

Centering BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Perspectives: Strengthening  
the Efficacy of DEI Initiatives through Shared Understanding

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Centering BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Perspectives: Strengthening  
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**ABSTRACT**

Efforts to establish diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) spaces within organizations, particularly for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) employees, have gained renewed attention amidst societal shifts towards social justice (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Brown et al 2022). Despite extensive literature on DEI initiatives, there remains a gap in understanding BIPOC members' perceptions and experiences within White-dominated workspaces. This study explores the efficacy of organizational DEI efforts through the lens of BIPOC members' perspectives, highlighting the crucial role of shared understanding in fostering genuine transformation. Findings reveal that ineffective DEI initiatives cause negative organization perceptions from BIPOC members as they find their organizations attempts at DEI inequitable due to the centering of White perspectives and lack of understand of BIPOC member's perception of the workplace. The study emphasizes the importance of centering marginalized voices in DEI initiatives to generate organizational and interpersonal impact on the experiences of BIPOC members, ultimately advocating for a shared understanding of the needs of BIPOC members in a White dominated space.

**KEYWORDS:** DEI, BIPOC, Multiculturalism, Shared Understanding

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Monica Carpenter

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## **Introduction**

Effectively creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) spaces to build a sense of belonging for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) employees in America has been a challenge that organizations have attempted to address over the past several decades. The issue is costly and harmful to ignore and has recently moved to the forefront once again (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Brown et al 2022, Nayani, 2021, Chandler, 2021, Evans, 2019, Brecheisen, 2023, Houston, 2021, The impact of belonging and the cost of exclusion, 2022, Ray, 2021). Since 2020, and a global pandemic, people have become more outwardly involved with social justice movements, protests, and other political engagements (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Brown et al 2022). There has been a social change in America around the ways racism and inequity are discussed, addressed, and mitigated at both the organizational and interpersonal level (Roche & Passmore, 2023). Organizations across the country have been demanded to participate in this cultural shift for the sake of their employees, customers, and society. (Brecheisen, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Brown et al, 2022, Roche & Passmore, 2023). However, the efficacy of DEI initiatives often misses the mark for many stakeholders, particularly within BIPOC organization members (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Brown et al 2022, Nayani, 2021, Chandler, 2021, Evans, 2019, Brecheisen, 2023, Houston, 2021, The impact of belonging and the cost of exclusion, 2022, Ray, 202). There's a lot of literature about DEI in organizations but not necessarily how BIPOC members perceive and experience these DEI initiatives. This paper seeks to investigate BIPOC perceptions and experiences regarding the efficacy of DEI efforts in the sociocultural landscape of White dominated workspaces. BIPOC

members are often tasked with navigating the workplace differently than their White counterparts, requiring them to have a robust understanding of their White institution and their White peers (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Mena et al., 2022, Lee et al, 2023, Santa-Ramierz, 2022, Nayani, 2021, Weissman, 2023, Ravishankar, 2023, Bahia & Park, 2022). This leads to the following question: In what ways does the efficacy of organizational DEI efforts impact BIPOC members' experiences and perception of the workplace? Through an exploration of perceptions and experiences from BIPOC students—prospective employees—and Colorado College alumni, this paper illuminates the role of shared understanding in fostering genuine and impactful transformation within organizational DEI initiatives.

### **Literature Review**

People of color have historical barriers that inhibit them from accessing elite colleges and breaking into the workforce post-graduation (Mena et al., 2022). Being so, much of the research in this literature review focuses on organizations that can be classified as predominately White institutions (PWI) and predominately White workspaces. These settings are now being pushed to encourage multiculturalism and diversity within their workplace and classroom culture to properly include their BIPOC members (Akpapuna et al, 2020, Roche & Passmore, 2023, Mena et al., 2022). In these environments, effectively creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) employees and students in America has been a challenge that organizations that organizations pour billions into and still BIPOC employees feel like they can't be themselves (Carr et al, 2019). This is due to workplace culture current inability to pursue and celebrate diversity, a concept that multiculturalism

hinges on. Multiculturalism is the shared belief in promoting appreciation, celebration, and preservation of social and cultural differences but the college classroom and workplace often lack this (Akpapuna et al, 2020). In college classrooms, literature suggests that when student's racial identities are concealed or not fully understood and seen by their peers, they feel isolated (Santa-Ramirez, 2022, Mena et. Al., 2022, Tyson et. Al., 2003). Similarly, many companies, particularly in the past, that have participated in a colorblind approach to manage racism and microaggressions in the workplace when they needed to see and allow BIPOC members to express their authentic selves the way multiculturalism encourages (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Kafta, 2023, Akpapuna et, 2020). A lack of multiculturalism and diversity in the classroom has permeating effects on BIPOC individuals and are highlighted heavily within the sociocultural interactions between BIPOC members and their White counterparts. Ignoring racial implications within classrooms and the workplace are ineffective methods to providing BIPOC members with equitable experiences and largely breeds feelings of isolation, as well as insincere allyship and a false reality of the racial climate (Roche & Passmore, 2020, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Kafta, 2023, Mena et al., 2022, Bahia & Park, 2022, Santa-Ramirez, 2022).

***A call for diversity to battle against isolation in the workplace and college classrooms***

Isolation due to racial prejudice was, by far, the most prevalent theme found in this literature review in both classrooms and the workplace. In addition to obvious historical barriers that have inhibited people of color in higher education and professional workspaces, Whiteness has been exacerbated within the last several years (Ray, 2019, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Mena et al, 2022). Demonstrated in Fortune 500, Black

Representation within high-ranking organizations has decreased by 50% in less than 10 years and the peak of racial diversity reigns in the early-to-mid 2000's (Ray, 2019).

Because of these barriers in education and business, the few BIPOC employees that break through to the workplace often feel isolated due to the lack of diversity and representation (Akpapuna et al, 2020, Nayani, 2021, Ray, 2021). The classroom was named "the most common place for students to experience racial prejudice" (Crumb et al 2020:101).

Students experience isolation in the classroom as a result of a lack of diversity and multiculturalism, assimilation, and microaggressions from either White peer's or their professors. Diversity refers to the degree that a group has varying demographic attributes that differentiate themselves from one another within the group (Akpapuna et al, 2020).

A lack of diversity in this literature review refers to BIPOC students and employees being the only person of color in the room (Mena et al., 2022, Lee et al, 2023, Santa-Ramierz, 2022, Nayani, 2021, Weissman, 2023, Ravishankar, 2023, Ray, 2021). This lack of diversity, and as a result BIPOC students' isolation on campus, has caused issues in institution's recruitment and retention at the undergraduate and graduate level (Mena et al., 2022). The feeling of being "the only one" inherently makes students feel alone and they often call for more representation in their studies, professors, and classmates (Santa-Ramierz, 2022, Lee et al, 2023, Mena et al., 2022, Bahia & Park, 2022). A lack of diversity strips BIPOC students from finding community and discourages them from continuing to pursue higher education at their current institution (Santa-Ramierz, 2022, Lee et al, 2023). A study about undocumented/DACA students, says they beg their institution to hire more faculty of color and market towards BIPOC students because without it, they are unsure if staying in school is even worth it. They yearn for even a simple nod between themselves and another BIPOC student on campus because the



representation is so miniscule (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). Without proper diversity, BIPOC students feel alone and discouraged in college (Santa-Ramirez, 2022, Mena et al., 2022, Lee et al, 2023, Bahia and Park, 2023). Students report even turning to literature on lived experiences of BIPOC individuals to find community when there was none presented to them in person (Lee et al, 2023). A lack of diversity isolates students of color and has these detrimental impacts to them, making it important to address the ways that simply increasing diversity can impact BIPOC students so that they stop looking for community in books but within the people around them.

