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Spring March 8, 2016

Black Identities Inside Advertising: Race Inequality, Code Switching, and Stereotype Threat

Christopher Boulton, *University of Tampa*



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Black Identities Inside Advertising: Race Inequality, Code Switching, and Stereotype Threat

Christopher Boulton

University of Tampa, Tampa, Florida, USA

ABSTRACT



This article explores Black identities within the U.S. advertising industry—an atmosphere charged by a history of discrimination against, and continuing underrepresentation of, African American practitioners. Drawing on theories of code switching and stereotype threat, the author interprets data from a set of focus groups with Black interns working at agencies in New York City and argues that their supposed race-based affiliations conceal deeper anxieties of cultural belonging marked by fissures of class and language that trigger self-monitoring and thus undermine retention and advancement in the advertising field. Furthermore, the author contends that the added psychological burden of stereotype threat makes Black interns wary of seeking out help from other more established Black employees—for fear of being seen as preferring their own race—thus placing them at a career development disadvantage vis-à-vis Whites, who have no qualms about affiliating with and mentoring other Whites. The author then offers some strategies for closing the White–Black labor gap in advertising ranging from agency reform from within to clients exerting structural pressure from without and concludes with a call for communication scholars to move beyond the text and critique race representation at the point of production.

KEYTERMS

race; African American Studies; identity; grounded theory; focus groups

The problem

In 2011, three large advertising agencies (Ogilvy & Mather, Fallon, and DraftFCB) produced print ads for three major brands (Dove, Cadbury, and Nivea, respectively) only to have them pulled from circulation after public outcry over their racist imagery. Dove's VisibleCare Body Wash positioned a Black model as “before” and a White model as “after” (Knafo, 2011); Cadbury's Dairy Milk Bliss compared supermodel “diva” Naomi Campbell to a chocolate bar (Sweney, 2011); and Nivea For Men told Black men with afros to “re-civilize” themselves (Wheaton, 2011). Madison Avenue should have known better. Just 4 years earlier, Intel had to publicly apologize for McCann Erickson's print ad featuring six Black sprinters “bowing down”

CONTACT Christopher Boulton  cboulton@ut.edu  University of Tampa, 401 W. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33606. The author derived this article from his doctoral dissertation, presented an earlier version at the 2014 International Communication Association Conference, and wishes to thank Emily West, Sut Jhally, Ana Branch, Julie Hemment for their guidance, feedback, and suggestions.

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before a smirking White boss (Frucci, 2007). Whether unwittingly honest or stunningly naive, these contemporary commercial messages evoked deeply racist discourses around the inferiority of Black skin, hair, and labor that harken back to the era of slavery and have since been reinforced through the explicit, frequent, and unapologetic circulation of racist imagery in U.S. popular culture and advertising (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt 1995; Cortese, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; O'Barr, 1994; Riggs, 1987). Although the Civil Rights Movement and ensuing efforts of both corporations and their agencies to develop greater cultural sensitivity to avoid offending non-White consumers has led to more subtle expressions of White supremacy (Chambers, 2008), the tone-deaf gaffs outlined above raise serious questions about the current decision-makers within the U.S. advertising industry. For instance, who developed and approved these ads? How could they have possibly missed their racist implications? And what can be done about it?

In 2014, Lenny Henry, a Black British actor and comedian, voiced his frustration with the stubborn persistence—and expansion—of White power and race discrimination within the creative industries. Invited by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to deliver the annual BAFTA Television Lecture, he used the occasion to call for quotas to correct the under-representation of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) employees (Conlan, 2014). Henry had given a similar lecture to the Royal Television Society 5 years previous, concluding that “I hope that things will now change and that I don’t have to come back and repeat myself in another five or six years time.” But, repeat himself he did, reporting in 2014 that “between 2006 and 2012, the number of BAME’s working in the UK TV industry had declined by 30.9%” to constitute only 5.4% of the workforce—in stark contrast to London’s population, which is 40% BAME (Henry, 2014). Crucially, Henry stressed that the decline in diversity took place despite recent creative industry initiatives to increase minority labor through recruiting, training, and mentoring programs such that, in the last 3 years, for every Black or Asian fired, two Whites were hired in their place.

