1 trillion dollars a year, but many predominantly White agencies, such as W+K, are using White employees to market Black culture to people of color. Despite Donahue and Graham’s optimism, race inequality inside mainstream advertising agencies has thus far endured the “emergence” of the Black market.

Though most of my informants agreed with the idea that diversity is both “right” and “smart,” almost all placed greater emphasis on the latter. But if hiring more Black employees is “smart,” then most agencies are still pretty dumb. In response, advocates seeking to sell social change as a profit-friendly venture often conflate a description of the now with a prescription for the future. Donahue and Graham may argue that diversity is already “smart” for business, but they are also looking ahead—hoping to call it into being through the mechanism of the market. And while Wieden criticizes his own agency for not hiring more people of color, he diagnoses the problem as a supply-side issue best solved by recruiting more diverse talent through internship programs like MAIP. And herein lies the problem. Despite all the pressure from activists, government regulators, and even clients, the common sense of the advertising industry boils down to this: if we place more interns of color into the pipeline, the free market will do the rest. The “smart” thing will bring about the “right” thing. Add color then stir. But this presumes an equal playing field. And as we have seen in the previous chapter, referral hires, along with subjective
notions of “chemistry” and “fit,” systematically advantage Whites with access to closed social networks. In the next section, I examine how this dynamic plays out on the level of the internship—the staging ground for most of the industry’s diversity efforts—and where the modest gains of MAIP are overshadowed by an invisible network of White privilege.

**Must-Hires**

My research suggests that “must-hires” (interns automatically accepted into the program because of who they know, also referred to as “must-takes,” “favor-hires,” and “asks”) are endemic to advertising internship programs. The requests come from “senior clients, chief marketing officers, directors of advertising, you know, presidents of the division” along with “friends of friends, family of family” and agency management. In practice, these “requests,” function more like commands and tend to be honored by HR. Indeed, my informants have come to expect these must-hires every summer, describing them as “the CEO’s assistant’s step-daughter or so-and-so’s best friend, the client’s kid, you know” or “the chairman of Proctor calls up and says, 'Hey, my kid, my niece, my God child,' you know?” In the three agencies that I observed during the summer of 2010, must-hires outnumbered MAIP interns by 24 to 9, a ratio of more than 2:1.\(^{60}\) Perhaps unsurprisingly, all the must-

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\(^{60}\) This calculation excludes a handful of other special slots such as those reserved for Prep-for-Prep (a leadership program for people of color) and the largely White nominees from a particular school (typically the alma mater of a senior staff person). I exclude these slots because, in terms of race, they tended to balance each other out. Overall, of the 75 total interns that I observed at these three agencies, I counted 23 interns of color (9 of whom were MAIP), or 30 percent. Though a higher percentage than the full-time staff of most agencies-at-large, which Wieden (2009) estimated at closest to 16 percent, this number is still below the 36 percent of the U.S. population representing Hispanics/Latinos, Blacks, Asians and other minorities according to the 2010 U.S.
hires at my three host agencies appeared to be affluent and well connected and all, without exception, were White. The following is a representative set of testimonials that illuminate the must-hire system from a variety of perspectives: a subordinate reluctantly acquiesces to her boss; a colleague ponders doing a favor for a friend; and a high-powered executive “pays it forward” to his alma mater, a co-worker, and even his own family.

So, you know we have a lot of ‘must-takes’ in the program. This year they actually seem pretty good -- but I mean, you meet kids that you know, they’re only here because their parents said, ‘get out of the house for the summer during the day.’ And, you know, it’s a shame because you could hire unbelievable kids for every one of these spots and we don’t... some ‘must-hires’ are fine. They don’t tend to be as good as people that we have picked... they don’t have any real interest in this business, you know. I interview them, and I know that they don’t even want to do this program, but they’ve been told to do it... but obviously, if this is someone that you really want in the program and you’d really appreciate it? ‘Done!’ What am I going to say? ‘CEO, I don’t like your pick?’ (Heather, HR Manager)

There’s this executive -- I really like him and we’ve built a relationship -- his son has a friend and he wanted me to see him for the internship. So I’m like ‘Okay,’ and he was really cool about it. Like he’s not like ‘hire him.’ You know, he doesn’t have a big ego or anything like that. He’s like, you know, ‘Would you mind meeting with him and telling me what you think?’ and he goes, ‘I’m not asking for a favor or anything’ but you know what? I was torn, because I really like him and he doesn’t ask for favors and it’s a friend of a friend -- his son’s father, and if he could do that for his friend’s -- his son’s friend -- I want to do that for him. We never did it, ’cause I interviewed the guy, and he was nice, but he was not a star -- he didn’t wow me. If he wowed me, he would have been hired. So I said, ’Listen, he was okay, I probably wouldn’t normally have passed him on, but, if you want me to pursue it, I’d be happy -- if that’s what you want -- because I like him -- he’s a good guy and I was all like ‘Oh my God! This is how it happens!’ (Patricia, HR Head)

Census (Overview, 2011). Therefore, even with multiple diversity programs in place, the intern population that I observed failed to reflect the diversity of the general population, much less compensate for underrepresentation amongst the full-time staff. Take, for example Patricia’s surprise that her agency’s diversity programs did not increase diverse hires.
One of the students that heard me speak at [my Alma Mater] followed up with me and was graduating and wanted to get a job in advertising, so he came to New York and I hooked him up with a whole bunch of people for him to talk to. Then he sent me an email that he got a job through the connection that I set up for him. And so that was kinda’ cool… I’m just glad I could help him out because I know how hard it can be to get a foot in the door. Every May/June, each agency gets hundreds and hundreds of resumes from people trying to get a job and HR departments gotta’ sift through it, and what gets through is when somebody knows somebody…. Another client in our agency, her daughter was trying to break in--get a job in advertising, so they contacted me and, anyway, they interviewed and she turned out to be a bright kid…. One of [our interns this summer] was my youngest daughter’s boyfriend’s brother who really wanted to get into advertising and was looking for an internship. We take two internships in our department, so I talked to him and said ‘sure.’ (James, CCO)

Together, these perspectives highlight the systematic nature of must-hires. They are prevalent, frequent, and expected. And, depending on your rank, can either be experienced as a burdensome obligation or a pleasant ritual of quid pro quo between friends and business partners. As James puts it, the reciprocal exchange of favors “works two ways. It's a relationship bank system. You make withdrawals and deposits all the time. And that’s not unique to advertising, that’s just kind of life.”

James’ comment both explains the utility of this material practice and points to the well-established sociological concept of embeddedness, elaborated by Royster (2003) in her study of how White networks exclude Black men from blue-collar jobs. Thus, while doling out internships to cultivate relationships with the right people can be an advantageous business practice, the must-hire system also presents us with yet another example of how “continuing patterns of opportunity hoarding among Whites have exacerbated exploitative political and economic conditions that harm Blacks” (36). Put another way, every must-hire is a non-competitive, sole provider, no-bid contract, and therefore an inherently unequal opportunity, in this
case, open only to affluent Whites with connections. As Royster argues, “who you know” is at least as important as “what you know” such that most successful job candidates must be not just qualified, but also embedded within the right social network for “gaining access to opportunities in American society” (p. 179).

We can see a clear example of embeddedness in the case of James’ favor to his fellow alum. Given the high demand for access to his industry, James clearly understands the value of leveraging his network to help this student “get a foot in the door.” James was quick to add that this kind of favor “doesn’t get you the job, it gets you an opportunity to talk.” But even if we entertain this suggestion by setting aside the frequent instances, recounted by Heather, when the favor alone was enough to guarantee the hire, it is worth considering the degree of advantage conferred by the mere “opportunity to talk.” My HR informants concurred that special access alone is an insufficient condition for hire, but they also insisted that it is almost always a necessary one. Indeed, for Heather, this is the way most of the hiring in her agency gets done: "people have people who know people and somebody knows my name and the creative director talks to alumni in their school and it’s really -- to get in is word-of-mouth here with some sort of connection." As for the more official job application channels that are ostensibly open to anyone, Heather’s agency has an employment box on their website that she rarely checks, a dead letter office where hundreds of candidates will languish, without nary a perfunctory consideration. In similar fashion, Patricia’s granting of an informational interview to her colleague’s son’s friend was an exclusive act—a unique opportunity
afforded by virtue of proximity, not qualification. And while she ultimately deemed this particular candidate unworthy of the position, she admitted that she would have felt compelled to make an exception had her colleague persisted. Moreover, while he “was really cool about it” and washed his hands of any favor asking, this colleague did in fact ask for, and received, “a foot in the door” for his family friend—a privileged form of access reserved for him and denied to others.

**Blind Spot**

The evidence suggests that the must-hire phenomenon is not only an institutionalized form of White privilege that is undermining even the most well-intentioned efforts to diversify the American advertising industry, but also a giant blind spot in the debate over how to remedy the current situation. Despite vastly outnumbering interns of color placed in agencies through programs like MAIP, must-hire interns seem to get a free pass from diversity advocates. This is remarkable, given both the scarcity and desirability of internship slots; they are an invaluable opportunity for access, training, and networking within a highly competitive industry. As one HR staff member explained, they like to hire interns: "if they've already graduated we're like 'well, this person's already trained, like they've been here for 10 weeks. They know how [the agency] works. They know all the point people." In short, internships bring outsiders inside. And yet, diversity advocates have opted not to publicly challenge the practice of must-hires, the giving away of internship slots to the friends and family of the White and powerful. Beyond

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61 Maria describes how she does much of her hiring through staff referrals which she describes as "someone's someone, so it's not like a 'must-hire' but it's like a 'must-bring-in' for informational interview but we do end up taking a lot of those people."
the obvious disincentive against criticizing upper-management or resisting requests from clients, I suspect this silence is reinforced by a polarized debate on diversity tactics pitting the likes of Sanford Moore against Tiffany Warren. On one hand, Moore’s “negative” approach of using the “big stick” of a lawsuit/client pressure demands that management do the “right” thing. On the other, Warren’s more “positive” appeal of “cashing in” on essentialist notions of ethnic insight seeks to coax agencies into embracing diversity as a matter of “smart” business. These two positions react to and reinforce each other, creating an entrenched polemic and reducing the issue to a question of financial interest. Which is a more effective lever for correcting racial inequality: the threat of fines or the promise of profit? The answer is thus a forgone conclusion: we need agencies to hire and promote more people of color and Blacks in particular, the logic goes, and the only question is how. This presumes that the issue is solely one of discrimination. And while the subjective notions of “chemistry” and “fit” along with the closed social networks of referral hires outlined in the previous chapter do play a discriminatory role, I contend that the extent of the must-hire system offers up an alternative solution to racial inequality: stop giving away internship slots to undeserving Whites.

Incredibly, the material practice of hiring interns solely on the basis of a particular connection or pedigree, despite the fact that these must-hires are almost always White, does not seem to be on the agenda for diversity advocates seeking to rectify racial inequality within the advertising industry. Instead, must-hires seem to be accepted as an inevitable cost of doing business. As Elizabeth explains, "the asks are always going to be there" because “everybody is going to use their opportunity
to use their chip or ask for their favor or whatever." For example, "if you're the kid walking around on campus whose -- you know -- Dad works at Procter & Gamble, chances are you've got someone who could get the resume on the right desk -- and that's the reality." While admitting that, historically, virtually all of these well-connected must-hires have been White, Elizabeth insisted that this was merely a result of circumstance. People in power just happen to be White:

I think it's the reality. I mean you know, if our, I don't know, if one of our clients was a very senior, you know, minority male and he wants his kid to get a job, generally the kid's going to be a minority. So I think it mirrors what's going on. We don't say, 'Hey! Lets go work with GM because they're a bunch of White guys [laughter]! You know, I mean, but think about the jobs that are, you know, where they'd be coming from -- senior clients, chief marketing officers, directors of advertising, you know, presidents of the division.

For Elizabeth, then, the measure of a racially discriminatory policy is intent, or the premeditated execution of individual prejudice. Since her agency did not deliberately seek out White-led clients, and since the dispensing of favor hires to White interns is an unavoidable artifact of circumstance, therefore a material practice that disproportionately benefits White people does so not by way of discrimination but rather by the hazard of good fortune; Whites just happen to be better positioned for taking advantage of the system. This idea, that the present is innocent of the past that created it, underpins the logic of many of my HR informants and will require some unpacking. As I will argue below, it psychologizes and individualizes a structural problem while deflecting attention away from the material practices of White privilege, such as must-hires, that favor the advancement of Whites in advertising.
**Durable Inequality**

As argued in the previous chapter, what Bonilla-Silva (2010) calls "individual psychological dispositions"—whether they be explicitly prejudicial or not—are largely irrelevant to the successful reproduction of White privilege (7). Rather, as DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2003) argue, "one of the characteristics of White privilege is that Whites do not have to be racists in order for racial inequality to be reproduced" (p. 190). Put another way, a must-hire may not feel like discrimination to those involved in distributing internship slots to the largely White sons and daughters of the rich, powerful, and well connected; Elizabeth sees each case as benefitting an individual who just happens to know the right people. But when we step back and evaluate must-hires as a system of material practices hoarding opportunities for members of a racially-bounded social group while excluding others, what emerges instead is a set of "cumulative, relational, often unnoticed organizational processes" that reproduce what Tilly (1998) calls “durable inequality” between racial groups (p. 35). Such a systemic practice can function perfectly well without any personal animus directed towards minorities and, at the same time, still manage to over privilege Whites. Moreover, it is remarkable, given advertising’s ongoing diversity crisis and the typical profile of a must-hire, that none of my HR informants appeared to conceive of these favors as race discrimination per se.

When race discrimination was mentioned, it was typically done to disavow any personal prejudice amongst the HR department, the agency or the industry-at-large. Dorothy was particularly adamant on this point: "Do I really believe that
someone would look at someone and say 'I'm not hiring you because you're Black?' I don’t believe that. I really just don’t believe that...I don’t believe that this is an industry full of White men that go 'Oh, you're Black--got to go. No, get out of here. We can't promote you.'" Elizabeth concurred that there was no discrimination at her agency and Patricia expressed confidence that, for her team, race was not a factor in evaluating candidates: "if they happen to be Black or Hispanic or whatever -- great! I don’t care, I mean I really don’t think we care." These disclaimers interest me for two reasons. First, my informants seem to assume that discrimination is only measured by harm done to minorities, rather than advantage conferred to Whites. This is striking, given their acknowledgment in the previous chapter that hiring in largely White agencies is often done on the basis of affinity; people hire people who remind them of themselves. Second, they make the common move of couching discrimination within a framework of prejudice. This defines the problem as an issue of personal psychological dispositions rather than systemic institutional barriers. While this deferral to individual responsibility is understandable, as it puts a concrete face on a problem that might seem abstract, it can create a dangerous distraction. Moreover, while hunting for racists may be “the sport of choice for those who practice the 'clinical approach' to race relations -- the careful separation of good and bad, tolerant and intolerant Americans,” Bonilla-Silva (2006) puts forward a more “structural understanding of race relations,” one that seeks to better understand “how many Whites subscribe to an ideology that ultimately helps preserve racial inequality rather than assessing how many hate or love Blacks and other minorities” (p.15). For example, by denying personal prejudice while
perpetuating the material practice of must-hires, HR practitioners are participating in a mechanism that produces systemic racial inequalities. In the next chapter, I will argue that the dominant ideology allowing Whites to defend the privilege they enjoy in advertising is the widespread belief in meritocracy—the idea that, in the end, a worker's talent and qualifications are all that matters. But before doing so, I want to take a moment to further develop the material and structural context that this ideology obscures: a present state of racial inequality shaped by a long history of White “affirmative action.”

**Whiteness as Property**

Whiteness has long been linked with the pursuit of collective class interests through the accumulation of property. Harris (1993) argues that early notions of Whiteness were initially formulated both through the institution of slavery and the accompanying legal system protecting those who had rights to own property (both human and otherwise) against those who did not. Furthermore, as objects of property themselves, Blacks helped consolidate White identity across class lines by conferring “free” status upon most of their White-skinned contemporaries.\(^{62}\) Put another way, just as Black skin was becoming a legally recognized sign of slavery by the 1660s, White skin also was increasingly recognized as its opposite—a social identity based on both the actual legal/economic status and the myths/ideologies of

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\(^{62}\) While there may have been Whites bound by the confines of indentured servitude, Harris (1993) points out that, unlike slavery, these terms were not linked to skin color nor transferable to offspring by law.
a racial hierarchy that put Whites on top. Wise (2005) concurs with Harris, noting how "preferential treatment for Whites has, of course, been the hallmark of American law and society for hundreds of years" (p. 29). As evidence of the very material consequences of this social identity, Wise cites various examples ranging from the Naturalization Act of 1790, which specified that only "free White persons" could become citizens, to the Homestead Act of 1862, which conferred free title to 160-acre plots of land almost exclusively to White pioneers (pp. 30-32). Of course, as Roediger (2005) chronicles in his book Working Toward Whiteness, the racial hierarchy in the United States developed unevenly over time in response to the immigration of White "ethnics," but the polar constructs of Black and White established during slavery stubbornly persisted and often facilitated the assimilation of Poles, Italians and Jews into all-White enclaves.

Scholars have chronicled how federal domestic spending policies and priorities have favored Whites throughout the history of the United States (Bowser, 2007, p. 125), but one form of structural racism in particular—housing discrimination—helps explain both the problem of social segregation outlined in the previous chapter and the intersection of race and class in the must-hire system. As

63 Of course, what was considered “White” also changed over time as WASPs slowly embraced Italians, Irish, and Jews among others (Allen, 1994; Wise, 2008).

64 "At various times, Italians, Greeks, Jews, and Pols weren't considered White. But, by the end of World War II, they had access to jobs and financial assistance (for instance, the G.I. Bill) that African-Americans, Japanese Americans and many Chinese Americans, American Indians, and dark skinned Mexican-Americans did not... banks redlined neighborhoods, not giving loans to people buying in those areas; neighborhood covenants were drawn up saying that houses couldn't be sold to Black people; realtors wouldn't show houses in particular neighborhoods to Black or Latino people" (Kendall, 2006, p. 44).
Lipsitz (2005) observes, the Federal Housing Act of 1934 “aided and abetted segregation in U.S. residential neighborhoods” for decades by way of racist city surveys and appraiser manuals that channeled government backed credit “away from older inner-city neighborhoods and toward White home buyers moving into segregated suburbs” (p. 70). Such loans fueled the boom of the American middle class between the 1930s and 1960s but were rarely granted to Black families—essentially restricting them to "the urban core at the very time that the ‘American dream’ was being subsidized for White families" (Wise, 2005, p. 32). As a result, the suburbs consolidated a sense of White unity built upon proximity, kinship ties, and the improved life chances that stem from an increasing net worth. In other words, discriminatory housing practices not only exacerbated social segregation, but also allowed Whites to accumulate a disproportionate share of the country’s wealth based on the appreciation of valuable real estate. Thus began a generational cycle of privilege making "White parents more able to borrow funds for their children’s college education or to loan money to their children to [in turn] enter the housing market" (Lipsitz, 2005, pp. 77-78). In this way, the link between race and class, as rooted in the group-based head start provided to Whites through structural

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65 As Lipsitz (2005) argues, those who would deny minorities home loans would defend their decision as stemming not from discrimination "but from the low net worth of minority applicants, even those who have high incomes" (p. 77). Yet, this focus on net worth says "in essence, ‘We can't give you a loan today because we have discriminated against members of your race so effectively in the past that you have not been able to accumulate any equity from housing and to pass it down through the generations’" (p. 77).
forms of past discrimination, remains relevant to inequality today. Such a historical perspective helps make an important distinction between concurrent trends of increasing income parity between Whites and Blacks on the one hand, and persistent wealth disparity on the other:

Because the parents and grandparents of young Whites were able to accumulate assets and professional security at a time when the parents and grandparents of Blacks were restricted in their ability to do same, today's young Black couples, although earning roughly the same as Whites on the job, continue to have a net worth that is less than one fifth the worth of young White couples...the average value of inheritances received by Whites is as much as 3.6 times higher than the value of inheritances received by Blacks. Today the typical White family has wealth and net worth of nearly 11 times that of the typical Black family, and eight times higher than the typical Latino family. (Wise, 2005, p. 34)

**Legacy Admissions**

We can see another example of the intersection of race and class in how “legacy” admissions at prestigious universities resemble the must-hire system in unduly benefitting Whites. Researchers estimate that 75 percent of top national universities and over 90 percent of the country's top ten liberal arts colleges grant legacy preferences, which can add anywhere from 23-160 extra points to the SAT scores of children of alumni (Brittain and Bloom, 2010, pp. 124-125). A recent article in *The Economist* calculates that legacies make up between 10% and 15% of every Ivy League freshman class and “are two to four times more likely to be

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66 Despite the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the federal government estimates that "as many as 2 million cases of housing discrimination take place every year against persons of color" ranging from "outright bias in mortgage lending, to refusing to show apartments to people of color, to steering Blacks to mostly Black neighborhoods, to showing fewer units to Blacks seeking to rent or fewer homes to those seeking to buy" (Wise, 2005, p. 33).
admitted to the best universities than non-legatees” (The Curse of Nepotism, 2004, p. 1). A highly publicized example of such exclusive qualification inflation was the admission of George W. Bush to Yale University, where his father went and his grandfather had been a trustee, despite having SAT scores 180 points below the median for students admitted to his class. Similar to must-hires in advertising, legacies are considered "proxies for privilege" since they tend to favor children of White, well-educated, and presumably affluent families. This did not come about through a coincidence of circumstance. The legacy system was born of discrimination—originally established in the 1920’s by Ivy League schools hoping “to stem the influx of the 'wrong' type of students” (Jews, Catholics, etc.) by shifting admission criteria from academic merit demonstrable through test results towards “personal estimates of character” by way of recommendation letters from friends of the school (Brittain and Bloom, 2010, p. 136). And while today’s legacy policies may no longer be explicitly anti-Semitic and xenophobic, their beneficiaries still represent "constituencies that monopolized higher education in the beginning of the 20th century: affluent White Protestants" (Brittain and Bloom, 2010, p. 136). Moreover, The Economist opined that, by “pandering to the (overwhelmingly White) children of the overclass,” legacy admissions to the educational institutions controlling access to “the country’s most impressive jobs” had become a glaring “insult to meritocracy” (The Curse of Nepotism, 2004, p. 1). For instance, one particularly damning study by the Department of Education found in 1990 that “the average Harvard legacy student [was] ‘significantly less qualified’ than the average non-legacy student in every area except sports” (Ibid.).
Legacy admissions illuminate how class interest can compound over time, bequeathing the benefits of ill-gotten gains to future generations. For instance, an average White student whose race facilitates his entrance to Harvard in the 1920’s would thereby gain privileged access to a set of prestigious and lucrative career options—passing down a cycle of socio-economic life chances (including assisted admission to his alma mater) likely to advantage his descendants for generations to come (Anderson, 2010, p. 293). Put another way, the economic benefits of White privilege—initially won through deliberate policies of race discrimination—will remain in the family as wealth/real estate and education/employment long after those policies are overturned. As Foner (1997) puts it, "slavery may be gone and legal segregation dismantled, but the effects of past discrimination live on in seniority systems that preserve intact the results of a racially segmented job market, a Black unemployment rate double that of Whites, and pervasive housing segregation" (p. 25). Such “seniority systems” are precisely what makes must-hires possible in practice and racist in their execution. It was the advertising industry’s long history of race discrimination, outlined in the previous chapter, which prevented Blacks from rising to the levels of seniority where inner-agency must-hire requests are typically made today. Thus, it is Whites whose rise to the senior ranks was facilitated by past discrimination that can now continue to hire and promote other Whites more on the basis of who, and not what, they knew. Moreover, just as I found that must-hires outnumbered MAIP interns by a ratio of over 2:1, research on legacy admissions found that more White children of alumni got into Harvard in the early 1990’s through preferential treatment “than the total number of Black,
Hispanic, and American Indian students combined” (Brittain and Bloom, 2010, p. 124). With its roots buried deep in the past, White privilege continues to bear fruit:

For Whites to have such a relative advantage over people of color, and in such large measures because of the inertia carried over from past unequal opportunity, as well as ongoing discrimination, is unjust...Even more, those head starts allow Whites to have advantages in multiple arenas of life, from jobs to education to housing, that will continue to place future generations of color at a disadvantage. In other words, the relative positions of Whites and those of color will too often be transmitted across generational lines, having little to do with personal merit, hard work or effort. (Wise, 2010, p. 134)

Summing up, Anderson (2010) argues that “these practices, and the lifetime benefits that accrue to beneficiaries and in their effects over generations, in actuality produce substantially greater advantage for rich white people than actual affirmative action does for people of color” (p. 293).

Diversity advocates from both within and without the advertising industry have used statistical evidence of racial inequality to lobby for reform. They have employed various tactics (ranging from the “big stick” of legal action and client pressure to the “carrot” of ethnic insight) to bring attention to the issue and, in some cases, increased funding for diversity programs and scholarships. And yet, these notable gains have been limited by an incoherent rationale, muddled by the contradiction between diversity as “right” (a matter of social justice) and “smart” (a profitable business practice). On one hand, the “big stick” of a lawsuit can act as the “bad cop”—making management more receptive to the “good cop” who is offering diversity programs as a win-win feel-good expense that will pay for itself. The problem with this approach is that it limits the range of debate to supply-side solutions and thus fails to directly challenge the existing mechanisms of White privilege—such as must-hires—that systematically reproduce racial inequality on a
structural level. Furthermore, since advertising is already a White-dominated industry, any hiring based on chemistry, fit, and referrals through closed social networks will likely play a discriminatory role—placing minorities at a disadvantage while favoring Whites. Again, these material practices may occur beneath the awareness of personally held attitudes. Practitioners, whether positioned as subordinates, colleagues, or high-powered CCOs, may perceive their own must-hire as unique and unrelated to race. And yet, as I hope I’ve demonstrated thus far, when these practices are evaluated together on a structural level, they can be more rightly understood as a form of group-based discrimination, regardless of intent.

Must-hires, in particular, provide a vivid example of how the durable articulation of race and class in America continues to hoard opportunities for, and provide extra help to, those who need it least: affluent Whites, many of whom enter the job market already advantaged by: a) generations of wealth accumulated through housing discrimination, b) personal/professional networks cultivated through social segregation, c) educational opportunities won through legacy admissions, or d) all of the above. Therefore, as a material practice within the advertising industry, must-hires are doubly redundant—privileging the already privileged and exacerbating existing racial inequalities. Ironically, must-hire interns often work side-by-side with interns from MAIP (the Multicultural Advertising Internship Program), an industry-sponsored effort explicitly designed to recruit under-represented minorities and thus counteract the culture of White privilege that must-hires represent. Given the material practices outlined above, the next
chapter will examine the ideological screens that allow both sets of interns to understand and defend their right to be in the program. And while we might expect the very presence of must-hires to undermine any notion of meritocracy, we shall see that the must-hires themselves are some of its most passionate defenders.
CHAPTER 5

IDEOLOGICAL SCREENS: MERITOCRACY AND COLORBLINDNESS

Having established how hiring in advertising tends to disproportionately benefit White job applicants, I now wish to consider the perspective of the interns themselves, both White and of color. In doing so, I follow Johnson’s (1986) call to study the more subjective side of social forms, or the way in which social actors interpret and understand their own material conditions. While the previous chapter considered the operation of power through the material practices of social relations (actors using rank or economic clout to hoard opportunities for their White friends and relatives), the present chapter examines the stories interns tell themselves about such practices and about fairness in general. Put another way, this chapter addresses ideology—a central concern of cultural studies—and how common sense notions of meritocracy can blind us to the material practices of inequality.

White Interns

I managed to recruit a pair of must-hires to participate in my first focus group. I met John at one of my host agencies. He was hired by James, the CCO referenced in the previous chapter, and had been very open about how he got his internship slot, telling everyone in his agency’s internship program cohort that his brother was dating the CCO’s daughter. John was an accounting major and generally unpopular; his fellow interns described him as incompetent, arrogant, and rude. My informants in HR concurred. As Donna put it, "He doesn't want to do this; he wants to be an accountant." Heather added, "I think from start to finish, [John] was underwhelming--except, on top of that, he was also a jerk which just is the worst of
the worst." And yet, John's brash style played to my advantage by creating an interesting moment of truth during an early focus group session. John was there with two other White males, one of whom, Richard, was a must-hire from another agency and had been very careful to conceal his own connections. John bragged to Richard about his relationship with the CCO saying "I didn't really apply" and "this is the only internship I could get" because it's all about "who you know." He went on to surmise that most of the other interns at his agency had connections: "[Sam's] dad knows the CEO" and "[Kurt's] dad is the president of [the agency's client]." Richard, visibly stunned by John's frank revelations, sputtered in disbelief, "They advertised it?! They broadcasted it?!” to which John quickly countered, "It's not like 'Fuck you, I know this person' -- they all worked hard...they don't not deserve to be there." Then, as though sensing Richard's discomfort, John turned and asked him point blank, "how did you get your internship?" Richard smiled, looked down, shook his head and paused.

“It's All About Connections”

At this point, I knew Richard was a must-hire, but he did not know this. As for the other two interns in the focus group, they were from a different agency and were meeting Richard for the first time. Moreover, Richard could have lied and, as far as he knew, no one in the room would have ever been the wiser. It was a

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67 Heather also blames the situation for exacerbating John's bad attitude: "I'd be interested to see John in an internship where he actually earned a spot in it. And I do not think it helps John's ego that he knows he was a must-take, and we didn't have a say in the matter and he comes prancing in like a prince and I actually think, of all the kids, he's the one who really used that card because I can't imagine he would've approached the internship the way he did if he didn't feel confident in the fact that we're here to serve him because of his relationship to James [the agency's CCO]."
fascinating moment, ripe with anxiety and catharsis. While I had deliberately placed
these two must-hires in the same focus group, hoping that the topic might come up, I
never could have dreamed that one would actually call the other out. This had
clearly caught Richard off guard; it may have been one thing to be discreet, and not
"broadcast" his good fortune and risk the resentment of his colleagues, but now he
was being confronted, head on, by John, a sympathetic inquisitor, who, like Richard,
had also said that his career was headed elsewhere (finance). Perhaps John pressed
the point because he sensed that a summer internship in advertising was just a lark
for Richard as well. There were also class indicators at work. At the very start of the
session, John admired Richard’s watch, recognizing the expensive brand by the
signature diamond on the face. Moreover, the two may have been strangers, but
there was a palpable sense of mutual recognition in the air. As such, John’s question
had a knowing tone, coming across less like curiosity and more like an invitation to
confess. And, with a deep sigh, Richard eventually acquiesced, explaining that he had
two very powerful personal connections at his agency: an uncle was CEO and a close
family friend was CCO (Chief Creative Officer). Richard hadn’t told his fellow interns
because he worried about getting treated differently.68 If asked, "I’d say I applied

68 Unbeknownst to Richard, he was indeed treated differently. In my White female focus
group, Julia, who worked at Richard’s agency and was the creative on his intern group
project, told the other participants that she recognized his last name and therefore had to
"tip-toe around him." She knew he was living with his uncle, "So he’s going back and
saying 'Hey! Guess who I’m working with-blah-blah-blah. Such-and-such is great and
such-and-such is awful." She even joked how Richard "was like 'I've presented strategy
to higher-ups.' OK, the 'higher-ups' are at your BBQ on Sunday, that's why you've
presented to higher-ups!"
and I did!" but, of course, he added, "they're not going to deny the chairman's nephew."

Another White focus group consisting of four White male interns yielded similar moments, this time inflected by class differences. Gregory, an advertising major at a Southern State school, told of a brutal application process including 10 interviews in one month (all rejections) and no response when he requested feedback. Thus he was frustrated by the apparent ease at which interns of color secured their internships along with a 70% housing subsidy:

Many MAIP kids are not ad majors or don't know the basics...they don't interview you, they're probably not even asked why they want to do advertising. It just seems unfair that people who have the advertising background and want to intern at a big agency can't do it when people who don't have the background are able to.

Gregory's complaint produced a series of surprising admissions from the other participants beginning with David: "I didn't know anything--but I've caught up fairly quickly." Thomas explained that advertising was also new to him since, being only 18, he didn't have any relevant experience on his resume and therefore was "not qualified." As for how they got in, David's Dad knew the CMO of his agency and Thomas' grandparents were friends with the owner, so his own application consisted of sending his resume and making a quick phone call: "I felt like I had an unfair advantage...I wasn't gonna say it when I got there." Since the internship program at his agency was not advertised, Thomas insisted that you had to know someone to even know about it: "other kids got it because the CEO went to their college--it's all about connections." Michael admitted that a family friend works at his agency, and though his best friends went to South Africa for the World Cup, "my
Mom wanted me to get a job.” Moreover, when Gregory initially protested that MAIP gave interns of color an unfair advantage in accessing internship slots, he did not realize that he was addressing his grievance to three must-hires who, prior to the internship, knew next to nothing about the advertising industry.69 Thus, a critique aimed at interns of color; the missing others not in the room, landed instead on Gregory’s more hidden rival: unqualified, yet well-connected Whites. Race created an ideological screen of pseudo-solidarity, blinding Gregory to the material barriers—both invisible and silent--of class privilege that separated him from the rest of the group.

During both of my two White female focus groups, non-must hires outnumbered the must-hires but, during the first session, Brenda brought up the topic of her own accord: "I want to talk about hiring because I think it's BS because it’s all done through connections...it's such bullshit...it becomes exclusive." Like Gregory, Brenda did not have an “in” at her agency and said she "had to fight to get into advertising" whereas "literally, my entire [intern project] team had connections." Brenda was particularly incensed over her agency’s decision to hire John, who, she said, had gone around during the first day of the program asking everyone who their "in" was. During another White female focus group session, Sharon, also a must-hire, described doing something similar; her "new favorite thing to do" was to ask people how they got their intern slot. At the time, it seemed to her that everyone, except the diversity hires, had a family connection to the agency’s

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69 David was a double major in Communication Studies and English Language/Literature, Thomas was an undeclared freshman, and Michael was a film major.
owners. Sharon cited the most egregious example as a high school senior who was too young to be in an office environment and seemed to be wasting a precious opportunity: "A lot of people talk about how they were interns [at my agency] before they got the job there. And I really do think that means a lot because obviously you have a relationship with people from the internship and you can then enter into the swing of things and it's like less complicated to get you started."

Jennifer concurred that the first internship is a crucial step in career development: "You can't get like a good internship till you have like a first internship on your resume." And Julia used every tool at her disposal to get her first break: "The only way that I was able to get an interview there was because my good friend from high school was currently working there and the only way she got in is she babysat for the vice-president....and before they would even look at me, I had to have that connection." Rachael had a similar story and, unlike Richard, opted to come clean on her own:

In terms of the connection thing, I think it depends a lot on the person and their, like, morals. I'll say, I have an amazing connection to work at any agency that I want [laughs]. Since [this focus group is] confidential, my best friend from childhood--her father is CEO of [one of the world's four largest advertising holding companies]. And, so, I could have been--I could have asked him for a job and he knows me very well and would have given me one but I didn't want to do that and so instead I went and used my experience from last year to try and find other connections and get my own interviews and do my own thing. So, even though I had a connection like it wasn't that I was just placed there--I got that connection myself through my experience at my internship last year where I proved myself, where they were willing to recommend me based on my work, not based on who I knew.