Some similar discussions surrounding isolation have been said about BIPOC in the workplace as many BIPOC employees also feel like they are “the only one”. It is difficult for BIPOC employees to make strides in their work environment when they lack the psychological safety of belonging, as a lack of diversity only works to further stifle them (Akpapuna et al, 2020, The impact of belonging and the cost of exclusion, 2022, Kafta, 2023). Without proper representation throughout employment levels, speaking up and taking risks becomes extremely difficult as ignorant White group forces BIPOC employees to homogenize their ideas (Akpapuna et al, 2020, The impact of belonging and the cost of exclusion, 2022, Ray, 2019, Kafta, 2023). Homogeneity is the antithesis of diversity and negatively impacts employees and the organization. HR leaders were surveyed and only 27% thought that their employees felt they could authentically express themselves at work (Where employees think companies DEIB efforts are failing, 2023). This is especially true for people of color in the workplace. BIPOC members tend to be “acutely aware” of a lack of diversity in their spaces and perform uncharacteristic

behaviors in order to fit in or make White peers comfortable with their “unknown” presence (Ravishankar, 2023).

The simplicity of increasing diversity is a gateway for BIPOC employees to build connection with other BIPOC members at their jobs (Akpapuna et al, 2020). It allows potential to build networks with other BIPOC employees to create a working knowledge of the sociocultural dynamics of White workspaces. If senior BIPOC employees build relationships with new BIPOC employees, they can become guides for new members and allow them to build off their wisdom from their experiences in White workspace. Although this implies that BIPOC senior employees are able to build a trusting relationship with their new BIPOC employees, if there was the opportunity of more people of color in the room from an increase in diversity, the potential benefit is through their relationship building (Ravishankar, 2023). This is similar to the support that BIPOC students look for through seeking more representation in their faculty. With BIPOC faculty guidance, BIPOC students are able to sustain motivation and continue their education at their institution (Santa-Ramirez, 2022, Mena et al., 2022, Lee et al, 2023, Bahia and Park, 2023). With the support of BIPOC supervisors, BIPOC employees can sustain and build connections to their workplace and feel less isolated. In addition to their supervisors, BIPOC employees feel isolated because of a lack of diversity within their co-workers (Mena et al., 2022, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Roche & Passmore, 2023, Wong and Jackson et al, 2023). Being able to debrief a racially insensitive experience at work with a co-worker allows for catharsis and healing for BIPOC individuals (Wong and Jackson et al, 2023). The mere presence of other BIPOC—through faculty or supervisors, peers or

coworkers, or media—would benefit BIPOC students and employees in predominately White spaces and help to reduce feelings of isolation that many of them face.

***When diversity in the workplace and classroom aren't enough to combat isolation, multiculturalism may be...but only if it is truly implemented.***

Isolation in the classroom and workspace is also perpetuated by a lack of multiculturalism (Mena et al., 2022, Akpapuna et al., 2020, Roche & Passmore, 2023). Multiculturalism goes beyond diversity in the way that it seeks to truly understand and values various cultures whereas diversity simply wants more faces in the room (Akpapuna et al, 2020). This mitigates feelings of isolation, builds a sense of belonging, creates safe spaces, and encourages different ideas (Mena et al., 2022, Akpapuna et al, 2020, Roche & Passmore, 2023). Unfortunately, many institutions have not mastered how to implement multiculturalism into the classroom or workplace. Instead, assimilation often occurs—stripping these communities of cultural understanding (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al, 2020). A byproduct of assimilation is microaggressive behaviors prompted by a lack of cultural understanding of the newfound identities in the workplace (Akpapuna et al, 2020, Roche & Passmore, 2022). Discrimination occurs within 90% of employees that don't feel respected by their peers, which is 40% of employees. 2 in 10 employees experience discrimination at work and only 30% say their workplace is a “fair” environment, the percentages likely changing when studying solely BIPOC employees (Where Employees Think Thier Company's DEIB efforts are failing). When there is a lack of multiculturalism, BIPOC employees are undervalued even when operating at the same performance level as their peers and targeted through microaggressive behavior from White employees. Despite antidiscrimination laws under

Title VII, there are implicit biases and social pressures to conform to the dominant race that impede this act's success. Many feel they must have a "working identity" to conceal their cultural presentation, knowledge, and history in order to enter and advance in the workforce. This persona of the working identity forces marginalized individuals to perform extra emotional labor when at work so that they can appear as professional and appeal to the dominant culture (Mena et al., 2022). Consequences of not adapting to Whiteness in the workplace are too inhibiting for BIPOC employees to rebel against, leaving BIPOC members to assimilate. They must act and speak like White people as opposed to honoring their own cultural background. Assimilation assumes that the practices of one culture are applicable and suitable for all despite multiculturalism demonstrating that this approach stifles BIPOC members when they are in the room (Nayani, 2021, Akpapuna et al, 2020). This lack of support and added emotional labor contributes to higher rates of job-related stress amongst people of color and further isolates them from their supervisors and colleagues (Akpapuna et al., 2020). Employees of color then experience a different workplace than the one of their White counterparts—a workplace where they are undervalued, ignored, and forced to either assimilate or put themselves on the line to preserve their identity and others alike (Mena et al., 2022, Akpapuna et al, 2020). Being blatantly ignored in the workplace is a shared experience of many BIPOC. From supervisors, these behaviors include not answering emails, refusing to share information, excluding their participation, and outright ignoring their presence because they are not a part of the preceding White culture (Akpapuna et al 2020). Whiteness in the workplace is represented through personal appearance, professional networks, perceived collegiality and demeanor. Because White people are able to navigate these categories with ease due to their social knowledge, BIPOC employees

often fail in comparison—making their attributes automatically seem lesser (Roche & Passmore, 2023). This forces BIPOC employees to turn to White counterparts for external interpersonal validation amongst supervisors. A method to be seen and not have their work undervalued in comparison to White co-workers is to ask others to send their supervisor notes of praise for the excellent work they have done to get full recognition rather than being swept aside in light of White counterparts (Ravishankar, 2023). Because of the social and fiscal risk of losing one's job, BIPOC employees cannot blatantly advocate for themselves and have to outsource help from people who are more respected in their work so that others can craft their image. In this way, BIPOC employees are forced to assimilate to norms they feel are oppressive to their racial identity (Roche & Passmore, 2023). They must adapt to climb the professional ladder or be doomed to low rank positions (Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al., 2020). Expectations of employees of color are far higher as they have to learn White social knowledge and adapt to fit in, while learning to perform their job (Mena et al., 2022).