Though addressing a British audience, Henry might as well have been describing the U.S. advertising industry, which, despite four decades of seeking to “expand the pipeline” of Black employees through small, targeted scholarships and internships, maintains a Black–White labor gap that is 38% larger than the labor market in general—a divergence that has doubled over the past 30 years (Bendick & Egan, 2009). As of 2009, Blacks in advertising earned \$.80 on the dollar when compared to equally qualified Whites and represented only 5.3% of managers and professionals instead of the expected 9.6% according to numbers from the US Census Bureau and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—a shortfall that amounts to 7,200 “missing” Black advertising professionals and managers (Bendick & Egan, 2009). Like Henry, the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) has also had to repeat itself on the subject of race discrimination in advertising. In 1967, the Commission found that people of color represented only 5% of advertising industry employees versus 25% of the city’s total labor force—only to declare some 44 years later that advertising’s aversion to hiring minorities seemed so entrenched

that “they have to do something to change the entire culture” (Bush, 2011, para. 12; Kern-Foxworth, 1994). The present study takes up this problem by examining how challenges of code switching and stereotype threat inhibit more Blacks from working and advancing in this sector.

Literature review

In taking a closer look at race inequality inside advertising, my project contributes to a rich sociological literature documenting and theorizing the reproduction of class-based and racial hierarchies within workplace settings largely through informal hiring practices based on existing social networks (Acker, 2006; Branch, 2011; Das Gupta, 1996; McGuire, 2002; Vallas, 2003). Others have drawn similar conclusions through studies of specific communication industries including telephony (Green, 2001), journalism (Becker, Lauf, & Lowrey, 1999; Drew, 2011), and public relations (Logan, 2011). Thus, although much is known about White opportunity hoarding and how other axes of identity—such as gender—can inflect professional relationships and consequent life chances,¹ this article is the first to use qualitative agency-based fieldwork to explore how Black identities function within contemporary advertising—an atmosphere charged by a history of discrimination and a continuing underrepresentation of African American practitioners.

To do so, I draw on two theoretical frameworks: code switching and stereotype threat—which I will now review in turn. Situational “code switching,” initially developed by Gumperz (1982) and elaborated by Goffman (1981), describes how speakers might modify their vocabulary and even shift their “pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, [or] tonal quality” to better accommodate the expectations of their listeners or conform to the context of perceived participant roles and relative power hierarchies of any given social interaction (p. 128). For instance, Glenn and Johnson (2012) described how African American male college students can seek acceptance in predominantly White institutions by code switching from vernacular to standardized styles of English. The study’s participants reported that mirroring White culture in this way helped to dissociate them from negative stereotypes of Black identity, but also acknowledged that the appearance of “selling out” could undermine racial solidarity and thereby alienate them from Black peers. However, as Sha (2006) pointed out, the degree of subjective racial belonging can vary depending on whether the particular identity is avowed, ascribed, and/or salient in any given context.

My second theoretical framework, “stereotype threat,” was initially measured in academic settings where Blacks performed worse when race was emphasized due to anxieties around Black intellectual inferiority (Steele & Aronson, 1995) but 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, 2002). 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, & Miller, 2005). In what follows, both code switching and stereotype threat help illuminate the dilemmas of Black interns in my study: Not only are they doubly marked by their skin color and explicit participation in Affirmative Action-style scholarship programs, but they must also seek social acceptance within White-dominated advertising agencies while pursuing professional mentoring from the precious few Black superiors who have managed to advance their careers past the entry-level.