Technically, Rachael was not a must-hire; at least not this time. When I followed up later, she explained that her current internship came at the end of a string of favors starting with a family friend getting her an internship at a local news
station during her senior year of high school. The following summer, she used her "amazing connection" to get an internship at a pharmaceutical advertising agency. The next year, another family friend set up an interview at a non-profit public service advertising organization. By the time she applied for her current internship, Rachael had a resume boasting extensive media industry experience--opportunities all afforded by family connections. Thus, her initial frame of "morals" is telling. It both condemns the calling in of favors as immoral and confers nobility upon her restraint. And yet, despite positioning herself as doing her "own thing" to earn her current internship, Rachael stopped short of telling the rest of the focus group how the must-hire system buttressed her throughout the three internship cycles that got "her foot in the door" of the advertising industry in the first place. Like Robert, she likely understood that such a confession would violate the principles of meritocracy and thus risk resentment from her fellow participants--Brenda notwithstanding. Instead, she offered a general rationale for leveraging social networks--justifying the practice as the only way to get noticed:

I think connections to the point where you get an interview and have to prove yourself, I think that's completely appropriate because like, we've all submitted applications into Black holes. They don't even tell you they're done recruiting--just a Black hole, you have no idea. So, how do you differentiate yourself from the 2,000 applications that have been submitted? You know? And that's just through having a name of someone who works there in your cover letter.

I should note that the term "connection" was often used quite loosely by my participants; it wasn't always clear whether they meant someone else vouching for a previous job performance or a character reference from a family friend well-positioned within the hiring company, or even a combination of the two.
Nevertheless, I got a clear sense that the former use was accepted as a legitimate practice while the latter was seen as a regrettable, but completely understandable tactic given the competitive nature of the job market. Moreover, there seemed to be a sliding scale at work. Getting an interview based on a referral from a friend was a minor, and thus forgivable, violation of meritocratic principles while calling in a favor from a high-powered executive was relatively worse, a blatant abuse of power. And yet, no matter the nature of the connection, most of the White interns bent over backwards to argue that, in the end, justice would be done; must-hire practices didn't really matter because everyone--no matter who they knew and how they got in--would eventually be held to account:

Helen: If you get your foot in the door and you're the best and you work hard, you're going to stay in the industry...If you have a connection with the CEO and you get in, you're not working for him, you're working for an account exec or you're working under someone and if you're not good then you're not going to make it far...if you suck, and you don't know what you're doing, how far are you going to get in that career?

Jennifer: A connection's not going to get you a full time job, and if it does, it's not going to last forever just because you know someone in the company...It's a good way in, but you still have to prove yourself--

Rachael: --and I wouldn't want it any other way.

Rachael and Jennifer even told glowing stories about children of CEO's inheriting jobs in their father's company, then placing extra pressure on themselves to become "one the hardest working people I know" and "one of the least showy people I've ever met" such that "I have never seen a more driven person in my entire life." In this way, even those born into power were seen to have earned their place through a kind of post-hoc meritocracy. Their class position, and the exclusive access it granted, was written off as merely one aspect of an otherwise humble and
industrious worker, driven to do whatever it takes to deserve what they have been given. In ideological terms, these White interns were formulating a more complex model of determination. Rather than a univariate relationship of cause and effect (class=power), they excused the advantage of birthright as mere circumstance—a "invisible hand" of the free market. Put another way, they resolved the contradiction thusly: must-hires did not succeed "just because" of who they knew, but also because of what they knew and how hard they worked. While I don't doubt that Richard, David, Thomas, Michael, and Rachael have, in fact, worked very hard to increase their relative class position, we must add a crucial caveat to this formula: their absolute class position has been overdetermined from birth onwards through a multivariate process of head-starts and exclusive socio-economic opportunities for upward mobility ranging from private education to summer internships. Their success is thus determined by the product of both who and what they know such that even a must-hire can legitimately "earn" their position of power over time. And yet, this benefit of the doubt White must-hires bestowed upon their fellow wealthy and well-connected Whites was generally not extended to people of color who may have benefited from an initial edge on the hiring pool through the color of their skin.

**Anti-Affirmative Action Backlash**

Of the thirteen White must-hires participating in my study, the majority (8/13 or 62%) were opposed to affirmative action while two had mixed feelings and four supported it.\(^70\) Despite the patently unfair process by which they all obtained

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\(^70\) When there was any doubt, I defined affirmative action as a “tie-breaker” policy that favored candidates of color over Whites with equivalent qualifications.
their own internship slots, most explained their opposition to affirmative action in terms of fairness and equal opportunity. For instance, David described it as "reverse discrimination against White people" since "no one can help what they are born into," adding that "no one should be given special treatment." Carol used similar phrasing, noting that scholarships "should always be based on merit above all else. No one, including minorities, should be given any sort of special treatment." Thomas opposed "creating a law that provides minorities with 'advantages' against equally qualified Whites" on the grounds that "minorities have just as much power to achieve the same success as Whites." While Carmen summed up her opposition succinctly with the commonsensical phrase "everyone should be equal," Kim’s response is worth quoting at length:

> Personally, I understand it, but I don’t really like it. While I understand my background (White, middle-upper class) makes my opinions against affirmative action pretty stereotypical, I don’t think you can justify a system that hypothetically favors a wealthy African American girl from a prestigious private school over maybe a lower-middle class White girl.

In response to one of my surveys, Kim ranked her family’s economic status as a “9 or 9.5 out of 10.” She grew up in a “White, upper-class, conservative” neighborhood in Connecticut, went to a private school, and got connections from her hometown “that have already helped my career immensely through either people I’ve met or internships I’ve gotten.” Moreover, Kim’s class-based assessment of affirmative action fails to account how she justifies benefitting from a must-hire system that favors wealthy Whites, such as herself, over everyone else.

While many of the must-hires acknowledged “wounds of the past,” “historic injustices,” or “a terrible wrong done by our forefathers,” most insisted that affirmative action was no longer necessary. They described it as “a system based on the past” that treats minorities "like second-class citizens" so "we must accept our wrongs from the past but can only truly move forward by putting such wrongs
behind us.” Richard took this even further, describing his own view as the "most progressive standpoint - in the future -- we're all going to blend together” so there will be "no minorities or majorities" because "it’s not what we're founded upon.”71 Overall, most of the must-hires sought to stake out a philosophical position based on principle: discrimination of any kind is wrong. This is consistent with previous research on the subject:

When Whites are asked about affirmative action, they resort to the frame of abstract liberalism to oppose it: 'why should we use discrimination to combat discrimination? Two wrongs don’t make a right. We should judge people by their merits and let the best person get the job or promotion.’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, pp. 262-63)

More specifically, all six of the women in one of my non-must-hire White focus groups expressed their opposition to the MAIP program. Jennifer was particularly forceful in her comments, describing a "Black friend" from her high school who "didn't deserve it" and yet “got into law school anyway.” She compared this dynamic to MAIP, accusing the recruiters at her college of "giving it away like candy" since "all you need [to succeed in advertising] is a foot in the door." As evidence of this, she referenced a "Black kid" in her school who was "dumb as a rock" but now works for a great agency. Resentful of how the “multicultural kids get free travel and housing and a lot of meals and seminars -- they get a full ride,” Jennifer accused MAIP of "putting it on a platter" for minorities and wistfully asked "why am I not Mexican?" adding that MAIP is “not fair” because "there's no White

71 In this gloss of American history, Richard, who hopes to become President of the United States, evokes the founding principle of “all men are created equal” while overlooking the concurrent practice of slavery and restriction of citizenship to land-holding White males.
kid included...if you want equality, that's not a great way to bring it about." None of the participants pushed back on this point, though including a White kid would essentially nullify MAIP's very reason for being. Instead, Helen brought up BET (Black Entertainment Television) and complained that if anyone had proposed a White network they "would have been slaughtered." She dismissed MAIP as a naïve kind of political correctness: "Oh we have been so terrible to different races for so many years so we need to make up for it instead of leveraging this equality for everyone -- it still keeps you separate." Rachael also found the MAIP program discriminatory and, in her survey, echoed Jennifer in her wish that "the same resources (seminars, mentoring, etc.)" would be "offered to everyone, not just those selected through minority based scholarships/hiring practices." Even though she was a political science major, Rachael’s comments to the focus group implied that she regarded herself as equally, if not more, qualified than the interns in MAIP:

Rachael: I'd be curious to know about [the industry's] long-range plans for race-based hiring practices--
Brenda: Yes, ugh!
Rachael: --just because...I've seen a lot of people coming through the program that have all these extras that I'm not sure [they] are any more qualified than I am -- and why do they have extra seminars once a week explaining more about the industry? And why do they get subsidized housing for $800 for the entire summer? And why have—why were they sought out over someone like me who, if on paper, I'm not sure...it's sort of time to end affirmative action in a way because of this sort of backlash that now people that have put in their time and put in the effort and gave themselves the backgrounds that they wanted to have so that they would be qualified are actually being discriminated against.
Brenda: I just think that whether or not it's reverse discrimination, there needs to be some sort of conversation around qualifications.

Rachael's comments about a "backlash" proved prophetic. Moments later, the discussion turned to White students not qualifying for loans either because of race
or class. Again, contemporary programs seeking to correct past discrimination against minorities produced a bitter comment, this time about supposed government payments to Native Americans:

Brenda: They get tons of - Native Americans—Indian's not politically correct—they get tons of money. They get like $50,000 when they turn 18. It's ridiculous.
CB: Cash?
Brenda: Check, like, they get tons, like hund-
Rachael: Who?
Brenda: Native Americans.
Rachael: From your school?
Brenda: No, no, no.
Rachael: From the government?
Brenda: From the government. They get so much aid and support for internships and stuff like that.

Brenda invented both the figure and the source. Though tribes may use net revenues from Casinos to distribute “per capita” dividends to members of the host tribe, the amounts vary. Furthermore, Henson (2011) estimates that only about 25% of tribes in the United States actually make such payments. Nevertheless, none of the other Whites in the focus groups objected either to the basis of Brenda’s statement or its vitriolic delivery. Instead, they generally concurred that people of


73 For Eliasoph (1999), this silence is to be expected: to charge a fellow White with racism is to risk ridicule and alienation such that "for most people, expressions of everyday racism, and bystanders’ passive stances, are rarely primarily about race, but are at least as much about how to form a group, how to be together" (p. 497). Whites must go along with such rituals of racist rhetoric, often uttered the form of complaints or jokes, that "socialize and cement new men (and women) into the "white fraternity" or else "suffer some punitive boundary maintenance actions, even to the point of being treated as a 'race traitor'" (Feagin, 2004, p. 1).
color benefit from a discriminatory system that hinders Whites. Julia was particularly adamant on this point, noting that she sees 30 scholarships come through the VCU Brand Center (a master's program for advertising creatives) every year and, since they are mostly based on race or need, Julia doesn't qualify: "I can't get as much financial aid just because my parents are wealthy...Just because my parents are wealthy doesn't mean I am wealthy—yet." I challenged Julia on this point, arguing that rich parents "means you're more secure--if you were in trouble, your parents would help you out." Julia's retort was both swift and emphatic: "How would [financial aid] know that!? How would they know my parents would help me out!?"

Rachael also seemed quite keen to position herself as a victim, objecting to being excluded from her college's unpaid summer internship subsidy program:

To even be considered [for the subsidy] you had to be already on financial aid from the school. And that was really frustrating to me because even though, yeah, OK, my parents--I’m lucky enough that my parents can pay in full for my education...that doesn't mean that there's so much extra money lying around that I can afford to not make money all summer, you know? For cost of living.

At the time, Rachael was attending an elite liberal arts school with a comprehensive annual tuition fee of over $50 thousand dollars per year and no financial aid. Furthermore, despite her reports of financial strain, Rachael went

74 Another White female intern echoed these sentiments in one of her survey responses: “Affirmative action is counter racism. I think its bullshit. This girl who went to my high school, who was adopted by a family with more money than mine, got like a huge scholarship just because she was 1/4 Native American. Even though she was totally and completely unaffected by it.”

75 I opted not to debate the point at the time, but will note here that Julia certainly could have declared herself a legal independent, but this would have had tax implications for her parents, who she said were withholding support to teach her a lesson: "they worked hard to get where they are now and so they wanted me to work hard too."
ahead and took the unpaid internship the previous summer, even in the absence of a subsidy from her school; indeed, in this case, her subsidy came from home. Rachael clearly enjoyed the financial and emotional support of a wealthy family and her example points to how the must-hires' opposition to affirmative action is underpinned by a denial of their own class privilege. For instance, the legitimacy of Rachael's complaint about the "extras" provided for MAIP interns is undermined by the overwhelming "extras" of her own circumstance. Even Brenda was starting out from an absolute position of privilege. Despite positioning herself as relatively working class vis-à-vis both the must-hires and her sorority sisters who "went to the most expensive boarding schools," Brenda enjoyed significant financial support from her mother who paid for her school, rent, and food. So when Brenda

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76 Schmidt (2007) provides additional context for how Rachael’s socio-economic buttressing might construct both a floor for her success and an obstacle for others: “When Americans talk about discrimination, they often use the word 'ceiling,' as in references to the 'glass ceilings' believed to keep women and minority members from climbing the corporate ladder. Yet it is clear that floors really play the key role in determining educational opportunity....the wealthiest parents generally provide their children so many advantages that it can take sheer determination and a lot of effort -- often in the form of years of sustained rebellion -- for those kids not to end up qualified for admission to a decent four-year college. Of course, what is a floor to those above it can be ceiling to those below it. When wealthy and well-educated parents seek to shield their children from contact with the poor, they often are, in effect, imposing a ceiling above the kids being shunned and avoided." (pp. 40-41).

77 Rachael said she would support AA or minority-based scholarships like MAIP as long as they were held to "the same standard" as White applicants. The problem is, there is no such clear "standard" in advertising hiring practices. As we saw from the previous chapter, decisions are based more on "fit" and chemistry. Indeed, as a political science major, Rachael's own qualifications for the advertising industry would have been rather dubious had she not used family connections to break in. Were it that must-hires be held to the same standard as MAIP interns, many might not get past the first round.

78 As it turned out, one of Brenda's sorority sisters, Kim, was a must-hire at another agency in my study.
described working during the summer to "support herself," she later admitted it was to earn money to spend on high-end designer clothes.

**Race Trumps Class**

Together, these stories demonstrate how the denial of class privilege is facilitated by an upward comparison: each strata, no matter how high in absolute terms, looks to the strata above to generate a relative sense of their own deprivation: Jennifer's friends work in Energy Management (Oil and Gas), John's friends are at "top accounting firms and paid very well," and all three of Richard's roommates are in finance. At Thomas' agency, many of the must-hires brought suitcases to work on Fridays and left early to catch a jitney to the Hamptons, a "surreal" playground for the super rich. Michael, who knows the Hamptons well and moves in similar social circles, spoke of feeling relatively poor when going out with his wealthier friends. In such settings, class becomes a stratified and therefore relative concept—even among the very rich—that varies depending on the subjectivity of the social actor. As a result, any clear sense of "fairness" *within* wealthy White communities becomes rather fluid and murky. In comparison, affirmative action seems much more concrete and clear, uniting Whites as a single cross-class category by imposing an ideology of race-based solidarity over a material base of class divisions. Gregory and Richard, Brenda and Rachael, non-must-hire and must-hire alike, can all unite as White in opposing affirmative action.

I understand that some of these opinions were likely an artifact of situation. It is much easier to oppose an abstract policy, such as affirmative action, than it is to attack a living, breathing must-hire sitting directly across the table from you during
a focus group session. Nevertheless, it is telling that my White participants felt safe enough amongst themselves to attack an affirmative action program supporting their internship colleagues of color. Indeed, they all seemed oblivious to the possibility that I might have relationships with the MAIP interns. And while some conjured up other must-hire Whites who had eventually earned their spot through merit, no one—not even those supporting affirmative action—spoke up to specifically defend an individual of color at their agency, vouching either for their general qualifications or specific contributions to group projects.

This dynamic of race-based solidarity across class lines points towards this chapter’s central argument: that ideologies of meritocracy undermine diversity efforts by concealing the underlying material practices of favoritism towards Whites while framing affirmative action for people of color as unfair. A key component of this dynamic is Dyer’s (2005) notion of Whiteness as an empty category, a race-less form of invisibility, and the ground of normality against which the figures of raced peoples are measured. In other words, Whiteness is the canvas, neutral and unassuming, while people of color are the pigment, different and exotic. As Dyer argues, "there is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human...the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity" (p. 10). Similarly, under the cloak of Whiteness, Richard, David, Thomas, Michael, Rachael, and Sharon could pass as "normal" employees who had every right to be in their position. For instance, Richard’s race concealed his class privilege and allowed him to entertain a pair of options: he could either reveal or continue to conceal the secret of his exclusive access. As an HR practitioner from his agency told me, hiring Richard was done as a
personal favor to the CEO who had contributed to the success of the agency for years and so "Why not let him in? He does know the right person." This may sound rather matter-of-fact, and yet, Richard knew better than to admit it in public, as it would violate the principles of meritocracy and thus risk exposing him to social stigma.

**Meritocracy**

For Bonilla-Silva (2010), the myth of meritocracy in the United States holds that status is earned through competition and hard work; people get what they deserve. Such notions, widely accepted as common sense, are rooted in the frame of "abstract liberalism," which melds political ideals of egalitarianism and equal opportunity with economic ideals of free choice and individualism (pp. 7, 28). As Royster (2003) explains:

> Meritocracy presumes a faith in the free market's ability to ensure that everyone who seeks work has an equal chance of being considered for jobs and that the best candidate is nearly always chosen irrespective of race or other irrelevant characteristics -- except when affirmative action interferes with the self regulatory system. The 'invisible hand' analogy suggests a sorting process that is free of particularistic bias and therefore inherently meritocratic. According to this worldview, anyone who studies and works hard ought to be able to make it in their chosen field. (p. 6)

Thus, when Richard finally admitted his family connections, he undermined meritocracy's "invisible hand" with an alternative, equally common-sensical explanation for hiring practices: “who you know” is just as important as “what you know.” Recall that neither Richard nor John intended to pursue advertising as a career; they had higher aspirations. John hoped to take over his father's accounting business and make $400,000 per year by the time he turned 35. Richard planned to go into finance and dreamed of being a millionaire at 30. While not all of the must-
hires were simply passing through the ad agency world, they came from a much wider range of majors (Business, English, Economics, Film, etc.) and expressed a variety of options for possible careers (art curator, hedge fund manager, TV network executive, comedy writer, etc.). In contrast, the MAIP interns and even the other White interns in my sample were, as a whole, much more sharply focused on advertising as both an academic discipline and a destination for future employment. For them, and others wishing to "break in" to the advertising industry, an internship at a major agency is a golden opportunity for training and networking. This helps explain why internship applications at Heather’s agency numbered in the hundreds every summer. To get noticed, it helps to know someone. As Carol put it, "almost all of the interns in my program had access to connections. It’s difficult to access such programs without them." Sharon struck a similar chord:

I did have connections through family friends for this internship, and actually every internship/job I’ve ever had in NYC. For my internship searches over the years I have always reached out to connections as well as applying independently, but family friend connections are always the ones that come through in the end.

Isabel’s grandparents knew her agency’s owner’s father. When I asked Michael, who is White and comes from a wealthy family, if he thought White privilege existed, he said “definitely,” adding that it meant "knowing people who can connect you to an internship." He was, of course, speaking from personal experience.

In her comparative study of White and Black graduates from a vocational High School, Royster (2003) found that Whites were four times as likely to achieve success in the workplace. After controlling for variables such as test scores, grades and other measures of preparedness, motivation and character, she found no
significant differences of qualification between the two groups. She thus attributed Whites’ greater degree of success to racially segregated communities, social circles, and informal networks where Whites were more likely to know the "older men who recruit, hire, and fire young workers" and thus benefit from their bias towards "whom they are comfortable or familiar" with (p. 184). For Royster, such "visible hands" in positions of power exploit the legacies of political and economic conditions that have historically advantaged Whites in order to hoard opportunities and help out their own. McGuire (2002) concurs, noting that "sociological research warns us that the use of informal procedures to hire, to evaluate, and to reward workers tends to advantage workers already in privileged positions" (p. 318). As Healey (2010) argues:

These subtle patterns of exclusion and closed intra-racial networks are more difficult to document than the blatant discrimination that was at the core of Jim Crow segregation but they can be just as devastating in their effect and just as powerful as mechanisms for perpetuating racial gaps in income and employment (p. 201).

Crucially, this process does not require racist attitudes to produce racist results. Similarly, Richard’s uncle may not have intended to discriminate against candidates of color, but by calling in a favor, he shielded a White candidate from the burden of having to compete against them. As DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2003) have argued, the hoarding and passing of jobs “among circles of friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and family” effectively takes them “out of competition” leaving “many fewer job opportunities that can be competed for among those who are not part of the same networks, friendship circles, or social categories” (p. 197). Furthermore, by staying silent, Richard conspired in a concealment of material
advantage under the guise of meritocracy; his cohort was left to presume that he simply applied for, and earned, his internship.

As James noted in the previous chapter, the act of hiring the friends and relatives of powerful people is an investment in "a relationship bank system" that will, presumably, pay off, but not without costs. First, there is the likely loss of a potential employee; the must-hires in my study were less likely to pursue advertising as a career. Second, there is the loss of a potential intern of color; all the must-hires in my sample were White. This is particularly harmful given the industry's long-standing problem of race inequality. Finally, there is the literal cost of subsidizing a frivolous position. Heather estimates that her agency's summer internship program runs upwards of $100,000 which, when divided by the number of interns, works out to about $6,000 each.79 When I asked Jennifer why she bothered investing so much time and money in someone like John who wasn't actually serious about going into advertising, she got defensive, "We did not hire any interns voluntarily that were not interested in advertising as a career, but we did have interns who didn't want to go into the business. James' daughter is dating John's brother. I can't help that!" She added that the CEO was very unhappy about the CCO's relationship to John. I pointed out that, discontent aside, the CEO did

79 Each of the interns at Heather's agency made about $350 a week for 8 weeks during the summer of 2010. The two creative interns from the VCU BrandCenter commanded higher salaries and the two MAIP interns carried an extra administrative cost of $2300 each. Therefore, Heather's CFO allocated about $45,000 for intern salaries, an amount that she estimated was at least doubled by expenses ranging from catering, transportation, studio production costs, and a last night bar bill that topped $3,000. In addition, very senior creatives billed hours to the intern project and Heather told me that "we don't really calculate" how many hours they put in because the CFO would go "bat shit...it's a lot of money!"
nothing to stop it. On the contrary, he had brought his own godson, William, into the internship program. For Heather, however, this must-hire was less egregious, because, unlike John, at least William was actually studying advertising "and [the CEO] really thought this could be a good foot in the door -- which it is!"

Nevertheless, she admitted that William was "not the brightest bulb on the tree" and would not have been hired otherwise. As for the rest of the must-hires in that summer's cohort, Sam was also a disappointment to his team, repeatedly not doing what they asked and David was too quiet and "just not right for the business." The two most successful must-hires were Kurt and Kenneth. Kurt, despite causing concern early on, did end up doing a lot of work by the end, but as the son of a very wealthy client, was unlikely to pursue advertising as a career. Kenneth "was good" and "really worked for it" and had said that he'd like to eventually work in HR. Final score: 6 favors, 4 disappointments, and 1 potential colleague. Estimated cost: 6 slots and $36,000 (which is well within the range of the typical annual salary of an entry-level employee).

**MAIP Interns**

When I asked MAIP interns about must-hires at their agencies, they had many stories of White privilege. Alyssa described “a snobby Princeton kid” who would brag about his "shore house" and got away with multiple acts of sexual harassment: "He didn't know when to quit...and like his uncle was one of the CFO's or something." Rynn spoke of a must-hire who "got into the agency because his

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80 The intern repeatedly sent “really graphic and nasty” obscene messages over company email. And, according to Amelia, who also worked at the agency, "That's not even the worst of it. When we were at our intern farewell lunch, the head of HR she was like ‘So,
father and the CEO were in business together” while Lin described a fellow intern who was "best friends with the HR lady." Sophia reported that a high school senior's family had actually bought him an internship slot by making the highest bid at an auction. She also complained that another was only a college sophomore (interns are typically juniors or seniors) didn't seem to know much about advertising: "He's a baby! To the point that even I have to hold his hand! I worked hard to be here and there are people that don't care." Felicia also worked with must-hire sophomores who had come "to hang out in New York City for the summer" and often wondered, "Are you guys talking about the project or what you did in the Hamptons last weekend?" Zooey's agency even tasked her with taking care of the 14-year-old daughter of a client, the vice president of Citibank, who said his daughter wanted to learn about advertising because she was "so creative." In all these cases, the must-hire intern in question was White.

Flipping the Tortilla

At this point, Zooey's Hispanic/Latino focus group took an unexpected turn. Cecilia, who was sitting next to Zooey, spoke up to defend the Citibank Executive as doing it in "the good spirit of a father." She then told the rest of the group about how John got in (they are at the same agency), but then defended him by arguing that networking is natural and "I would do the same thing." The other four Latinas in the group concurred that publicly boasting of family connections may be in poor taste,
but none was willing to condemn nepotism outright or begrudge John for taking advantage of his social network. Rather, they agreed with Cecilia when she said, "if you have connections, use them!" and nodded knowingly when she made a provocative comparison: "Besides, what if they flip the tortilla and say you’re only here because you’re a minority?" Throughout my focus groups with interns of color, I was struck by this seeming paradox: while participants were generally aware of the must-hire phenomenon, and annoyed by how it systematically advantaged affluent Whites, no one called for the cessation of the practice. I wondered, could this be out of fear that such a protest might "flip the tortilla" and turn an unwelcome spotlight on MAIP, casting doubts upon the merit of minorities benefitting from the program?

For at least some of my HR informants, there appeared to be a kind of symbiotic relationship between MAIP and must-hires with the former counter-acting or canceling out the latter. While Elizabeth put it plainly, describing how her department "tried really hard to supplement the MAIP kids...balanced by the asks [must-hires]," Mary proposed a more elaborate formula. In response to a colleague pointing out that being a White male "is not in your favor these days" because human resources departments are looking to recruit people of color, Mary acknowledged that pressure to diversify may give unfair advantage to candidates of color, but then contextualized MAIP as a way to recalibrate a tilted scale and thus restore equilibrium to an already unfair system:

But then you look at the other side and--how many Whites have been hired because of who they know? So I think when you balance it out, it almost comes out to be even -- like for the [diverse] people you are pushing forward versus all the people that were hired because they knew [her agency's CEO]
or they knew [her agency’s CCO] -- I feel like they’re already getting a lot of those privileges that diverse people aren’t. I think we need to coach [diverse people] and push them along the way because they aren’t going to have the same kinds of opportunities.

Put another way, Mary and her colleagues simply presume and accept the presence of White must-hires and therefore seek out programs like MAIP as a trade-off and a way to inject racial diversity into internship programs that would otherwise be largely White. Of course, there is another way; balance could also be achieved by eliminating must-hires altogether. With few exceptions,81 however, the HR practitioners I spoke with did not actively seek the elimination of must-hires, for reasons pointed out in the previous chapter, but what could happen if they did? According to Cecilia’s theory, the very un-meritocratic nature of the must-hires provides a useful cover for diversity correctives; which begs the question, if must-hires go, would MAIP go too?

While the advertising industry’s must-hire system has yet to be studied in a systematic way, we can find a close analogue in the practice of legacy preferences in college admissions that favor the children of alumni and big donors. Kahlenberg (2010), in the introduction to his edited volume Affirmative Action for the Rich, bemoans the practice as undermining the American Dream by further buttressing socio-economic hierarchies that impede mobility: "children in other nations are more likely than American children to have future economic success determined by merit, rather than by birth. Absent such economic mobility, Americans increasingly will have their futures determined by the economic class into which they were

81 Linda told me that, over the last few years, her agency’s HR department was able to reduce the number of must-hires by almost half.
born" (p. vii). In a later chapter, Golden (2010) adds that "even though legacy preference runs contrary both to public opinion and the national ethos of meritocracy, and is unheard of in countries otherwise far less democratic than the United States, it remains firmly entrenched in American higher education" (p. 99). In sum, the authors argue that legacy preferences smack of aristocracy and therefore have no place in the United States. But, as many of the authors note, and Kahlenberg, himself, has written in his book *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action* (1996), the same meritocratic logic that calls for an end to legacy admissions also calls for the elimination of race-based affirmative action programs in favor of "race-neutral" diversity initiatives based on class--which presumes that helping the poor will, in turn, help the minorities that affirmative action is meant to target and thereby diversify higher education and social, along with professional, institutions. Though space does not permit me to take up this issue in detail, Byrd, Reed, and Graves (2011) offer a useful rebuttal. Most relevant to the argument at hand is the power of meritocracy as a common-sense ideology holding that all should be treated equally, no matter what. This simple idea can be used to condemn contemporary acts of favoritism to any and all parties (whether White or of color) while, at the same time, leaving historical inequalities (the inheritance of past discrimination) firmly in place. Or, as Cecilia might put it, the merit-based argument against legacies, if directed towards must-hires, could easily "flip the tortilla" and be used against MAIP.
Playing Defense

This danger may explain why diversity advocates have not publicly called for a moratorium on must-hires in advertising. For instance, Tiffany Warren, who ran MAIP for several years before founding AdColor to celebrate successful minorities within the advertising industry, has deployed meritocracy not as a weapon to attack White affirmative action but rather as a shield to defend diversity programs from detractors. I witnessed a clear example of this strategy at "Making Your Personal Brand Known," a panel hosted at Google in New York in August of 2010 and co-sponsored by AdColor, the 4A's, and MAFA (another diversity initiative). The panel, consisting of three Blacks, one Asian-American, and two Latinos, included Tiffany Warren, SVP, Chief Diversity Officer, Omnicom Group, Chris Pitre, Social Marketing Strategist for IDEA, Torrence Boone, Managing Director Agency Development – North America, Google, Maria Lopez-Knowles, EVP of Digital Strategy at GlobalHue, and Dave Ramirez, copywriter at Campfire, and an Alum of the MAIP program (since this was a semi-public event, I have used the panelists' real names). With all the 139 MAIP interns from the national program in attendance, 76 of whom were graduated seniors and therefore on the job market, Boone focused on talent: "at the end of the day, if you're good and add value, nothing can stop you—especially in this business." Most of the panelists agreed that while the interns should incorporate their racial/ethnic identity into their qualifications, it should "not be the headline of what you are." Then, after warming up the crowd with jokes

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82 MAFA stands for the Mosaic Alumni and Friends Association, a program of the AAF (American Advertising Federation).
about giving her ex-husband "the wrong finger" and other hard-learned-lessons from "Keeping It Real" University, Warren returned to the theme of meritocracy--insisting that "talent has no color" and objecting to the idea that "just because you're of color, you're talented." At the time, Warren's accusation of entitlement struck me as a rather flimsy straw person. After all, who were these supposed interns who thought that their skin color alone entitled them to a job? But what Warren said next suggested that her public scolding of a set of hypothetical scapegoats was a strategic attempt to shore up the reputation of diversity programs against those seeking to undermine them. Warren recounted experiencing a backlash after founding AdColor; White colleagues accused her of promoting "a segregated awards show "and whispered that the honors weren't properly earned but given out like charity."

I later asked Mary, who was also at the panel, to react to Warren's argument:

I don't think you [are entitled] because you are diverse...you need to be talented. And I think that [the panelists] were addressing the issue that a lot of people think that because they are diverse, 'Oh, I get these special privileges, I get these special job fairs, that I'm going to get this job because I'm diverse...remember that talent is number one...There's no entitlement because I'm the Golden diverse child that's going to get hired because of that' and she was basically saying that's false -- like you need to have talent...I think she's talking to the critics of diversity. A lot of critics of diversity are saying that as well -- that 'people are getting hired just because they are diverse and I'm not getting hired and I'm more talented but I'm White and I'm not getting hired.'

It would appear that the "critics of diversity" were using arguments around "talent" and qualifications similar to those mobilized by my White focus groups. But while meritocracy was used by Whites to attack diversity programs, it also provided a defense for MAIP interns, who, like Warren, used it to defend themselves from naysayers. For instance, during the Hispanic/Latino focus group, Monica described
how her friends would say "it's easier for you because you're a minority." Zooey said when she posted her MAIP acceptance on Facebook, someone commented, "Oh, that must have been easy to get." When she explained that this hurt because "We all got [accepted into the MAIP program] because we earned it on our own merit," the rest of the group nodded in agreement. During the Asian/Asian American focus group, the participants emphasized the rigor (three rounds of elimination) of the MAIP application process: "There are no slackers in MAIP. You can't!" "I know everybody else earned this like I did." "I really feel like I earned my place here." Michele was even more explicit, emphasizing the superiority of MAIP interns vis-a-vis must-hires:

> It would have been extremely difficult to find internships in New York City with no ties to the industry or city here. Also, as far as getting here just because of race, every single person in MAIP is extremely qualified and has more experience and skill than many of the interns who got these internships just through connections.

But when I described the Madison Avenue Project, the NAACP-sponsored initiative to increase the levels of Black employment within the advertising industry, and suggested that something similar could be done for Asians, the reaction ranged from skeptical to outright hostile: "Like straight-up affirmative action?" "That's kind of dumb." "I don't agree with quotas." For instance, Sophia insisted that she had never been discriminated against and wanted to feel that she is always judged on her own merits. Khloë expected that increasing diversity "would be more organic" and since "White people will be in the minority" or the "majority minority," a quota is too "strong," adding sarcastically, "We need five more yellow people. Awesome."
Thanks!" This inspired Lin to tell a more complicated account from her first day on the job.

**“But What About the Asians?”**

Lin’s story began when the HR officer at her agency introduced her to the other interns as "from MAIP," as though this explained why she was there. This act of public humiliation elicited gasps of exasperation from the rest of the focus group. Lin went on. Adding insult to injury, the President then told the HR officer that it was more important for the agency to recruit more Latinos and Blacks. At this point in the story, Lin turned to the rest of the focus group and asked, "but what about the Asians?" In response, the others murmured and shook their heads in disbelief. To conclude, Lin performed a meritocratic retort clearly intended for any of her doubting co-workers: "I have a good resume. I don't have to explain myself. I got here the same way you did." As in the Hispanic/Latino focus group, Lin's reliance on meritocracy as a means of self-defense was generally accepted by the rest of the group as self-evident: MAIP had rigorous criteria in place, the program was competitive, and, besides, they were qualified on their own merits. Such a strategy has historical precedent. As Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues, meritocracy has long provided a sanctuary for marginalized groups seeking to extend abstract liberalism to its logical conclusion of inclusion for all. In resonating with the principles of individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and the sense that both people and institutions can be improved, meritocracy has offered a distinctly American rhetorical device for progressive movements seeking to advance social and legal reform (p. 27). Meritocracy thus promises citizens a variety of protections including
equal treatment under the law and fair consideration by employers. While this rationale, both in its retroactive and aspirational forms, may help shelter MAIP interns from attacks by critics of diversity programs, it is ultimately an ideological explanation of a material situation and thus only constitutes a limited account of their current position.