This experience of isolation due to a lack of multiculturalism expands to the experiences of BIPOC students in the classroom as they navigate being in predominately White spaces with a proceeding culture of Whiteness (Lee et al., 2020, Mena et al., 2022, Bahia and Park, 2022, Tyson et al., 2003, Santa-Ramierz, 2022). This phenomenon was analyzed under the working identity lens as their experience are so similar. Students compromise their culture, language and history and assimilate to White classroom standards to appease their peers and professors in the same way that BIPOC employees do to obtain and advance in their job through relationships with their co-workers and supervisors (Mena et al., 2022). Again, the culture striping that this requires from

students further isolates them. Because there is a lack of multiculturalism, BIPOC students endured experiences of being ignored and undervalued by their peers and supervisors (Lee et al., 2020, Mena et al., 2022, Bahia and Park, 2022, Tyson et al., 2003, Santa-Ramierz, 2022). White students and professors fail to understand their BIPOC community members and often say microaggressions or even overtly racist comments (Santa-Ramierz, 2022). Students of color report choosing to be silent in most of their classes because White students won't even consider their point of view. This stems from a lack of multiculturalism as the classroom fails to promote appreciation for diverse perspectives (Mena et al., 2022, Bahia and Park, 2022). BIPOC student experiences worsen from passive misunderstandings to hostile encounters. White peers will stereotype women of color as aggressive and report them to their professors. The professors often believe these remarks about their women of color students (Bahia and Park, 2022). This hostility advances as many women of color report being undervalued in group work settings. White peers tend to take women of color less seriously and discredit their inputs are surprised when a BIPOC student outperforms them. BIPOC students will often feel like they are additional teachers for their White peers, especially when studying racialized topics (Bahia and Park, 2022, Mena et al., 2022). This same issue of underestimating BIPOC students' capabilities followed students of color more generally at the high school level. Students of color were undervalued in their group work dynamics and thought to be not as smart as their White peers even when performing at the same level (Tyson et al., 2003).

***Because no one values or understands them, BIPOC students are forced to speak up and advocate for themselves and their people.***

Despite being discredited by White peers in the classroom, it is important to many BIPOC students to take up space and represent the capabilities and histories of their ethnic community accurately (Bahia and Park, 2022, Mena et al., 2022, Santa-Ramirez 2022). BIPOC students report struggling to decide whether to conform to the dominant culture or to speak up against the microaggressions and misinformation that White peers and professors may do or say (Bahia & Park 2022, Santa-Ramirez 2022, Mena et al., 2022). When White peers and professors say something that needs to be corrected, BIPOC feel pressure to speak up because they know no one else will, making all the responsibility fall to them (Bahia & Park 2022, Mena et al., 2022). This is difficult for BIPOC students as they want to take up more space in the classroom but have been taught not to ever draw too much attention to themselves. Even so, they feel obligated to express their cultural identity and represent their community, especially in instances of injustice because of their own internal desires for resistance and advocacy but it doesn't come without a cost. The persistent expectation of experiencing microaggressions and other isolating behavior from peers and professors impacts BIPOC students even outside of the classroom. It is a feeling that students report follows them all day, even further isolating BIPOC from creating community on campus (Bahia and Park, 2022). Additionally, White students and professors pressure BIPOC peers to become 'the voice' for their racial identity or even all BIPOC communities in classroom discussions. This homogenizes people of color as well as spotlights and tokenizes the individual without their consent, which can be very isolating (Bahia and Park, 2022).

***Organizations should care about effectively implementing DEI initiatives into their environment because it impacts performance and effects the bottom-line***

If organizations fail to increase their DEI efforts and have multiculturalist corporate culture, they will suffer at both the organizational level and interpersonal. Discrimination will continue to fester as companies ignore DEIB issues, straining the relationship between BIPOC employees and White employees. Innovation will suffer as diversity of thought and multiculturalism are not properly celebrated—leaving BIPOC employees fearful to take risks and develop innovative ideas. And obviously, losing the edge of innovation and intellectual capital leads to a downfall in economic competitiveness and profitability (Kafta, 2023, The impact of belonging and the cost of exclusion, 2022, How employee development for all, to just executives, benefits organizations, 2023, Carr et al, 2019, 2019, Brecheisen, 2023, Nayani, 2021, Parker , 2023). When BIPOC employees dedicate their time to assimilating, it negatively impacts performance as they endure additional emotional labor coupled with the unknowledgeable White co-workers that may struggle to navigate interracial relationships at work. This also has detrimental impacts to employee motivation, which is an obvious indicator of performance (Carr et al, 2019, 2019, The impact of belonging, the costs of exclusion, 2022, How employee development for all, to just executives, benefits organizations, 2023, Gamlem & Mitchel, 2023). A study done on inclusion demonstrated that individuals who feel excluded do not care about the success of their team, even if it compromises their own success. This has been called self-sabotage and team-sabotage. Juxtaposing this, when an individual is included by even one member of their team, their motivation and effort their team's common goal was significantly increased. When workers feel a sense of belonging, rather than conceal their identity, companies can gain substantial bottom-line benefits affecting both performance and profits. A high sense of belonging was linked to a 56% increase in job performance, a 50% reduction in turnover



rates, and a 75% decrease in sick days taken. Employees are also 18 times more likely to earn a promotion, demonstrating the impact a sense of belonging has on employee motivation and performance. These benefits are estimated to save a 10,000-person company 52 million dollars annually (Carr et al, 2019). In addition to the bottom-line benefits, employee talent pool is affected by an organization's DEI efforts (Gamlem & Mitchell et al, 2023, Parker, 2023, Kafta, 2023, Carr et al, 2019, 2019, The impact of belonging, the costs of exclusion, 2022). Not only does DEI attract diverse applicants, but 80% of prospective workers of all positionalities say that DEI is an important factor when considering a new job and when comparing opportunities with similar salaries, 78% would rather a job with strong DEI initiatives than one without. The same survey showed that employees that trust their workplace to treat their workers fairly regardless of their positionality are 5.4 times more likely to stay at their organization (Gamlem & Mitchell et al). Overall, exclusion in the workplace causes lower organizational commitment, lower employee engagement, individual feelings of isolation, self-sabotage and team-sabotage, an apprehensive applicant pool, a plateau in innovation, and decreased profits as well as performance (Carr et al, 2019, 2019, The impact of belonging, the costs of exclusion, 2022, How employee development for all, not just executives, benefits organizations, 2023, Brecheisen, 2023, Parker, 2023, Nayani., 2022, Kafta, 2023, Akpapuna, 2020).

Social belonging within the workplace is a difficulty that 40% of employees face and yet organizations throughout America spend an aggregate amount of 8 billion on DEI trainings each year that fail their employees. 84% of employees say that organization investments in DEI are increasing and that about 73% of Chief Human Resources

Officers have DEIB specific training for their managers—37% for subordinate employees. Despite large investments into DEIB, only 31% of employees believe their organization is committed to improving the racial environment in the workplace. Less than that (25%) say that racial inequity is openly discussed in their workplace (Carr et al, 2019). Clearly organizations see the value in DEIB but are not effectively addressing the issue. This is seemingly due to “woke-washing.” Organizations demonstrate signs of advocacy and commitment to a social justice related cause, such as DEIB, without genuine intentions to address said issue. Companies do this to please their stakeholders without actually taking action (Kafta, 2023).

***Lack of implemented multiculturalism causes insincere allyship within interpersonal relationships and woke-washing from organizations to perpetuate isolation in BIPOC communities***

Despite anti-discrimination laws and initiatives attempting to create inclusive and equitable spaces in the workplace and classroom respectively, clearly BIPOC individuals are not experiencing diverse and multicultural settings. Some research alludes to, and few defines, a phenomenon where institutions attempt to include diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives but continue to cause and perpetuate harm against their marginalized members (Kafta, 2023). BIPOC individuals offer sharing tales of insincerity from their organizations and colleges that, in their view, simply pretend to be committed to DEI efforts. These views are seen from both the organizational level and interpersonal level from their peers, professors, supervisors, or co-workers. BIPOC employees report feeling like they are being used as pawns to market diversity within their organization, but that actual diversity and inclusion was not effectively implemented in the workplace

(Akpapuna et al., 2020). On the interpersonal level, BIPOC employees and students feel that White counterparts merely pretend to care so that they can preserve their moral both internally and externally (Kafta, 2023, Bahia and Park, 2022, Mena et al., 2022, Santa-Ramirez, 2022, Akpapuna et al 2020). In reality, White counterparts, particularly within the classroom, often disengage in hard conversations with BIPOC students because they do not want to say something wrong and not appear “woke”. Because of this, BIPOC students get the impression that the White people in their institution believe that they are already anti-racist, so they do not continue to improve themselves. This is harmful for BIPOC students as they find it difficult to critique people who already think they are doing the best that can be done (Bahia and Park, 2022). In the workplace, BIPOC employees recount stories where their co-workers think they are enough allies to speak freely and insensitively. One BIPOC employee was told by their White co-worker that they were being “too sensitive” when they were micro aggressed at work (Akpapuna et al., 2022). This same experience continues with supervisors despite the organizational standards against this, making the sentiments of multiculturalism and inclusivity seemingly fake (Akpapuna et al., 2022, Kafta, 2023). The inauthenticity that BIPOC experience from an organizational level as well as the people who are allegedly in their community causes the rhetoric that organizations use surrounding ADEI (Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) to not resemble BIPOC experiences and render the efforts invalid in the eyes of many BIPOC members (Mena et al., 2022, Kafta, 2023).