Methods

In what follows, I analyze five focus groups that I conducted in the summer of 2010 with 11 Black interns participating in the Multicultural Advertising Internship Program (MAIP) at 10 different advertising agencies in New York City.² Most groups took place in a conference room at the interns' residence and typically convened in the evening for approximately 90 min. I supplied refreshments during each session and would open the proceedings with a preamble explaining the study, my intent to audio record the discussion, and commitment to anonymity along with ground rules of confidentiality and issues of informed consent. Because White qualitative researchers are rarely asked to explain how their race might bias their results—regardless of the race of their participants (Hendrix, 2002, p. 167), I should note that my own position vis-à-vis this project carried with it a particular set of opportunities and limitations. As a middle-class, 36-year-old White male graduate student, my physical characteristics, social attributes, and cultural capital created axes of both affinity and difference with my participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 142). On one hand, I was a familiar figure; most of the Black interns had grown up in largely White, suburban communities similar to my own and, as college students, recognized both the methods of my research and my positioning as a sympathetic ear who was “on their side” (Becker, 1967; Nader, 1972). On the other hand, because the focus groups were overwhelmingly female, had I been a woman of color, I would have most likely achieved a much deeper level of rapport with my participants and perhaps been able to draw out more nuanced responses. In my case, the Black interns addressed me as a curious outsider, and, bemused by my presumed ignorance, and not taking for granted any shared subjective understandings of mutual racial identity, would take pains to patiently articulate their experiences.

Data analysis

Drawing on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), my analytical process was both iterative and emergent—toggling between induction and deduction in a constant comparative process of triangulation between my own observations, the rhetoric of my participants, and the extant literature. When transcribing the audio recordings from the relevant focus group sessions and interviews, I stayed true to the actual spoken speech as much as possible, occasionally removing overly cumbersome clutter such as repeated use of the verbal tick “like.”

I then entered the data into NVivo 9, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program well suited for coding large amounts of information (Sweeney & González, 2008). When quoting, I looked for patterns and passages that were both representative of my sample as a whole—and, of those, tended to favor the pithy, creative, vivid, and/or anecdotal. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter at hand, I protected the identities of my subjects by assigning them pseudonyms, though I also gave them the option of choosing their own. I have also changed other identifying information when and where appropriate: I do not name agencies or clients and substitute positions or relationships (e.g., CEO and Father) with approximate equivalents (e.g., President and Aunt). Finally, I sent a draft of this work to all of my participants, inviting them to comment and request any further anonymization.

Results

In this section, I will argue that the Black interns' supposed race-based affiliations, as rendered by acceptance into the MAIP program, conceal deeper anxieties of cultural belonging marked by fissures of class and language. Furthermore, the added psychological burden of stereotype threat makes them wary of seeking mentorship from other Blacks—for fear of being seen as preferring their own race—thus placing them at a structural career development disadvantage vis-à-vis Whites, who have no qualms about affiliating with and mentoring members of their own race.

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 conducted a focus group over 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" 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 said 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 tried to take everything back. The group laughed, Kelly surmised that "everybody's Mom probably sounds White on the phone," and all agreed that "talking White" meant speaking in a more proper and professional 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!”³ 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. 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.”⁴

Others told stories of early lessons in language allegiance. When she was a girl, April went to a daycare near her Grandmother’s house in the Black part of town and, while 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 tried to avoid the situation only to have her friend yell 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.” Like April, 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 quickly “learned to adapt” her speech 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 they 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 (a) speaks differently than Whites and (b) 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. Amelia grew up in the South Chicago suburbs, but admitted that she would tell other Blacks that she’s from “the South Side” because 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 in college, 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!”

Together, these stories convey the instability and antagonistic nature of the identity formation process; as Hall (2000) argued, “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 its ‘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 while interning at her agency, Amelia had her racial identity marked through a White performance of “Black” hailing.

Back at the Irish Pub, the conversation kept circling back around to racial belonging. Shirley, in particular, seemed to stand at the margins. Whereas 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 admitted that “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.”