For instance, Lin's deployment of meritocracy failed to adequately resolve the various contradictions that emerged in her story. First, she kept moving the goalposts. Initially, she wanted to be seen as hired only for her talents, and nothing more. But then, when the agency President spoke of recruiting other populations of color, Lin protested that Asians were being unfairly left out. Furthermore, Lin was at once ashamed of being publicly associated with MAIP and unapologetic about accepting the 70% travel and housing stipend. Similarly, her claim that she "got here the same way" her White co-workers did was patently untrue on at least two counts. First, as mentioned earlier, she herself spoke of a fellow intern who was "best friends with the HR lady." Indeed, Lin and the other MAIP interns were well aware of the closed social networks advantaging Whites. We can see further evidence of this in a similar story told by Amelia in the Black/African American focus group:

One intern guy, his brother works there and he was like ‘Oh, well some of us had to interview with HR’ and then he turned to me and said, ‘Oh, no Amelia, we all know why you’re here. We all know why you got in.’ And I let him know what it took for me to get here. Like the process that I had to go through—writing those essays, getting those letters of recommendations, those interviews—that’s much more than you talking to your brother and setting up an interview.

Moreover, at least when compared to the must-hires at her agency, Lin did not get there the same way they did. Second, MAIP may be competitive, but it remains
exclusively limited to, and designed to advantage, people of color. It is very much an affirmative action style program. Many agencies even reserve a set number of slots (typically two) for MAIP interns every summer; by definition, these are quotas, to be filled only with interns of color. That being said, there is a whole world of difference between a must-hire and a MAIP placement; the former has exclusive rights to their slot while the latter must still compete with others albeit in a limited labor pool.

Nevertheless, lest we forget the hundreds of internship applications that go ignored every summer at one of my host agencies, both must-hire and MAIP interns benefit from material barriers erected to hoard opportunities for some to the exclusion and deprivation of others.

**Relative Advantage**

Simply put, MAIP is not “fair” in the ideological sense of the word. To claim that it is does violence to the premise of inequality that justifies its very existence. The MAIP scholarship is based on a structural analysis of systematic discrimination (see Chapter 3). In contrast, the ideology of meritocracy, hand-in-hand with the American Dream, suggests that "talent has no color" and any individual, should they work hard enough, can succeed on their own because the "invisible hand" of the market will sort the labor and the cream will rise to the top. This tells a very simple story of determination: talent = success. But, as Hall (1996b) reminds us, there is no necessary correspondence between the two. Talent may be a necessary condition for success, but it is by no means sufficient. No one succeeds only "on their own" merit, nor can anyone get hired "just because" they are Black. On the contrary, success is overdetermined by a myriad of mitigating variables. Take, for example,
the very notion of the "most qualified" for any given position in the advertising industry. Though the HR practitioners in the previous chapter constantly expressed deference to this standard as the determining factor for who they would hire, no one offered a working definition of what "most qualified" actually meant. This is because it is a relative concept, unknowable until the finalists are chosen. Qualification in its most concrete form sets general parameters of some basic skill sets and relevant experience that help ensure that the finalists for any given position appear relatively equivalent on paper. As explained above, the final decision of who is "most" qualified is overdetermined by a wide variety of interacting variables relating to "fit" and "chemistry" with the rest of the team including, but not limited to: dress, speech, comport, age, physique, rapport, sense of humor, etc. Of course, this ever-expanding list includes race and sex, but only as they intersect with, and are thus inflected by, the other variables both within the identity of the individual and the context of the agency. In other words, depending on the setting, a Black male who is gay, slight of build, and wears glasses could very well fair better than a White female who is obese, in her late forties, and speaks with a deep southern accent. In this case, there is no univariate causation of the hire, but rather a complex totality overdetermined by pre-existing structures.

Ideology is at its most powerful when it offers a simple explanation to resolve a complicated set of contradictions. The danger lies in a general embrace of a "common sense" that disproportionately benefits the powerful. Therefore, I do not wish to say that all aspects of identity are equivalent and interchangeable, for to do so would produce a false leveling of the social asymmetries outlined in the previous
chapter. Furthermore it would be a mistake to debunk one explanation (meritocracy) only to replace it with its opposite (chance) for this would merely spin the polarity of the ideological function from determinacy to indeterminacy, from hard work to luck. Rather, I wish to argue that the MAIP interns do, in fact, experience agency, and even aspects of advantage vis-à-vis others aspiring to work in advertising, but only within structures of dominance that systematically advantage White people. To do so, I now turn to my focus group data on White privilege and colorblindness.

**White Privilege**

Across the focus groups of color, there was a general consensus confirming the existence and prevalence of White privilege; participants defined it in terms of advantages in access leading to accelerated success in the workplace, regardless of merit: "If you are White -- you're smart -- you're hired." "White people are favored because they have stronger networks." "It is like the old boys club...they might promote the White suburban guy over the Asian suburban girl... even though she is more competent." For Shirley, who is Black, White privilege was gendered in a different way. She noticed that her agency's office culture was dominated by "the stereotypical over privileged White girls" who lived in the suburbs where she grew up, "got giggly over nothing, always caught The Hills (an MTV reality show featuring young, White, wealthy protagonists), and shopped at the non-clearance rack at their Banana Republic." Though they did not explicitly exclude her, they talked extensively about their favorite hair products, brands that were both useless and irrelevant to Shirley. Similarly, Amelia, who is also Black, described having an office
with a window that overlooks a location for Gossip Girl (a CW drama featuring young, White, wealthy protagonists). While everybody else (mostly White women) in the office got excited about it and rushed over to look, Amelia couldn’t relate because she doesn’t watch the show. Kioni responded to this story by echoing Royster’s (2003) analysis of the "visible hands" that tend to help some groups more than others:

I think also the reason why the industry is so White is because in advertising it's who you know -- and like that's how it is with everything is -- but it just seems that in advertising it's even more so, so if everyone, if the CEO’s White and the person who started the company, you know, is White, then he gets his friend and the people he knows in his network which is probably majority White, you know it's not anything intentional, but it's like they get who they know...for me to be in your group I have to like you as a friend and culturally be able to communicate and relate to you. But a lot of times it's hard for me to network because I don't like these people, I don't want to talk to these people, they have these perceptions of me that I don't want to have to deal with this--you know what I mean?--like I don't want to, but that's your way in.

"People Don't Think I'm Hispanic"

Another aspect of White privilege came up within MAIP. Rynn, who has light skin and blonde hair, described herself as "White, or of European descent." But since she was also 1/16 Native American, she qualified for the MAIP program. In her survey response, Rynn made a particularly poignant observation, noting that racism is "easy to overlook when you are White or White looking, because it has never been directed at me. Being in MAIP has made me realize that it is there." Indeed, on my first day observing the MAIP orientation program, I noticed Rynn right away.

The orientation weekend was held in the common room of the Clark Residence in Brooklyn where most of the interns were staying. I arrived during a Friday night “welcome dinner” of pizza and soda. There were no tables, so all the
interns sat in clusters of chairs hunched over paper plates on their laps. The room was unbearably hot and humid. A large fan circulating the air all but drowned out the sound of anyone trying to speak and had to be turned off for announcements. I was briefly introduced, then generally ignored. I took the opportunity to scan the approximately 100 interns in attendance. While the vast majority of interns displayed racially phenotypical traits that I used to mentally sort them into the official MAIP minority categories, I was surprised to see that a handful of students, like Rynn, stood out; they appeared to be White. After dinner, Luke, one of this group of light-skinned interns, strode right up to me, and in a conspiratorial tone, took me aside and asked, somewhat rhetorically, "So, what's your take on the talent pool?" I was taken aback by his disparaging tone and uncomfortable with his insinuation that a) I was an authority who could evaluate the "talent" of 100 people in the span of 60 minutes and that b) even if I was such an authority, that I would confide in him. I couldn't help but wonder if our shared skin tone and racial minority status in that room had made him assume that we shared some sort of affinity. When I shrugged and asked what he meant, Luke complained that the other MAIP interns were not well "vetted" and "don't know anything." I was at once troubled by Luke's groundless (and therefore hasty) judgment and also aware that, though our conversation was out of ear-shot, other interns could see us talking

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83 These categories are Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Asian American, American Indian/Native American, and Mixed/Multiracial.

84 In retrospect, this moment was very similar to John calling out Richard as a must-hire. Not only was Luke treating me like a peer, he implied that he already knew something about me; namely that I shared his disregard for the other MAIP interns.
together - the only two White-looking men in the room. Since I needed to recruit these interns to join my study, I was wary of being associated with Luke's negativity, so I quickly changed the subject and brought the conversation to a close. Though I did not pursue the topic, the arrogance of Luke's "talent" question proved prophetic, foreshadowing issues around meritocracy that would emerge over the course of the summer. Together, my surprise at seeing light-skinned MAIP interns and my uncomfortable encounter with Luke both highlighted the importance of qualitative specification of quantitative categories and helped puncture some of my initial naivété regarding diversity within the MAIP program--namely tensions around race, language, and class.

As I soon found-out, most of the half-dozen or so "White" interns of color were Cuban-Americans. For example, Leti joined my Hispanic/Latino focus group with some trepidation, worrying that she wouldn't fit in since she didn't speak Spanish and "people don't think I'm Hispanic." In a sense, she was right. During one of my other focus groups, one of the participants referred to Leti as White, and another corrected her, saying, "She's Cuban. Ohio Cuban." This attention to geography was indicative of the strong ethnic identifications of the Hispanic/Latino group; any diasporic sense of solidarity based on racial identification seemed weak by comparison. For instance, Cecilia and Lucero, both from Puerto Rico, agreed that they hated the term "Latino," explaining that they were more loyal to home than race and felt "racist" towards Puerto Rican Americans that proudly "marched and waived the Puerto Rican flag" in New York City but didn't speak Spanish and had never visited the island. In similar fashion, Zooey lived in Miami and, relative to Leti,
her proximity to Cuba seemed to provide her with a stronger anchor of cultural authenticity. And yet, these commitments to national identities did not ensure proper recognition by others. When Cecilia told of being confused with a Mexican-American intern at her agency, "everyone thinks you're Mexican," the group nodded in agreement. In this way, a misrecognition by others produced a common experience capable of transcending regional identities. Moreover, as Dávila (2001) argues, "the homogenization of all Latina subgroups into a common category, be it Hispanic or Latina" helps produce the idea of a coherent Latino/a market through "the depolarization of the history of conquest and colonization that has affected particular Latina nationalities" (p. 40).85

Contingent Solidarity

Such a dynamic of contingent solidarity strikes at some of the core tensions within the MAIP program. First, as we saw with Lin's story, agencies seeking to diversify their workforce do not prioritize racial minorities in the same way. There are several reasons for this. First, according to approximate statistics quoted at a 4A's conference in 2009, Latinos, Blacks and Asians make up 14.5%, 13%, and 4.25% of the U.S. population and only 8%, 5%, and 3% of advertising industry

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85 This recalls an interesting moment near the start of my study between Marta and Ines, who identified as Hispanic and Latina, respectively. The two debated which term I should use when announcing my focus groups to the interns. Ines insisted that “Latino” was more “correct” and that some may take offense at “Hispanic” because it implies “belonging to Spain.” Marta grimaced, shook her head, and warned me “some people would not take very kindly to that.” A few beats later, Marta struck a compromise, advising me to say Latino/Hispanic.
employees (see Figure 14). So, in one sense, all three groups are underrepresented, but, proportionately speaking, Asians are faring best, by far, with employment rates around 70% of their population percentage while Latinos are 55%, and Blacks trail a distant third at 38%. Second, Latinos have access to a large and thriving Spanish language advertising industry. Finally, as we saw above, some Latinos have light skin and, depending on their name and accent, can sometimes pass for Whites and thereby dodge certain discrimination barriers. In contrast, Blacks are the most visible minority, particularly to Whites (Feagin, 2010, p. 102). They are also the most underrepresented and, as we saw earlier, have been the focus of repeated attempts to sanction or even sue the industry for race discrimination. Thus, for many diversity advocates, Blacks are the focus; one HR executive even complained to me that MAIP wasn't "delivering" enough Black interns.

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86 O'Leary (2010) cites slightly different statistics with similar proportions: "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 47.3 percent of employees working in advertising and related services in 2009 were women; 6.4 percent, African Americans; 3.2 percent, Asian; and 9.5 percent, Hispanic" (p. 1).
We can see another tension in how MAIP’s reliance on racial categories reacts to structures of oppression by deploying an equivalent form of coding in their application process; in this case grouping together all Latino/Hispanics, regardless of skin-color, class, region, sex, education etc. This logic parallels the niche market segmentation so common in advertising based on the fiction that "there are indeed some essential and intrinsic characteristics that all 'Hispanics' share" (Dávila, 2001, p. 41). As we saw in the previous chapter, many diversity advocates have seized on this logic of "ethnicity as insight" in order to make a "business case" for MAIP and other programs like it as not just right, but "smart." In this way, essentialized notions of racial identity can be used as an opportunity for self-promotion for minorities hoping to trade on their identity as specialized access to particular market segments. For instance, Dávila (2001) recounts how one Hispanic
advertising executive continually stressed to his clients that "only a Hispanic can really understand our culture, our way of being and feeling, to produce a truly compelling and relevant campaign" (p. 42) As a result of such positioning, "Hispanic ad professionals thus become both victims of U.S. 'othering' practices, homogenized into the marginal category of Hispanic regardless of their class or educational background and their lack of identification with most Hispanics, as well as key 'tropicalizers'...circulating dominant representations of Latinidad that draw on the exotic and the essential characteristics of the 'other'" (p. 42). A similar dynamic emerged amongst the MAIP interns in my focus groups as they wrestled with the knowledge that White stereotypes closed some doors, while opening others.

**Dress Codes**

Luis, a Latino male in the MAIP program, is an interesting example of both the limitations and opportunities created by racial stereotypes. Luis grew up in a poor neighborhood in Fresno, California and recounted being treated as dumb and/or pugnacious like any other "Mexican with a shaved head." A High School teacher even suggested that he pursue a trade, despite having grades that ranked him near the top of his class. Such obstacles became potent motivators: "I want to spit in the face of the people who said I'd never go to college." And yet, despite being the victim of prejudice, Luis was not against racial profiling in every instance. When I asked how he would feel if an agency sought his opinion as a Mexican-American, his response was pragmatic: "I don't care. Exploit me. I’d be flattered...I grew up in a racist neighborhood; I know what it is to be slighted. To be asked for your opinion is not a slight -- it's a way to break in, it's like a wedge." This strategy recalls
Chambers’ (2008) description of how minorities founded ethnic advertising agencies in the 1960’s and 70’s as an "on-ramp" for gaining access to general market agencies. And while the barriers of discrimination are no longer so steep or explicit, Luis still took careful steps to both counter racist stereotypes and accentuate his own difference: wearing non-prescription glasses that made him appear like "I am smart and doing something with my life," donning gaudy, bright-colored outfits like a mustard sweater and silver bow tie, and impersonating White sounding voices, based on Al Michaels (a sports commentator) and nightly news anchors. All of this was very deliberate and, according to Luis, the combination of the glasses, outfits, and a White sounding voice was working like a charm: "I’m reading people... at first it was just trying to live... now I’m trying to separate myself from the pack... you don’t see bow ties anymore - zigging when other people are zagging - it works stupid well...if I can attach some crazy -- stupid -- borderline ridiculous image to my name, it’s easier to remember." Luis believes he got assigned to work on desirable projects at his agency simply by standing out. Though he started this self-styled branding as a way to combat racist attitudes in Fresno, he now uses it to increase name recall and distinguish himself amongst colleagues on Madison Avenue.

Like Luis, Lamar, who is Black, also monitored his speech and appearance in order to counter racist assumptions, carefully avoiding slang terms like "yawl" and "I be" while at work "so I don't slip into that habit," restricting rap music to personal headphones (not speakers) while at his computer, and dressing up because "as a

87 For Georgia, who is originally from the Dominican Republic, conforming to her coworkers’ accent is simply not an option: "The ‘up talk’ thing kills me... I'm praying I don't pick it up.....White people sound so annoying, let me tell you."
Black male, we want our clothes to speak for us. I can't leave this iron at home! I won't go in with a wrinkled shirt." This last point is important because Lamar continued to dress up at an agency where the other staff dressed "like they're going to the club" and advised him to not "wear dress shirts and look like the intern."

Thus, despite being mocked for appearing to try too hard, Lamar continued to dress more formally than his colleagues; and while he may have been honoring his own inclinations, he was also complying with official MAIP Dress Code policy.

Instructions for the policy, including a "Business Casual Visual Primer" of fashion "do's" and "don'ts" (see Figure 15), appear as the first major section of the MAIP 2010 Intern Manual and constitute 8 of the 46 total pages. Though the Manual acknowledges that dress at agencies "will likely range from suits to super casual," it warns interns to avoid dressing "to the lowest common denominator" since "dressing a step beyond what's least required will actually help you stand out and avoid wardrobe mishaps that could be career suicide" (p. 3). This may very well be sound advice for an intern of any race, but smacks of ham-handed paternalism in light of two factors.
First, as others have observed (Miller, 1997; Soar 2000), advertising agencies are notorious for the internal rivalry between the creative and account departments, with creatives ritually defining themselves against the "suits" in account. At the agencies I visited, the nickname seemed apt; high-level account executives often dressed in business suits and blazers. It thus made sense for Lamar to dress more conservatively, since he worked in account and aspired to be like the CEO who "has that $2,000 suit on." In contrast, I noticed that lead creatives, typically men, tended to wear t-shirts, jeans and sneakers, some even sporting tattoos,
unkempt hair, and stubble. In spite of these contrasting dress codes, MAIP required all of their interns, regardless of their department, to wear suits on their first day at the agency. For interns working in creative, this did not make a good first impression; many reported being mocked for wearing the wrong clothes while some were even asked if they knew where they were. Creatives are expected to dress "creatively," or against the suit and tie, in order to distance themselves from their nemeses in account. For his part, Luis recovered from this initial moment of humiliation, by establishing an outrageous wardrobe (think mustard sweater and silver bow tie) that expressed an appropriate tone of iconoclasm. Moreover, by not specifying dress codes by department, MAIP's one-size fits all policy needlessly marginalized their creative interns on their first day at work.

The Cloak of Whiteness

Second, when we compare MAIP's top-down dress code with the regime (or lack-ther eof) for White must-hires, a clear double-standard emerges. For instance, Barbara, who works in HR at one of my agencies, complained that her White interns, especially the young women, dressed inappropriately, noting that "lots of leg is

88 This image of the "hipster creative" is a well-known cliché. When I asked some of the interns to visualize what their agency would look like, Darshelle imagined a "White guy with spiky hair and a tight Black T-shirt and skinny jeans wearing bright red Converse shoes. He is a creative and is drinking a beer trying to relax and gather his thoughts." Millicent expected to see "hipsters" with tattoos playing ping-pong and wearing plaid shirts and ripped jeans in an office environment that says "we're funky, yet we're serious."

89 Incredibly, the interns were also required to wear their suits on the last day of their orientation weekend. There was no apparent reason for this. No pictures taken, no interface with employers. Given that the summer weather was extremely hot and humid and the common room had no air conditioning, I cringed as the interns sat in their chairs, sweating for several hours.
distracting" and "the creatives take liberties" in terms of dress codes because they're sitting at a desk all day and do very little client-facing. And yet, she opted to avoid a formal reprimand:

I could have torn into them in regards to their dress this summer -- I mean, it started a whole debate... 'do we send out an e-mail in regards to shorts?' My manager wanted to, and I'm like, 'You can't. You can't send out an e-mail in regards to shorts because people are going to wear shorts no matter what.' ...It's not in [our] DNA to send out an e-mail saying 'do not wear X.'

In this case, the White interns were excused for wearing inappropriate attire because it would have been untoward to correct them. For these Whites, fashion infractions were written off as annoying, but nowhere near "career suicide." And yet, it is well within the "DNA" of MAIP to tell their interns "do not wear X." Sadie, a participant in my Mixed/Multi-racial focus group who also identifies as Black, reported more evidence of this double-standard at her agency. A group of five junior-level employees (three White and two East Asian) declared "Hood Rat Friday." Sadie asked for clarification and was told to "dress like a ghetto person."90 She did not participate but was disappointed to see "non-Black people from mid to high income backgrounds with little to no experience of what it was like to be from 'the hood' throwing out their interpretation of what urban, Black America was to them" by wearing "wife beaters, baggy sweatpants or jeans, and bandannas" and "throwing up fake gang signals in greeting" with hip-hop music blaring in the

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90 This interpretation of "hood rat" is an approximation, or perhaps deliberate euphemism, of a highly sexualized and racialized term of slang, most frequently defined in the Urban Dictionary as "A girl who sleeps with various men in the neighborhood. Usually noticeable via her slacking standards of personal care." Synonyms include: slut, skank, whore, hoe, ghetto ho, hood bitch, etc. (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hood%20rat)
background. She also noticed that "with the attire, came an attitude...most people (the staff was mostly women) threw on a hyper-masculine attitude with their outfits." Thus, a largely White and female office space became a kind of minstrel stage for performing a spectacular version of Black men, the missing other, by donning a more extreme version of the fashion "don’ts" in Figure 15. Again, the instigators and participants "got away with it" and no one's career was harmed since dressing "ghetto" for fun presumes--and perhaps justifiably so--that no one in the office is actually from "the hood." Just like the Mad Men parties referenced earlier, "Hood Rat Friday" was both tone-deaf towards advertising's race crisis and revealing of the kind of atmosphere where Whites—under the cloak of Whiteness—can dress however they want, while MAIP interns are told to watch their step, lest their job suffer a fatal "wardrobe mishap."

Human Resources

The organizers of the MAIP program have good reason to be cautious when developing the careers of young interns of color. They, along with diversity officers in the major agencies, are mostly women of color and all have been placed in a very precarious position. On one hand, as we saw in the last chapter, agency upper-management ostensibly responded to outside pressure by tasking HR to "fix the numbers." These mandates often came without significant funding or attention from top executives. Nevertheless, diversity officers, human resource professionals, and recruiters were all judged by how far they "moved the needle." On the other hand, the same agency upper-management have consistently undermined diversity efforts by both tolerating and participating in the kind of cronyism and nepotism (favoring
the White and well-connected) so typical of the must-hire system--a contemporary practice that, while dwarfing and long predating diversity programs, is rarely challenged. As Foner (1997) wryly observes,

I have yet to meet the White male in whom special favoritism (getting a job, for example, through relatives or an old boys’ network, or because of racial discrimination by a union or employer) fostered doubt about his abilities... At a time of deindustrialization and stagnant real wages, many Whites have come to blame affirmative action for declining economic prospects. Let us not delude ourselves, however, into thinking that eliminating affirmative action will produce a society in which rewards are based on merit. Despite our rhetoric, equal opportunity has never been the American way. For nearly all our history, affirmative action has been a prerogative of White men. (pp. 25-26)

The current race problem in the American advertising industry is both a product and a reflection of this history of White affirmative action; its continuing legacy is the very rationale for the MAIP program, but is kept tightly under wraps. Must-hires are placed secretly. When HR professionals did finally disclose their must-hires to me, they did so in hushed whispers, forbidding me to talk to the must-hires about the topic directly. I was to pretend that I did not know who they were, who they knew, and how they got in. Though some, like John, did choose to self-disclose, most, like Richard, knew better and concealed their connections. In contrast to must-hires who could slip past scrutiny under the cover of Whiteness, interns of color, whether they were in the MAIP program or not, were often marked by their White peers as having gotten their slot “just because” of the color of their skin. Moreover, while some HR professionals introduced the interns of color as part of MAIP, such as in the case of Lin, I heard no reports of anyone in HR taking the time to explain why MAIP was necessary to the rest of the intern cohort. For HR manager Dorothy, this was not simply an oversight; any reference to advertising’s
historic and continuing practice of White affirmative action risked offending very powerful people—especially those who might have placed a must-hire of their own.

In this industry -- oh this industry is such a trip -- in this industry, you have that conversation with some of those kids, then they walk home to tell their father who’s the CEO of whatever company, who’s then going to call the president of [the agency] and call to his office -- not with a happy face -- and say 'What the fuck are you doing? What did you say to these kids?' Now you have to defend why you had the conversation to begin with...I would bet money that that would happen -- a lot of money! Because it’s just so riddled with -- danger is the wrong word -- [agency upper management] don’t want to have this conversation, don’t want to deal with this -- and when you put it in their face, and now they have to deal with it because someone that can either impact their reputation or their revenue or something important to them is coming at them with that, because of you, and that person is uncomfortable because you made their kid uncomfortable -- this is some career ending shit!

**Meritocracy in Theory, Discrimination in Practice**

Given these pressures, it’s easy to see the appeal of meritocracy—fiction though it may be—especially to White HR professionals charged with diversifying a largely monochromatic workplace. But while Elizabeth quoted platitudes about objectivity and talent (“we're not lowering our standards for the must-haves” and “we hire the best person for the job”), another HR manager at her own agency was using very subjective criteria to sort candidates. Comparing the probable fates of three female interns towards the end of the summer, Heather expressed high hopes for the two White women, despite their relatively lackluster performance. Faith, a must-hire, could easily be hired "to work on Maybelline" since she "sort of looks the part" even though Heather wouldn’t have pursued or hired her otherwise. Similarly, she expected Sarah "to turn out to be fairly underwhelming" and yet understood that she offered a similar package of superficial appeals: "she comes in, she is very well put together, she’s pretty mature... she’s cute, you’d want to have a beer with
her. Check some of the boxes." In contrast, Lourdes, a Latina intern who was well respected by her colleagues at the agency, faced an uphill battle. For starters, she "wouldn't get hired on Maybelline. She doesn't dress like Maybelline. She's not a size zero." And though Lourdes performed well during the internship program and was ultimately hired, Heather assured me that she never would have gotten a chance if not for the MAIP program:

I have to tell you, that if Lourdes came in to interview here [on her own], she would not get hired. She has an accent. [Grimacing] I know that sounds horrible! Her English isn't quite as strong in presentation as other assistant account executives that come in. I don't think she would've gotten the job-- she comes in, she's a little shy, she's a little different -- they don't like different.

Indeed, despite high evaluations, Lourdes was initially rejected during the hiring process by one of the agency's internal teams due to issues of "fit." Clearly, there is a disconnect between the clean, univariate causation of meritocracy in theory and it’s more messy and overdetermined application in daily practice. Put another way, the common sense of “we hire the best person for the job” acts as an ideological screen concealing the material practices of White affirmative action taking place on the ground.

Patricia, another HR manager from a different agency, also struggled to square her ideological commitments with the realities of her job. While admitting that "we [Whites] were hiring our own people because of employee referrals...you look at C-suites;⁹¹ it's all White," she expressed concern that affirmative action was a form of "reverse discrimination" that could harm people that looked like me:

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⁹¹ “C-suite” is industry parlance for where the offices for upper management, where all the agency chiefs work: CEOs, CMOs, CCOs, etc.
I feel like you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t... you are a White male - you seem like you are -- I could be wrong -- like that’s not in your favor these days and that’s not fair because if you’re qualified but if I have three candidates -- one’s White, one’s Black, one’s hispanic or whatever, I’m gonna’ hope that the two diverse [candidates] interview better or have a better background, you know what I mean? Just because that’s what we’re trying to do more, or trying to hire more -- but that’s not -- I mean -- you may be just as qualified -- like that’s the double-edged sword, you know?....We do [reverse discrimination] now, but it’s unofficial... we’re consciously hiring diverse people first -- no, not first, most qualified.

At this point, Patricia was speaking under her breath. We were in her office, in private, with the door closed. When I asked why she was whispering, she exclaimed, "Because it's wrong. I'm morally against it!" Prioritizing diverse hires, or what she described as "reverse racism," violated Patricia's notion of meritocracy and her ambivalence seemed to swing her allegiance back and forth even as she spoke: from defending my/our rights as Whites to admitting to taking affirmative action towards hiring minorities and finally a hasty attempt to synthesize diversity and meritocracy: "no, not first, most qualified." Patricia's confusion is understandable. As head of HR, she is expected to ensure that all hiring is fair and equal even as her agency's holding company pressures her to increase diversity numbers, management and clients expect her to place family members, and agency staff place their friends' resumes on top of what is often a very steep pile.

Colorblindness

The ideology of meritocracy, along with its frequent evocations of "talent" and "qualifications," provides cover for White affirmative action taking place behind

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92 As Bonilla-Silva (2010) points out, "informal expressions of ideology are a constructive effort, a process of building arguments in situ," so it is reasonable to expect interviewees to contradict themselves in the pursuit of a coherent response (p. 30).
the scenes and out of sight. Again, we can see a clear example of this in the practice of legacy college admissions favoring the children of alumni and large donors. As Schmidt (2007) argues in his book *Color and Money: How Rich White Kids are Winning the War Over College Affirmative Action*, "because the admissions preferences that Whites benefit from are largely hidden and offered only to some, few people ever question whether a given White student on campus is academically under qualified, and you almost never hear a rejected White applicant complain that he or she lost out to a less deserving White student" (my emphasis, p. 15). As a result of this blindness to undeserved White advantage, Whites overlook the multiple factors (illustrated in Figure 16) that many schools take into account, including regional diversity and athletic prowess, and instead scapegoat both affirmative action and the people of color supposedly benefitting from the policy for interrupting what would otherwise be a fair system.

![Figure 16: Affirmative Action Cartoon (Wilkinson, 2003)](image)

For Elizabeth, the issue was personal; diversity efforts in advertising reminded her of her own family: "You know, an average student who happens to be
Black is going to get an offer from [Boston College] before my kid... I have mixed feelings about it; I really do -- only because I feel like there should be opportunity for everyone. I think that's a hard message to say -- to tell some kid with blond hair and blue eyes why you didn't get in." I challenged Elizabeth on this point, asking her how she could square her ambivalence on affirmative action with her agency's systematic favoritism towards Whites via must-hire practices. At first, she was defensive, arguing that not all must-hires were White. When I asked her to produce an example of a non-White must-hire during the last ten years, she hesitated and then backtracked, conceding my point. However, Elizabeth also insisted that must-hires were colorblind; any favoritism towards Whites was an unintentional outcome of demographic distribution: top management positions tended to be occupied by Whites and so it followed that the must-hire requests would, in turn, benefit Whites. I countered that this set up a classic affirmative action scenario: hundreds apply for a summer internship, their resumes are fairly equivalent, and HR tips the scale towards the (White) must-hire. I asked her if it would be fair to frame such a dynamic as White affirmative action and she reluctantly agreed: "Yeah, I think that's probably fair." This conversation is significant because it suggests that Elizabeth had never thought of the must-hire system in racial terms, despite a long history of White domination; her colorblindness prevented her from seeing that the must-hires, as a group, were of a common race.

Recounting a litany of material inequalities between Whites, Blacks, and Latinos ranging from wealth disparities, inferior education, housing discrimination, surveillance in stores, racial profiling, a racist justice system, and even studies
documenting how Blacks still pay more for goods like cars and houses, Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that Whites reconcile these inequalities through "colorblind racism" (p. 2). Unlike Jim Crow racism, which is based on theories of biological and moral inferiority, colorblind racism is more covert having “rearticulated traditional elements of traditional liberalism (work ethic, rewards by merit, equal opportunity, individualism, etc.) for racially illiberal goals” (p. 7). Bonilla-Silva outlines four frames of colorblind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Of these, abstract liberalism is the most important "as it constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology" (p. 26). This foundation is built upon the ideology of meritocracy and helps explain why so many of the White must-hires opposed affirmative action:

The frame of abstract liberalism involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., 'equal opportunity,' the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters. By framing race related issues in the language of liberalism, Whites can appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral,' while opposing almost all practical approaches to dealing with de facto racial inequality....Abstract liberalism is the explanatory well from which Whites gather ideas to account for residential and school segregation, limited levels of interracial marriage, and a host of other racial issues. (pp. 28, 153).

The “explanatory well” of abstract liberalism is a useful discursive resource, especially since most of my focus group participants, whether White or Black, described themselves as not racist. For instance, Richard and John, both White must-hires, took a colorblind stance towards race in America. During one of the focus groups, Richard said "race, class, gender doesn’t matter to me" and, when asked if he was racist, responded, "not even a little bit." In similar fashion, John credited his colorblindness to his personal biography: "I grew up in California -- one of the most
diverse places and I have never seen color.” This is unlikely. Anderson (2010) reviews a host of studies that demonstrate "that people are in fact not colorblind, they do notice race and they treat people differently depending on race" (author’s emphasis, pp. 239-264). He argues that colorblindness helps White's deny their debt to the “structural favoritism toward Whites that has been built into US institutions for generations” such that “colorblind racism forms an invisible yet impregnable ideological wall that shields Whites from America’s racial reality” (p. 265). In another instance, Sweeney and González (2008) analyzed 2000 online responses to a newspaper article about college admission preferences and found that writers used individual merit, zero-sum gains, reverse discrimination, and "the language of colorblind ideology to argue for the elimination of affirmative action” (p. 135). Crucially many appropriated the language of the civil rights movement and the concepts and discourse of Dr. Martin Luther King. Gallagher (1997) had similar results, concluding that, "the ascendancy of colorblindness as the dominant mode of racial thinking and the emergence of liberal individualism as a source of White entitlement and racial backlash was a central finding in my work" (p. 9). Finally, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) observes, abstract liberalism may require a philosophy of colorblindness, but even such ostensibly open-minded attitudes rarely translate into the material practices of association:

Whites, despite their professed colorblindness, live in White neighborhoods, associate primarily with Whites, befriend mostly Whites, and choose Whites as their mates. The contradiction between their professed life philosophy and their real practice in life is not perceived by Whites as such because they do not interpret their hypersegregation and isolation from minorities (in particular Blacks) as a racial outcome. For most Whites, this is just 'the way things are.' (p. 263)
As we’ve seen in previous chapters, we can best understand “the way things are” by the way they were. While civil rights legislation has interrupted the more explicit forms of race discrimination in the United States, it has left race-based legacies of wealth, professional seniority, and social networks firmly in place. This matters because, as Lipsitz (2005) argues, when the vast majority of available jobs do not appear in the classifieds, “personal connections prove the most important factor in securing employment” and so “attacks on affirmative action guarantee that Whites will be rewarded for their historical advantage in the labor market” (p. 79). Bonilla-Silva (2010) concurs, noting that today "discrimination in the labor market is alive and well (e.g., it affects Black and Latino/a job applicants 30 to 50% of the time) and that most jobs (as many as 80%) are obtained through informal networks" (p. 33). DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2003) take this point further. Noting that a “growing liberalization of White racial attitudes” has not reduced White opposition to “public policies that are intended to bring about greater racial equality," the authors suggest that an overemphasis on discrimination against minorities has diverted discussions of public policy away from discrimination favoring Whites—namely, the exclusive forms of opportunity hoarding through the disproportionate access to “social and cultural capital and economic resources” (pp. 189-190). They found that Whites generally opposed affirmative action and expressed a strong belief in meritocracy despite having leveraged personal networks to get “their own jobs primarily with the help of family, friends, and acquaintances” (p. 197). These Whites were blinded to their own group advantage by a belief that their success was based on individual hard work rather than “the
situation or contextual factors that have contributed to their life outcomes” and “because of this, many Whites can believe themselves to be innocent bystanders vis-à-vis Black disadvantage” (p. 190). On the contrary, Whiteness is a form of property shared by all members of the group and thus lends itself to race solidarity in opposing affirmative action while ignoring, for example, the bevy of other advantages conferred through college admissions (dramatized in Figure 16) favoring alumni, donors, athletes, and out-of-state residents (Hurtado & Stewart, 2004). In other words, anti-affirmative action attitudes are fundamentally disingenuous since “the language of liberal individualism serves as a cover for coordinated collective group interests” (Lipsitz, 2005, p. 84).