***Moving away from insincerity and into a genuine sense of belonging in the workplace and classroom.***

Organizations need to work on developing an authentic sense of belonging for their BIPOC members because racial discrimination will continue to undermine it (Mena et al., 2022, Lee et al., 2023, Nayani, 2021, Roche & Passmore, 2023, Akpapuna et al., 2022). Until this can be addressed, BIPOC employees and students seem to find a sense of belonging within themselves and other BIPOC members. This may be due to centrality, the idea that someone's racial identity may be a core part of their sense of self. Because of this, positive self-affirmations about one's culture improve their sense of belonging. In addition to this, discussing shared experiences amongst BIPOC individuals within their organizational community allows for catharsis and feelings of being understood outside of oneself (Lee et al., 2020). Being able to reconvene with another BIPOC after a something racially insensitive was said in the workplace or class makes BIPOC feel safer and more confident in navigating the experiences they are going through (Bahia and Park, 2022, Lee et al., 2020, Wong and Jackson, 2023). Because of this, it is no surprise affinity groups are a method that often helps BIPOC within college feel more at place (Nayani, 2021). To further support BIPOC individuals in their early career development, alumni affinity groups were suggested. They have the ability to offer continued connections, networks, and prosperity post-graduation. Fostering these relationships allows BIPOC post-graduates permission to freely express themselves and their experiences after college to their likeminded peers as well as develop a sense of belonging in an isolating world (Nayani, 2021). Students feel they are able to express themselves freely with faculty of color who they have similar ethnic background with as well. It offered them a unique experience and bond with someone they could look up to (Santa-Ramirez 2022). It is these relationship that make BIPOC individuals feel obligated to the BIPOC community.

***Generational sense of responsibility from BIPOC individuals inspiring BIPOC employees and students to better the workplace and classroom.***

Some BIPOC feel obligated to endure the negative racial environment that the workplace and college classrooms creates because of their sense of responsibility to honor generations past and pave way for generations in the future. Passing down knowledge, history, and life experience is integral to many BIPOC cultures (Lee et al., 2023). Learning how to navigate the White world and sharing that knowledge with younger generations is important to BIPOC communities. It's also important to set an example, to show that success is more than possible, but that it's been achieved by people who like them (Lee et al., 2023, Wong and Jackson 2023, Bahia and Park, 2022). In some ways, BIPOC students and employees find this to be a method of resistance. That this value is a vital step in instilling change (Wong & Jackson 2023, Bahia and Park, 2022). BIPOC are able to build off the wisdom of their elders and provide toolkits for their young in navigating a nuanced and overt world of Whiteness. Each generation makes the next generation that much closer to actually having a place to belong in higher education and the post graduate workforce (Wong and Jackson 2023, Lee et al., 2023).

***BIPOC students feel pressure to not fail in order to appeases their family and create a better future for themselves and future generations***

This cultural responsibly comes with added pressure for BIPOC students and employees as they attempt to break down oppressive barriers to achieve individual success as well (Wong and Jackson 2023, Lee et al., 2023). Feeling pressure to honor your family in your own success raises the stakes for many BIPOC students (Lee et al., 2023). This develops rhetoric around being afraid of success—or a lack of it. This was

particularly seen within high school students but could potentially have relevance to the college level or even postgraduate with further exploration. Students are afraid of being perceived as behind in class in comparison to their rich White peers. Their peers view themselves as better than low-income BIPOC classmates and treat them as such, further isolating BIPOC and diminishing their capabilities. Students also report feelings of anxiety surrounding job hunting and future career progression. They are afraid of being behind in high school, then in college, and untimely lowering their rank in their career achievements. Students seem to be more afraid of failure than they are of success (Tyson et al., 2003). More investigation needs to be done into the ways this shows up in collegiate and post-graduation experiences but has valuable insight for the ways BIPOC may have felt before entering college and the workforce.

***Being explicit about the racial climate aids in creating authentic allyship and safe spaces for BIPOC employees.***

Throughout this literature review, researchers mentioned, with limited elaboration, the impacts of clearly stating the racial climate in the workplace. Being explicit about the racial harm that can and does occur in the workplace and the impacts that it has on creating authentic allyship (Stokes, 2023). An issue cannot be addressed if everyone already thinks its adequacy solved so to continue progressing the effectiveness of ADEI method, supervisors have to make the “invisible” racial climate “visible” by clearly naming it. This is how peers and supervisors can begin to intervene when microaggressions occur. It also allows BIPOC to feel more comfortable speaking up in the workplace as they can more freely identify and address racism as it shows up (Wong and Jackson et al. 2023). This approach of explicitly requires ongoing conversations

within the organization in order to work effectively. With this approach, organizations can improve the authenticity of their DEI goals and mitigate the feeling of fake wokeness in the workplace that many BIPOC experience (Stokes, 2023). The research behind this approach is insufficient but intriguing and could be valuable in helping intuitions build a sense of belonging for BIPOC students as well as employees and address their feelings of isolation through being foundationally and therefore interpersonally better understood in the workplace.

***Improving diversity and multiculturalism within the classroom, as well as the workplace, to mitigate feelings of isolation, microaggressions, assimilation, inauthentic allyship, and woke-washing.***

Clearly diversity is an important factor to improve BIPOC student and employee experiences with equity and inclusion but must go far beyond that to truly see an impact. Diversity of cultures must be authentically celebrated and encouraged within these communities to address the permeating effects of assimilation and a lack of multiculturalism. Without it breeds microaggressions from White counterparts, a false reality about the racial climate, insincere allyship, and additional emotional labor for BIPOC individuals that continuously isolates them from others in the space. There are gaps in the literature about the ties between BIPOC student and employee experiences in the workplace and classroom and how they perceive one another but the similarities of BIPOC students and employee experiences calls for further analysis. Much of the literature mentioned not feeling truly supported by their organization and peers despite ADEI practices and beliefs, leading some BIPOC employees and students to allude to fake allyship from an organizational and interpersonal level but only one article in this

review attempts to identify this phenomenon. Because these attempts to authentically include people of color are not penetrating deep enough to truly make a positive impact on these communities, it is important to highlight the lived experiences of BIPOC members in these institutions and their insights on organizational issues in their respective settings further than what the literature in this review provided. This developed the following research question: In what ways does the efficacy of organizational DEI efforts impact BIPOC members' experiences and perception of the workplace?