In sum, MAIP’s 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, and so on because “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!” Ironically, when Shirley’s agency scheduled a meeting with Al Sharpton, a prominent African American civil rights activist, her supervisor asked Shirley to attend, because there weren’t going to be enough Black people in the room. When relating the story to me, Shirley joked that she was “planning to go extra Black.” 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. They all did, but joked that “White people must think we all get a Black memo.” So, just as Whites can presume the cultural uniformity of Black identity as a race-based subscription to the same “memo,” the Black subjects in my study often experienced their own racial belonging as a membership “card” that could expire at any moment. Moreover, this contradiction between ostensibly self-evident racial affiliations (as perceived from without) and more latent identity differences (as felt from within) made it difficult for them to effectively code switch while navigating the White-dominated settings of their agency internships.

Stereotype threat

In addition to confusion around code switching, the added burden of “stereotype threat” (Marx et al., 2005) puts pressure on minorities to avoid individual behaviors that might reflect badly on their race as a whole. This made the Black interns in my study deeply ambivalent about seeking out mentorship from other Blacks at their agencies, for fear of appearing to prefer their own. Although Amelia, Kioni, and Sadie made “head counts” of all the “freckles” at their agencies in the hopes of finding a friend, overall, the Black interns in my focus groups were generally disappointed by the lack of race-based bonding and mentoring. For instance, April and Latoya’s “Black cards” did not get much credit:

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.⁵

Kioni wasn't surprised by the snubs. 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 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: "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 Shirley 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 identities, 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.

While 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 their coupling was 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.

The risk of stereotype threat applies to the Black MAIP interns in my study in two ways: (a) they already stand out as minorities working within a largely White industry and (b) 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. And yet, this kind of informal guidance—so crucial for advancement in the advertising industry—is freely bestowed by older Whites upon younger versions of themselves. For Donna, who is White and runs the internship program at her agency, mentorship tends to be monoracial—both for minority and majority alike:

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 kicks 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 [sic.] less people like them. So that is the one thing I would say works against them versus White people in this business. (emphasis added)

Discussion

My research suggests that advertising's race problem presents a unique set of challenges for Black interns hoping to break into a predominantly White industry. On one hand, the Black interns in this study are expected to offer their unique insight into their own demographic by displaying “Black cards” to other Blacks, going “extra Black” to a meeting, or cc-ing any “Black memos” to their White colleagues. On the other hand, and at the same time, these interns must constantly self-monitor their behavior because, unlike Whites, they are seen to represent—and be represented by—all other Blacks. In other words, to succeed they must code switch to negotiate Whites' racial stereotypes about Blacks while driving “the nod” underground to avoid stereotype threat because even the mere recognition of racial affiliation threatens to further exacerbate existing Black marginalization inside advertising. And although internships might seem like a logical mechanism for expanding the so-called “pipeline” of underrepresented workers in media industries, the current study supports Tindall's (2013) assertion that, given the “structural impediments and barriers” of unpaid internships, nepotism, and homosocial reproduction that favor those already in power, “obstacle course” might be a more fitting analogy.

In closing, I would like to suggest three alternatives to internships that could help diversify the advertising industry and help close the Black–White labor gap. First, agencies should raise entry-level salaries (which hover around thirty-five thousand dollars per year in New York City) to better attract talented working class and/or first-generation college students of color. Otherwise, as *Adweek's* Noreen O'Leary (2010) put it, the “WASPY homogeneity of a past mass-media era” will continue to reproduce its hold on advertising by hoarding opportunities for the “well-heeled, subsidized White college graduates and clients’ kids” of a certain class that can “afford the industry’s low entry-level salaries.” Second, agencies should recognize code switching as a valuable skill for marketing across demographic targets since employees of color can offer valuable ethnographic perspectives on the tastes and dispositions of a majority White culture to which they’ve learned to adapt. This would help agencies avoid hiring Blacks merely for their “Black perspective” as this isolates them from peers, pigeonholes their identity along a single axis, and ultimately limits their contributions and truncates their careers (Boulton, 2015). Third, to mitigate stereotype threat and avoid anti-Affirmative Action backlash against interns of color, agencies should provide incentives for cross-racial mentoring and explain the purpose of MAIP in the context of contemporary (not just historical) race inequality and discrimination within advertising. Furthermore, these efforts should be led by White management, not delegated to HR practitioners of color, and coupled with placing a moratorium on management’s widespread practice of trading internship slots as favors to their own friends, families, or important clients (Boulton, 2013). This kind of nepotism and cronyism disproportionately benefits Whites and undermines HR departments, who should instead be empowered to make all internship or entry-level hires without interference either from management or mostly White account teams who tend to refer and hire people like themselves based on vague, subjective notions of “fit” and “chemistry” (Boulton, 2013). And, yet, even if all of these changes were to be implemented, structural racial inequalities within advertising will likely remain and require even more dramatic reforms.