The ideology of meritocracy, so deeply rooted in the American Dream’s promise of upward mobility, offers the interns in my study a soothing overlay that mutes the harsh reality of “the way things are” in advertising today. By screening out a) the glaring inequalities of race and b) opportunity hoarding by the ruling class, it forms a convenient articulation between the commonsensical, and thereby unassailable, philosophy of “equal opportunity” and the capitalist approach to labor sorting, wherein the “invisible hands” of a disembodied free market separate the winners from the losers. Meritocracy was adopted by the must-hires in my study as a way to alleviate their insecurities; no matter how they got in, they could still “prove themselves” on the job and retroactively earn their right to belong. The MAIP interns also embraced meritocracy as their best defense against accusations of tokenism—accusations that, ironically, even came from Whites who had benefitted from White affirmative action. This ideology renders the labor market as a safe
space, a univariate vacuum that brackets your race, class, gender, etc. so that all that’s left is your talent; the best candidate wins. Of course, this story is most appealing to the winners and since all of the interns that I interviewed had, for one reason or another, been selected for an internship slot, everyone had an interest in explaining why the system worked.

And yet, as I hope the argument thus far has made clear, the labor market in advertising is structured in dominance; the way things were largely continue to be the way things are. Upper-management is still almost exclusively White and male, as are almost all senior creative positions. Account management and Human Resources remain highly feminized both in its personnel and institutional role. And hiring is most frequently conducted through referrals and closed social networks, which, in turn, reproduce the overwhelming Whiteness of current staff. This is not a simple story of meritocratic cause-and-effect. Employment in the advertising industry is overdetermined by a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, inequalities of race, class, and gender. Moreover, the must-hire system is only the most egregious example of an industry that makes countless transactions in the “relationship banking system” of personal favors. Given this material context, the ideological screen of meritocracy exacerbates Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) notion of colorblind racism offers safe harbor for the ruling class even as they secretly insert their children into internship slots while exposing minorities to anti-affirmative action backlash. Rather than acknowledging and seeking to mitigate White advantage, colorblindness opts to look the other way—not back to how we got here, nor around at the way things are today, but rather ahead to the way things ought to be. Martin
Luther King had a dream, but it won’t come true by way of belief alone.

Colorblindness is not achieved by merely wishing it so; it also requires a redistribution of power. This begins with a clear recognition of racial patterns within the ruling class. In other words, Whites need to learn to see Whiteness.
 CHAPTER 6  

CASE STUDY: DIVERSITY AS INDIVIDUALITY

My interviews with HR professionals have given me a pretty clear view of how the practices of referral hires, team chemistry, and "must hires" primarily benefit Whites. It's also clear from my focus groups how the ideology of color-blind meritocracy can conceal and reify the ill-gotten gains Whites have made through past discrimination and contemporary closed social networks. The result is a fundamental disconnect between material practices and ideological screens: the damning numbers of persistent inequality on the structural level and the "post-racial" attitudes on the level of individual subjectivities. We can see further evidence of this tension in the following case study wherein an agency applies the tools of the trade in an attempt to solve its own, internal diversity problem.

Rebranding Diversity

During one of the Black focus groups, Kioni mentioned that I might be interested in Agency D’s upcoming intern team project presentations. She explained that, similar to her peers at other agencies, Agency D had given her cohort a brief with the expectation that they would work together in teams to develop a campaign over the course of the summer (including original research, consumer insights, and creative executions) culminating in a pitch competition before a panel of judges (Agency D senior agency management). However, unlike her fellow MAIP interns at other agencies, Kioni and her colleagues were not assigned to work on a client product. Instead, they were asked to rebrand Agency D’s own internal diversity and inclusion initiative. I asked for more details and Kioni explained that the assignment
had come directly from HR and the interns’ goal was to increase active participation in diversity programs agency-wide, especially from senior management. As further incentive, the winning team would get to see aspects of their campaign put into practice. Noting my enthusiasm, Kioni invited me to come see the final presentations, but expressed ambivalence about the assignment:

It's not a product, it's an initiative, so that seemed kind of weird to me...I'm happy that they care about [diversity]. But I feel like if they really cared about it, they wouldn't give it to the interns. You know, like you don't trust an intern -- like the interns are the people at the bottom -- like the freshman and, I don't know, I just don't feel like the act was, very, very sincere. I don't know why. I just have this weird vibe.93

I later acquired a copy of the brief in the form of a PDF of the "deck" (industry parlance for power point slides). It began by outlining Agency D’s commitment to celebrating diversity by recruiting and developing talent "representing a vibrant mosaic of personal characteristics, backgrounds and experiences" while creating "a culture of inclusion that respects the uniqueness of individuals and values the

93 I later learned that Kioni's suspicions were right on target. Maria in HR admitted that she and her colleagues had originally assigned the diversity and inclusion branding assignment to more senior creatives within the agency, but the creatives, who had taken on the project "pro-bono" (as in something to do in their free time outside billable hours), repeatedly missed deadlines and failed to produce any workable solutions. Faced with limited funding for the project and little influence within the agency-at-large, Maria said that assigning the project to a labor force directly under HR’s purview--the interns--seemed the most logical, if somewhat desperate, next step: "We were like, 'well, we have the interns here, you know, let's have them' -- because it's just one of those things where it's just really hard to get people excited about diversity -- I don't know why that is." At an office of approximately 1200 employees, only three HR staff worked (part-time) on diversity issues in addition to other responsibilities. Indeed, one of the judges for the pitch competition would later say he didn’t even know the topic had been assigned and seemed to share some of Kioni’s concerns: “I didn't know this until I entered the room, that we picked a topic so potentially polarizing as diversity on the heads of our interns -- to be very honest with you.”
contributions that each employee makes."94 It then framed diversity as something to be leveraged for competitive advantage given the approaching minority "tipping point" of under-represented groups becoming the majority in the U.S. by 2050. And while the brief did include a pie chart demonstrating the diversity of the New York City labor pool, it did not list the current percentages of minorities working within Agency D in particular or the advertising industry in general. In other words, the interns were not informed of the degree of contemporary race inequality nor the impending race discrimination lawsuit outlined above in Chapter 3. According to Agency D’s Chief Talent Officer (who oversaw HR and thus the intern program), this was a very deliberate move:

The advertising industry as a whole is getting dinged that we're not a diverse industry! You walk into agencies and it's still Mad Men, you know? You know, with little flavors here and there. So, there was a huge memorandum by the EEOC that's like we actually have to deliver numbers and report in on numbers...but that wasn't the brief because that would've been a whole different history of trying to teach them about the memorandum...Either we could have gone in and hit it hard, and that's how I could have briefed the teams, but it's just kind of -- we wanted to make it a fun exercise.

"Fun" would be a theme during the final presentations. When I arrived, Juanita, another Black female MAIP intern working at Agency D, greeted me at the door and gave me a tour of the newly remodeled building. As the headquarters of an international agency valued at nearly $1 Billion dollars, the architecture and appointments of the space were vast and impressive, spread across multiple floors marked by open space, glass walls, modern furniture, bright colors, widescreen

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94 I have excluded any citation for this document in order to conceal the identity of the host agency, thereby protecting my participants and honoring an agreement I made on site.
iMacs, and lots of wood, art, and tile. Juanita, who was working on a health insurance direct mail account, explained that the open floor plan—no cubicles—was designed to break down "boundaries" between departments and integrate the creatives with the rest of the team. The tour ended in the presentation room, where six teams of around eight interns apiece were milling around, visibly excited. I touched base with my HR contact, wished Kioni good luck, and grabbed a seat in the second row. The five judges, who all appeared to be White, sat in a row behind a table facing the presenter podium and large screen at the front of the room. They included Agency D’s Executive Director of Business Development, Chief Talent Officer, a VP Account Director, an Associate Creative Director, and a Training Specialist from Agency D’s diversity and inclusion team. The Training Specialist opened the proceedings by thanking the judges and describing the teams as "integrated" because they included interns from account, creative, and production departments etc. She explained that each team was allotted 15 minutes to present their own deck, plus a five-minute question and answer period. What follows is my summary of each pitch.

**The Pitch Competition**

Kioni’s team went first, although she did not speak. Instead, another Black female introduced their team’s key finding that diversity is hard to define. As evidence of this, she recounted how they had asked employees at Agency D to complete the sentence: "Diversity is ____." and since "everyone had different answers...diversity has no definite definition because it’s different to everyone." She then related this insight to her team’s diversity and inclusion logo which featured a shaded gradient from Black to White to symbolize expanding the definition of
diversity to include "the variety of individuals and unique perspectives that comprise the community, not just the physical attributes of the people that work here...it’s the individual that we are referring to by shades, not race, not ethnicity, not exactly anything physically related." She then handed it off to a White male, who presented a creative execution in the form of a Flipboard-style curated magazine for the iPad which would "highlight people, as individuals, and could also highlight market trends." For example, he suggested profiling an employee who is Jamaican then adding the relevant marketing statistic that 59% of all Jamaicans live in New York City. The Black female concluded the presentation by summing up her team's main campaign idea that it was time to go beyond Black-and-White: "we are not our categories, we are individuals."

The next team emphasized the importance of creating "a social atmosphere where people can communicate common interests" so as to not "marginalize anyone" and avoid lecturing employees with "the spin" or "standard talking points about diversity" and, instead, proposed to "rethink diversity altogether to totally revamp it, make it fresh, make it fun and to totally move away from that cynicism, and just keep it exciting." To dramatize this point, they used a series of four slides (see Figure 17) expanding the "Dimensions of Diversity" out from "the very common, limited definition" of race, gender, age, and disability [sic.] to include things like taste in food, hobbies, style, and even pop culture preferences: "we wanted to break out of that stereotypical view and just change it up a bit and realize that there’s more...there’s personalities, there’s where you live, there’s what you like to do."
### Dimensions of Diversity

- Gender
- Race
- Age
- Disability
- Sexual Preference
- Education
- Gender
- Age
- Disability
- Religion
- Country of Origin
- Political Affiliations
- Cultural Heritage
- Parental Status
- Education
- Martial Status
- Country of Origin
- Lifestyle Preferences
- Diet (Omniverous, Vegetarian, Vegan, Low Fat, High Protein)

*Figure 17: "Dimensions of Diversity" Slide Series*
For their creative execution, the team proposed "The Spot," an "online calendar, digital destination, and meeting place" that would serve as "the home of the diversity and inclusion initiative" and provide opportunities for staff "to voluntarily come together." Keeping with the broadened "dimensions of diversity," each calendar date would spark meet-ups and events celebrating identities and interests ranging from the profound to the trivial. For instance, Oct 17th included Black Poetry Day, Wear Something Gaudy Day, and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty while October 28th honored the Statue of Liberty’s Birthday, Plush Animal Lover’s Day, and National Chocolate Day (see Figure 18).

![Figure 18: “The Spot” Sample Month](image)
By the time the third team began presenting their pitch, a clear pattern of "diversity as individuality" was starting to emerge. This was surprising, given that each team had been working independently. Moreover, even if the interns had gotten wind of their rivals' approaches, they would have had good reason to look for ways to differentiate themselves in order to stand out from the competition. Instead, the presentations were beginning to bleed into one another like variations on a common theme. In the case of the third team, the presenters' "big idea" was to "make diversity exciting" by "celebrating everyone's originality" by moving "away from the word 'diversity' to something new, intriguing, and inspiring." For them, the very prospect of "telling employees to be diverse" was patronizing and off-putting because their generation was "desensitized" to "patronizing lectures." Moreover, when conducting research by interviewing people at Agency D, this team was operating under a clear hypothesis:

We were expecting people to be cynical about it. Everybody's grown up in these school programs of diversity and it being a very forced kind of lecture format. We believe diversity represents a broad spectrum, instead of racial or ethnic and that's where it ends...we thought that diversity had a stigma attached to it so we wanted to focus on something other than the typical definition -- who they are, their interests etc....from a tolerance mindset to a celebration mindset by implementing programs that inspire an appreciation for uniqueness.

As an example of such a program, they played a "training video" featuring "Rob," a White male described as "not mean-spirited or closed-minded," but rather portrayed as clueless until his White female co-worker cajoles him into attending a diversity potluck featuring employees' "favorite cultural dishes" and catered food from "neighboring ethnic restaurants." The optimism of the video was underscored by the lyrics of the soundtrack, "Why Can't We Be Friends?" (War, 1975): "the color
of your skin doesn’t matter to me, as long as we can live in harmony." Moreover, the presenters argued that the agency's diversity and inclusion initiative should be "natural" and relationship-based since "people don't become friends by going to a lecture, they become friends through normal social interaction." They branded this approach "Evolve," because it was "easier on the ears than diversity" and symbolized "movement" and "change" while celebrating a "safe and positive" space where "everyone is unique, valuable, and special."

The fourth team began with a gimmick, asking everyone to reach under their chairs, remove the slip of paper taped underneath, and read the text together out loud and in unison. Since each slip had the phrase "Diversity is" followed by a unique adjective, the result was a cacophony of noise. Pleased by the chaos, a Black male intern explained that the exercise was designed to illustrate how "diversity is a lot of things; it's not just your skin color or where you're from, it's the way you like to wear your clothes, the way you like to eat even." Like the previous teams, these presenters noted "the stigma attached to diversity" and stated their mission to "relieve the tension associated with diversity by broadening its definition to include all aspects of individuality." To accomplish this, they suggested creative executions based on the organizing metaphor of the pixel, something that "helps define the image but is only a small piece of the big picture...each person is made up of many parts that contribute to their character." For instance, they proposed posting fun-house style mirrors around the agency to demonstrate how "Diversity is not just how you look on the outside." One mirror, placed in the pantry, would be accompanied by the tagline "Diversity is how you make your coffee." In similar
fashion, a lunch-swap would involve "sharing a bit of you" since "what you have for lunch is a reflection of your preferences, a unique pixel that defines you. Some people may bring lunches that are influenced by nationality or culture. Some may be vegetarian, others might just really, really like blue cheese." Summing up his team's whimsical approach, the Black male intern posed a pair of rhetorical questions: "Why do we have to take diversity so seriously? Why can't we have some fun with it?"

Two moments during the Q&A warrant mention. The vice president pressed the team on their central campaign idea and two White interns answered simultaneously "celebrating individuality." Then one elaborated, defining diversity as an all-inclusive category: "Diversity is pretty much everything. Everything about you reflects part of your personality. Like you can't get through the day without showing somebody a part of yourself. So, I mean, trying to hone in on diversity as a whole is pretty much impossible for anybody to do. So, I mean, if you were to take one thing away, it's that diversity is everything that you do." This claim went unchallenged, but another judge—a White female—did take issue with a tagline describing Agency D as "focused on diversity since 1925" objecting that the phrase was "taking liberties" and struck her as "a leap." The Black male presenter conceded that "Maybe it is a stretch, maybe we were not diverse in 1925" and the room erupted in nervous laughter and ironic quips from judges and audience alike.

Across all six presentations, this was the only instance of semantic pushback from the judges and the moment was poignant for several reasons. First, it happened in response to a Black intern presenting before an all-White panel of
judges. Second, the intern was enthusiastically promoting a flattering—if ahistorical and patently false—characterization of Agency D’s track record on racial diversity. Third, it was a White woman who then set the record straight: "focused on diversity since 1925" had gone too far. All of which helped create the unfortunate impression of a naïve Black laborer corrected by a knowing White authority. Indeed, it was the White woman who imparted the impromptu lesson on early twentieth century race relations. And yet, while the judge’s protest might have briefly recuperated the race aspect of diversity, she quickly undermined her own logic when she suggested that the phrase "individual since 1925" would work better while failing to question any of the previous teams’ rebranding of diversity as individuality. In other words, her common sense “taking liberties” retort may have defended the racial meaning of diversity, but his intervention failed to recognize the current race crisis in advertising as well as the ultimate intent of diversity programs to recruit and retain more staff of color. This unwillingness to challenge White conflations of diversity and individuality betrayed her own naïveté, complicity, and/or cowardice.

Similar to team three’s "Dimensions of Diversity" slides, team five used a visual matrix of adjectives to illustrate how, when asked to describe themselves in one word, all the agency employees they interviewed used different words "and, more importantly, nobody described themselves based on race." Juanita, the MAIP intern who had given me a tour of the building, presented the next section. Her slides depicted sad figures identified by race, followed by the same figures, this time happy, depicted in monochromatic red, their racial identities erased and the "diversity" of their ideas represented by different shapes (see Figure 19). Narrating
these slides, Juanita explained: "The reality is that people don't like to be called by their race, and that's why they don't attend any diversity events...people prefer to be recognized for who they are, what they can do, and how they can contribute to the agency."

![Figure 19: Sad vs. Happy Faces](image)

Team five echoed the sense of backlash against diversity education as indoctrination, complaining that "we've all been raised on it" and summed up their campaign with a closing statement on the now-familiar-theme of expanding definitions: "And, in the end, diversity in the creative world is about so much more than just ethnicity and gender. It's about what people bring to the table. It's about creating an environment that is rewarding and obsessed with new ideas... after all, isn't that what advertising is all about?"
Of all the intern teams’ campaigns, team six came closest to the implied, but unspoken, goal of the brief: increasing the number of minorities on Agency D’s staff. While acknowledging how "diversity is often seen as taboo," they proposed a poster design contest invitational publicized through college financial aid offices and historically Black institutions like Howard University. And yet, they deliberately avoided limiting their target to minorities because "we didn’t want to exclude anyone," rhetorically asking "how is it diverse if we’re only marketing to one school?" Thus, despite the team’s recognition of diversity programs as a response to race inequality, they are trapped by the drift into conflation; instead of advocating diversity and inclusion, they combine the two ideas into diversity as inclusion.95 This is understandable if we recall that the brief’s more explicit assignment was to increase active participation in diversity programs agency-wide. In response, team six, along with the rest of the teams, sought to rebrand diversity as individuality, a definition so broad, and so banal, as to apply to, and include, anyone and everyone.

The teams used very similar formulas to get from diversity to individuality. First, they attacked the very term as "taboo," a "stigma" eliciting "cynicism" from a "desensitized" generation. Then they redefined it, expanding the "dimensions of diversity" beyond "just ethnicity and gender" to celebrate "everyone’s originality" since "diversity is everything that you do" including "personalities" and "the way you like to wear your clothes" and "make your coffee" and your favorite things, be

95 And yet, on it's very face, inclusion for all in a competitive labor market is an impossible task. More likely is the idea equal opportunity--everyone getting a chance to compete for the same job. And, yet, as we saw in chapter four, even this is undermined by advertising's systematic discrimination in the form of closed social networks, the "chemistry" and "fit" of team hires, and nepotistic "must-hires."
they “plush animals” or “blue cheese.” Moreover, they argued, diversity must "evolve" beyond race to "an appreciation for uniqueness" because "we are not our categories, we are individuals.” In the end, the logic was based on a simple transitive theorem. Diversity is individuality. Everyone is an individual. Therefore, everyone is diverse. This formulation is attractive, in that it promises inclusion for all. However, by making diversity initiatives open to all, it also proposes a kind of reverse diversity through the inclusion of Whites, a false equivalency of seeking equilibrium within an imagined context of ideal conditions of parity, rather than a corrective to empirically based inequalities. In locating difference within the individual, rather than amongst groups, the intern presentations diffuse any discussion of power and privilege and thus undermine the premise for race-based corrective/compensatory programs such as MAIP. Furthermore, the “abstract liberalism” of such an approach willfully ignores the material practices on the ground disproportionately advantaging an already advantaged race-based group in a myriad of ways. As I have argued above, the hiring of Whites in advertising through closed social networks, the "chemistry" and "fit" of team hires, and the "must-hire" system of nepotism combine to provide a potent example of group-based advantage through opportunity-hoarding conferred to the White and well-connected, a set of privileges that I have described as "White affirmative action."

**Missing the Point**

After the presentations, the judges retired to a back room to deliberate in private. I tagged along and took notes. The Vice President opened the proceedings by praising all the teams, assuring his colleagues that his assessment was objective:
"That is a strong, strong intern class. It really is. And I'm not just saying that. I would have no problem saying it's all shit." Together, the judges agreed that team three ("Evolve") and team five (sad vs. happy faces) presented the strongest pitches based on "strategy stemming from target insights derived from research," but the Vice President objected that team six seemed to veer away from the brief's diversity assignment and towards recruitment, sparking this exchange:

Chief Talent Officer: See, but, I hate to say it though because I'm so jaded with what the diversity is for me-- it's all about recruitment for me and... 'celebrating individuality' within an agency is not delivering a lot of the objectives that we need to say -- like how are we making it more diverse...

Associate Creative Director: I had an interesting reaction to what you were saying [gestures to the Chief Talent Officer]...I saw things kind of differently, they kind of evolved beyond diversity--it was almost like a confidential thing -- not even mention the word--like they kind of redefined what it means to be diverse versus the kind of 'celebrating our differences’ to what it really means to be diverse is to embrace globally -- just kind of redefining the whole notion of what they're meant to do -- and I kind of saw that as a positive.

Chief Talent Officer: ...I'm so happy that the next generation is so evolved and that they're going to take care of that for us but like, for right now, that's where the big gap is -- I mean...honestly, when it comes down to it, what we as an agency are expected to deliver on is changing the numbers and moving the numbers across diverse candidates -- that's what diversity in the industry is really about and what we have to deliver on.

This back-and-forth highlights the tension between the interns "redefining the whole notion of what they're meant to do" and HR looking to “deliver” on “objectives” by “moving the numbers” on diversity. Indeed, by opting not to "hit it hard" and instead make the pitch competition "a fun exercise" for the interns, it would appear the Chief Talent Officer reaped what she sowed. And yet, on the other hand, the rest of the judges were impressed and seemed to buy the redefine-diversity-as-individuality consensus that emerged across the presentations. Perhaps
this was an indicator of their naiveté regarding race inequality inside advertising, but even Maria and Margaret, two HR staff of color explicitly charged with "moving the numbers" by recruiting diverse candidates and thus presumably well aware of advertising's diversity crisis--expressed ambivalence towards the intern pitches. For instance, when we spoke privately afterwards, Maria granted the "individuality" premise while joining the skeptical judge in challenging the overoptimistic tagline:

They wanted to be like 'how you make your coffee is what makes you diverse!' And that's great, which I get. And we agree with that definition, but at the end of the day, if you keep looking at like how diverse this company is, like well--what's the percentage of Black employees at an ad agency because traditionally it is still very much Mad Men -- we're not, we haven't been 'ethnically diverse since 1925!' I mean look around you so [laughter] I don't know what you're talking about!

She also empathized with the progressive attitudes and colorblind assumptions of the typical employee, while noting that these subjectivities were, in themselves, insufficient, having failed to interrupt the reproduction of White labor:

Just from the diversity stigma I think people are just tired of hearing about it because I think most people especially at a young agency in a very liberal city are like 'what is the point of talking about diversity, like, I get it' because people think about diversity in terms of race, gender, sexuality, you know and they're just like 'we don't need to hear it anymore because, like, you know, I'm not a racist person. I'm not sexist, it's fine.' But, in terms of like a business perspective, it's like well that might be all true, then why are we still hiring largely like, you know, why are we still not that different...it's predominately White and male, so why is that?

It would appear that even as the diversity message gets stale, the old numbers stay fresh. On another occasion, I solicited Margaret's opinion on the presentations in general and she gushed: "I think they did amazing. I could totally like see using all of that stuff to be quite honest. And I'm not one to mince words when it comes to like 'yeah, this was not a very good pitch' but I was impressed I
was like ’Wow! Why didn’t we think of that?’” But when I asked her specifically about the diversity-as-individuality idea, she changed her tone:

To be honest, my feedback on all the presentations -- granted, the students did what we asked -- told them to do -- approach it from like diversity, this sort of like perfect, utopian agency world. But, on our side of the fence, you heard--the memorandum--there are specific groups we are targeting that are missing in our hiring and none of what they presented would necessarily help us satisfy those demands right now, to be honest. I mean, this latest demand, they are specific to the Black community. And -- one student got up and said ’Well, we just think that diversity is more than about race.’ Honestly! We’re talking about numbers that are low based on race.

The Chief Talent Officer concurred that the interns followed the brief while ignoring the obvious:

This all became about celebrating individuality, to me. That was the theme of this whole thing. And it was really, kind of missing the point, or maybe purposefully, because they didn’t want to point it out, and I get it...they’re like ’Oh, we want to dilute it because it becomes a taboo subject.’ It is still a taboo subject! Like, it’s still out there. We still have to deliver. We’re still getting dinged, you know what I mean?...I think they got the underwritten -- I think you saw the brief, there is a little bit written in there about why we have to do this--to make the hiring match the current New York City population. You see this? [shows me the pie chart] Does our agency actually reflect this reality?

The interns may have missed the point, but the brief didn’t exactly make it either; it merely dropped hints. In many ways, both HR’s ambivalence and the interns’ dilution of the term diversity mirrors policy shifts in other institutional settings. For instance, Urciuoli (2005), in her critique of the POSSE Program, which sought to diversify “predominately White colleges” with “supportive, multi-cultural teams (‘posses’) of ten students” on 75% scholarships, found that the program used diversity “in ways that sound more like individual-embodied traits than an historically shaped group identity” (pp. 167, 170). She cites how this approach stems from corporate diversity manuals celebrating individual traits “dry-cleaned of
residue from history, structural inequality, and discrimination” (p. 165). Such policies oppose “quota filling” as a “detrimental and divisive” approach which “only adds to conflict and reinforces stereotypes” while endorsing an all-inclusive “mosaic” notion of diversity (p. 165). Acker (2006) adds that the educational remit of “diversity” programs (training employees) “lack the timetables, goals, and other proactive measures of affirmative action and may be more acceptable to management for that reason” (p. 457). Moreover, the “indeterminacy” of the term “diversity” is “not an accident” and management in both corporate America and higher education has widely embraced such a flexible, expansive, positive, and forward-looking notion as a means to displace the more grounded term “multiculturalism” that both acknowledges and seeks to correct past injustices.

We can see more evidence of this trend in a speech on the subject by Nancy Hill (2008), President of the 4A’s, sponsoring organization of the MAIP program. Reflecting on the meaning of diversity, she laments how many see it as a “mathematical equation to be solved with numbers alone” and the act of “simply tapping into the same pool of like-minded, like-experienced, like-educated talent, who happen to be ethnically and racially different from the (generally) White establishment.” For Hill, the real solution requires still more semantic expansion of the term:

> Like many of you, I’ve thought a lot about diversity and the ad industry, and I’ve come to realize that part of the problem is the word itself...I believe that in

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96 The term “mosaic” is also used by the American Advertising Federation (AFF): “The AAF Mosaic Center on Multiculturalism implements all AAF multicultural and diversity initiatives and is the only national ad industry resource of its kind.”

http://www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=20
order for us to get past considering only the mathematical equation of
diversity, we need to add to the definition of the word to include *talent and
inclusion*. Diversity of gender, race and ethnicity—the ad industry needs to
put these at the top of the list, of course, but we must also embrace *diversity
of experience, point-of-view, and knowledge*. I’d like to go one step further:
True, genuine diversity recognizes the business value of respecting,
celebrating and rewarding all of the differences that *unique individuals* bring
to their work, because of and regardless of age, race, gender, sexual
orientation, physical ability or life experience. (my emphasis)

In Hill’s remarks, we can see the central elements of the Agency D intern
presentations: rebranding “the word itself” by expanding the definition beyond the
traditional dimensions to emphasize inclusion of “unique individuals.” Diversity,
then, becomes entirely subjective—a matter of talent as measured through one’s
own “experience, point-of-view, and knowledge.” Clearly, the interns at Agency D
were reflecting a common sensibility regarding diversity that has long been deeply
ingrained within the advertising industry. In another instance, Donna, who works in
HR at another agency, put it to me this way:

> I think its diversity of thought. So is that skin color? Absolutely. Is that
economic status? Absolutely. That’s the target. You don’t want to have
groupthink. You don’t want everybody in a room who comes from the same
background and approaches things in the same way. They are going to look
at things from a different perspective -- that is the value of diversity, not so
you have a Black person in the room because that is 30% of your target
market.

The consensus across my interviews with HR practitioners was that diversity
of race in advertising may be the “right” thing to do in terms of ethics, but “diversity
of thought” is the “smart” thing to do for business and therefore is the only case
worth making to management. And, contrary to Donna’s objection to tokenism, it is
precisely the buying power of minorities that often justifies agencies recruiting
those populations—recall that even the intern’s brief emphasized the approaching
"tipping point" for the U.S. minority population in 2050. Furthermore, as Bowser (2007) argues, affirmative action may have been “designed initially to correct inequalities for Black people,” but the move towards “diversity” places greater emphasis on “the rights and opportunities of universities, corporations, and the military” than it does on “redressing generations of racial discrimination and continued underrepresentation of Blacks in U.S. life” (p. 109). Thus, we can see how profit-making pressures can shape discourse about diversity in advertising just as in any other business. And yet, as I will demonstrate below, the structure of advertising as a practice presents a set of unique pressures that channel the formation of discursive strategies towards particular kinds of common sense, ranging from the sovereignty of the brief to the presumed autonomy of the consumer.

The Context of Advertising

I wish to argue that this case study’s setting offers a unique window into the formation of ideologies that promise to screen out, or paper over, the reproduction of White labor and the complexities of social inequality. First, we should consider how the central purpose of advertising helped shape the interns’ rebranding of Agency D’s diversity and inclusion initiative long before they began building their decks and rehearsing their pitches. In their analysis of print ads from 1910-1980, Leiss et al (2005) argue that, over time, advertising appeals have evolved from text dominant and rational appeals based on a product’s effectiveness to more image dominant, identity-based, emotional appeals—a fetish that masks the true nature of material objects by associating them with “the enduring sources of contentment in
life” (p. 259). According to this view, advertising is a “privileged discourse” that plays a central role in American society and has only grown more sophisticated in its ability to tap into the anxieties and aspirations of consumers, associating real concerns with branded, and ultimately hollow, images of well-being (p. 120). In this way, advertising has developed discursive techniques for articulating consumable goods with the immaterial hopes and dreams of any given target market. As a craft, it operates under an inherently optimistic bias and often makes promises it can’t keep. Thus, if the interns’ hopes of wishing away inequality through a more inclusive diversity initiative comes across as a bit naïve, so would other advertising campaigns portending friendship through soft drinks, familial intimacy through pasta sauce, or sexual conquest through light beer.

In similar fashion, advertising, as an industry, does not sell products per se, but rather ideas that solve problems for the manufacturer of said products (Schudson, 1986). Agencies sell their clients a very specialized service: producing messages that ascribe meaning, often by accentuating the positive, and bracketing the negative, attribute/s of any given commodity and/or associating it with attractive words, sounds, and images (Messaris, 1997; Wernick, 1991). In this case, many of the intern teams proposed the creation of new diversity programming but Maria from HR described such efforts as “off-brief,” since the interns were only meant to “revamp” or “facelift” what was already in place.97 In this way, and from

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97 Maria told me that the key deliverables of the brief for the intern project (which she wrote) was to create a new logo for the agency’s existing diversity and inclusion initiatives and brand it using options such as a micro-site, print ads for the pantry areas, and short videos.
the very beginning, the rebranding assignment was designed to make the existing
diversity and inclusion initiative more palatable on the surface by rewrapping the
same goods in new packaging. Moreover, as the Chief Talent Officer told me, HR
opted not to “hit it hard” and instead “make it a fun exercise” for the interns with the
assumption that they would use the best branding tactics and then “umbrella all our
hard-hitting initiatives underneath.”\textsuperscript{98} Thus, like a Trojan horse, the interns’ tactics
were meant to soft-pedal diversity by accentuating the positive and creating a “fun”
and attractive veneer that would cover up the more “hard hitting” (and potentially
divisive) minority recruitment initiatives hidden below. Given the mixed messages
of the assignment, it’s no wonder that the interns buried the lead with Orwellian
double speak, concealing an appropriate headline addressing material inequality on
the ground (i.e., Diversity Initiative Fights Racism Inside Advertising) with a
colorblind ideological screen (i.e., Race No Longer Matters Because Whites Are
Diverse Too). New brand. Same product. Problem solved. As a result, an assignment
inspired by outside pressure to “move the numbers” on diversity ultimately buckled
under the inside pressure of advertising practice--pandering to the client by
conforming to the brief.

The Brief

In directing advertising practitioners to highlight the positive and shadow
the negative of any given product, the brief functions as the most fundamental

\textsuperscript{98} Though she did not specify exactly what these “hard-hitting” initiatives would be, this
quote came up in the midst of a conversation about how most of the intern presentations
fell short of addressing the pressure she feels to move the numbers on diversity by
specifically recruiting and hiring more minorities.
structuring device in contemporary advertising practice. Its principle aim is to explain the client’s challenge or opportunity, thus framing the problem and requesting a solution. As Slater (1989), who conducted fieldwork at several agencies, observes, the brief “plays a disciplinary role; one hears it quoted verbatim in countless situations, as the answer to any question concerning directions that might be taken” (p. 127). Thus, despite the industry’s aggressive promotion of “creativity” and the so-called “creatives” who produce it (Nixon, 2003; Soar, 2000), the most decisive power within an agency is located elsewhere, namely with the account managers who liaise between the client and agency and thereby serve as the "bearers of the brief" (Slater, 1989, p. 127). This often leads to what Miller (1997) describes as the performance of a "ritual encounter" between rival organizational roles:

The creatives are supposed to be budding artists, wishing to demonstrate their artistic abilities through this medium. It is generally assumed that, if they could make a living through art, they would have done so, and that they resent the limitations imposed by commerce. The [account manager], by contrast, is expected to identify with the commercial concerns of the client and to be primarily identified with the drive towards a profitable product. (p. 188)

As others have observed (Moeran, 1996; Tunstall, 1964) and I note in Chapter 3, this long-standing tension between “artists” and “suits” manifests in many ways, ranging from expressions of mutual disdain to the policing of informal dress codes. Elsewhere, Miller (2003) describes how experienced account managers

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99 As x (2003) wryly notes, self-styled performances of rebellion can often be used to conceal an actor’s deeper investment in professional institutions: "it is true that the advertising business, in one of its public guises, likes to see itself as the trickster inside the business machine (just as anthropologists sometimes like to see themselves as jesters at the court of social science)" (p. 69).
learn to "read between the lines" of the brief and pursue a "trajectory of constraint" when advising creatives on campaign executions (p. 80). As a result, Cronin (2004) argues, and to the chagrin of many-a-creative, "advertising is not the dynamic driver of cultural change" but rather operates in a reactive mode, “scouring the terrain of popular culture for new ideas, images and techniques to meet their client's brief” (p. 354). And yet, this familiar story of an epic battle pitting art directors and copywriters against brief-bearing account managers overlooks the emergence of a third actor in our drama: the planner (aka: strategist), author of the creative brief.