## **Methods**

### *Context*

This study was conducted between October 2023 and February 2024 in Colorado Springs, Colorado during a sociopolitical era that demands the U.S. to address the concerns of people of color locally, nationally, and globally to radicalize American systems perpetuating inequity. In recent years, there has been an attempt by organizations to shift workplace and classroom culture to be more inclusive for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) members, but these efforts are hindered by counter steps and political polarization over the necessities of cultural change. Although some colleges are striving to address diversity and equity, the Supreme Court banned affirmative action—a method aimed at increasing diversity at the higher educational level. Addressing the sociopolitical state of the U.S. and its institutions is crucial in the context of this study as it informs the research's purpose and the environment in which participants find themselves. A critical theory framework was employed to investigate the



experiences and perceptions of the workplace and classroom among BIPOC employees and students, emphasizing overt and subvert tensions within their respective settings and perceptions. The focus is specifically on the relationships occurring between BIPOC members and their White counterparts. Given the traditionally White-dominated reality of both higher education and the workplace, critical theory is imperative for understanding these relationships and perceptions through the social inequality and power imbalances that exist within them.

### *Research Participants*

To investigate BIPOC employee and student experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 Colorado College (CC) students and 3 CC alumni in their postgraduate careers. Using a convenience sample, I reached out to my friends and people within their networks. Additionally, I contacted the Alumni Office and Butler Center at CC to identify research participants outside of my personal connections. The Butler Center, a multicultural center for CC students, facilitated contact with students of color through their listservs. Participant demographics are detailed in appendix A. Participants were selected with their positionality in mind, either as a student or employee identifying as BIPOC, currently enrolled at CC, or having graduated from CC and working in a field requiring a bachelor's degree.

### *Data Collection Process*

I conducted interviews to highlight the lived experiences of BIPOC members in historically White institutions to understand the needs of marginalized communities when creating DEI initiatives. My interview questions were inspired by my research question

and literature review, to further elaborate on previous research. I developed separate interview protocols for students and alumni that followed similar scripts. The student protocol had additional questions that delved into their perceptions of prospective workplaces. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in neutral locations chosen by participants, such as the on-campus library or other meeting rooms at CC. Participants also had the option to be interviewed in their own homes. Prior to interviews, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form outlining their participation in the study and informed of their agency to continue or halt the interview at any point without repercussions. All interviewees agreed to be recorded before the interview took place via verbal and written consent. Interviews were voice-recorded only to maintain participant confidentiality. Subsequently, interviews were transcribed.

### *Analytical Process*

This analysis process required me to be highly reflective. I analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis and grounded theory. I generated memo notes after each interview to inform future interviews conducted in this study. Following memo writing, I coded interviews based on major themes within the data. Throughout the interview process, I revisited the transcriptions periodically to connect themes identified in later interviews. After this process, I organized the interview quotes into these themes and synthesized them to create theories used in the findings. This approach, characterized by high reflexivity through constant revisitation and analysis, was used to honor the lived experiences of BIPOC students and employees, capturing students' perceptions of their future workplace in real time. It is imperative not to make presumptions about interview outcomes to formulate an authentic and accurate theory of the social environment.

Acknowledging inherent biases due to my positionality as an Afro-Latina student at CC and a prospective employee of color, I attempted to mitigate these biases through the interview protocol, formulating neutral questions, reflection, and mindfully analyzing the narratives of participants.

### Findings

Given my intent to understand what ways that efficacy of organizational DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) efforts impacts BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) members' experiences and perception of the workplace, I conducted 8 interviews, and my findings are summarized in the following table:

Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Organizational DEI initiatives are ineffective and do not penetrate organizational behavior enough to generate impact on individual BIPOC experiences and have limited impact on interpersonal interaction between BIPOC &amp; White employees</li> </ul>
<p>Theme:</p> <p>A lack of diversity in the workplace perpetuates and celebrates homogeneity of thought</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Organizational understanding of diversity doesn't align with BIPOC member's understanding of diversity leading BIPOC members to feel like organizational efforts for diversity are inadequate</li> <li>★ A lack of diversity in the workplace affects BIPOC student career decisions, impacting diversity in the workplace for years to come.</li> <li>★ A lack of diversity creates superficial conversations from the BIPOC member perspective, deterring them from organizations without a diversity of thought and shared understanding.</li> <li>★ Diversity is more than a handful of people of color, it requires organizations to be intentional and build BIPOC community and support.</li> <li>★ DEI initiatives are harmful for organizations because White-centered organizations cause DEI initiatives to center White perspectives</li> </ul>
<p>Theme:</p> <p>DEI efforts don't drive cultural change or understanding, pressuring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ DEI initiatives don't align with culture because there isn't understanding/valuing/celebration of BIPOC identity/culture making these efforts seem insincere.</li> <li>★ If diversity of thought and culture isn't celebrated or promoted, BIPOC members reconsider their sense of</li> </ul>

<p>BIPOC members to assimilate rather celebrate their diverse perspectives</p>	<p>belonging in the organization and may choose to quit the job because of it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ BIPOC member’s threshold for a lack of shared understanding from their peers lessens based on positionality and claims of systemic knowledge.</li> <li>★ A lack of multiculturalism perpetuates homogeneity and forces BIPOC members to assimilate, blocking organizational opportunities to build a shared understanding.</li> <li>★ Shared understanding can occur between White and BIPOC members, it is not contingent on race as every BIPOC experience is different.</li> </ul>
<p>Theme:</p> <p>Organizations that prioritize White perspectives often fail to adequately address the needs of BIPOC members in their DEI initiatives, rendering such efforts ineffective and insincere</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ BIPOC employees perceive the organization to be inauthentic because of chasm between strategy and impact of DEI initiatives</li> <li>★ Centering marginalized people allows for a more authentic representation of diversity and fosters organizational collaboration.</li> <li>★ DEI initiatives do not center BIPOC experiences and therefore cannot make meaningful organizational or interpersonal impact.</li> <li>★ DEI initiatives are forgettable to BIPOC members because they center White perspectives</li> <li>★ DEI initiatives are purposefully elusive to maintain control but perpetuate assimilation due to their inability to generate organizational change.</li> <li>★ BIPOC do not blame organization completely as they understand the organizational perspective of maintaining the “status quo” and maximizing profits</li> <li>★ White peers’ position BIPOC members to be the expert on race, placing responsibility for the pursuit of DEI in the workplace on BIPOC members.</li> <li>★ BIPOC members hold themselves responsible for making a more DEI minded workplace as they see themselves as representatives for the BIPOC community</li> <li>★ BIPOC members have to build an understanding of the organization and their White peers to be successful in an environment that hardly sees them. Organizations and White peers they fail to decenter their perspectives, making it difficult for organizations to build a shared understanding with the BIPOC members</li> <li>★ By placing responsibility on BIPOC members to perpetuate DEI efforts in the workplace, organizational efforts seem insincere.</li> </ul>

<p>Conclusion:</p> <p>Establishing a shared understanding between BIPOC members and the organization is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of DEI initiatives and catalyzing cultural change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ By not centering marginalized individuals when creating DEI initiatives, they are ineffective at generating impact and perpetuate White homogeny.</li> <li>★ Organizations can make workspaces more diverse and multiculturalist through shared understanding of the BIPOC employee experiences and perceptions of authenticity</li> <li>★ Shared understanding isn't limited to BIPOC communities; shared understanding applies to all members of the community</li> </ul>
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Students and alumni shared a range of thoughts on the workplace, from criticisms to praise but the importance of shared understanding was the most prevalent theme impacting their perception of the sincerity of DEI-minded institutions and their experiences in the workplace. Each interviewee is in a predominantly White institution, some with more diversity than others, that proclaims they value DEI in the workplace while allowing their initiatives to fall short. Students and alumni alike shared experiences and opinions that demonstrate an insincerity from organizations and their peers to create a more authentically diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. The narratives shared by students and alumni collectively illuminate the gap between organizational declarations of commitment to DEI and the lived reality experienced by BIPOC individuals, reinforcing the notion that genuine inclusivity goes beyond mere rhetoric and necessitates a deeper, shared understanding within the workplace. Without an authentic desire to pursue DEI focused environments, their organizational reputation is damaged. This disjuncture between organizational strategy and outcome poses a critical challenge for institutions aspiring to create truly diverse and inclusive environments. This emphasizes the need for sincerity and genuine efforts in implementing inclusive practices

that foster a shared understanding between the organization and their BIPOC members as well as BIPOC members and their White peers.