Lenny Henry (2014) concluded his BAFTA Television Lecture by praising the BBC for living up to its charter that promises to “represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities” by enacting quotas to achieve more regional diversity in its programming and thereby better represent its license-fee payers. Henry then proposed that British media industries enact a similar model for race. Specifically, he called for bold legislation that would set aside “ring-fence money” specifically dedicated to projects where the participation of self-declared BAME people meet, by cost, at least two of the following three quotas: (a) 50% of any production crew; (b) 30% of senior production company owners, executives, or senior personnel; and (c) 50% of on-screen talent. Given the apparent inability of the U.S. advertising industry to correct its own internal diversity problems, “ring-fence money” carrots and quota-based sticks from without may be the only way to address the sector’s persistent reproduction of White labor. For instance, if influential agency clients such as Proctor & Gamble were to insist that at least a certain percentage of their ad dollars

would be dedicated to supporting their own compliance to supply chain diversity commitments, their advertising agencies would have a strong incentive to follow suit (Boulton, 2012).

The preceding study also has three important methodological and ethical implications for future scholarly work in this area. First, my analysis joins Kern-Foxworth (1994) and Chambers (2008) in challenging the field of communication to go beyond textual representations and engage race inequality at the point of cultural production. By shifting the focus from interpreting message reception (whether through textual or audience analysis) to observing the opportunities and limitations of message creation (though empirically-grounded qualitative fieldwork), communication scholarship can offer new insights into how worker identities and subjectivities help shape both labor conditions and the range of expression within creative industries. Second, this study demonstrates that interns, as novices seeking to enter an industry for the first time, can provide fertile ground for research—especially because their initial interactions can provide raw and unvarnished views of subject formation that “reveal much about how a group socializes its newcomers, polices its boundaries, and generally enforces its preferred styles of communication” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 156). Finally, the preceding work’s focus on how Black identities formed outside of White office space can hinder professional advancement suggests that future communication research on race inequality in the creative industries could expand fieldwork beyond the workplace and out into more informal settings. Indeed, one of the blind spots of the current study is the crucial role of after-hours social settings where upwardly mobile Whites, relatively unencumbered by code switching and stereotype threat, are free to meet, bond, and pursue their career aspirations by trading favors amongst themselves. Put another way, future scholarship might investigate whether the performance of White identities outside of advertising help to ensure success within it.

Notes

1. Boulton (2013) has analyzed how the interactions of race and gender inequalities inside advertising tend to reproduce White male leadership through informal hiring practices based on personal referrals and team-based chemistry/fit. For more on gendered labor in advertising, see Broyles and Grow (2008), Gregory (2009), and Mallia (2009).
2. Founded in 1973 by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (the 4As), MAIP 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 internal summer internship programs (4As, 2010).
3. This commitment to maintain her own, authentic way of speaking 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” such that her agency would not want her on the phone with a client.
4. 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 going into Black communities rather than going into White communities. White people

are going to feel fine around me, but Black people might get nervous: ‘Why are you talking like that? 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.”

5. 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, saying 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, effort by an 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.

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