Account planners/strategists have gained prominence inside agencies in recent years and their primary responsibility is to “write briefs for the Creatives outlining the remit and aims of a campaign; they generate the campaign’s long-term strategy, and coordinate with research companies” (p. 366). So, while the client brief is typically developed within the client's own marketing department and thus designed to establish a set of parameters for the advertising campaign based on the client’s goals, targets, budget etc., the creative brief is written agency-side and based on what Agency D’s Vice President described above as "strategy stemming from target insights derived from research." To better clarify the differences between these two kinds of briefs, I will recount an example from my ethnographic fieldwork within internship programs at three other large advertising agencies in New York City during the summer of 2010.¹⁰⁰ Like Agency D, Agencies A, B, and C also tasked

¹⁰⁰ All three of these agencies have over 500 employees in their New York offices. Two are headquartered there. Two have international reach, with offices abroad. As a condition of access, I have granted the agencies anonymity and so will not name them here.
their interns with developing a campaign over the course of the summer. Only, this time, they pitched consumer goods and services: a soda-maker, grocery delivery, and instant oatmeal, respectively.\textsuperscript{101}

The first step in this two-stage process is the client brief. As Slater (1989) notes, "the client does not walk in the agency and deposit a product to the copywriter’s desk with the injunction to 'sell it' with the agency’s special communicative magic" but rather every step is constrained by "a logic of market calculation and cultural intervention: analysis of consumption relations in terms of competitive market positions" (p. 126). For example, at Agency A, the intern assignment product was an in-home flavored soda-maker and the client brief included the following key elements:

1. Product – what it actually does (makes homemade soda)
2. Market – total annual sales in category (both in and out of home)
3. Category – a general definition (domestic soda-making machines)
4. Players – the “competitive set” of that category (rival manufacturers)
5. Consumer – the market research profile (“flavor-focused occasionalist”)

In introducing the assignment, Agency A’s Project Manager showed the interns a branding video contrasting a set of clichéd soft drink images with Apple products and other “iconic,” “charismatic,” and “savvy” brands that offer "new ways to do everyday things."\textsuperscript{102} The Account Manager then placed one of the soda-makers on the seminar table and fired it up for a demo; it didn’t go well. "It’s pretty drippy,” she

\textsuperscript{101} I have replaced the actual product categories with equivalents so as to avoid identifying the agencies and clients involved.

\textsuperscript{102} Project Managers are not client facing but rather direct the internal coordination of "work request" forms from various departments within the agency. In short, they run logistics and direct traffic.
admitted. "Know the flaws of your product." But this was a throw away remark; the function or quality of the product would not be the focus of the campaign. More important was the target consumer profile: the "flavor-focused occasionalist," described as a young, single female who drinks soft drinks as a daily ritual and likes variety. The Account Manager then instructed the intern teams to conduct more research in order to gain deeper insight on the target and build a strategy that would inspire the creative executions. In other words, write a *creative* brief.

The creative brief is a directive from the planning department that picks out the most essential elements of the product description, competitive set, and consumer profile from client brief, but also crafts a more detailed description of the ideal target based on the planner’s big “insight” gained through research. In that spirit, both of the intern teams at Agency A conducted surveys over Facebook and compiled the results, along with third-party market research, in the form of composite characters ("Kate" and "Elizabeth") embodying the typical flavor-focused occasionalist: 81% female age 25-34 and 74% White. In fleshing out these characters, the interns embellished the data with their own, aspirational senses of self. For instance, one team spent twenty minutes arguing about whether "Elizabeth" was a trendsetter and, if so, whether or not she knew it. Of course, "Elizabeth" didn’t exist, but she did provide a convenient vessel and the interns’ proximity to her made it easy to insert their own dispositions. For instance, the other team, during a “tissue” session of involving rough sketches of creative mock-ups, pitched the soda-maker as the target’s “last toy and first real appliance” purely on the basis of their own sense of nostalgia: “maybe it's just me—I love hot wheels
cars.” In this way, similar to the Agency D presentations on rebranding diversity, “target insights derived from research” mixed freely with the interns’ personal opinions, resulting in a pseudo-scientific subjectivity wherein all data, whether empirical or anecdotal, was pooled and then boiled down, conforming to advertising’s remit to aggregate market segments and reduce complexity to actionable insights. In other words, the creative brief is a strategic device for message discipline, a funnel, or sieve, through which all ideas must pass before the creatives start executing them as campaigns.¹⁰³

I cite the example of Agency A to clarify the structuring power of the brief in general and help explain the outcome of Agency D’s intern team presentations in particular. Exploiting their similarity to the target demographic, interns at both agencies leveraged their own social networks and personal experience to buttress more formal research findings and construct the ideal types of “Elizabeth” (the trendsetting, young, single White female) and "Rob" (the "not mean-spirited or closed-minded" White male from team three's training video). In sum, the interns targeted themselves, whether matchbox car lovers or post-racial millenials jaded about diversity. Perhaps this was to be expected. Returning to Hall's (1980) theory of "encoding/decoding" and Johnson's (1986) “circuit of culture” outlined in Chapter 1, we can better understand advertising communication as a dynamic, circular process rather than a simple unidirectional delivery between a given sender

¹⁰³ Though this process of developing a research-grounded, insight-based strategy before building campaigns was oft repeated as a taken-for-granted best practice during my fieldwork (e.g., “don’t jump into execution!”), many admitted that “creative briefs” were also written post-hoc-style to justify an idea after-the-fact.
and receiver. The transmission of meaning from one to the other is mediated by inputs from the subjectivities of “lived cultures” that inform both the production and reading of texts. This is why the role of planning/strategy in advertising is so crucial: it must “mine” an “insight” or “human truth” from within the “lived cultures” of the target in order to sell it back through the product. Advertisers collect and adapt the stories we tell about ourselves in order to better imbue their clients’ products with cultural meaning. Moreover, as a communication text, advertising stands in for experience and therefore presents an ideological screen that brackets and conceals whole hosts of material practices, whether it be the “hidden abode of production” where the soda-maker is manufactured or the domestic context of use where the drippy spout makes puddles on the counter.

Viewed in this light, the formula of diversity=individuality=everyone makes more sense. After all, the brief directed the interns at Agency D to rebrand the idea of diversity in order to increase staff participation. Their pitches did not address the outside pressures and failed reforms, outlined above in Chapters 3 and 4, which have been the approach of an older generation of diversity advocates (public shame through numbers) and the response of management (affirmative action programs like MAIP). Instead, the interns targeted themselves as a post-racial generation steeped in the ideology of “abstract liberalism” and therefore opposed to quotas or favoritism of any kind and yet blind to the power of White privilege in their midst. Put another way, they ignored the material practices of inequality from both the past (“diversity since 1925”) and present (White must-hires) in pursuit of a more inclusive, colorblind message emphasizing difference as a universal trait of the
individual and therefore acceptable to all: we are individuals and, therefore, diverse. While it may be tempting to dismiss this message as overly optimistic, naïve, or even willfully ignorant of the persistent empirical inequalities based on race that still haunt society in general and advertising in particular, we still must grapple with the fact that this subjective view of diversity emerged as a broad consensus across six multi-racial intern teams—albeit under the structural determinations of the brief. As we saw with “meritocracy” in the previous chapter, the same ideology can resolve contradictions for Whites and people of color, though perhaps in different ways. The next chapter re-examines the appeal of individuality over group-based identities, this time through the perspective of Black interns in the MAIP program. In doing so, it takes the solutions to the diversity problem proposed by the interns at Agency D and asks the question: what if they’re right?
Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
(Whitman, 1897, p. 78)

During their intern presentation at Agency D, team four showed a one-minute video montage of the phrase “Who are you?” uttered by a series of characters: Jack Nicholson in Anger Management, a sunbather in what appeared to be a James Bond movie, archival footage of Malcom X, and the Caterpillar from Alice In Wonderland (See Figure 20). The video also featured a satirical diversity exercise from The Office and one of the agents confronting Neo in The Matrix: “As you know, appearances can be deceiving, which brings me back to the reason why we’re here,” before driving home the group’s diversity-is-everything-about-you thesis with the final scene from The Breakfast Club: “What we found out is that each one of us is a brain, and an athlete, and a basket-case, a princess, and a criminal. Does that answer your question?” In its random assemblage of almost all White characters, the video unwittingly demonstrated the underrepresentation of minorities, even as it more explicitly laid out the larger argument of all the Agency D intern presentations as a whole: race is irrelevant because every

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104 Each member of the group (4 White females, 1 White male, 2 Black males, and 1 Asian female) also appeared at the beginning of the video, addressing the camera with the phrase “Diversity is…” over the song “Who Are You?” (The Who, 1978).

105 Indeed, the inclusion of Malcolm X is particularly striking, given that his “Who Are You?” quote was lifted out of a speech endorsing Black liberation through race-based solidarity (http://www.democracynow.org/2007/5/21/manning_marable_on_malcolm_x_a).
individual is unique and, therefore, diverse. Identity matters, but appearances can be deceiving; we cannot be categorized by social constructs or divided into the traditional dimensions of diversity. We are, each one of us, large; we contain multitudes.

Figure 20: Stills from Team Four’s Video Montage

This optimistic attitude was not limited to the interns at Agency D, nor was it necessarily more prevalent amongst the White interns in my study who would presumably have the most to gain by expanding the definition of diversity to include non-racial characteristics. On the contrary, it came up again and again, even during my focus groups with interns of color. For instance, in response to a fellow MAIP
intern who insisted that he did not want to be seen as racially diverse, but only
diverse in terms of talent, Amelia, who is Black, whole-heartedly agreed:

That’s what I wrote about in my MAIP essay -- that diversity is more than just
a color, a gender, like it's every -- every person is diverse -- it’s in every
strand of your being. There's differences in people that go much deeper than
skin color, then gender, but right now that’s what we see -- it's concrete, so
it's easier to say that diversity is a race thing or a gender thing because it’s
right there and you can see it, but I agree that it’s much more. But I don’t
think our society, as a whole, is open to seeing that right now.

Sadie, who is multi-racial but usually identifies as Black, also embraced the
everyone-is-diverse ideal before countering it with an analysis of power that
seemed to reflect her education at an elite liberal arts college: “Our generation feels
strongly about moving towards a post-racial world, but it’s a very abstract dream,
given the context we live in. And I think it’s really dangerous, actually, to like avoid
talking about things like race and gender especially when our society is stratified
based on these components of identity.” Moments later, however, Sadie conceded
Amelia’s central point: “Of course, no one wants to be defined solely on the basis of
their race or gender.” In this way, both Amelia and Sadie are caught up in a
fundamental contradiction of identity. On one hand, they understand that society
may not yet see diversity as an all-inclusive concept transcending race and gender,
and yet they both wish for a more complex answer to the question “Who are you?”
In other words, there is no necessary correspondence between advertising’s
structural inequality (the “numbers problem” outlined in Chapter 3) and the
subjectivities of the interns themselves (marked by the aspirational ideologies of
meritocracy and individuality described in Chapter 5 and 6). This non-
correspondence can make for a precarious subject position for people of color, made
plain during the MAIP orientation weekend, when Lamar, a Black male intern, stood up to tell of how the White interns at his last internship nicknamed him "Token." They said they were kidding, but Lamar fought back tears as he spoke.

**Intersections and Contradictions**

This chapter takes a closer look at the various intersections and contradictions of Black identity that I encountered during the course of my fieldwork. Drawing largely on stories that emerged out of my Black focus groups, I will argue that affirmative action style programs such as MAIP operate in a racialized cultural environment wrought with anxiety over subjectivity and belonging. For instance, while Whites generally enjoy the presumption that they are entirely unique in and of themselves, people of color carry the extra psychological burden of representation—their behavior is under constant scrutiny as either defying or reinforcing stereotypes ascribed to an entire race. In what follows, I will engage with theories of identity (Hall, 2001) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1998; Collins, 2004) in order to unpack some of the Black interns’ stories around identification, difference, language, and class in order to more carefully examine the precarious nature of common culture and race-based affinities. Moreover, I will take seriously the interns’ proposition to expand the meaning of diversity, both as a theoretical response to essentialism and a practical solution to inequality.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the material practices of referral hiring through closed social networks hoard opportunities for the White and well-connected at multiple levels of any given agency. For example, among the rank and file, teams tend to hire the applicants that most remind them of themselves by appealing to
vague notions of “fit” or “chemistry.” Thus, despite HR’s efforts to include “diverse” candidates amongst the slate of finalists, the mostly White teams hire who they like—and who is most like them—and thereby, over time, reproduce Whiteness across the industry as a whole. At the top of the administrative hierarchy, advertising executives have become accustomed to using highly-sought-after internship slots as currency for a “relationship bank system,” making “must-hire” deposits in order to curry favor, and future withdrawals, from powerful clients. From this perspective, the root cause of advertising’s diversity problem would appear to be quite simple: Whites looking after their own.

**Ambivalent Opportunists**

And yet, when it came to practical correctives to racial inequality, such as internship slots and scholarships for minorities, many of the MAIP interns I spoke with described themselves as ambivalent opportunists. Juanita, who has mixed race parents but described herself as “ethnically” Black since “it’s the culture I grew up in,” admitted that, “for government documents, to make it simple, I also put ‘Black’ but I don’t feel limited and don’t really always feel connected to my race.” Moreover, Juanita called for a more inclusive definition of “minority” that would include her White friends who “are having trouble breaking into industries” because “I might be able to find a program while they are left out.” Khloë, who is Asian, wondered aloud if MAIP’s 70% housing subsidy is a form of discrimination since there is no “CAIP” (Caucasian Advertising Internship Program) for White people. Kevin, who joined the mixed/multi-racial focus group, got a scholarship for identifying as Pacific-Islander even though he described himself as culturally White; he had Filipino friends as a
kid but now can’t relate to them because he is gay and they are homophobic. Cindy, who also joined the mixed/multi-racial focus group, added that "I honestly check the box that is going to be most beneficial to me and MAIP is the only time it’s helped me." Rynn, a light-skinned Cuban-American, gave the most principled, strident response, echoing the cross-race consensus around earning a job on the basis of merit alone:

“I define affirmative action as making ethnic and racial quotas. I am honestly 100% against it. I believe that everyone has hardships, regardless of race. Many friends I had growing up were minorities but grew up just as privileged, if not more so, than their White peers. I see no room for affirmative action. All positions, admissions, internships, etc. should be merit-based, always. I would never want to be promoted just because I am a woman and they need more women. I want to earn what I get. Therefore, I don’t believe anyone should get a position based on any kind of demographic information.

Of course, Rynn’s access to her MAIP internship did depend on her own demographic information; it was an exclusive minority scholarship program open to her, yet closed to Whites. Perhaps it was the competitive process amongst MAIP applicants that helped her to reconcile a meritocratic ideology with her own participation in a race-based material practice. In any case, Rynn later railed against a scholarship at her school for “kids from low socio-economic backgrounds” that “sounds nice, until you find out that you have to be African-American to qualify.” Put another way, class-based programs are fair, but race-based programs are not. This recalls Kim, who, despite her own status as a White, wealthy must-hire, strongly opposed “a system that hypothetically favors a wealthy African American girl from a prestigious private school over maybe a lower-middle class White girl” (see Chapter 5). Most of the other White must-hires in my study, along with many of the White
non-must-hires, also opposed affirmative action but only evoked class in an effort to open up more opportunities for Whites heretofore reserved for minorities. In other words, no one suggested that the class privilege enjoyed by White must-hires was unfair to other, less connected Whites like Gregory, who blamed MAIP for inhibiting his own progress, rather than the White must-hires in his own focus group. The result was a closing of ranks, a race-based solidarity across class lines.

**White Complexity**

It is important to note that such a united front of Whiteness is, in itself, a fiction. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that Whites are rarely expected to reflect on and speak to their own race and identity, questions on the topic during my focus groups were often diffused with giggles, evasion, and ironic deflection: "Are you German?" "I'm Scottish, from a long time ago." "I love this controversy!" However, over time, more nuance emerged. For instance, two of the must-hires in my study, John and Richard, identified themselves as decidedly non-WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). They were Romanian and Greek, respectively, and described their family ethnic cultures as “loud.” Other White interns spoke of being Jewish as a way of signaling their own struggles with discrimination (two went so far as to compare the Holocaust with slavery, in order to undermine affirmative action) and, at the same time, acknowledge their reliance on Jewish social networks, some of which were well-ensconced within particular advertising agencies. Indeed, the latter suggests great progress since the 1960’s, given the casual anti-Semitism portrayed in *Mad Men’s* dramatization of the era. For instance, in the premiere episode, the WASPs in charge of the show’s fictional agency put on a charade—posing a Jewish
mail clerk as an important art director—in order to woo a Jewish client. The ruse backfires when Don Draper mistakes the clerk for the client and they serve shrimp cocktail at the meeting, neatly demonstrating their oblivion to Kosher food restrictions (O'Barr, 2011). I learned of a similar moment from Shirley during one of the Black focus groups. Her agency was scheduled to meet with Al Sharpton, a prominent African-American civil rights activist, and her supervisor asked if she’d be willing to attend, since there weren’t going to be enough Black people in the room. When relating the story to me, Shirley joked, "I’m going to go extra Black." Token indeed.

In sum, just as I do not wish to overstate the uniformity of White identity, I intend this chapter to conduct a more granular analysis of Black intern experiences inside, and outside, advertising. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that 1) resistance to diversity programs and philosophies are not limited to Whites and 2) Blacks face a particularly challenging set of intersections and contradictions when it comes to issues of identity and belonging.

What if They’re Right? (in Theory)

The interns at Agency D, along with many others in my focus groups, have argued above that “diversity” includes characteristics extending well beyond race and, as a result, individual identity is both a complex and multi-faceted phenomena. In light of advertising’s persistent problem of race inequality, such a perspective seems naïve, at best, undermining solidarity amongst members of oppressed groups, and, at worst, inherently conservative—a recipe for the continued reproduction of White labor. In light of critical theory, however, the perspective
shifts. According to Hall (2001), there is nothing original, unified, nor singular about identity. On the contrary, the ideal of a "self-sustaining subject at the center of post-Cartesian Western metaphysics" has been thoroughly and definitively debunked in philosophy (p. 15). And yet, Hall concedes, with no suitable concept to take its place, identity is rendered a provisional yet still useful concept “which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (p. 16). As we saw with the cross-class race-based solidarity amongst White interns, there is a tension between 1) the myth of group membership based on a shared identity—easily unraveled through close analysis—and 2) the very material consequences that can, and do, accrue to group members solely on the basis of perceived affiliations. In other words, race, as a category of identity, is neither natural nor stable yet it is still capable of producing determining structures of inequality, albeit in more complex ways—ways hinted at by the Agency D interns’ effort to expand the “dimensions of diversity.”

The interns are quite right to imply that the concept of identity—whether it be race or another dimension of diversity—is “not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one...and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 2001, p. 17). In this case, the most obvious intersection would be class, as Sadie pointed out during one of the MAIP focus groups: "Yes, we are all racially diverse, but in other ways we’re not all diverse because we’ve gone to elite schools and we’ve gotten into this program.” Sadie may have overstated the case since not everyone attended “elite” schools, but,
as a cohort, the MAIP interns did have college in common and many that I spoke with did not “need” MAIP’s financial aid.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, the majority appeared to be from middle-class families. According to Wilson (1987), this is to be expected:

\begin{quote}
The competitive resources developed by the \textit{advantaged minority members}—resources that flowed directly from the family stability, schooling, income and peer groups that their parents have been able to provide -- result in their benefiting disproportionately from policies that promote the rights of minority individuals by removing artificial barriers to valued positions. (author’s emphasis, p. 147)
\end{quote}

Jhally and Lewis (1992) concur, observing how “affirmative action programs, in other words, have helped relatively few Black people. They have had almost no impact upon lower class Blacks.” (p. 66) If poor Blacks have remained largely unaffected by the gains of affirmative action, then what are we to make of middle-class Blacks who have made great strides? Should we, as some of the White interns suggested, revoke their access to diversity programs like MAIP and instead offer up their slots to poor Whites? Put another way, given the “fragmented and fractured” nature of identity, how are we to evaluate “multiply constructed” and “intersecting” subject positions? Can an individual be doubly oppressed? Or perhaps privileged and oppressed by contradictory—even “antagonistic”—aspects of their identity?

\textbf{Intersectionality}

In response to such questions, Crenshaw (1998) first proposed “intersectionality” as a feminist sociological method for understanding how various

\textsuperscript{106} This is not to say that there were no working class Blacks in the MAIP program; as I will elaborate below, my focus groups produced several incidents illuminating a range of class stratification. On the other hand, many of the MAIP interns grew up in the suburbs, went to good schools, and enjoyed relatively privileged backgrounds. These interns may not have needed MAIP’s rent/travel subsidies, but what they did need was access.
axes of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, overlap and interrelate with one another in producing systematic social inequalities. After examining three Title VII court cases brought by Black women, Crenshaw concluded that the plaintiffs’ experience, which was “multiply-burdened” by the “interaction of race and gender,” was consistently rendered invisible by the courts’ “doctrinal response” to discrimination as either gender- or race-based, but not both (p. 315). For instance, in DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors, a class of Black women accused their employer of hiring Black women last, after White women and Black men, then firing them first due to their lack of seniority (p. 316). The court, considering sex and race separately, concluded that 1) no sex discrimination had occurred since no White women had been fired and 2) no race discrimination had occurred since no Black men had been fired. Arguing that this example illustrates how the legal system tends to treat discrimination as a set of parallel tracks—cases proceeding along one dimension of identity, and one dimension only—Crenshaw proposed an alternative analogy: a traffic intersection. Just as accidents can be caused “by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them” at the same time, labor discrimination can occur at the intersection of the victims’ various aspects of identity—whether sex, race, or class, etc. (p. 322).

We have already seen examples of how “intersectionality” can work in advertising. In Chapter 3, we considered Winfrey Harris’s (2010) argument that a Mad Men episode comparing the relative oppression of Black men and White women ultimately misses the experience of women of color, who must confront both racism and sexism at the same time. And yet, as we saw with Dominique and
Darius, intersectionality is context specific and can therefore play out in very unexpected ways. To wit, advertising, as an industry, may still be patriarchal in most executive suites and creative departments, but the area of account management, where both Dominique and Darius worked, is more like, in Dominique’s words, “a sorority.” As a result, Dominique’s female gender role may have helped mitigate against her sense of racial isolation as a person of color, while Darius, as a Black male, experienced obstacles to co-worker bonding in this largely female space, especially when his gender minority status intersected with racial difference. In this way, intersectionality provides us with a tool for better understanding the multiple and overlapping valences of oppression and how Wilson’s (1987) “advantaged minority members” are relatively better positioned than others to take advantage of affirmative action programs. In order to help conceptualize the social hierarchy, Crenshaw (1998) puts forward another analogy:

Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are not disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that 'but for' the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who—due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below—are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch. (my emphasis, p. 324)

107 Although, as we saw in Chapter 5, many well-advantaged Whites do not perceive their lack of disadvantage. There is another hierarchy above the ceiling, so many privileged Whites feel relatively deprived.
In Crenshaw’s analogy, the hatch between the basement and the upper room is opened only for those who, all else being equal, are already well within reach; their burden is singular, they are almost there “but for” the ceiling. They are, in a word, the perfect plaintiff. If the hatch is closed to them, then it must be due to that univariate aspect of their identity conforming to the parallel track requirements of the “doctrinal response” to discrimination: one dimension only. Just as a legal proceeding seeks to isolate variables down to a single motive for any given injury in order to assign blame and award compensation, ideology follows a similar course, offering to reconcile all the contradictions wrought by a matrix of determinations and produce a simple formula of cause and effect. For the interns in Chapter 5, “meritocracy” provided the most popular answer—a common sense of causality shared by Whites and interns of color alike, all of whom wanted to be hired “just because” of merit and none “just because” of anything else. In contrast, intersectionality tries to tell a more complicated story, one overdetermined by the interaction of multiple advantaged and/or disadvantaged identities. Such a perspective helps illuminate both the promise and limitations of rebranding diversity as individuality.

On one hand, in their insistence on complexity, the interns at Agency D, along with many others in my study, align themselves with both Crenshaw (1998) and Collins (2004) who later helped revive and expand the intersectional approach. After all, identity is a subjective, multi-layered, and overdetermined process; every

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108 As Rynn put it above, “I would never want to be promoted just because I am a woman and they need more women” (my emphasis).
individual is, in fact, unique (Hall, 1996a). This is surely a good thing. And yet, in advertising, individual, unique consumers are the problem; in order to effectively communicate messages for their clients, agencies must aggregate people into mass-market segments embodied in synthetic consumer profiles—ideal types like “Elizabeth” and “Rob” from the previous chapter. Put another way, advertising is precisely in the business of dividing and segmenting audiences along the traditional variables of identity in order to bound them as discrete targets they can then sell as potential customers for their clients. In actual campaigns, “individuality” is often deployed as a well-worn canard, an ideology decoupled from notions of power and group membership along axes of oppression and used instead to flatter audiences and conceal the homogeneity of mass production, the conformity of mass consumption, and the similarity amongst corporate competitors within product categories.

Thus, while grasping the complexity of the individual, the Agency D intern presentations missed the structural insight of intersectionality: that a class—such as Black women—can collectively experience discrimination on the basis of multiple identities held in common. The interns took a theoretical principle capable of recognizing the multi-faceted form of group-based solidarity and instead applied it to the internal psychology of the ideal individual, unhitched from more traditional external identities and unhindered by disadvantage of any kind. Perhaps this was to be expected since, given the setting—a corporate internship is like auditioning for a job—there was little incentive to either recognize or engage with institutional forms of racism, sexism, classism, etc. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the subjective
consensus amongst the interns is worth exploring further; since they point us towards what Johnson (1986) calls the subjective side of “social forms” that animate our common understandings of material conditions. Moreover, even if we grant the premise that internal diversity goes beyond race and, therefore, includes everyone, important questions remain. For instance, how are group identities formed in the midst of intersectional differences? If we all contradict ourselves and contain multitudes, how do we associate across our necessarily approximate affinities? To explore this further, the next section turns to several examples of ambivalent Black identity formed both around and against commercials, speech, and money.

**Identification and Representation**

The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed,' but that the subject invests in a position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an articulation, rather than a one-sided process, and that in turn places identification, if not identities, firmly on the theoretical agenda. (Hall, 2001, p. 19)

For Hall (1996a), identities are unstable articulations, or non-necessary correspondences, between shifting discourses and subjectivities—moments of “temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 6). In other words, the answer to the question “Who are you?” is neither straightforward nor inevitable—neither determined by the “traditional dimensions of diversity” nor limited to an empirical assessment of the subject’s material circumstance. Rather, identity is prone to aspirational longing and thus remains—at least potentially—up for grabs. For example, consider the “discursive practice” of an advertisement that seeks to suture a subject to a consumer subject position through a process of representation and identification. In his famous analysis of a print ad
for Panzani pasta, Barthes (1967) argued that the representation (a string bag spilling out pasta, parmesan cheese, tomato sauce, and fresh vegetables) carried both denotative (literal) and connotative (referential) meanings. Thus, as Williamson (1978) explains, advertisements invite us to engage in an active process of identification, drawing on our own pre-existing reference systems in order to make sense of the advertisement’s representation. If successful, this interpellation sutures individual subjects into a common subject position through an ideological transfer of meaning. In this way, we can see how identity is not simply conferred at birth but rather continually negotiated through discursive practices that hail us into being; advertisements speak to us through the representation of recognizable worlds populated by our better selves. And yet, as Hall (1980) points out, the encoding of a message with a “hegemonic/preferred” meaning in no way prevents a negotiated or even oppositional decoding of that message.

I’m (Not) Lovin’ It

For instance, when I asked one of my Black focus groups if they had seen any television commercials that they thought were racist or offensive, two women, Amelia and Kioni, did not hesitate: “McDonald’s!” “I’m Lovin’ it!” “Oh my goodness. That McDonald’s ad that had those cartoon women—" "Oh, I hated it! I hated it!” “It was so ‘Oh, Girl!’ da-da-da—” “Hey girl!” ”—that was so ignorant, so ignorant.”109 I later watched the McDonald’s television commercial [see Figure 21] and tracked down the agency’s treatment:

109 Two other Black interns, Lamar and Kelly, also criticized McDonald’s in a separate focus group.
The spot opens on a live-action sequence where an attractive African-American woman walks down the sidewalk and hears laughing from behind the fence. Pushing the door open she inquires, "Why are you all so animated?" to three CG [African-American] girls sitting at a table. When one of the animated characters says that it must be their fruit buzz, the real woman asks, "fruit what?" The CG friends then proceed to explain that they’re referring to the new McDonald’s fruit & walnut salad. Jump to a live-action product shot where the women describe the salad’s delicious ingredients. "Tastes so fresh, so sweet, so real" at which point the formerly live-action woman, now a CG character herself, says, "You mean, like me?" The four girlfriends laugh and continue to chat as the visually compelling spot concludes with the McDonald’s logo and tagline, "I’m lovin’ it." (Wit Animation, 2005, p. 1)

Amelia and Kioni, while expressing their annoyance and disdain, also seemed to relish their common rejection of the commercial’s representation of African-American women, bonding through their mutual recognition of the attempt to hail them as African-American women consumers and joint refusal to identify with the animated characters. And yet, they did not escape the “discursive practice” of subject position formation. Rather, in their oppositional read of the ad’s message,
they distinguished themselves from the ostensible target, albeit with some

ambivalence:

Kioni: I can't relate to these animation characters who are so stereotypical
and like trite and clichéd and—

Amelia: —I guess on the same level, I can understand, like, I'm -- OK -- I'm
gonna try to say this right, but -- although our race has come far, you and me
could be a minority and there could be, you know, a large, very large
population of African-Americans that still like relate to those, you know—

Kioni: —but, I mean, I say like 'Hey girl!' and all of that, but like the way in
which they do it...like they rape the culture and then they try to recycle it in
this brown plastic that you know is fake.

While both Kioni and Amelia explain their hatred of the McDonald's ad in
terms of the stereotypical characters, they also imply a more subtle awareness of 1)
other Blacks' identification with the same representations and 2) their own
performances of similar greetings. For instance, in contrasting her own authentic
use of the phrase “Hey girl!” with the “fake” version depicted in the commercial,
Kioni creates a dilemma for racial belonging: is she part of Amelia’s “minority”
within a minority—likely code for upper/middle-class Blacks—or the “very large
population of African-Americans” that presumably recognize themselves in the ad?
Or perhaps she belongs to both, depending on the context and setting? And what of
Kioni and Amelia’s potential future in the advertising industry? Would they unite
with other Black practitioners in support of positive representations? Amelia had
her doubts:

I'm sure there were Black people that saw the McDonald's ad before it came
out, but rather than say something about it and speak up and, like, try to
change the way it is being presented, they would rather profit off of it to help
their own family and whatever.... I don't think the ads [Black agencies] create
are any better than the [White] agency ads.
“Positive Realism”

It would appear that Amelia’s cynicism is justified; the McDonald’s ad was produced by Burrell Communications, one of the country’s first African-American advertising agencies (Wit Animation, 2005). Founded in Chicago in 1971 as Burrell-McBain, the agency’s point of entry was to specialize in what Tom Burrell called “positive realism” since Blacks were “not just dark skinned White people” and were “dying to see themselves as they really are” (Burrell quoted in Chambers, 2008, p. 249). Today, the agency’s website continues to promote its intimate and rigorous qualitative insight into the distinctive nature of African-American markets:

We’ve actually talked face-to-face with thousands of African-Americans in communities across the country. We’ve been in their homes and cars. We’ve looked in their cupboards, medicine cabinets and closets. We’ve looked at their smart phones and DVRs. We see things that others don’t and talk to people others don’t….Core values, like family, spirituality and community have unique, distinct meanings for African-Americans. When these differences are not recognized or understood, it becomes difficult to truly connect brands with consumers on an emotional level….if you really want to connect with the target, you need to invest in the target. (Black is the New Black, 2012)

As a purveyor of African-American cultural authenticity grounded in both personal experience and qualitative research, Burrell would seem uniquely qualified to represent Black women in both a realistic and positive light. And yet, for the McDonald’s ad, Burrell subcontracted Wit Animation, helmed by Jeb Milne, a White male Creative Director, who “acted out all of the girls’ parts on video so the animators would have good references for their movements” and was quoted as saying that "the most challenging aspect of this project was capturing the women’s attitudes...with a lot of reference material and careful direction during the voice recording. Everything was precisely scripted except for the end when the girls freely
tease each other” (Wit Animation, 2005, p. 1). While I don’t mean to suggest that Milne’s creative role on the project is solely responsible for the stereotypical representations that so offended Kioni and Amelia, I mention it as a reminder that, on any advertising campaign, the racial make-up of the agency—even one explicitly dedicated to Black consumers—does not exempt the production process from further mediations, whether from White subcontractors below or clients above—lest we forget, the ad was ultimately approved not by Burrell, but McDonald’s. As Dávila (2001) notes in her study of Latino/a agencies, niche advertisers are "brokers and mediators of pre-existing hierarchies of representation" and must therefore define their target in ways “that meet both the expectations of their corporate clients and those of their prospective audience of consumers” (p. 7). Many seek out market share by emphasizing unique insight into discrete communities—thereby reifying the essential difference of their target, often through exotic and stereotypical portrayals of what is likely their clients’ “Other” (p. 42). In short, Burrell is in the business of owning, then selling, “brown plastic” to White clients.

Furthermore, representation need not be representative; there is no necessary correspondence between media depictions and human populations. Burrell Communications may use a variety of qualitative methods to measure Black values and behaviors, but their remit carries a strong selection bias towards relative buying power. In other words, client briefs will typically orient agencies towards the segment of any demographic with the most disposable income (Turow, 1998). Just as the college-educated Black interns in the MAIP program do not constitute a random sample of the general population, Burrell's tradition of “positive realism”
excludes representation of poor Blacks in favor of more middle-class depictions.110

While reflecting the lived experiences of a minority of Black viewers, these representations nevertheless appear “realistic” more generally through their resemblance to similarly “positive” representations of Whites—what Schudson (1986) described as “capitalist realism”—depicting life not in the empirical sense, but rather as it should be in the ideological common sense of the times (p. 215).