### ***Authentic Diversity is Built through Shared Understanding***

Diversity in the workplace is perceived by not only current employees, but prospective ones as well, even the prospective employees that may not attempt to join an organization for several more years. This is why it is important to understand the student perspective of authentic diversity as well as their more obvious stakeholders' perspective, such as current employees, investors, or consumers. For students, a lack of diversity in the workplace is a problem that begins far before recruitment. A senior majoring in economics, see appendix for additional participant information, identifies how entry into predominantly White fields is obstructed very early on in a student's academic career and is due to the reflexive nature of higher education and the workforce.

I think the workplace definitely reflects who's even in economics anyways, everyone who wants to go into finance are White people at this point in time, I don't really know any POC student here that is looking to be in finance and I feel like the department in general is harder for like POC students to want to [join] when it's dominated by White students...That's definitely strayed me away from wanting to be in the industry. *(Senior, economics)*

The degree of racial diversity within the workplace impacts not only primary stakeholders, such as current employees or consumers, but undergrad students who are considering their place in the workforce 4 years out. To students, a lack of racial diversity signals far more than the ethics of an organization, but the culture of an industry, their academic track, and network. BIPOC students are making academic decisions based off the demographics of spaces they aren't even in yet because of the workplace's ability to influence culture so pervasively. By allowing the workforce to remain homogenous,

organizational leaders perpetuate a lack of diversity in the workplace for years to come. Racial dynamics in the workplace is a concern for many BIPOC students as they think about their academic and professional careers.

That's something I think a lot about like just how much racism plays a role in like how I want to structure the rest of my life in terms of the workplace, which is like not something I think White students will ever have to think about in terms of where they want to work and what they want to do (*senior, economics major*)

Because BIPOC employees and students are the minority in their respective settings, the racial makeup of their desired industry is an influential factor in deciding their early career path because it impacts their future working experience. This is an example of the emotional labor BIPOC students endure as they spend their time making decisions for their future based on racial representation and dynamics. It is an experience that they identify as specific to the BIPOC community. Racial diversity, obviously, has positive impacts for White as well non-White employees, but a lack of diversity is detrimental for BIPOC members when it may be unnoticeable to the White eye. Despite a lack of diversity's overtness to BIPOC members, White peers do not have consider it when making career decisions or do not perceive diversity to the extend BIPOC members do. A lack of diversity, while overt to BIPOC members, is unseen or normalized by White members which misaligns organizational pursuit for diversity with the preception of diversity in the workplace. This is why a shared understanding between BIPOC members, their organization, and their White peers is so important. It helps address BIPOC members' needs and identifies the gap between BIPOC and organizational perceptions of diversity, as well as White peer's perspective of the BIPOC experience. A lack of shared understanding perpetuates a lack of racial diversity as organization do not understand the needs of their prospective BIPOC employees. Both of these attributes perpetuate a

homogeneity of thought and pushes BIPOC members further away from these White dominated spaces, willing-so, as the student later shares.

The conversation with White students is really superficial...I don't want to be in spaces and talking with people who, I feel like, don't share similar backgrounds to your life or don't have shared experiences. (*economics, senior*)

Because this student is in a homogenous environment where Whiteness is centered, they don't feel connected or enriched by their peers, deterring them from the organization as a whole. It also contributes to a sense of isolation as BIPOC students are unable to have meaningful conversations with their White peers in a White dominated environment. In these interactions they are unknowingly othering their BIPOC members. Homogenous environments, especially those sanctioned by the workplace or classroom, breed negative organizational perceptions and experiences for BIPOC students and employees alike. Students expressed repeatedly the differences between the learning that occurs within BIPOC groups versus White dominated ones. BIPOC students felt that the conversations with White students did not offer the same complexities as conversations with students who have a shared understanding, such as their BIPOC peers. A different student said they had to simplify their group project with another BIPOC student to make it easily understood by the dominant White group. These two students were not from the same race but still had a shared understanding due to their shared experience as women of color. They had robust conversation that was stifled by White students because, as the minority, BIPOC students believe that White students do not know anything about the experiences of people from different backgrounds. Despite the insignificance a lack of diversity in the workplace has for White students, it causes an unmeasured amount of stress and consideration from BIPOC students—prospective employees—and from current BIPOC employees as they endure the homogenous environment in real time with



unimpactful efforts to address their concerns. Furthermore, there are nuances to gaining racial diversity that organizations do not consider. An alumnus speaks to the complexities of the shared—or unshared—experiences of people of color after navigating racial aggressions alone.

'These are two different co workers who just like said shit to me that were just like, extremely racist. And there was a lot of microaggressions underneath it. I am one of a handful of people of color that I work with. So I just know that that's not something that my White coworkers are experiencing. It's just something that I am specifically going to experience. And also my co workers are not Black, like all of my co workers who are BIPOC, none of them are Black. I'm the only Black person... there are like two Latinx people and there's one Asian woman and then that's it. And that's all the people of color you're gonna get. But other than that everyone else was White. And if they're not ethnically White, they look White. And they'd be White on paper. (*sociology, alum*)

This alumnus experienced several macro and microaggressions at work that has negatively impacted them even months after an instance occurs. Racist behaviors and comments in the workplace do not impact White employees the way they impact BIPOC employees, creating a different environment for the two as BIPOC members are more aware of racial tension and diversity. This deepens when knowing variety of experiences and identities that the BIPOC community holds. The alum's experience showcases how people of color that do not have a shared understanding with each other's identity are not able to truly support each other in when experiencing a microaggression. In this situation, the microaggression was specific to Black people and as the only Black person at their job, no one else could be a support system or even recognized that a racist comment was said because both White people and other BIPOC colleagues did not have the shared knowledge that comes from being a part of the Black community. This is one way intersectionality isn't considered by organizations and undermines their diversity goals. Diversity within this work setting is already limited but its absence is exacerbated by the

lack of shared experiences amongst different ethnicities. The Black experience differs from the Latino experience, or the South Asian experience, or any other BIPOC community. The varying experience deepens as the cultural differences between diasporas are considered.

Although the experience of every person of color is different, the shared experience amongst people from the same race is “so special” and a Black alumna even explicitly claims she “would do anything for Black woman”. Students and alumni alike shared about the mutual understanding that most people of color have with each other but particularly their own race. Having BIPOC peers makes navigating racial insensitivity in White spaces less isolating due to the collective understanding of their shared experience but when the harm is more specific to a certain positionality, BIPOC members without that positionality cannot offer the same support, according to both Black alumni.