For instance, when I asked Amelia and Kioni to name a positive commercial representation of their race, they both praised a Downy television commercial depicting a married Black man at home with his young son. Of course, their embrace of the Downy ad does not make it any more true to Black life—writ large—than the McDonalds’ ad.111 As Sender (2004) argues in her analysis of commercial images of queer communities, “marketing does not merely represent gay and lesbian people, but produces recognizable—and sellable—definitions of what it means to be gay or lesbian” (p. 11). Similarly, in countering what Kioni described as “all the stereotypes about Black men” and appealing to her hopes of a future family, Downy’s representation engaged her in an active process of identification; she decoded the preferred meaning of the ad and recognized her better self in the Downy world

110 Of course, this is not limited to Blacks. As Dávila (2001) notes, "the [marketing] breakdown of Asian-Americans, for instance, omits Cambodians, Laotians, and other Southeast Asian groups who are the poorest and hence the least advertising-worthy of all Asian groups" (p. 227).

111 A similar tension emerges in Cortese’s (1999) work on race representations in advertising. While he criticizes "the bending of ethnic images into a utopian assimilated social context instead of using actual, unique subcultural values, images, and symbols," he stops short of explaining who would render the authoritative definition of any given image as either “utopian” or “actual” (p. 98).
(Hall, 1980). In contrast, Kioni and Amelia read the McDonald’s ad in negotiated and oppositional ways, respectively; largely due to the way the characters spoke. This emphasis on style of speech as a shifting marker of racial identity emerged as a recurring theme shared by all the Black participants in my study.

**Code Switching**

The way I feel, I don't mean to do it and I don't want to do it, because I feel like I want to sound like myself all the time, but it seems like if I’m in a situation with all White people, I don't sound the same with White people as I do when I’m with Black people. (April, Black female MAIP intern)

After one of the MAIP evening seminars, I went to dinner with four Black women from the program: April, Darshelle, Shirley, and Kelly. Sitting around a table at an Irish Pub, the group laughed, teased each other, and shared stories from work. They had clearly developed a close camaraderie. For example, April, who was writing radio spots at her internship, told Darshelle “I actually stole your man’s name for one of mine,” and Kelly said she would make a Darshelle “hashtag” and turn her into a “trending topic” on Twitter. After ordering, we speculated about the “authenticity” of our server's Irish accent, which eventually led to the topic of “the phone voice.” Darshelle told a story about how her mother, who worked in sales over the phone, once had a White customer send her chocolates and flowers before realizing she was Black and trying to take everything back. The group laughed, Kelly surmised “everybody's Mom probably sounds White on the phone,” and all agreed that "talking White" meant speaking in a more proper, professional, White-sounding voice. Both Kelly and April described going back and forth between White and Black verbal registers, depending on the setting. In this case, Darshelle did not take after her mother; she refused to change the way she spoke for anyone: "I'm just country
as hell...I grew up in the hood, for real!” Shirley, on the other hand, grew up in a largely White suburb and, when she was around 10-years-old, tried out for a television commercial because “I sounded like I could be anybody.” As a result, she’s often judged by other Blacks for talking "too White" and feels a bit off in both worlds, “but more off in the Black world.” Shirley’s way of speaking continues to marginalize her from other Blacks:

I get the ‘prissy thing’ a lot too. Like someone would hear me say one sentence and then they'll be like [she grimaces] but they're wrong!...People will hear me talk for like a short -- in passing—like, ‘Hey, that was funny!’ And then they're like 'Oooh, you’re a jerk until further notice.' You know? So many people were like 'Oh yeah, when I first met you I thought you were like kind of stuck up.'

April and Shirley told parallel stories of getting in trouble for using Black slang when they were young. April described an early lesson in language allegiance.

When she was a girl, she went to a daycare near her Grandmother’s house in the

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112 This commitment would have inhibited Darshelle’s career prospects in advertising. According to the supervisor of her internship program, Darshelle had "a very different background, you know, a different sense of polish, you know, then the rest of the interns." In short, her agency would not want Darshelle on the phone with a client. As Patricia, a White woman who works in HR, put it: “I know, when they are certain people in the office, that happen to be Black, their language is different. I always give them shit like 'Why don't you guys talk to me that way?' and they're like 'You know, because we just don't.' And they'll say 'Hey, you know' -- and throw out some rappers' names...so we joke about it, but there is a difference and I feel like that's not addressed, like we're all supposed to be the same and not supposed to see it.”

113 This dynamic also surfaced between Shirley and Lamar during one of the focus groups. It began with Shirley describing how “I felt like I had to do more making people feel comfortable like going into Black communities rather than going into White communities. Like White people are going to feel fine around me, but Black people might get nervous: ‘Why are you talking like that? Like what’s the deal here, where are you from?’” Lamar then responded, “And I’m gonna’ be honest, cause when I first met you, I knew like [snaps] as soon as you started talking—you’ve grown up around White people…cause I could hear it in your dialect. Nothing’s wrong with it; I can just hear it.”
Black part of town and, when she was there, spoke like all the other kids—which was not like she spoke at home. A trip to JCPenney with her Mom would bring a reckoning. While in the store, April ran into a friend from the daycare. Unsure of which register to choose, she opted to speak softly to her friend at a distance. But when April turned to leave, her friend yelled out: "You ain't gonna’ give me no dap?" This did not go over well. April’s Mom pulled her out of that daycare and within 2 weeks, April’s speech had changed so dramatically that her Grandmother even said, "Oh my God, you talk so proper, I can’t understand anything that you’re saying."

Shirley also went to a daycare center in her Grandmother’s neighborhood, “the Blackest area of Houston,” during the summers and soon found herself stuck between two worlds:

I would pick up what everybody else was saying so quick and when I came home I’d be in trouble until I would stop. [My parents would say] ‘You can’t keep going over there if you’re going to switch the way you talk every time you come back...This is how you speak for real...we can’t have you quarantined.’ And now, thinking back, that’s a little bit weird for them to ask me that, but then coming back to my [White suburban] elementary school and me being like ‘Word up teach!’ [laughter] I couldn’t really do that, so I see their point.

On another occasion, Amelia described how she went to a White suburban high school where she fit in by speaking with a “suburban accent” until she started attending a historic Black university and "learned to adapt" and "pick up the cues and get a little more 'hood' in there." For her MAIP internship, she ultimately switched back to "talking White." But this didn’t stop a White superior at her agency from "talking Black" to her:

What bothers me is when somebody -- I’m speaking with a White person or anybody of any different race and then all of a sudden they change how they talk because there are around me. Like there was one woman in my
internship and it's like I was wearing like a dress and I was kinda' dressed up or whatever and I had met her once before and she walks into the office and she's having a conversation with my managers and then she sees me and she's like 'Oh girl! I didn't even notice you over there! You've got your Michelle Obama on!' I was like, 'Are you serious? Did that really happen!? Did you call me Michelle Obama?' And said 'Oh my goodness girlfriend?' You were just having a perfectly normal conversation... And she'd spoken to me before and I talked just like this and she just decided to -- I don't know...

While Amelia resented the dual assumption that she 1) speaks differently than Whites and 2) would welcome a “Black” form of address from a White person, she had to monitor her performance of her race just as carefully in Black settings. For instance, she grew up in the South Chicago suburbs, but admitted that she’d likely tell other Blacks that she’s from “the South Side” since the more urban implication might protect her from the sorts of “prissy” and “stuck-up” insults that Shirley mentioned. Kioni tried to use a similar technique only to have it backfire. As a freshman, she stopped to talk to a table full of football players in the cafeteria:

I said 'Hi, my name is Kioni’ in my suburban accent and they’re like ‘Where you from?' and they said it in like a judgmental way so they could judge me even further when I gave them an answer -- an answer that they thought they already knew. So in Texas, most Black people come from either Dallas or Houston. So I said Dallas so I wouldn’t have to say the suburbs. And then they said, 'Which part?' and so then I had to say the name of my suburb and so I said it and everybody at the table burst out laughing because that’s like the snippety, uppity part -- the section that’s really safe and we don’t have street credibility -- and everybody thinks that everybody in the area is just kind of snobbish. And so they were like 'Oh look at you, trying to pretend that you’re all hood!'

Identity Through Difference

Together, these stories convey the instability of identity in general—a constant negotiation of shifting discourses and subjectivities—inflected in this case by the particular intersections and contradictions of Blackness in America. They also highlight one of the key theoretical insights of the interns in my study—namely the
range of diversity within race. Importantly, the stories also reveal the antagonistic nature of the identity formation process; as Hall (2001) argues, “it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not...that the 'positive' meaning of any term -- and thus it's 'identity' -- can be constructed” (p. 17). For instance, Shirley and April learned at an early age that “proper” speech would please their parents but only at the expense of isolating them from their peers—indeed even their Grandmothers who lived in Black neighborhoods. Amelia and Kioni would also deploy verbal codes in an attempt to conceal their upbringing and thereby facilitate cross-class social relations with other Blacks. Conversely, despite speaking with the “phone voice” of White professionalism at her agency, Amelia had her racial identity marked through a “Hey girl!” style of hailing of reminiscent of the McDonald’s ad that she so identified against.

Back at the Irish Pub, the conversation kept circling back to the question “Who are you?” and anxieties around racial belonging. Shirley, in particular, seemed to stand at the margins. While the others spoke of stereotypes around skin color gradation within the Black community, Shirley couldn’t relate: “there wasn’t enough Black people in my childhood to do all this.” When Darshelle and Kelly softened the distinction between White and Black speech by acknowledging the influence of region, Shirley insisted that her speech identity was both indelible and universal: “Everybody, collectively, Black people and White people all came together and collectively decided that I talk White [laughter] -- regardless of where you’re from, that’s how I talk.” And after her suburban phrase “teen-inchy bit” raised eyebrows, Shirley quickly changed the subject: “Let’s not talk about it anymore, look at ya’ll’s
 faces!” And yet, she was not alone; all of the women at the table, like Kioni and Amelia, went to mostly White, suburban schools. April may have “frequented the hood” to visit family but “I’ve never lived over there...I was a visitor” and so “most Black people think I talk White and White people think I’m hood.” Kelly was “classified as White all through my schooling...they used to call me White, I don’t even know why...I think it was because of the way I acted.” Of course, for all the women, even this common material experience at the intersection of race and socio-economic status would only provide a “temporary attachment” to a common subject position (Hall, 1996b, p. 6). Identification remained an unstable articulation, forever in progress between shifting discourses and subjectivities:

April: I don't know what she's saying half the time!
Darshelle: Who me?
April: No, I know what you’re saying -- what she’s saying -- Kelly.
Kelly: Me? What?!
April: Like she uses some off-the-wall slang – stuff I’ve never heard before.

Class Fractions in the Race of Life

As we've already seen, one of the most disruptive intersections of Black identity is class—often signaled through language and/or place of origin. This was made painfully clear during the MAIP weekend orientation in New York City. The workshop facilitator led the approximately 90 interns in attendance out of the Clark Residence and down to the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, a wide walkway

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114 Shirley wasn’t the only one prone to linguistic missteps. Earlier in the evening, before Shirley had joined the group, I had asked the others to explain what they meant by the term “wretched areas.” They laughed, amused by my naïveté, and explained that they were saying “ratchet areas” which refers to the “ghetto” or “hood.” I later used the term for comedic effect, which sparked more laughter and a telling editorial from Kelly, a friendly reminder that the word was not meant for me: “He just used the word ‘ratchet’ in a sentence! Oh no, that’s awful.”
overlooking Brooklyn Bridge Park, the East River, and the financial district of Manhattan. He then instructed them to line up for a “Race of Life” where everyone would either take a step forward or a step back, depending on whether any given statement applied to them. In many ways, this was a variation on Crenshaw’s (1998) basement analogy described above except that, this time, instead of the advantaged getting up on the shoulders of the relatively disadvantaged in order to reach for the “hatch” to the upper room, the statements and steps would slowly stratify the interns over lateral space in order to demonstrate the wide range of privilege, even amongst people of color. While most of the statements touched on standard indicators of access to wealth, education, and other material resources, one, in particular, struck a nerve with Juanita:

    When [the facilitator] said ‘country club’ – I saw people looking at me. And me and Amelia were looking at each other...Everybody else had stepped one way, and we had stepped this way. And we were like, ‘Okay, now all these other people know.’ It’s not necessarily something I bring up, put it like that. It’s uncomfortable because a lot of other people are uncomfortable with that and don’t know how to react. Like, there’s somebody here, who I’m cool with now, but he was definitely like ‘When I first saw you step out and it was like you had been a member of a country club, I was like, ‘Oh, she’s probably like this snooty, bougie person’... I hate the word ‘bougie.’ People say it all the time. And I've been like called it a lot.

    In response, Latoya empathized with the vulnerability of the class outlier, reflecting on how she felt better being in the majority for every step of the “race of life” and would have hated to be one of only two people moving in one direction for anything—whether it was for belonging or *not* belonging to a country club. Latoya had been an outlier herself, except on the other end of the spectrum. As a child, she was embarrassed when her family couldn’t afford to send her on field trips. Her peers teased her for wearing the same clothes every day: "I knew we were poor;
people were noticing it." Millicent nodded in recognition of a familiar childhood. She was now working her way through college and taking three summer school classes during her MAIP internship, doing homework on the job during down time: "I work so my mom doesn’t have to and my sister has someone to look up to." In contrast, Felicia commiserated with Amelia and Kioni during another focus group session about the burden of being a member of the Black upper-middle class. Felicia’s parents paid for her historically Black private college entirely out-of-pocket, which meant that, on campus, she felt like “the only person not standing in line for a loan check so I stopped talking about it.” When people did learn of Felicia’s family’s wealth, they would say, “You’re the Cosby’s!”115 She resented the suggestion that her family was mythical or didn’t exist. To her it felt like mockery, a way of implying that “real Blacks” don’t live like that: "So what do you do if you are Black and you do live like that?"

One answer to Felicia’s rhetorical question would be to avoid the topic altogether. This was a common strategy. Just as Amelia and Kioni tried their best to circumvent any upper-class-inflected language or locations, Juanita also hid her privilege whenever possible and I would soon see why. Juanita went to a White preparatory high school, celebrated her friend’s “Sweet 16” on a yacht, and has frequented racket clubs, country clubs, and polo matches. When she went to college, Juanita realized she was better off than she had thought and started editing what she would say around other, presumably poorer, people. This time, despite the

115 *The Cosby Show* was a very popular NBC sitcom from the 1980’s featuring Bill Cosby and Phylicia Rashad as the Huxtables, an affluent doctor/lawyer couple raising a family in a brownstone in Brooklyn Heights.
presence of Latoya and Millicent in her focus group, Juanita opted to speak freely, recounting an embarrassing episode with her roommates in the grocery store:

We want ketchup and the girl is two aisles down with the chips and yells, 'Are those the chips that you get with a food stamps card?' And it's like, 'You couldn't really just kind of walk over there and say it to her? Now we have half of the store just like knowing that you want these chips not those chips because they're on the food stamps card. I mean, if it's like you need to use them--I don't use them, so I'm not going to judge you for using them but maybe you could not scream it'...It was not comfortable, at all.

This time, there were no verbal affirmations from the rest of the group. No expressions of empathy, no nodding. Sensing that Juanita had overstepped and offended some of her fellow interns, I quickly changed the subject. Had this been a room full of other upper-middle class interns—like Felicia, Kioni, and Amelia—I might have pressed her on the point, but in this situation, much like the “Race of Life,” Juanita was a clear outlier, the minority of a minority. Nevertheless, her frank confession fractured the precarious affinity amongst the intersection of Black women in the room by introducing another flow of traffic—class difference—in antagonistic fashion. By negatively framing her gauche roommates as the “Other,” Juanita clarified her own identity as opposed to, and over-and-above, the relatively disadvantaged—opening up the hatch from the upper room only to tell everyone in the basement to mind their manners and keep the noise down.

**Intersectionality Revisited**

One of the great ironies of MAIP is that many of its participants of color undermine the very premise of the program; it is not just Whites who oppose affirmative action. Many of the MAIP interns I spoke with opposed the idea that their race should even be considered in hiring decisions and instead embraced
ideologies of color-blind meritocracy and diversity-as-individuality. This chapter has dared ponder if they might, after all, be right. As we have seen through Blacks’ various relationships with commercial representation, linguistic modalities, and/or material resources, identity does not naturally stem from a single attribute such as race, but rather remains a discursive, antagonistic, and unstable articulation prone to fracture. As such, all of this diversity within one category would seem to support the Agency D interns’ notion that race is no longer central and intersectionality applies to us all; the four-way stop of old is now a sprawling spaghetti junction.

On the other hand, MAIP operates within a racialized cultural environment wherein Whites not only retain the material advantages accrued through past discrimination but also hoard current opportunities for each other by way of closed social networks. As outlined above, “must-hires” remain unmarked precisely because their Whiteness covers over class advantage, conferring with it a presumed entitlement that counters any suspicion of favoritism. In short, Whites belong. Compare this to Blacks, who must confront class-based stereotypes from both Whites and other Blacks, all while performing their “culture” differently depending on the audience. Take, for example, how diversity advocates sell the MAIP program as “smart” for business because hiring people of color will bring special insight into emerging ethnic markets. In theory, this sounds like a win-win. More minorities. More profit. But this “be-the-target” logic puts a unique kind of pressure on Blacks working for White supervisors and clients who already have classed notions of what constitutes “Blackness,” whether it be a “Hey Girl!” salutation or other forms of “brown plastic.”
In sum, such explicit attention to race can lead to a kind of class-blindness that puts upper-middle-class Blacks in the awkward position of representing communities where their own sense of belonging remains quite precarious. Shirley, for example, constantly has to prove herself: "I'd best know some Black fill-in-the-blank" like Aretha Franklin, Black movies, the *Roots* television special etc. since “the Black card has been on the table” despite the fact that “when people just see me on the street, I’m *certainly* Black and, I don’t know, if they reinstate slavery, I’m pretty sure I’d be taken in!” Ambivalence about racial-identity-as-insight also ran deep among the other Black women in my focus groups. Many resented how their White colleagues simply presumed that they knew about a free Drake concert. Of course, they all did, but joked that “White people must think we all get a Black memo.”

“Where’s the Nod?”

We can see many of the intersections and contradictions of Black identity in the tensions between the “Black card” of precarious belonging from within and the “Black memo” of presumed cultural uniformity from without. As Jessica noted during one of the focus groups, “This race thing, it’s really complicated. Even as we sit in here, a White person can come in and say, ‘Well, you’re all Black,’ but look how many different answers we had for that one question. And yet we all *look* the same. It’s really weird, and I don’t get why it’s so important.” This contradiction between superficial affinities and latent differences makes it particularly difficult for Blacks to locate allies and mentors in the workplace. Amelia said she’s done automatic “head counts” of all the “freckles” in any given setting ever since she was little. 

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116 Drake is a Black hip hop/R&B singer.
her agency, Amelia was the only person of color on her team but took note of the six other Black people, all women, on her floor: two working as receptionists, one in an office, and the rest in cubicles. Kioni also head counted two Black females in her agency’s human resources department and Sadie trolled her agency’s website for Black faces (“I got you!”) and later sought them out. But, as April and Latoya observe, looking for, and even finding, “freckles” working at your agency is not enough:

April: Like say you start a job, or whatever, and then, you know, there’s never really always a lot of Black people in any place that you go into and I remember, when we were talking about it the first day, we were saying, ‘Are we going to find Black people trying to like pull us aside in the office area?’ and it hasn’t been like that here, it’s totally different.

Latoya: At my previous job, an older Black woman took me under her wing and she’s like, ‘Latoya, no matter where you go, no matter what setting, if there’s an older Black person there they should take you under their wing—that’s accepted, it should happen’...but I haven’t gotten that here at all, like at all—there’s a lot of people at my work, and like, I’ll say ‘Hi’ and it’s like, ‘Did you see me?’ They just walk by.

The Black interns in my focus groups were generally disappointed by the lack of race-based bonding and mentoring at their agencies. Kioni wasn’t surprised. From her previous experience, she knows people don’t like “being boxed in...I’ve learned not to expect people who look like me to automatically welcome or try to like pull me aside and be like ‘This is how it is--this is what the agency’s like from

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117 Some notable exceptions include: Lamar, who had two Black employees take him out to lunch and “put me under their wing;” Millicent, whose supervisor's supervisor, a Black man, reached out to her, telling it was good to “have someone in my corner,” and that she should call him by his first name because "I know I’m old, but I still listen to Drake;" and Shirley, who reported a clumsy if well-meaning older Black women at her agency who "adopted" her like an “Auntie” and gave her non-work-related advice like where to find the $.99 store.
the Black perspective.” She even wondered if there were too many Black people at her agency for automatic mentoring—hypothesizing that there may be a critical mass at which point Black people no longer “stick together.” Shirley, too, wondered if New York was too diverse to sustain Black solidarity either on the street or in the office, asking, "Where's the nod?" from the mentor that says "Hey, I see you and we're sticking together" because “what if everything goes left or something crazy happens?" This vague anxiety reflects hook’s (2004) observation that "all Black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they'll be terrorized by Whiteness" (p. 23). Moreover, everyone in Shirley’s group seemed to know exactly what she meant by “the nod.” As Lamar explained:

It's like, hey I see you, we're stayin' together, because the thing is in the Black community, like let’s say it's a predominantly White—or another race—event and it's you and another Black person there. You're seen as being disrespectful or a sell-out if you don't acknowledge that person in some type of way like in a head nod or a gesture or make an attempt to go over there and talk to them.

And yet, head counts and even nods do not a mentor make. Ambivalence around the contradictions of Black identity, in particular, can hinder the development of more meaningful relationships leading to professional development and promotion. For instance, despite her initial expectation of intra-group allegiance, Shirley soon found herself reacting against the possibility that she might be perceived as preferring her own kind:

There's a Black guy on my team and I'm comfortable talking to him -- he's like my brother's age, so it just made sense. And we really do get along, but there was like a time when I like sort of purposely stopped talking -- like I'd make it a point to talk to everybody else as much because even though that was where I was most comfortable I didn't want it to look like that. I didn't
want it to look like I was trying to start a team...especially cause there could
have been something even crazier like, that if one person had been like
‘Shirley has a crush!’ I knew it was gonna’ be spread like all over and would
be the only thing there was -- it was like I can't have one person say that ever
-- I can’t have one person think that there’s like a thing -- anything other than
we happen to sit close. Anyway, I thought about it. Like, I was aware.

Though echoing Kioni's theory about not “being boxed in,” Shirley's
comments add a new layer of complexity: she already knew this person and had
connected with him for a variety of reasons and yet pulled back for fear that their
common skin color would cause other people to presume they were either a Black
“team” or a romantic couple—confirming a stereotype of Black social exclusivity
(Tatum, 2003). Thus, simply for socializing with her own race, Shirley felt she would
be exposing herself to a disproportionate degree of scrutiny from Whites. In other
words, imagine that Shirley and her friend were White. If they were noticed by other
interns, it would most likely be based on heteronormative assumptions, rather than
race-based ones. In Shirley's case, however, she was well aware that both sets of
assumptions were in play.

**Stereotype Threat**

This kind of self-monitoring is often the burden of what social psychologists
describe as “stereotype threat,” the risk associated with potentially confirming a
negative stereotype about one’s own social group. Though initially measured in the
context of academic settings where Blacks performed worse when race was
emphasized due to anxieties around Black intellectual inferiority (Steele & Aronson,
1995), stereotype threat has since been applied to other populations and their
associated negative stereotypes such as White men in sports (Stone, Lynch,
Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999) and women in negotiation (Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson,
Moreover, recent work has shown that the greater the salience of the stereotyped group identity, the greater that subject’s vulnerability to stereotype threat (Marx & Stapel, 2005). This could apply to the Black MAIP interns in my study in two ways: 1) they already stand out as minorities working within a largely White industry and 2) they are marked again by their participation in the MAIP program, which generates White resentment and increases the salience of race in general. Given this context, it’s no wonder that the more senior Black employees at the Black interns’ agencies may have been hesitant to take them under their wing. This matters because mentorship is so crucial for advancement in the advertising industry. After reviewing the results of an impact study surveying over 600 minorities in advertising, Wheaton (2012) concluded “African-Americans (33%) and Latinos (21%) were more likely to cite lack of racial and ethnic diversity as a very important reason for leaving the industry, compared to Whites (4%).” This could be because, as we saw in Chapter 4, people tend to help those who they see as younger versions of themselves. Donna, who runs the internship program at her agency, put it this way:

Because we don’t have a lot of people of color in higher positions -- I firmly believe, no matter what color you are, to stay in this business you have somebody who helps mentor you along and helps guide your career and kick some sense into you when you’re freaking out about nothing and helps show you the big picture. And for a lot of people of color, they feel more comfortable looking to somebody -- and anybody does -- that looks like them and there’s less people like them. So that is the one thing I would say works against them versus White people in this business. (my emphasis)

All of which brings us back to representation and identification. When Black interns walk through the doors of an agency and count heads, the “freckles” are few and far between—especially at the top. They ask the question “Who will I be?” and
search the executive suites in vain for someone to identify with—that better version of themselves they can aspire towards in the future. Contrast this to White interns who step inside only to be blinded by a fun house of mirrors, reflecting their own image from every direction and in all sorts of shapes and sizes; the possibilities are endless and the future looks bright. Perhaps they already know someone: the friend in account management or the relative in the executive suite. Perhaps they’ll go to lunch. Perhaps a wing will be extended, perhaps not. Either way, it won’t be seen as a race thing, even though it is.

**What if They’re Right? (in Practice)**

The Agency D intern presentations generally proposed soft selling their agency’s internal diversity program: instead of hard-hitting lectures, encourage “normal social interaction” through more inclusive events like potlucks. At the time, such ‘can’t we all just get along’ optimism struck me as so much weak tea—an ideological screen obscuring the empirical reality of racial inequality. But, in light of my analysis of material practices of White privilege and the complexity of Black identity, I must concede that the interns may have a point. A strictly political economic approach to diversity in advertising would likely focus on material incentives; locate the financial levers and exert pressure. However, as we saw in Chapter 4, such a top-down approach to reform has produced mixed results in the midst of the social segregation underpinning personal and professional networks. In other words, it is precisely the structuration of social relations that continually undermines more programmatic diversity initiatives; inequalities reproduce themselves through unintentional and largely homogenous social circles (Giddens,
Therefore, following the interns’ instinct to foster cross-racial friendships in the workplace actually helps get us to the root of how White labor is reproduced in advertising through referrals, chemistry, and nepotism. It is not enough to simply count heads and then fix the numbers; advertising careers are made possible and developed through relationships.

**Critical Intervention**

It may be tempting to categorically dismiss the interns’ message of “we are all diverse, unique, individuals” as adding yet another brick in the soaring fortress of White Supremacy. Indeed, I have attempted to argue that this oversimplified ideology screens out the underlying material practices that reproduce White labor in advertising over and over again. But this only gets us so far. As Gibson-Graham (2006) argue, recognizing power, and its resilience, may be central to the work of critical cultural studies, but so is the imperative to intervene by re-articulating popular ideas with progressive social movements *in practice*. Instead of focusing “the political imagination—somewhat blankly—on a millennial future revolution,” they call us to reengage in “a politics of possibility in the *here and now*” (authors’ emphasis, pp. xxi, xxvi). Moreover, critical work need not end in pessimism, bitterness, or yet another confirmation or grand narrative of “strong theory” where “feelings of hatred and revenge toward the powerful sit side-by-side with the moral superiority of the lowly” (p. 5). To be sure, the twin ideologies of colorblind meritocracy and diversity-as-individuality serve the interests of the always already over-advantaged. But if we stop here, the only way forward would be to keep chipping away at the mortar until we can wrench those bricks free; the rest of the
wall resists demolition precisely because so many—no matter their race—are invested in not just the material advantage it represents but also the ideologies that bind it together. But what happens when we look again, through the lens of critical theory? Might the interns' bricks—namely cross-race social events—appear in a new light, perhaps not quite fitting correctly and not so flush with the wall after all?

I’d like to suggest that they do, in fact, jut out a bit, offering footholds for scaling; if the principal obstacle to race diversity in advertising is closed social networks, then what better way to open them up than through “normal social interaction?” Here’s how Dorothy, a former HR manager, used to run it at her agency:

Before you walk in the door, you would know what other people have in common with you. My whole philosophy there was, I want to take diversity and move it over into inclusion and I want to start to move away from a traditional, governmental, ethnicity breakdown for diversity -- you know it's a transition though -- and move away from that to the things that make us different are no longer about our color--but the things that make us different are about 'I like basket weaving and you like boating or something' so the point of bringing you, as a new employee, into that space is to--'I'm starting to indoctrinate you, and your thinking, beyond the color line'....Now I can say 'Okay, you're just a dude. What are your passions? What inspires you? What motivates you? We've got a whole bunch of people here just like you'....That inspires a dialogue among people of all different ethnic backgrounds about something they have in common.

Dorothy sought to forge group identification amongst new employees across racial lines by way of a third object--“something they have in common.” This approach brackets out the “traditional dimensions of diversity” in favor of the more personal tastes promoted by the interns at Agency D: a hobby, a favorite singer perhaps, or, yes, even the way they make their coffee. This inclusive appeal of diversity-for-all has several advantages, some of which are, at once, both problematic and promising. First, it lowers the stakes across the board. Take for
example, how “The Spot” online calendar trivializes something as earnest as “International Day for the Eradication of Poverty” by butting it up against something as silly as “Wear Something Gaudy Day.” The mind boggles. Would they dress up as homeless clowns? And yet, the combination also offers a rare opportunity to acknowledge social class in the workplace with the silly providing cover for the serious. Second, by foregrounding diversity as a universal aspect of the human condition, diversity-for-all mitigates against commonly held assumptions that race is a matter of presence (color) or absence (Whiteness). In other words, it at least provides a potential foothold for considering diversity within the monoliths of White, Black, or any of the other broad demographic fictions so often bandied about by advertisers as having self-evident meanings. The third possibility is the most exciting, and perhaps most dangerous. To say that we are all individuals and that we are all diverse, is, in the final analysis, to be right. It is simply true and therefore an ideology far too powerful and important to give up for the sake of analytical complexity. Surely we are social creatures and have group affinities—often multiple—that index along race, class, sex, etc. Still further, as we have seen, others associate and categorize us according to these traits and dispense material rewards and punishments accordingly. Nevertheless, we each have a unique and individual subjectivity through which we experience the world. To deny this is to risk alienating any subject, no matter their position.

While it makes perfect sense to use quotas and affirmative action to correct the numbers on an institutional scale, such efforts, if not correctly framed, can be deeply offensive to any given individual. No one wants to be a token, their identity
boiled down to a single aspect of their identity. This is not to say we should dismantle MAIP or other diversity programs, but rather to rethink selling them as “smart.” Instead, they should be advertised for what they are meant to correct: the class-based advantages too-long-reserved for Whites. Diversity is therefore a justice issue in the here-and-now. Anderson (2010) suggests that such "a presentist framing of the argument in favor of affirmative action” puts the focus on contemporary forms of White Privilege and thus brings "an independent and compelling case for affirmative action, regardless of what happened in the past" (p. 315). Moreover, she argues that advocating for diversity practices as good for business promulgates several problematic assumptions: discrimination is a thing of the past, the current lack of diversity is accidental, and people of color can’t think outside their race, when in fact, White advertising practitioners do it all the time; well, at least they should. Furthermore, hiring a Black person to advertise to Whites actually makes much more sense than the reverse, given that minorities must learn the dominant culture in order to survive in this country; they are the true anthropologists in our midst, and can offer valuable perspective on all the rules and rituals that Whites take for granted. And who knows? Running the "Race of Life" inside the agency could create more complicated intersections inside racial groups and help develop cross-race factions based on anything ranging from single-parent families to country club memberships.

In my larger argument, I have taken the quantitative measures of inequality as a point of departure and adopted a “helicopter” view of the material practices and ideological screens operating within and around advertising agency internship
programs (Havens et al., 2009). In so doing, my conception of power—while recognizing asymmetries—has never been strictly top-down. On the contrary, as this chapter demonstrates, ideologies can be mobilized in the Foucauldian (2003) sense of knowledge production from the bottom-up. For instance, the ideological screens described above, while extremely useful for the maintenance of White power, are also hugely appealing for the relatively oppressed, as they tend to flatter the subjective perspectives of the individual. Similarly, Gramsci's (1971) description of hegemonic “leadership” reminds us of the limitations of coercion and relative importance of gaining consent in order to form a historic bloc. In other words, if we seek large-scale change within advertising, government regulation alone will not be enough to change hearts and minds; there will always be ways to subvert or rebel against compliance issues. The successful, and efficient, enactment of material practices requires an attendant, and consistent, ideology. Moreover, the non-necessary correspondence between the two means that they can both be de- and re-articulated to more progressive ideas and practices. New forms of discursive common sense are possible in the here and now. The habits and routines of social action that Giddens (1979) describes as “structuration” may be durable, but they can be restructured over time by more closely examining the subjectivities behind the numbers to “understand how difficult social change might be to achieve and where it might be possible” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 48). This is the challenge: to look for cracks in the wall of White power—footholds from the bricks that don’t quite fit—and start climbing.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

It is a mistake to posit a gradual and inevitable trajectory of evolutionary progress in race relations: on the contrary, our history shows that battles won at one moment can later be lost (Lipsitz, 2005, p. 69).

The Dream

Martin Luther King is more beloved by White America today, some 44 years after his death, than he ever was in life. In the 1960’s, King was a controversial figure, supporting economic boycotts, marching with striking workers, opposing the war in Vietnam, and proposing a general redistribution of wealth. Despite this radical record, King's (1992) popular legacy has long since boiled down to a few lines from a speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." This idea, that color shouldn’t matter, has become the symbolic shorthand for the kind of colorblind racism outlined above. Forgotten is the official name of the event at which King's words were uttered: "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom."118 Note that the word "jobs" came first. This was no accident. The march was called by A. Philip Randolph, who had planned a similar demonstration in 1941 to protest discrimination against Blacks in the national defense industry. This pressure forced President Franklin D. Roosevelt to establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Hoping to repeat this strategy in 1963, Randolph recruited King to join a new march on Washington “for Negro job rights” with goals that included a

massive federal works program “to train and place unemployed workers”; and “a Federal Fair Employment Practices Act barring discrimination in all employment.” Thus, it should come as no surprise that King strongly endorsed the principles of affirmative action:

Whenever this issue of compensatory or preferential treatment for the Negro is raised, some of our friends recoil in horror. The Negro should be granted equality, they agree, but he should ask for nothing more. On the surface, this appears reasonable, but it is not realistic. For it is obvious that if a man enters the starting line of a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some incredible feat in order to catch up. Society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis (King, 1963/2000, p. 124; author’s emphasis, King, 1967, p. 90).

King’s use of a racetrack metaphor is particularly enlightening, because it helps dramatize the fallacy of instant "equality." Even if we were able to ensure that all jobs were technically open to anyone, existing White networks and family support still prioritize and subsidize the ruling class. Thus, in order to open up the American Dream to all, we must go beyond getting more Black faces into the office and disrupt the material practices of cronyism, favoritism and nepotism that favor Whites.

**The Reality**

Race discrimination in the advertising industry is an accidental conspiracy with legions of unwitting accomplices. At the top of the administrative hierarchy, mostly White agency executives and powerful clients call in favors in the form of "must-hires" to hoard highly sought after internship opportunities for their friends.

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and family through a clandestine network. At the entry-level, mostly White teams circumvent HR's diversity efforts by selecting candidates that remind them of themselves through team and referral hires. None of these individual acts require the perpetrator to harbor racist attitudes against minorities; rather, a wide range of "individual psychological dispositions" can and do reproduce systematic and structural forms of inequality inside advertising institutions through favoritism towards Whites--and the very material advantages that result. Most are just trying to please their boss, following orders and fulfilling Abe's "Nuremberg on Madison Avenue" prophesy. Thus, discrimination inside advertising resides in very concrete practices--hidden in plain sight--but offers plausible deniability to all individuals in the system because of its dispersal; Whites pay it forward, to other Whites. The closed networks of White power function like monopolies -- they confer privilege on the group level and game the capitalist system because the "relationship bank" means that the competition for labor is never fair. Actual head-to-head discrimination within advertising agencies is hard to prove because it rarely happens. Indeed, it doesn't have to. By the time hiring time comes around, embeddedness steeped in the ghosts of Mad Men's WASP-only era has already pre-sorted the candidates in a racial hierarchy well before the competition begins.

This dissertation has investigated the role of ideology in the material reproduction of White labor in advertising agencies. When preparing to enter the field, I expected to witness the reproduction of White middle-class cultural dispositions in ethnographic moments of social interaction. Instead, I found White privilege operating through more structural and embedded--indeed secret--forms.
My interviews with HR professionals have demonstrated how the practices of referral hires, team chemistry, and "must hires" primarily benefit Whites. It's also clear from my focus groups how the ideology of color-blind meritocracy can conceal and reify the ill-gotten gains Whites have made through past discrimination and current social networks. And though White backlash to affirmative action is well known, I was nonetheless surprised to find that so many must-hires opposed it on ideological grounds—appealing to common sense notions of fairness and equality. Some Whites were quite vehement, expressing bitter resentment towards members of MAIP, and other corrective diversity programs, as the perceived beneficiaries of “reverse racism.” Overall, these findings suggest that the simple stories offered by ideological explanations can often trump the careful tracking of complex empirical statistics—a point made plain in this extensive passage from Lipsitz (2005):

The present political culture of this country gives broad sanction for viewing White Supremacy and Black racism as forces from the past, as demons finally put to rest by the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Jurists, journalists, and politicians have generally been more vocal in opposing what they call 'quotas' and 'reverse discrimination' -- by which they usually mean race specific measures, designed to remedy existing racial discrimination, that inconvenience or offend Whites -- then in challenging the thousands of well documented cases every year of routine, systematic, and unyielding discrimination against minorities. It is my contention that the stark contrast between nonWhite experiences and White opinions during the past two decades cannot be attributed solely to individual ignorance or intolerance but stems instead from liberal individualism’s inability to describe adequately the collective dimensions of our experience. As long as we define social life as the sum total of conscious and deliberate individual activities, we will be able to discern as racist only individual manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility. Systemic, collective, and coordinated group behavior consequently drops out of sight. Collective exercise of power that relentlessly channel rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another one will not appear ‘racist’ from this perspective, because they rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals. Yet they nonetheless give racial identities their sinister social meaning by giving people from different races vastly different life chances. (p. 83)
Racism, goes the conventional wisdom, has been legislated out of existence, rendering all *individuals* equal before the law such that abstract liberalism can no longer conceive of discrimination at the group level. In this way, the ideology of individualism screens out both the “routine, systematic, and unyielding discrimination against minorities” and the collective channeling of “rewards, resources, and opportunities” amongst Whites. This denial allows two types of affirmative action to achieve very different outcomes: must-hire interns thrive under the cloak of Whiteness while MAIP interns, exposed through racially marked bodies, draw White cries of outrage in defense of meritocracy. In such an environment, it’s no wonder that the Agency D interns would recognize the popularity of individuality—as an ideology—and re-articulate it to the relatively taboo term of “diversity.” At first blush, such a rebranding only seems to further exacerbate abstract liberalism’s tendency to undermine any sense of collective grievance; how could individuals, victimized by one aspect of their identity, seek redress? In other words, simply declaring your own individuality will not ensure that others treat you accordingly. And yet, this is, after all, what the interns want—to be seen as unique. Affirmative action is a blunt tool, designed to hammer away at employment numbers to bring corporate payrolls more in line with the population. Interns are pawns in this larger game, and they don’t like it.

Much of King’s genius as a civil rights leader lay in his uncanny ability to re-articulate the United States’ founding principles with contemporary calls for justice. He recognized these principles as indispensible aspects of American popular culture and so hitched up his wagon. Never mind that he wasn’t the first. Many others
before him had already used the same principles to justify slavery and segregation. Thus, they came already freighted with the weight of past use and abuse. Even so, the ideas were far too powerful to ignore. Individuality shares a similar lineage. True, it has long been used as an ideological wedge to divide and conquer, undermining group affiliations and collective action in representative democracies. In this light, individuality could be seen as the very anti-thesis of diversity such that any rebranding of diversity as individuality would essentially rub it out. But there is another aspect to the term, one that resonates with theoretical understandings of intersectionality as well as more subjective longings to be special. Individuality is powerful precisely because we all know—deep down—that it is true. Despite the various intersections of identity that we may share with others, there is no one else exactly like us—a thought that can be both exhilarating and terrifying. Moreover, there is a radical potential within individuality, should we look hard enough.

**The Future**

It remains important to measure social inequalities, but, as this study has shown, numbers can be explained away with the "invisible hands" of labor sorting and ideologies of meritocracy that blame victims while shielding the material practices of White affirmative action from view. In short, for sociologists of race, critical cultural studies’ concern with ideology, determination, and articulation offers new insights into the non-necessary correspondence between empirical consensus and individual subjectivities. Likewise, future critical media industry studies work—having already gone past representation in the circuit of culture in order to reveal hidden abodes of production—should expand its ethnographic gaze.
out into a more sociological study of the closed networks where Whites help each other access positions in the creative industries. Indeed, one of the major blind spots of the current study is the crucial role of spaces outside the agency where after-hours professional networking transpires in a variety of informal settings. I hope to pursue such work in the future and will keep in touch with my participants to that end.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

BEST PRACTICES

In light of the preceding research, here are my seven recommendations for diversifying the advertising industry. The first four are recruitment-oriented policy proposals best implemented by agency upper management; the last three are more day-to-day administrative strategies designed to increase retention by fostering a more hospitable environment for employees of color.

1. Stop Must-Hiring

It's time to declare an industry-wide moratorium on White nepotism. An internship is a precious training/networking opportunity and should not be wasted on a favor. Moreover, a relationship, in itself, is not a qualification -- on the contrary, it should recuse the candidate from consideration. This policy should be exercised through the trade organizations (4A’s, AAF, etc) to penalize any agencies attempting to use must-hires for competitive advantage. If widely observed, this best practice would help open up employment opportunities to people of color by removing/neutralizing White advantage.

2. Empower HR

Entry-level hires should be agency hires, hired by HR, and later assigned to teams. This will help stem the tide of referrals and teams hiring people just like them on the basis of vague notions like "fit" and "chemistry." Teams may complain, but as Elizabeth put it, this will stop them from wasting time interviewing for a position that will turn around in a year: "you didn't get to pick your college roommate...we get a little precious!" Patricia agrees that HR can’t diversify an
agency without the power to hire good candidates of color: “So it’s like ’Listen, we’re going to take that back, we’re going to just hire.’”

3. Spend Money

   a) Raise entry-level salaries. With most AAEs in New York making around $35k per year, agencies are limiting their applicant pool to wealthy candidates who can afford to subsidize their income during the lean, early years. Talented working class and/or first-generation college students of color will get better offers elsewhere. b) Put your money where your mouth is; don’t unfairly burden HR with unfunded diversity mandates. If money’s tight, add a rider to a contract. If your clients care about diversity, then make them pay for it. c) Pay Your Interns. An unpaid program begets an all-White cohort.

4. Explain MAIP

   Many of the White interns in my study did not understand why MAIP was even necessary. Resist the temptation to sell it as "good for business." Instead, teach the history and present of race inequality in advertising, especially at your agency. This should be done by White upper-management, not delegated to HR practitioners of color. Jason Chambers' (2008) book Madison Avenue and the Color Line would be a good place to start.

5. Build Cross-Racial Mentorships

   Don't expect people of color to mentor each other based on skin color. MAIP provides another reason. Make sure you organize networking lunches with current interns and any alumni at your agency. Arrange for junior-level employees to report to people of color. Provide incentives for White employees to respect and cultivate
relationships with, people of color. All of this will help mitigate stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

6. Honor Individuality

Data mine your employees. Compile all the demographic information that you can so you can ask their opinion based on more than what's most immediately apparent (e.g., race or gender). Asking people of color to vet a potentially racist ad is a losing proposition. Consider that people of color may be less apt to protest an offensive ad during a pitch for fear of being pigeonholed or stereotyped as the representative voice of their whole minority population.

7. Acknowledge Whiteness

Admit that the "general market" is code for the White market. Then ask employees of color for their take on White targets. You'll be surprised what minorities have had to learn about the dominant culture--from an objective perspective no less--in order to survive in the United States.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS RESPOND

I sent a penultimate draft of this dissertation to all 65 of my quoted participants (along with 12 others whom I interviewed but did not quote) and invited them to respond to my analysis. Of those, 22 sent responses of varying lengths. I have excerpted their comments below, extracting more personal salutations and inquiries while leaving their writing style intact. I have identified any quoted participants with their pseudonym and described other respondents by race, gender, and relevant occupation. See Figure 22 for an overview of my respondents sorted by profession and race.

![Figure 22: Respondent Pseudonyms (Interviews Sorted by Profession and Interns Sorted by Race)](image-url)
MAIP Interns

Georgia: "I read a little bit, including the part where Georgia is referenced (footnote 83), and so far, I think it's a good reflection of what we experienced. I have to admit, I was a bit in shock when I read that footnote. I can't believe I expressed myself that way back then. I still think "up-talk" is pretty annoying, but I no longer relate it to "white people". My young colleagues talk like that, so now I see it as an "age thing", not a racial quality. Experience is a great thing. I would say that at that time the few white people in my circle (school and the internship) were very young, so I was exposed to more "uptalk" than if I were to work with older, more experienced people. I can tell you that 2 years after sitting in this focus groups, I still get surprised to see all the racial and gender issues in today's ad world. I believe I mentioned this to you during our focus groups, but I consider myself a bit naive when it comes to racial disparities in USA. I came to this country as an adult and while I see differences in the way people of color are treated, I don't go into a job/class/group expecting discrimination towards me. I still think that my talent, personality is the first thing they'll see. In my current position, for example, I am surrounded by mostly white people (there are less than 10 Latinos in the entire NY offices which has almost 100 employees) and the power seats are occupied by men. Among my coworkers, it is not uncommon to hear a joke about accents or minorities stereotypes in general. I attribute this to the fact that my coworkers are very young and inexperienced, but it still bothers me a great deal. One of bosses used to refer to me as "sassy" all the time. We had a great relationship and she meant it as a way of saying I was assertive, but to my ears, that sounded like I was in a sitcom and I was
Georgia, the sassy Latina. However, racial/accent jokes do not bother me as much as inappropriate gender comments. I hear them everywhere and even from women. Just last week I was at a meeting with members of the executive team and they attributed a client’s unprofessional behavior to the fact that their team was all women. I voiced my disagreement, but the entire table (including a powerful, smart female exec) agreed and laughed along with the c-level exec that made the comment. It is so hard for women to advance when these stereotypes are still enforced. The same men who hire women to be in positions of power believe that they must not be grouped together on the same team because they are catty/hormonal/emotional, etc. To paraphrase what was said in the meeting: "They just have too many women over there. They should know better; you can't have women working together." In other words, the reason why that client was so difficult was because they were a team of women. Moreover, the women in position of power believe and support the same stereotypes. I hope my generation voices their discontent not only in advertising, but in all fields--politics, as the 2008 election/primaries proved, is another area where minorities and women are challenged. A lot of times our fear to "not be liked" or to be seen as a "trouble-maker" is bigger than our desire to stop the stereotypes."

Sadie: “I’m so pleased at what I’ve read. I love that you don’t just analyze the issues but that you offer concrete solutions, and I think the solutions are so well thought out. I especially agree with the idea that these wealthy institutions need to pay their interns and stop pretending that whiteness is an invisible or default culture! I hope this material will be readily accessible to MAIPers of the future and
HR representatives from all institutions because you put to words a lot of convoluted thoughts that I had when I participated in the program. Thank you for letting me participate in your project!!”

*Juanita:* “I’ve only gotten through about half and personally I like the progression. At the same time I’m not the best editor but it makes sense to me. It is however a great topic and very interesting even thought I know part/a good bit of the story already. Its interesting to see the pieces and analysis put together.”

*Amelia:* “It’s very interesting to see how the dissertation turned out, especially being almost 2 years removed from it. I still find some of these same issues at my current role (especially with individuals addressing me vocally in a different way they do their white peers). I agree with your conclusions.”

*Kioni:* “Thank you for keeping in contact and sending a copy of your dissertation. Please let me know when we can share this; my mentor would be very interested in reading it (she earned a PhD in Advertising) as well as some other people I know. A few points I appreciated and some comments: (vii) The issue with "...rebranding diversity as an aspect of individuality rather than a social problem..." It’s easier to ignore the issue at hand. Addressing the real issue would mean that we all have to take responsibility and have honest, sometimes tough conversations about race. (Pg 1) The Dan Wieden quote. I work in a DC high school and the student body is 100% African American. We have amazing students. But we also have few elective courses. No library. No open computer labs. The community surrounding the school is facing the highest unemployment rates in the city. It can be a challenge to promote school attendance - let alone college and a major no one
has heard of. But, if framed properly, I think advertising could serve as an attractive choice. This is the inner city. Young people pay attention to the media. They are highly influenced by it. More than a few might want to cash-in on an industry that is capitalizing off of their creativity. - (Pg 2) Advertising as a storyteller - (Pg 173) I am shocked to hear Luke's comments regarding the MAIP talent pool. I had been very impressed with my fellow MAIP'ers! Oh well... - (Pg 255) "One of the great ironies of MAIP is that many of its participants of color undermine the very premise of the program." To be honest, I was very frustrated with the attitudes and beliefs of many MAIP interns. Not everyone recognized the presence of racism in today's society or in the advertising world. Many people felt like it was "America's past time" and it was useless in discussing the significance of race, racism or discrimination. I feel like some purposefully ignored the whole reason why MAIP was created in the first place - and its purpose for existing today; yet, nevertheless, they were more than happy to benefit from the perks of affirmative action. That was disappointing to me. - (Pg 265) "Instead, they should be advertised for what they are meant to correct: the class-based advantages too-long reserved for Whites. Diversity is therefore a justice issue in the here and now." - (Pg 267) "Similarly, Gramsci's description of hegemonic leadership reminds us of the limitations of coercion and relative importance of gaining consent in order to form a historic bloc." It can be hard sometimes to see why change is needed when things have always been like this. A new mindset has to be achieved before change occurs in the workforce, or in hiring practices. And that means having conversations about race and job inequality - not just disregarding it altogether. - (Pg 268) MLK reference and focus on jobs. The idea
that color should not matter is something that many of us are still fighting for.

Ignoring the reality of discrimination is one of the things MLK fought so hard against. MLK has been rebranded to fit the needs of today’s political landscape - but that image, or story rather, is a distilled version of the truth. Less people care about why MLK stood for justice - that message has been lost."

_Rynn_: “I have been slowly but surely making my way through your dissertation. To date I've only read about half, but from what I've read I think it's fantastic. You do a great job analyzing all sides of the argument and I love your solutions to many of the problems with the advertising industry. Reading is also a fun way to reminisce on all I learned that summer with MAIP. You put to words some of the feelings and lessons I took from the MAIP program. As I read, I wonder if this is applicable to other industries. Surely advertising is not the only place where this occurs. I daresay it's worse in other areas of business, like finance. Just a curiosity. By the way, I have gotten a job with the agency at which I did my MAIP internship. Perhaps after MAIP, they considered me a "Must Hire," because they offered me a job about a week before graduation without even interviewing me. In any case, I’m really excited to get started.”

_Khloë_: “i want to start off by saying thanks for choosing this topic and my MAIP class. i otherwise may have never questioned the lack of diversity in ad agencies, outside of making a joke once or twice at my office happy hours, where the sea of faces make it quite clear that there is an obvious and undeniable issue. after reading your dissertation, i feel more educated about the social situation at hand and am now aware of the ignorance of my personal thoughts. the latter always feels
a little shitty at first but heeeey that’s life! my first commentary was about the ad biz in general. advertising is not a science, even though my college degree labels it as one. HR can not administer a test to prove who the "best" candidate is because no test exists, and because agencies are made up of client and job based teams, a "qualified" advertising candidate is someone who the team feels would fit and/or have something to add to the group. (Sidenote: you eventually comment on this industry's nebulous definition of what a "qualified" candidate is, on page 181 of the PDF). this also fits into the idea of meritocracy, that the best man/woman will get the job. this thought occurred to me while reading the section about "social reproduction" (specifically Dominique's agency story on page 106). i recall feeling a little annoyed that asking someone to be social at an ad agency was made out to be a negative issue. this clearly was not the point of the section but i jumped to defending advertising hiring practices based on a subjective hiring process and meritocracy, versus taking in the bigger message: that social reproduction isn't the issue, it's the fact that only one kind of person is being replicated, due to must-hires, etc. i've been so blind to these sources of the issue, completely clueless in fact, that the message was almost lost upon me. good thing your thesis is 300+ pages, amirite?? lots of time to get it through to those like myself. my second commentary was about the must hire responses. i became very upset when reading rachael and brenda's inane comments about affirmative action, feeling that their thoughts and words were rooted in ignorance and sprinkled with a whole lot of self centered shit. i then realized that although that might be true, i was just as ignorant, especially as to why affirmative action to some degree is still necessary in the ad industry. which leads to
my next rambling thought. if diversity = issue, affirmative action = a solution, my thought is that diversity isn't the word that needs a new definition or framing. it's affirmative action. it's clear that the intern groups at Agency D as well as the HR ladies and diversity group leaders you spoke with have reached the same conclusion about what diversity means these days. what about affirmative action? you asked all focus groups to discuss affirmative action in some way (i believe you used some of my...pithy quotes in reaction to those discussions) and i think it's something especially difficult for us young ones, the generation of "Glee" watchers and anti-bullying PSAs, to understand as well as talk about. perhaps this is another reason why diversity at ad agencies are low; we tip toe around the solutions because the "issues" don't seem as bad as they did before. that must mean we have progressed, right?! which is why i really enjoyed your best practices list. i think they're all quite doable and i feel that any agency would gladly incorporate these best practices into their diversity advancement policies. although i do question some HR departments desire to do MORE work...random comment about best practice #3 spend money: have you ever heard of Streetlights? http://www.streetlights.org/ RPA has had a relationship with them for a while, but about three months ago, my department head at RPA has included working with Streetlights on our production contracts, as a necessary requirement for all companies we end up awarding our biggest clients’ broadcast jobs to. you know why? because he is not only the boss, but because he's a straight up boss, urbandictionary style. trying to write this feedback email was quite challenging. i tried to take notes and respond whilst reading, and ended up typing reaction paragraphs only to delete them because as i read on, i realized that you
would address the questions i had in the immediate paragraphs or section. thanks so much again for sharing this with me and let me know if you need me to clarify any of the above! do let me know if and when this ever gets published.”

*MAIP Male #1:* “I absolutely agree with all points. As I’ve been at my entry-level job for almost a year, I feel more negatively towards the industry compared to when I was at school and when I was doing MAIP. For example, the executive board of my agency revealed results of the annual employee survey. As a person of color, I was surprised to see that nearly three-quarters of my fellow employees thought that my agency was a place that promoted diversity through company initiatives - surely, I can see it in a recruiting sense; however, I have yet to witness any mention of events, mentorship programs, and affinity groups that could factor into that outstanding result, which proves that your fifth, sixth, and seventh points are valid. As for your fourth point, "Explain MAIP", I think it’s a good practice in theory to show the inequalities in advertising of the past - however, I’m not sure whether it this "topic" could ever by important interest to any employees of an agency. In general, these are intriguing points that the industry should look at and I’m happy I was able to read through your thesis.”

*MAIP Male #2:* “First off, I want to sincerely thank you for taking on an initiative as bold as this and shedding light on an issue that’s rarely publicized. I was incredibly moved and inspired simply by the premise of the dissertation and know a paper like this will have long lasting, positive repercussions down the line. Once I began reading, it was quite difficult to put it down, which calls attention to how truly engaging this was. I am definitely coming from a biased perspective, but I am
slightly appalled that these archaic (or so I thought) issues around racism were still widespread in the ad industry, especially since MAIP has been active for decades. Overall, my impression of your dissertation was extremely positive on the basis that you made an in-depth exploration of subtle racist cues that still lingered in the hiring process. The pithy observations you conducted on my colleagues were not only insightful and emotionally compelling, but tapped into a deeper level of fears and concerns my generation continues to face. Despite the caveats in your research concerning the limitations to your sample size as well as the length of time you had to conduct the ethnographic study, I agreed with the majority of what was written and felt it contained large traces of universality that not only applied to me and my colleagues, but also all other MAIPers I know from former years. As I read through, no red flags appeared that made me question the validity of your findings, however I wanted to call out several considerations that could potentially give greater context to certain observations, or shed light on an emerging trends that I’ve frequently noticed during my current time working in the ad industry: 1.) But what about the Asians? (caveat: I am also Asian, but the observation below is based primarily on my experience at Columbia during several recruiting seasons) To dovetail on your analysis of Lin’s anecdote, I felt your portrayal of the intern was fair in debunking the mentality that Lin received entry into the program the same way as her white colleagues. On another note, the section mildly insinuated that Lin believed herself to be not only equal in talents and status as her white colleagues, but at the same time superior to her fellow MAIP interns. If that was the intended aim, this was correct on the most part, but had the beauty of being a great segue into the
consequences of that mentality. Having the opportunity to connect with other Asians and Asian-Americans due to my ethnicity, I frequently witnessed my colleagues retain feelings of equality with their white colleagues, mostly based on similar socio-economic standings as well as the privilege of advanced educational opportunities. If they ever experience some sort of racial exclusion, the inherent mentality is one of competitiveness and resilience - that Asians are harder working, more intelligent, and add more value to a team/company than others. With a focus to beat out the competition, the white man/woman, this eventually gives way to dismissing other racial groups not because there is solidarity and a common purpose, but because they are then seen as a non-threat to climbing the corporate ladder. Simultaneously, my Asian colleagues I observed tend to be very tactical in their networking strategies and did not hesitate to compromise their racial identity to assimilate to the dominating groups. You spoke on the topic of language coding in which interns would shift their speaking behavior to adjust to their social environment. In this instance, my colleagues would do just this along with any necessary form of racial degradation, to ensure they were accepted and liked. Any degrading or potentially racist comment would be appended by an "it's okay. I can say that because I'm _____ too." The uptake of a "white-washed" personality is something I saw repeatedly as my colleagues (as well as another Asian MAIP intern) went into more corporate environments. Perhaps this is a tactic they have taken to further distinguish themselves from the minorities and prevent themselves from being barred from white-dominant social activities. This is not to say this action is mitigating any form of racism against Asians, but my theory is that it may actually be
perpetuating a new stereotype that Asians are smart enough to adapt to social "white" norms. To loop back to Lin's anecdote, I interpreted Lin's refusal to believe she was selected on the premise of race as denial that she was in the same intellectual, socio-economic pool as the other interns. Despite the hypocritical action of accepting the benefits of the MAIP program at the same time, she may have just thought of herself as one of the few smart enough to adapt and thrive in a white man's world. 2.) White Privilege: When reading this section, a phrase that caught my attention was "If you are White -- you're smart -- you're hired." The word "smart" hit home the notion that perceptions on the intellect and competency of racial groups is just as limiting as a barrier to entry than your network itself. Although it wasn’t explicitly stated aside from that one phrase, a subliminal argument emerged in your text that preconceived notions of ethic competency may very well be a factor that is closely related to "just doing the CEO's friend a favor," and may be a reason why the must-hire system has been around so long. Similar to a referral process, HR recruiters believe they are receiving recommendations from members of the company who know the organization intimately, thus are more accepting of candidates who can closely fit the criteria of a certain job opening. Of course the primary component in a must-hire situation is a strong professional network that gives you entry, and secondary to that is the coincidence that most candidates turn out to be white and come from higher social-economic standings. My theory is that this process can be legitimized and be kept in place if it is believe these traits lead to hiring candidates who are better suited to contributing value to the company based on their assumed level of intellect. If we consider agencies being risk-adverse on
some level, they’d ideally want to invest in a candidate who is more likely to succeed in regards to cutting down time and expenses to recruit, interview, train, etc.. If an agency were to recruit from other ethnic pools, via a minority program, where there is high variability in intellectual competencies (based on the traits mentioned above), it would increase the risk of how the entry-level class would pan out for the agency. Nowadays there is a workaround as agencies like mine are targeting top-tiered universities such as Harvard and MIT (which you also indicated was a barrier for some minorities due to lack of educational resources and financial ability to actually pay for college). Resultantly assumptions of intellect by ethnicity are just as faulty as a must-hire system, but I feel it can potentially function as a strong rationale to keep it in place. 3.) The New Diversity: LGBTQ - Across the dissertation, you spoke occasionally on the topic when considering intersectionality between race and other attributes that define a person. Although lightly mentioned, I believe this intersection of sexuality and race has finally come to a forefront now that the Gay Rights Movement has made such progress. Similar to how some of the interns spoke optimistically on diversity and how it is multifaceted ("how a person makes coffee..."), I strongly believe that agencies are fast in taking on this approach. This is mainly speculation and based on personal observation, but in the past several years agencies who have been boasting about diversity are simultaneously prioritizing it. What should be a first consideration, inclusion of sexuality, race, physical disability? More and more, agency LGBTQ interest groups are growing at a steady rate and being the most vocal. Agencies are continually publicizing how they are in support of gay rights, but is this all an initiative that is inevitably placing racial diversity on
the back burner? In this instance, I am wondering if this functions as a front that is good CSR and PR, but redirects attention from the main issue that most employees are still white. In my own agency, 60% of my team is LGBTQ. Segmenting it down, 80% of them are white. Even if new standards of diversity are achieved, the gay rights movement may be a double edged sword in relation to ethnic diversity as most gay men and women coming in are white. A large portion of the paper was dedicated to understanding past implications of segregation in which you used the women’s rights movement as a prime example. However, since sexuality does not explicitly segregate on physical attributes, it can then function as an inclusive society that has to potential to segment and segregate the population once again on those who are physically different. As a gay and Asian male, I can say from experience that there is a distinct hierarchy even within a group as prominent as the Gay interest group. At the interagency mixers, many members are in fact white men, and it saddens me to say that it’s difficult being marginalized within an already marginalized society. Over time, I am seeing this perpetuating itself into more of a cultural issue where gay, white cliques form and reinstitute a refashioned must-hire system. I myself was able to get several referrals through gay colleagues and so have benefited from this system at the moment. 4.) Best Practices: Empower existing cultural interest groups - An additional consideration for agencies, and HR specifically, may be to recognize that there are a multitude of internal diversity programs in place that seek to promote the understanding of culture as well as facilitating minority career growth. The major issue with these organizations is that they’re commonly inactive, don’t have the necessary resources, or are not publicized
sufficiently to gain an adequate membership base. In rare cases, if led by uninterested and unexperienced members, may actually exacerbate stereotypes by promoting mainstream, culture-specific events ("sake bombs and fortune cookies for Chinese New Years and Margaritas for Cinco de Mayo). In line with what you suggested in regard to empowering HR, I would also recommend companies to increase engagement and awareness of these organizations for employees. This could go hand-in-hand with your point #5 on building cross-racial mentoring relationships which could also essentially result in cross-departmental and cross-discipline mentoring initiatives that would focus on building agency camaraderie and morale. The simple way to empower these groups would be to 1.) Tell employees about them, 2.) Give them appropriate resources and senior level support, 3.) Set expectations of what these groups need to accomplish and compensate the volunteer leaders accordingly (extra vacation days, tickets to a baseball game, etc...). At the end of the day, these groups, if fostered properly, can be the greatest advocates of an agency’s diversity if ever in a crisis. Lastly, just to call out a quote on page 130: "First my informants seem to assume that discrimination is only measured by harm done to minorities, rather than advantage conferred to whites." This was an incredibly powerful statement that I could not forget. Again Chris, I am extremely grateful you decided to share this with me and hope my comments will be helpful. I hope your final review goes well on June 18th and I can’t wait to see the final product. If possible, I’d like to share your dissertation with my colleagues once it’s finalized and cite it from time to time. Reading this was really
inspiring, especially after having a horrible experience with my MAIP intern company as well as having to deal with a pretty racist must-hire that summer.

**White Interns**

*Gregory:* “I powered through your dissertation. Good job! Lots of very thought provoking stuff in there, I feel like you’ve disrobed the mysterious hiring practices of the ad industry. Living under the ideology of Meritocracy, I wondered for a long time why it has been so hard for me (and my peers) to break into the industry despite pursuing all avenues to get there - it’s because the proliferation of must-hires takes the vast majority of intern and entry level jobs. Then, programs like MAIP help underrepresented minorities break into the business, and the combination of these two practices leave virtually no spaces left for non-minority students who are not must-hires. And, I would guess we are the biggest segment of the population (at least when you look at communications students pursuing a career in advertising). Me and my peers, the non-must hires are left out to dry, we don’t have the financial resources and connections of must-hires to get the opportunities nor are we eligible for the helping hand of MAIP or other affirmative action programs. Last summer my good friend, also an ad student from my school, applied and got an internship at an agency in Minneapolis. Turns out her and the one MAIP intern were the only two non must-hires who got into the program. There were 12 total interns. 1 MAIP, 1 out-of-state (my friend), and 10 must-hires. The MAIP intern was put up in an expensive, fully stocked apartment for the summer and my friend lived in the bad part of town where should could make rent with her $10/hr intern salary. All of the must-hires stayed with family. I would be interested
if your paper had more to add about Meritocracy when it comes to the creative side. Is attending portfolio school a way to bypass the must-hire bottleneck? Or do portfolio schools create their own insulated social networks? As a young Planner, I’ve noticed that a closed social network has cropped up in my community- all of the kids who pay $50k to graduate from VCU BrandCenter have inside connections to the best Planning jobs. This is an affront to the ideology of Meritocracy. I would imagine that closed social networks for portfolio schools help and hinder creatives in the same manner. The argument of "diversity is good for business" takes into account only one perspective of how advertising works- that we need the proper mix of diversity to accurately reflect the ideas and culture of greater American society. It misses the entire other half-side of the coin -that advertising shapes culture and society. Agencies want diversity because they want to reflect the diversity of society within their agencies. However, because of the product ad agencies produce, by not having the right diversity mixture they are pushing messages at society that have a cultural bias (white, privileged) and this shapes culture. Re: race trumps class 154 - The benefits of MAIP and affirmative action (seminars, networking, quota slots, subsidies, scholarships) are public knowledge and thus easy fodder for non-recipients to be jealous of, whereas the privilege of family wealth, status, and connections are kept private for the most part. Some beneficiaries keep their ties secret because they know inherently that they are more privileged than others and don’t want to self identify because they fear being found out and ostracized from their immediate peer group in the same room. A symbiotic relationship between must-hires and MAIP participants exists in that the people...
who determine who are the must-hires also fund the MAIP program, which serves as a distraction from the bigger industry problem: the proliferation of must-hires.

Last point, must-hires do nothing but hurt the industry. For advertising to be viewed as a profession, we need people who thoroughly understand how it works from both a business and cultural/societal level. We need people who have been trained in the ethics of our industry and understand how what we do impacts business, the economy, culture, and society - as both a shaper and mirror. We need people who have an advertising education but those people can’t get the entry level jobs and internships to start their career and transform the industry because must-hires who don’t know a thing about advertising are handed the positions. I hear from senior advertising professionals (and all the trade pubs) how the industry needs the best, most passionate, most educated talent, however that can’t happen so long as must-hires exist. Please let me know when this is published, as I would like to share it with some others.”

Rachael: “A point of clarification that I would like to make about my particular situation regarding the use of ‘connections.’ Throughout your section on must-hires you imply that "mommy and daddy" set-up the connection and called in a favor of one of their friends or colleagues to get their child an interview/internship. This is not the case for me. Neither of my parents work in New York City or have connections with the advertising industry. The "connections" I used to break-into the industry were my own. My friend's father that got me a job at the pharmaceutical agency knows me - my personality, my work-ethic, my qualities as a friend to his daughter. He is not a friend of my parents. The connection
I used to get my interview at the non-profit public service advertising organization again is a connection of my own. The woman knew me through our membership to a bookclub - my critical thinking capabilities, my analytical skills, and my character. This perhaps subtle difference between my situations and other’s in your study is a significant one, I believe.”

White Female: "I'm slowly making my way through your dissertation. Really nice job. It's amazing what goes on behind closed doors at ad agencies. I had no idea, but then again, can't say I'm surprised.”

**White Must-hires**

White Male: “Doesn't look like I was quoted anywhere but it was an interesting read. Not sure how I feel about being a "must-hire"! Will just have to keep working hard to prove I earned it too!”

David: “It's kind of disheartening reading that I was described as ‘too quiet and not right for the business’ but I was very appreciative of the opportunity and it was my first experience with advertising so I'm not really surprised that that was said about me and I've grown a lot since then. I think that my direct supervisors would have more positive things to say about me and that this is somewhat skewed to an HR perspective, but regardless I just secured a full-time entry-level position in the industry so I'm ready to prove myself! That being said, I don't need notification of when it's published since the mentions of me are mostly negative, but thanks for staying in contact and best of luck.”

Sharon: “So great to hear from you. I cannot believe your focus groups were almost 2 whole years ago now, time really does fly. From the first day you spoke to
all of us interns I found your topic very interesting. Interning and internship programs are a unique beast and I think your research into them should be required reading for advertising agency heads and human resources departments. From what I have read, I think you did a very good job of referencing the interviews and focus groups in a non-biased way. While your argument was clearly stated throughout, I was most impressed with how you presented us as interns. Despite the fact that most of us had connections and knew people who got us these internships, you did not frame us as spoiled, privileged, obnoxious college students. Rather, you could see that many of us were aware of our good fortune to know people within these advertising agencies and presented us as thoughtful and grateful rather than lucky and full of ourselves. Thinking back on participating in your focus groups always makes me realize how lucky I was to get that internship, for it was a major stepping stone in getting a job after college. Your focus groups highlighted the inequality in the industry and definitely made me more aware of the office environment and culture in which I work. I firmly believe that your dissertation, or at least parts of it, should be read and shared within Advertising HR departments around the globe. I hope your dissertation goes well and that your writing reaches many, many advertising execs.”