According to these alumni and a few students, diversity isn't one representative from each ethnic category but rather a community with shared understanding. They further speak on the complexities of diversity in the workplace as they explore the topic of gender nuances within racial categories. They explain how their workplace “[is] just majority Black men. They're not that many Black women like it's so sad and it's just it just feels like there's no community”. Despite there being a degree of diversity in this alumni's workplace, the representative and community-oriented goals of diversity fall short for this alum, making the organizations efforts for diversity seem ingenuine. They continue with anecdotes of differences between the way Black men are treated in their industry versus Black women, claiming they are “not special...[they] are one second away from getting fired and being treated like the rest of the Black people”. The experience between the Black men and

Black women in this workplace are notably different, to the extent that the Black community at their work is naturally divided, resulting in the women having a smaller community than their male counterparts. These are the layers that the Black alumni were touching on when explaining their qualms with having only non-Black BIPOC colleagues. For these Black alumni, standard workplace diversity barely scratches the surface of the iceberg. Diversity in the workplace is not just a handful of brown people in the room, it's a community of employees of color. Authentic diversity requires much more intentionality. Diversity is not just men of color, its women of color too. Current employees of color believe current diversity efforts must extend past the perception of diversity in order to truly serve BIPOC members.

Despite the call for a more authentically diverse working environment from BIPOC employees, for BIPOC students this perception of diversity in the workplace is enough to satisfy them when making judgments on their future workplace and academic track. They simply want more people of color in the room. Many of the students interviewed spoke about just being grateful for any diversity in their classrooms and future workspace. For them, working with other BIPOC students is automatically an opportunity for community because of their likelihood to have a shared understanding. Although some expressed sentiments of wanting more people of color in the racial categories that are underrepresented, overwhelmingly students were appreciative for their BIPOC classmates and simply wanted more without any parameters on what increased diversity entails. A senior shared exactly what lengths organizations should go through in order to create a genuine sense of diversity.

I definitely don't like how it's gotten to a point where [diversity] needs to be like a quota type thing, but maybe it's just like inevitably going to be that way. Like if

you want more BIPOC in your organization or in your workplace then like, yeah, you're gonna have to fill a quota. It sucks. But it's almost better because we're like, intentionally looking for other people, other different people to be a part of your environment. All that matters is if you have genuine intentions. (*economics, senior*)

Getting BIPOC applicants through the initial barrier is essential to increasing diversity.

BIPOC students are concerned with organizations increasing BIPOC representation in the workplace in general but didn't discuss the perspective of what true diversity encompasses. Although, the way this student discussed the intentionality behind quotas suggest similar sentiments around diversity as the alumni. The call for quotas arises from the recognition that the current standard of diversity is lackluster. The suggestion of quotas aims to guide organizations toward a more robust diversity approach, addressing blind spots in the hiring process. Importantly, in this context, quotas go beyond hiring individuals of color; they serve as a mechanism to prevent oversight of qualified BIPOC applicants. Emphasizing the significance of considering someone's positionality, quotas are viewed as a tool to enhance the organization by embracing diverse perspectives and experiences. It's not merely about meeting numerical diversity quotas but fostering an environment where shared understanding becomes an integral part of the organizational culture. True inclusivity necessitates an authentic commitment that permeates interactions and the decision-making processes. The alumni perspective differs as they want organizations to consider their company culture in regard to diversity in the workplace as address it specifically. The alumni didn't want more people of color in general but rather the specific positionalities that are lacking community support and representation. It's not just about increasing diversity as a whole but increasing representation of the identities within the organization while expanding to identities that are not yet represented rather than continuously hiring employees that already fit into the company culture. The alumni

perspective is more nuanced as students do not have first-hand knowledge of the workforce post-graduation, but their sentiments and goals are closely aligned. It is possible that this increased criticism of diversity in the workplace will come about for BIPOC students as they transition to BIPOC employees themselves, but the student perspective is clear—the workplace just needs more people of color.

### ***Authentic Multiculturalism Built Through Shared Understanding***

A student made it clear that if the field he pursues is predominantly White, then the job must uplift marginalized communities either through their work or social interactions, otherwise he would move on from that job.

I think, in the workplace I'll be in, it's gonna be predominantly White. And I don't know...like really, really it can fluctuate and, depending on the situation, it can be a good experience or an absolutely terrible experience...but if I don't feel supported in that way then I think I wouldn't be there in that position for long (Race, Ethnicity, and Migration (REMS), junior)

Even though students are entering a White workspace with an open mind, they are apprehensive and aware of the potential harm a community without diversity and cultural understanding breeds. This student was describing what he thinks his supervisors could be like once he graduates. He shares the importance of trust and support from his supervisors. The overarching tone of this statement showcases the students lack trust in the future workplace and their organizations. This student is already apprehensive of the workplace and is anticipating equal chances of a negative or positive experience with his supervisors because of his positionality. Trust and support from supervisors signal a shared understanding, builds a sense of community, and mutual respect. Without it, this student is willing to leave the organization because these interpersonal experiences reflect poorly on the organization as a whole. The issue described is one relevant because he is a

person of color and not a new employee so support from supervisors is vital to integrating and retaining BIPOC employees.

The alum perspective shares how a lack of cultural understanding from colleagues can be detrimental to the community building and retention of BIPOC employees in White workspaces.

And so, every time I have like, a racist moment with my coworkers, that's when I kind of hate them a little, because I'm just like, oh, this kind of sucks ass and I'm like...I just don't need this in my life (*sociology, alum*)

Similar to the student's perspective on supervisor relationships, the alumni express those poor interactions, a lack of shared understanding, and mutual respect lead them to contemplate the advantages of no longer being in that space. With the alumni, it is clear that they still have a good working and personal relationship with their colleagues but every interaction when they fail to be culturally aware of the identities in the room or outside, it further detaches the alumni from all of their co-workers, White and non-White. BIPOC employees seemingly require their colleagues to have a shared understanding with them or else they will be negatively judged and create tension that is unknown to them. It also damages the sincerity of both the organization and the interpersonal claims of commitment to DEIB. Depending on the positionality of coworker, the threshold for a lack of cultural understanding changes as describe by an alumni.

The reason why I was mentioning that three of my coworkers are sociology majors is because you learn a lot in sociology about race, and class, and how all those things impact identity. How literally every single thing in our world is connected to how society wants to oppress people of color. So when my coworker who was a sociology major I will admit like I hold people who have majors like that, like sociology, [feminist and gender studies], like things like that, that make you understand the way that your world works, and how your world oppresses others, in order to uplift others, I would assume that you would just have a little

more thought before you say a comment like that, especially as a White person...you should have known what that comment meant. (*sociology, alum*)

This alumni's coworkers had a background of sociology, a field that critically analyzes social inequalities at both the macro and micro level. Because of the deep understanding sociologists must have about marginalized groups, this alumni holds high expectations for them. The assumption is that there is a shared knowledge between these critical thinkers and their people of color they study. So when these individuals participate in racially insensitive behavior or chose to be ignorant and unintentional, it demonstrates to BIPOC members the inauthenticity of their educational background, morals, and commitment to addressing social inequality. Once there is an understanding of the marginalized identities within their community, there is no excuse for insensitive comments or behavior. BIPOC community members hardly ever get to be ignorant to injustice because they are constantly navigating racial dynamics in the workplace. White counterparts with knowledge of marginalized communities must endure the emotional labor of being intentional. If these knowledgeable counterparts don't, their actions are perceived as inauthentic representation of allyship and reflect the same poor image upon the organization as a whole. This is why it is so important for people of color to be in environments that not only have diversity but promote and celebrate diversity the way multiculturalism entails. The people around them need to see, hear, and support their BIPOC members and cannot do that if they are ignorant to the oppressive qualities of their environment and the empowering qualities of diverse positionalities.