Richard: “Very well done. Two years ago I was a specific person and I would have benefited greatly from a discussion with you about racism and meritocracy. While I want to say I’ve gotten better, your fiercely intelligent insights have beamed sunlight in darker places than I would like to admit. Thank you so much for letting me participate in this wonderful study and again for portraying the events with
unbiased clarity and clairvoyance. I would very much like to stay in touch and see the final draft. From my standpoint I believe you illuminated fundamental issues that have massive implications. Your insights truly give me pause and rethink what I do on a daily basis to consider a more holistic perspective."

**Other Voices**

*Elizabeth* (HR Director): “I have done a quick review. I am ok with it. Not sure I would change anything. Best to you and please stay in touch.”

*Dorothy* (HR Director): “I like what you said about diversity as ‘right’ vs. ‘smart.’ I think we need to move towards a justice model.”

*Bill* (Black Former Assistant Account Executive): “You totally nailed the conversation. The convo is spot on. It’s okay to use by me.”

*Darius* (Black Former Assistant Account Executive): “From what I can see here you've captured our conversation accurately. Good work, and I hope to see this in print!”

*Dominique* (Mixed-Race Former Assistant Account Executive): “Thank you for allowing me to look at this draft! I am impressed with your framework and overall recommendations. I particularly liked how you mentioned the low salary as a burden to entry for less affluent potential employees, which is something I still talk about with the (mostly white) friends I still know working in advertising. This is often further complicated by a pronounced focus on appearance especially for the more "hip" accounts, which adds more financial strain. Additionally, I like how you discussed how clients can pay lip service to diversity, but unfortunately overall often help reinforce the status quo in agencies, since ultimately keeping clients (to
keep accounts/jobs) are what matter to agencies. Lastly, I think what you talk about with the subjective notion of "fit", and what that it really means in terms especially of race, class, and environmental background is key. Personally I do not think I questioned things when I entered into advertising because I was raised in a predominately white suburb, where I was comfortable and used to being one of the only people of color. I also feel much of the concern is assuaged for agencies by the relative presence I saw of people of color as the secretaries and receptionists. There are also small niche ‘diversity’ agencies that focus on the needs of ‘urban’ clients, which I also think helps to rationalize the lack of diversity in the larger agencies.”

Senior Black Manager: “Once this is published, it’s highly unlikely you’ll be invited to any ad agency, 4-A or AAF events. Persona non-grata might become your nickname on Madison Avenue. Not having been privy to any dissertation before this, I must say that I’m very pleased by the depth and gamut of your insights. Having worked in the agency business for several decades, I can attest without reservation that you have hit every nail on the head. If this was a Black church, you’d have the entire congregation on their feet and saying…. "Amen!". The attention paid to the little known and highly nuanced "professional, personal and class related challenges" - which most persons of color must deal with in White agencies is back-breaking for many. Upper management and HR have no concept of the real difficulties of being the "other" in their agency. No idea whatsoever. Therefore, it's no wonder that Blacks and Latinos either leave the business entirely or migrate to a "minority" shop. To that point, here’s an idea. Ask your HR contacts about the attrition rates for MAIP hires after 3 years of employment. It would not surprise me
if 50% or more were gone. I'm not at all optimistic about the future of diversity and inclusion within holding companies or ad agencies. I've heard too many promises of change from too many agency CEO's during my career - and subsequently found those words and promises to be absolutely empty. Progress - or more accurately "window dressing" - is now represented by the appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Of course, most if not all of those CDO's have never really worked for an extended time in an agency - and one CDO never advanced beyond Assistant AE. Nonetheless, they arrive without a clue from a previous job with the 4-A's or AAF.

Having a CDO is not a sign of progress, because at its core it's primarily a defensive move in case Rev. Jesse, Rev. Al, the Madison Avenue Project or the NAACP comes a-calling. I believe change will come. I can't give you a day or time as to when, but I do believe the driving impetus will be a major lawsuit - coupled with talk of a boycott against the clients of that agency. One historical point. If my memory serves me, you might want to find a 4-A's statement on diversity in advertising issued in the early 1950's. If you can find it, what's striking is to compare that statement against progress made by minorities in other fields. For example, from the Supreme Court decision on Brown vs. Topeka - it took roughly 50 years for an African American to become President of the United States. Yet here we are in 2012 and no 'minority' holds a true position of power in any holding company or major agency. So, based on the available evidence, a minority has a much better shot to become President - as opposed to CEO of a holding company or agency.”
APPENDIX C
ACCESS NARRATIVE

Since advertising agencies form “the bridge” between goods and culture, commerce and art, industry and media (Leiss et al., 2005), they have reason to be particularly wary of outsiders. As purveyors of “creativity within constraints” and “functionaries in the service of capitalism,” the agencies manage large amounts of sensitive and/or expensive data on products, markets, and consumers (Mayer et al, 2009, p. 2). So it’s no wonder that ad agencies, as commercial businesses, often “keep their guard up, perceiving little practical benefit for them if they grant access, or even fearing that it may intrude on the proprietary nature of their products or services” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 102).

With this in mind, I approached the advertising industry from an oblique angle, conducting what Ortner (2009) calls “interface ethnography” by seeking out advertising contacts through academic conferences, industry conventions, job fairs and other events where “a closed community...interfaces with the public” (p. 175). The AEJMC (Association of Journalism and Mass Communication) Conference in August of 2009 proved fruitful. I attended a pair of panels and met two senior creatives at Boston-based agencies Modernista! and Arnold. Our chats were genial; they both expressed support for my research, and when I inquired about doing a study at their respective agencies, they encouraged me to follow up. Considering their respective ranks, I thought my prospects were good. Turns out, they weren’t. I was completely ignored by the former and then dismissed after a long process by the latter. No explanation was given.
I pressed on, leveraging UMass alumni contacts to work some “back channels,” using reference upon reference to solicit agencies through the Ad Club in Boston and The One Club in New York, and sending Facebook messages and old-fashioned email inquiries to friends working in cultural production. I included links to my personal website in the hopes that the homepage would provide both a good first impression of professionalism and convey a spirit of transparency. Of course, this gesture of reassurance was a gamble on my part. On a previous occasion, when seeking permission to reproduce images for my master’s thesis, I spoke with a publicist for Kimora Lee Simmons who told me he had visited my website and found a critical paper I had written on Ms. Simmons’ children’s clothing brand Baby Phat Girlz and had passed it along, saying Kimora looked forward to reading it. Shortly thereafter, he cut off all contact. To mitigate this risk, I deliberately recruited industry insiders to join my LinkedIn network so that, if “googled,” gatekeepers would see that I was connected—a tactic manifesting Grindstaff’s (2002) clever observation that “neither ethnographers nor producers have a monopoly on using personal relationships for professional purposes” (p. 288).

These efforts produced several leads, but most of my calls, whether “cold” or “warm,” were not returned. I then solicited help from the editor of Advertising and Society Review (A&SR), a journal where I had recently published. The editor forwarded my request to the Advertising Education Foundation (AEF), which, in addition to underwriting A&SR, also sponsors a visiting professor program hosted by various agencies. This query generated a heart stopping “we would be happy to help you” email from an executive vice-president at R/GA. He referred me to a
creative HR director who, after twice missing our scheduled phone appointment, finally agreed to meet with me in person. Waiting in the lobby under a wall littered with all sorts of strange-looking trophies, I watched a stream of white late-20-early-30-something hipsters swipe their security cards at the front gate, then the outer door, then again at the inner door. When the HR director came to collect me, I poked fun at all the swiping. “What is this,” I asked. “The CIA?” She laughed and marched me up a flight of glass steps, swiped again, then led me into a small cafeteria. She offered me a drink from the barista at the juice/coffee bar, sat down and gave me a big smile. “So,” she said. “Miami Ad School, right?” Apparently, she’d gotten some bad intelligence. It didn’t work out.

My big break came during the Advertising Women of New York (AWNY) Advertising Career Conference in November of 2009. Worn out by the throng of mostly, but not entirely, female undergraduates in business suits and sessions entitled “Account Management: More Than Portfolio Bags And Cocktails,” “Become a Social Media Star: Strategies for You and Your Clients,” and “Pharmaceutical Advertising: Side Effects May Include Wealth, Respect and Stability,” I stumbled upon a panel with a critical edge. It was entitled “Multicultural Marketing: Marketing to the Emerging Majority.” Unlike the other panels, this one was sparsely attended—there were more panelists than audience members—but the content was electrifying. The elder statesman on the panel, an African-American in late middle age was blunt, wryly observing that “white people of a certain pedigree” still dominate advertising and “every day in this business – every day I stay—I get even.” When asked to discuss specific incidents of racism in the industry and attempts to
solve them, he shot back “how much time you got?” He then gave a blistering account of how, when J. Walter Thompson tried to integrate in the 1980’s, they dropped 12 students of color into a “shark tank” and “six months later they were gone.” It was here that I first learned about MAIP (The Multicultural Advertising Internship Program) and how internships have long been the “go-to” solution for advertising’s “diversity problem.” More importantly, this panel introduced me to a critical space within advertising and provided me with two key elements which would shape my approach: 1) an interesting entry point (race) which resonates with a central theoretical construct in cultural studies (identity); and 2) a bounded scene for ethnographic observation (the internship). From there, I began attending industry-sponsored diversity events and met “diversity officers” who took me under their wing and advocated for entrance to their agencies on my behalf.

In January and March of 2010, I built up a network of contacts based on internal reform movements seeking to correct historic discrimination practices in advertising based on race. These people have since become my allies in the sense that they’re both practitioners and critics of advertising. And by hosting industry events and inviting like-minded individuals tasked with similar “diversity missions,” they made it easier for me to meet with potential gatekeepers face-to-face in an atmosphere of presumed solidarity; the simple fact of my presence in the room implied that I was already on their side. And, in some ways, I was, though with some reservations. From a strictly political economic perspective, diversity groups are easy to explain away as public relations ploys designed by management to show that “something is being done” while the underlying structures remain firmly in
place. For instance, Tiffany Warren, a former director of the MAIP program who now runs the “AdColor Awards” program, was appointed Chief Diversity Officer at Omnicom just days before the NAACP announced their lawsuit and immediately ridiculed as a “sell out,” “apologist,” and even an “Uncle Tom” by more radical diversity activists such as Sanford Moore (Parekh, 2009). I suspected the truth of the matter was somewhere in the middle. Diversity officers may have swipe cards to the castle and a seat at the king’s table, but they are still jesters in the court speaking uncomfortable truths.

I was also able to connect with diversity advocates as fellow members of the “professional managerial class” or “knowledge classes” (Ginsburg et al, 2002; Grindstaff, 2002). Ortner (2009) calls this “studying sideways,” a term which acknowledges “the relative complicity between us and our informants….we all more or less share a habitus” (p. 184). And yet, as Stacey (1988) reminds us, such presumed bonds of trust can quickly turn sour as purposeful deception along with “elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography” (p. 23). Thus, even with the best intentions, I am aware that this collaboration has come with considerable risk as I have put the MAIP program under the microscope. It was hard to be forthright with my participants when the outcome of my project was unknown and, as Ginsburg et al (2002) point out, “intervening in complex political arenas where the consequences for local groups cannot be foreseen is tricky….advocacy of subaltern groups makes criticism, public or otherwise, of any aspects of these group’s projects awkward” (p. 22). While I make no claim to objectivity, I have certainly done my best to be fair.
APPENDIX D

IRB MATERIALS

This appendix includes materials approved prior to my fieldwork by the Internal Review Board out of the Human Research Protection Office at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The materials include consent forms and question schedules for my data collection methods: interviews, ethnographic observations, and focus groups.
**INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

*Internships @ Advertising Agencies*

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in the interview research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. It will take place at four advertising agencies in New York City during the summer of 2010.

I understand that interviews will take place either over email, on the phone, or live-in-person off-site. As further incentive for participating, my name will be entered in a drawing for a chance to win an MP3 player. I have the right to choose the type of interview that I prefer:

~**Email interviews** will consist of a questionnaire sent over email. Chris will ask me to compose and return my responses within one week. I understand that the length and detail of each response is entirely up to me.

~**Phone interviews** will last approximately one hour and will take place at a convenient time (outside of work hours) that I will arrange with Chris.

~**Live-in-Person** interviews will last approximately one hour and take place in room HN 508 in the Department of Film & Media Studies at Hunter College. The #6 train (green line) stops directly under the college at the corner of Lexington Avenue. I will be provided with a metro card to cover my transportation and snacks will be provided.

I understand that minor psychological discomforts might occur during the recollection of unfavorable experiences. In all cases, if there are any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering, I am free to skip them. The interview will be complete once I have answered all the questions I wish to answer, or whenever I decide that I no longer wish to continue participating in the study.

I understand that Chris will audiorecord all interviews and keep my identity anonymous by guarding the recordings in a private and secure location. I know that if any quotes or stories are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies.

I understand that Chris does not work for my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

Should I develop questions or concerns, I may call Chris Boulton directly at 413-687-2720, or email him at chboulton@comm.umass.edu. If I would like to discuss my rights as a research subject, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may also contact the Department of Communication at UMass-Amherst at (413) 545-1311 or Dr. Emily West, Chris’ academic supervisor, at ewest@comm.umass.edu or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

_________________________________________________  ______________________
Subject Name (Print or type)                                                Date

_________________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                                Date

313
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM (MAIP)
Internships @ Advertising Agencies

I, ____________________________________________, agree to participate in the interview research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. It will take place during the 2010 MAIP program in New York City.

I understand that interviews will take place either over email, on the phone, or live-in-person at the Clark Residence. As further incentive for participating, my name will be entered in a drawing for a chance to win an MP3 player. I have the right to choose the type of interview that I prefer:

~Email interviews will consist of a questionnaire sent over email. Chris will ask me to compose and return my responses within one week. I understand that the length and detail of each response is entirely up to me.

~Phone interviews will last approximately one hour and will take place at a convenient time (outside of work hours) that I will arrange with Chris.

~Live-in-Person interviews will last approximately one hour and take place in the Clark Residence. A metro card gift card and snacks will be provided.

I understand that minor psychological discomforts might occur during the recollection of unfavorable experiences. In all cases, if there are any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering, I am free to skip them. The interview will be complete once I have answered all the questions I wish to answer, or whenever I decide that I no longer wish to continue participating in the study.

I understand that Chris will audiorecord all interviews and keep my identity anonymous by guarding the recordings in a private and secure location. I know that if any quotes or stories are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies.

I understand that Chris does not work for MAIP or my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

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I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

___________________________________________
Subject Name (Print or type)

___________________________________________
Signature

___________________________
Date

314
PHONE/LIVE-IN-PERSON INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PREAMBLE
Since I may also be interviewing some of your friends and fellow interns, I ask that you don't talk about the contents of this interview with them. You're welcome to describe the experience in general, but please avoid sharing specific questions. This will help ensure that they have an authentic experience when I interview them. Thanks!

EDUCATION
Where do you go to school? What's your major? How did you choose it?
What sorts of careers are you considering right now. Why?
Why did you choose this internship?
What are your friends doing this summer?
Was there any financial hardship for you to get here?
Do you work to pay your way through school?
How many members of your family have gone to college?
How do you think your parents would define "success" for you?
How do you define "success" for yourself?
What does your family think of advertising as a career?
Does your family have any connections that might help you?
How would you describe yourself politically? What issues are important to you?

ADVERTISING
Describe your dream job. Nightmare job? How does advertising measure up?
Why did you pick advertising?
Is advertising a "cool" profession? How does it compare to other jobs?
Are you rebelling against something by going into advertising?
Are you giving up a potentially more lucrative career to go into advertising?
How long have you known that you wanted to work in advertising?
What do you love about advertising? What are some favorites?
What do you hate about it? Any particular ads you can't stand?
Do you consider yourself a critic of advertising? How about a connoisseur?
What kind of ads would you like to make? Avoid making?
Is there anything you would never advertise, no matter how much they paid you?
Would you promote tobacco? Alcohol? Cigarettes? The military? Planned Parenthood?
Should there be any rule in place to regulate or limit advertising? Why or why not?
Did you take any classes critical of advertising? If so, what did you learn?
Did watching a lot of commercials and advertisements when you were a kid affect you personally? In what ways? Good? Bad? Both?

SOCIAL MEDIA
Are you a member of the Greek system at your college -- fraternity or sorority?
People say advertising is a relationships business. What does that mean to you?
How many Facebook friends do you have? How often do you use it?
Do you post stuff on YouTube? Do you have followers on Twitter?
Do you think there should be any places or parts of life totally off-limits to advertising?
How do you want your work life to relate to your free time?
If you could live anywhere, where would it be?
What's more important: the job or the city?
Do you watch reality TV? If so, which shows and why?
What are your most important material possessions?  
What are you most favorite and least favorite brands? Why?  
Do you want to be famous? If so, how important is it to you?  
Which celebrity do you envy the most?  
Do you feel like you have an audience for your creative output?

CLASS  
Where are you from? Describe your neighborhood.  
Does your Mom work? What does she do?  
How would you rank your economic status? (1=very poor and 10=very rich)  
Do you feel under pressure to make a lot of money? If so, why?  
Have you ever been embarrassed or ashamed of your clothes, house, car, etc?  
Do you consider yourself classist? How about society?  
Are working class people better fit to advertise to working class consumers?  
Do you think anything be done to bring more working class people into advertising?  
If not, why? If so, what? What could you do, personally?

RACE  
How would you describe your own race or ethnicity?  
Did you have friends from different races/ethnicities growing up? Which ones?  
Have you ever been called names because of your race?  
Have you seen members of your race portrayed on television in degrading roles?  
Have you ever felt uncomfortable about a joke related to your race?  
How would you define “white privilege?” Does it exist? If so, what does it look like?  
Do you consider yourself racist? How about society?  
Are black people more qualified to advertise to black consumers?  
Latinos to other Latinos? Asians to other Asians? White people to white consumers?  
Do you think anything should be done to make advertising more diverse?  
If not, why? If so, what? What could you do, personally?

GENDER  
Do you think men and women are treated equally in society? At work? At home?  
Do you think there are certain jobs that men do better than women?  
That women do better than men?  
Do you think advertising represents your gender in a positive light?  
Have you seen any advertising that you found offensive?  
Where are most of the women working in the agency? How about the men?  
Do you consider yourself sexist? How about society?  
Do you feel that past oppression of women still has consequences today?  
Do you think women are more qualified to advertise to female audiences?  
Should anything be done to get more women into creative?  
If not, why? If so, what? What could you do personally?

Is there anything you’d like to add? Any questions or concerns about the internship—or advertising in general—that you’d like me to investigate? If you were in my shoes, what would YOU want to find out?
EMAIL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
*(BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the internship)*

**I. BEFORE**

Describe the most mind-blowing or life-changing class that you’ve ever taken. What was the professor like? What did you learn?

If you could have any job in the world, what would it be? Where would you live? What is it about this job that would inspire you?

Tell me about your decision process. Why did you choose to do an internship and how did you choose the host organization? What did you hope the experience would do for you? How was it going to “pay-off?”

Before you visited your internship site, what did you expect? In your imagination, what did the building look like? What kind of people worked there? How did you think they would look and act? Be specific and include things like age, gender, race, clothing, personality, lifestyle etc. Where do you think the image you just described comes from?

**II. DURING**

Did the internship setting and the people live up to your expectations? Why and why not?

What kinds of things do you do there on a typical day? What do you enjoy most and least about the job?

Who do you report to during the internship? Do you have a mentor on site? Does your faculty sponsor provide any supervision?

Does your internship provide opportunities to use anything that you learned in your favorite class? If so, how? If not, why?

**III. AFTER**

How did your internship experience change your view of the advertising industry? How about your view of consumers? Do you still want to work there?

Was it worth it? Why or why not?

Looking back, what do you wish you would have known at the beginning? What would you like to tell your peers before they start a similar internship?

What are your plans for the future?
FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM
Internships @ Advertising Agencies

I, ____________________________________________, agree to participate in the focus group research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. It will take place at four advertising agencies in New York City during the summer of 2010.

I understand that focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes and take place in room HN 504 in the Department of Film & Media Studies at Hunter College. The #6 train (green line) stops directly under the college at the corner of Lexington Avenue. I will be provided with a metro card to cover my transportation and snacks will be provided. As further incentive for participating, my name will be entered in a drawing for a chance to win an MP3 player.

I understand that Chris is committed to creating a productive and supportive focus group environment. Therefore, I will 1) come prepared to express myself with honesty and integrity, 2) maintain a mature and respectful attitude towards my peers throughout process, and 3) keep what others say completely confidential and expect that my fellow focus group participants will do the same for me.

I understand that I may be assigned to a focus group that seeks to create a more comfortable environment by organizing participants according to race or gender. Though some of the topics may be complex or even contentious, I am aware that focus groups have the potential to reduce initial discomfort and embarrassment by allowing me to openly reflect on my experience in a collective setting.

I understand that Chris will audiorecord all focus groups and keep my identity anonymous by guarding the recordings in a private and secure location. I can rest assured that if any quotes or stories are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies.

I understand that Chris does not work for my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

Should I develop questions or concerns, I may call Chris Boulton directly at 413-687-2720, or email him at cboulton@comm.umass.edu. If I would like to discuss my rights as a research subject, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may also contact the Department of Communication at UMass-Amherst at (413) 545-1311 or Dr. Emily West, Chris’ academic supervisor, at ewest@comm.umass.edu or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

__________________________________________  ________________________
Subject Name (Print or type)                      Date

__________________________________________  ________________________
Signature                                      Date
FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM (MAIP)
Internships @ Advertising Agencies

I, _______________________________________, agree to participate in the focus group research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. It will take place during the 2010 MAIP program in New York City.

I understand that focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes and take place at the Clark Residence. Snacks will be provided. As further incentive for participating, my name will be entered in a drawing for a chance to win an MP3 player.

I understand that Chris is committed to creating a productive and supportive focus group environment. Therefore, I will 1) come prepared to express myself with honesty and integrity, 2) maintain a mature and respectful attitude towards my peers throughout process, and 3) keep what others say completely confidential and expect that my fellow focus group participants will do the same for me.

I understand that I may be assigned to a focus group that seeks to create a more comfortable environment by organizing participants according to race or gender. Though some of the topics may be complex or even contentious, I am aware that focus groups have the potential to reduce initial discomfort and embarrassment by allowing me to openly reflect on my experience in a collective setting.

I understand that Chris will audiorecord all focus groups and keep my identity anonymous by guarding the recordings in a private and secure location. I can rest assured that if any quotes or stories are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies in the study.

I understand that Chris does not work for MAIP or my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

Should I develop questions or concerns, I may call Chris Boulton directly at 413-687-2720, or email him at cboulton@comm.umass.edu. If I would like to discuss my rights as a research subject, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may also contact the Department of Communication at UMass-Amherst at (413) 545-1311 or Dr. Emily West, Chris’ academic supervisor, at ewest@comm.umass.edu or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

___________________________________________
Subject Name (Print or type)

___________________________________________ ___________
Signature Date
FOCUS GROUP PREAMBLE

I’m committed to creating a productive and supportive focus group environment. I will need your cooperation to make it happen. So, are you prepared to 1) participate fully with honesty and integrity, 2) maintain a respectful attitude towards your peers, and 3) keep what others say completely confidential? If so, great. I’m glad you’re here. If not, then now is your chance to leave. No questions asked.

Why is confidentiality so important? Because you may be working with each other someday and I don’t want anything that comes up in here, to be brought up out there. No one wants to get a reputation for being a gossip. So, if your friend talks bad about their boss, you need to keep it to yourself. Protect them, and they’ll protect you. So, are we all in? Great. Then let’s get started…

First, I need everyone to turn off all digital devices. Yes, all cell phones off for ninety minutes. You can do it. We’re doing this for three reasons. First, the focus group only works if everyone is totally engaged with what’s going on in the room. It’s called a “FOCUS group” not a “scattered group!” Second, it’s disrespectful to be texting while one of your peers is sharing a personal story. Finally, this is a confidential environment; so don’t even think about tweeting about what goes on here!

Next, I’d like you all to sign the consent form in front of you. It’s the same form that I initially sent you over email. Please turn it over when you’re done. Now I’d like to take a moment to audio record your verbal consent. Please state your name like this: “My name is Chris Boulton and I consent to participate in this focus group.”

The focus group will run approximately 90 minutes. Should you become uncomfortable, or just decide you need to go, you will be free to leave at any time.

Each of you should have a numbered piece of paper and a pencil. After each question, I’m going to ask you to jot down some ideas for about 2 minutes before we start the discussion. That way, even if you don’t get a chance to speak, I’ll be able to look at what you wrote later. In fact, why don’t you all write your names on that sheet of paper right now.

I’ll be asking you to tell personal stories, but you can be vague about the details. You don’t have to name names, but you can rest assured that, if you do, I will change them. Thus, you don’t have to talk about yourself. You can also mention things you’ve seen happen to other people.

Towards the end of this focus group session, I will appoint a facilitator and leave the room to let you talk amongst yourselves. So, as the discussion unfolds, whenever a topic occurs to you that you would prefer to discuss when I’m not in the room, make a note of it on your piece of paper so you can remember to bring it up during that time. Are there any questions?
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

I. CURRENT EVENTS

What are you telling your friends about this week?

Any funny or scary stories?

Controversies in the office?

Times when you felt uncomfortable? Or like you didn’t belong?

Ethical dilemmas?

Exciting stuff?

How about a time when you felt jealous of a co-worker?

Did you learn any ‘unwritten rules’ of working in advertising this week?

If you could go back in time and give yourself advice, what would it be?

II. BIG PICTURE

Are you noticing any patterns along the lines of what kinds of people tend to do creative, account or strategy work?

How do you think the events of this week would have been experienced by people of a different race than you? Gender? Class background?

Is advertising a good industry for women? Why or why not?

Is advertising a good industry for people of color? Why or why not?

Is advertising a good industry for working class people? Why or why not?

Is advertising a good industry for old people? Why or why not?
ETHNOGRAPHY CONSENT FORM
Internships @ Advertising Agencies

I, ________________________________ , agree to participate in the ethnographic research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. It will take place at four advertising agencies in New York City during the summer of 2010.

I understand that this study does not require me to do anything “extra.” Rather, by signing this form, I am simply giving Chris permission to observe and record my experience at the agency. This could range from shadowing me on a specific task to sitting in on a meeting with my team.

I understand that Chris’ direct observation of me will be limited to one day. During this time, his presence or questions may occasionally interrupt my workflow. I expect that Chris will do his best to avoid this and work with my supervisors to ensure that his research does not impede my ability to do my job.

I understand that Chris will keep my identity anonymous and store all the data he collects, including field notes and audio recordings, in a private and secure location. I know that if the data are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies.

I understand that Chris does not work for my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. Likewise, there will be no financial compensation or cost. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

Should I develop questions or concerns, I may call Chris Boulton directly at 413-687-2720, or email him at chboulton@comm.umass.edu. If I would like to discuss my rights as a research subject, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may also contact the Department of Communication at UMass-Amherst at (413) 545-1311 or Dr. Emily West, Chris’ academic supervisor, at ewest@comm.umass.edu or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

Subject Name (Print or type)

___________________________________________
Signature

___________________________________________
Date
ETHNOGRAPHY CONSENT FORM (MAIP)

Internships @ Advertising Agencies

I, ____________________________________________, agree to participate in the ethnographic research being conducted by Chris Boulton, doctoral student in the Department of Communication at UMass, Amherst. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the intersection of creativity, race, gender, and class in advertising agency settings. The study will take place during the 2010 MAIP program in New York City.

I understand that this study does not require me to do anything “extra.” Rather, by signing this form, I am simply giving Chris permission to observe and record my experience at MAIP. This could range from orientation, weekly seminars, social events, and graduation ceremonies to a causal conversation over dinner at the Clark Residence.

I understand that Chris will keep my identity anonymous and store all the data he collects, including field notes and audio recordings, in a private and secure location. I know that if the data are used for a public talk, print publication, or for teaching purposes, Chris will use pseudonyms to protect my identity along with the identities of all the other participants and agencies.

I understand that Chris does not work for MAIP or my agency. His research is for academic purposes only and has no bearing on my employment status. Thus my participation in this study (or lack thereof) will neither help nor hinder my future job prospects. Likewise, there will be no financial compensation or cost. This study is completely voluntary and I am free to leave at any time. There will be no penalties or consequences of any kind if I decide that I no longer wish to participate.

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I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

__________________________________________________________________________

Subject Name (Print or type)

__________________________________________________________________________

Signature

___________

Date
APPENDIX E

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

~ REQUEST FOR AGENCY ACCESS ~

Research Title: Internships@Advertising Agencies: The Intersection of Creativity, Race, Gender, and Class

Principal Investigator: Chris Boulton, Doctoral Candidate, UMass, Amherst (see curriculum vitae attached)

Academic Supervisor: Dr. Emily West, Assistant Professor, UMass, Amherst (see endorsement letter attached)

Location/Time Frame: Ad Agencies in New York City during summer 2010

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROJECT:
This research project examines the culture of advertising agencies from the perspective of the internship—that crucial juncture between education and employment. I have two main goals: 1) to help bridge the divide between theory (academia) and practice (industry), and 2) better understand how inequalities of race, gender, and class are reproduced—and might be reversed—in advertising agency settings. The results of this study will appear in my doctoral dissertation and may eventually be published as a journal article or book chapter.

STUDY PROCEDURES:
My methodology consists of 1) participant observation, 2) focus groups, and 3) interviews.
If your agency agrees to participate in my study, I will ask you to do three things:

1. Host me one day per week during your 10-week summer internship program.
This means I would be at your agency for approximately ten day-long visits over the course of the summer. Depending on what makes sense, my activities could range from sitting in on intern gatherings (such as “brown-bag” talks), shadowing an individual intern or team project, and even working on a task typically assigned to interns. Whatever you think would help me get a "boots on the ground" feel for the intern experience.

2. Allow willing interns to participate in a series of three focus groups sessions.
I envisage these focus groups involving 6-8 interns, lasting around 90 minutes, and taking place three times during the internship program: 1) right before they begin; 2) midway through the summer and 3) at the end in an “exit interview” format. I would of course remain flexible and ready to work around any scheduling conflicts that may arise.

3. Allow willing staff members and individual interns to be interviewed 1-on-1.
When possible, I would conduct one-hour interviews with relevant staff members in order to get an overview of the internship program and agency culture. I would also talk with interns at various times about their initial expectations and actual experience of the program. These interviews could be conducted either over-the-phone or in-person.
INDIVIDUAL AND AGENCY RIGHTS:
This study is completely voluntary and all participants (both individuals and agencies) would be free to leave at any time. Should you decide to grant me access, I would follow the standard human subjects procedures as outlined by my University's Internal Review Board which protects individual and institutional identities by assigning pseudonyms and keeping all data, including field notes and audio recordings, private and secure.

RISKS OF RESEARCH:
As I see it, this project could pose two central risks to your agency: disclosure and disruption. Here are the steps I would take to minimize such risks. First, I would sign a non-disclosure agreement and take care to excise any proprietary information or other trade secrets when I publish or present my research in public. Second, I will keep the name of your agency anonymous. I also understand that the advertising world is a small one and, despite my best efforts, word might spread. Therefore, I am taking the extra precaution of including multiple intern cohorts and agencies in my study. This will make it much more difficult to trace statements or events back to particular individuals or institutions. Third, I will work to minimize the disruption I might pose to group dynamics and work tasks by accommodating your scheduling needs whenever they may arise.

BENEFITS OF RESEARCH:
In my estimation, the potential benefits of this project outweigh the potential risks. For instance, past experience has shown that the process of participating in ethnographic interviews and focus groups can be tremendously rewarding for everyone involved. Beyond that, this study will offer unique insight into an understudied phenomenon and seek to compile a set of best practices for creating a more diverse workplace in advertising settings. As such, I undertake this project with the intent to produce new knowledge that will benefit advertising professionals, college professors, and even the interns themselves.

RESEARCH RESULTS:
I will provide copies of my dissertation or other publications that might arise from this project to you or any participant who requests them.

If you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed in this proposal, or have any amendments or modifications you'd like to make, please let me know.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP SURVEYS

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY
TOPIC: BACKGROUND/RACE

NAME: __________________________________________

1. What’s your major?

2. What sorts of careers are you considering right now?

3. Are you a member of the Greek system at your college -- fraternity or sorority?

4. How would you describe yourself politically? What issues are important to you?

5. Describe your dream job. Nightmare job?

6. Are you giving up a potentially more lucrative career to go into advertising?

7. How long have you known that you wanted to work in advertising? Since when?

8. What kind of ads would you like to make? Avoid making?

9. Is there anything you would never advertise, no matter how much they paid you? For example, tobacco? Alcohol? Cigarettes? The military? Planned Parenthood?

10. Did you take any classes critical of advertising? If so, what did you learn?

11. How would you describe your own race or ethnicity?

12. Did you have friends from different races/ethnicities growing up? If so, which?

13. Have you ever been called names because of your race?

14. Have you seen advertising portray your race in degrading roles? Examples?

15. How would you define “affirmative action?” What do you think about it?

16. How would you define “white privilege?” Does it exist? If so, describe it.

17. Do you consider yourself racist? How about society?

18. Are you for or against minority-based scholarships or hiring practices? Explain.
FOCUS GROUP SURVEY
TOPIC: CLASS

NAME: ________________________________

1. Where were you born? Where do you say you are from? Describe a neighborhood typical of your childhood.

2. Does your Dad work? If so, what does he do? How about your Mom?

3. What are your friends doing this summer?

4. Was there any financial hardship for you to get here? Explain.

5. Do you work to pay your way through school? If so, what do you do? Did you take out any loans? If so, how much are you in debt?

6. Is going to college a tradition in your family or are you one of the first to go?

7. Does your family have any connections that might help your career? If so, which?

8. How would you rank your family’s economic status? (1=very poor 10=very rich)

9. Do you feel under pressure to make a lot of money? If so, why?

10. Have you ever been embarrassed or ashamed of your clothes, house, car, etc? Explain.

11. Do you consider yourself classist? How about U.S. society?

12. Are working class/low income people better fit to advertise to working class/low income consumers?

13. Do you think anything can be done to bring more working class/low income people into advertising? If not, why? If so, what? What could you do, personally?

14. What drives you to work?

15. Do you have any close friends from different social classes than you? If so, try to name a few and note whether you consider them to be above or below you.
FOCUS GROUP SURVEY
TOPIC: GENDER/WRAPPING UP

NAME: ________________________________

1. Are there fundamental differences between men and women? If so, natural or learned?
2. Do you think men and women are treated equally in society? How about at work? Home?
3. Do you think there are certain jobs that men do better than women or vice-versa? Why?
4. Do you think advertising represents your gender in a positive light? If so, how?
5. Have you seen any advertising that you found offensive to your gender?
6. Where are most of the women working in your agency? How about the men?
7. Do you consider yourself sexist? How about society?
8. Do you feel that past oppression of women still has consequences today?
9. Do you think women are more qualified to advertise to female consumers?
10. Should anything be done to get more women into creative? If not, why? If so, what? Is there anything you could do personally?
11. Did the internship setting and the people live up to your expectations? Why and why not?
12. What did you enjoy most about your intern placement? Least?
13. Looking back, what do you wish you would have known at the beginning?
14. What would you like to tell your peers before they start a similar internship?
15. What would you change about your internship program?
16. What are your plans for the future?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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