Multiculturalist behaviors was an integral standard of the future workplace for BIPOC students. This is because of not only the harm a lack of cultural understanding but

because the benefits of multiculturalism for both White and non-White organization members.

We ended up creating this presentation about it, multiculturalism in the United States and what White hegemony really is... it was an amazing experience.... It was good working with them. We all had just very great dynamics while making the presentation. And like, while looking through the concepts together, like we were all kind of helping each other come to conclusions and shape our perceptions, look through each other's eyes. (*political science, sophomore*)

For multiple reasons, this anecdote is the perfect example of the power of shared understanding and multiculturalism. Clearly, multiculturalism was a standard in this classroom setting as it was the focus point of their learning. Considering the research shown in the literature review, it is no surprise that this group work was a positive experience, in part, because of the multiculturalist setting that the group work produced. Its clear that she and her groupmates cared about the project and its content. That sincerity was reflected not only in their group dynamic and the work they produced, but the students' perception of that classroom environment as a whole. These students listen to each other, understand each other, and we're able to relate to each other's shared experiences. Upon further inquiry, I found out that the groupmates were also women of color, demonstrating the shared understanding that people from different identities can have. When this group went to present their findings to their classmates, they purposefully diluted the content to satisfy the White gaze. Despite having a positive feeling towards the classroom because of the multiculturalist centered discussions within their group, the BIPOC students believed that their White peers do not have the shared understanding or empathy to receive information about marginalized experiences. This group chose to conceal part of their learning and identity, to appease the dominant culture, rather than celebrate the diversity of culture that their project required. Thier



presentation about marginalized people instead became centered around a dominant culture. And no longer provided them with a space of celebration and support that was previously made.

If organizations truly created a multiculturalist culture interpersonal interactions would be ones on sociocultural understanding and celebration. This multiculturalist culture would allow BIPOC members to comfortably express their identities and ideas. The degree that they could, isn't to the extent as BIPOC members could with other BIPOC members but it fosters the safe space that BIPOC groups tend to have. In the example before, the students confidently shared parts of their identify with their peers through their presentation despite concealing other parts that are not as easily digestible for White people because there was a degree of multiculturalism in their environment. In the following example, we see the differences in phycological safety for BIPOC students in spaces that celebrate diversity versus being in spaces that do not.

I think it is easier [to build community with BIPOC], just because you have something to discuss on like...Hey, we're different [from everyone else]. But I also think that some BIPOC students are just scared. Not scared, but just shy to open up. Yeah I have I know, someone who they don't use their real name, because they're not comfortable saying their real name. Because they don't want bad impressions from other students. (REMS, junior)

BIPOC members of White spaces often share stories of concealing their identify because their environment doesn't promote the beauty of differences. When this student's friend is in spaces with BIPOC students, they comfortability doesn't necessarily stem from the fact that they are all people of color but rather that they can celebrate their differences in culture and relate to ech other similarities. Its not just about being BIPOC its about having a shared understanding. Not every person of color is able to relate to each other but there is a shared understanding of being different from the dominate group that allows

them to celebrate the way in which they are different from each other without the judgment often felt in White spaces. When in a White space, homogeneity is the social structure and assimilation occurs. People attempt to fit in with the group instead of adding to it. When BIPOC don't celebrate their differences, that leaves them further isolated from both each other and the dominant group. Even relationships with BIPOC supervisors are only strong when there is not only a shared understanding but a celebration of cultural differences. BIPOC employees and students said they felt close to their professor or supervisor when they shared about themselves and authentically related to their student or employee, regardless of racial identity. The connection BIPOC feel to each goes deeper than the just being a person of color but rather their ability to relate and understand each other. When these qualities are exemplary in White counterparts, their relationship can build. Similarly, if these qualities are not present in a BIPOC member than the relationship cannot build. So when thinking about diversity, the purpose of it is much grander than representation, it is about building a community that understands and celebrates each other. The following anecdote from a alumni demonstrates how diversity becomes purposeless when BIPOC members do not have a shared understanding nor do they celebrate their differences.

I'm the only Black person there are like two Latinx people and there's one, there's one Asian woman and then that's it. And that's all that's all the people of color you're gonna get. Everyone else is White. And if they're not ethnically White, they look White. And they'd be White on paper. (*sociology, alum*)

When the goal for BIPOC members is to assimilate and fit in. To the White dominant culture. The purposes of diversity. Become nonexistent and irrelevant. It contributes to the disassociation between an organization's dedication to DEIB and the actual culture. Of the institution. Diversity and multiculturalism go hand and hand, without one or the

other organization's DEIB efforts are not only ineffective but read as insincere.

Organizations look more authentic to BIPOC students and alumni when they center building community for marginalized people. A student commended the implementation of affinity groups in corporations.

And I found out that they also started making affinity groups like within corporations—which I think is pretty cool...For me, it's not a problem for a corporation to establish an artificial structure for that space. And then that way they can, like give funding in that space. They can provide. (*political science, sophomore*)

Affinity groups are a clear demonstration of support for differences in identities. It promotes and celebrates diversity the way multiculturalism demands and increases psychological safety of BIPOC members. The identities and differences will be explicitly sanctioned by the workplace and allow BIPOC members to take risks in an environment that celebrates them, fostering belonging and collaboration across the entire organization. This is the narrative that affinity groups promote, especially to this student. She seemed impressed by organizations that would implement spaces in the workplace that promote diversity and multiculturalism. Her reaction to affinity groups in the workplace showcases that DEI efforts from organizations don't typically center BIPOC members or their experiences. Diversity isn't just a handful of employees of color. Multiculturalism isn't just accepting diverse identities, it's genuinely promoting them. The real goal of increasing diversity for BIPOC students and alumni is to increase community, and consequently, collaboration—with people of color as well as with White people. Many students said that they valued having safe spaces with BIPOC members but that they wish there were spaces that offered balance.

I wish that CC would do more to promote the events of minority groups to the general public. That's what I wish they would because, like they are promoting

those events, but they're promoting them to the demographic Therefore, you know what I'm saying. And I get like, a lot of the time that that's just to maintain the safe space of it for those communities. But there also should be events where like, people like in the general CC community can come together to learn about this group or to facilitate discussions (REMS, Junior)

A true sense of belonging does not come from fitting into a clique. BIPOC students want to belong to the larger community as well as a BIPOC community through a building a shared understanding. As the student alluded to, this shared understanding provides both White and non White community members to have open discussions and collaboration. These building blocks are exemplary in BIPOC spaces but can be replicated to make the larger community a safe space as well. Overall, BIPOC students want to work in spaces that promote shared understanding while valuing differences. It provides opportunities for strong collaboration and builds a sense of belonging by actively straying from homogeneity.

### ***Building Authenticity and Shared Understanding Through Centering Marginalized People***

Many organizations claim to care about BIPOC employees through DEI conversations and initiatives but fail to center the experiences of BIPOC members in their strategies, making them miss the mark. Organizations cannot sincerely show up for their BIPOC members while overlooking them and dismissing aspects of their character that informs their perspective at work. An alumni shared about the people their job tends to hire and illustrated what authentic diversity and dedication to multiculturalism looks like in the workplace.

We like to hire...people that have lived experiences with the issue areas that we are, you know, working on. So we have a lot of people that come from marginalized backgrounds, and like low-income backgrounds, or people who

have dealt with being unhoused, drug addiction, you know, all that stuff, like, those are employees. And like, those are the people doing really great work. And they're all very smart, talented, capable. (*political science, alum*)

It is clear that differences are celebrated in this workspace. Unlike the other experiences highlighted in this paper, differences in identity, even aspects that are widely socially unacceptable, are seen as valuable experiences that can inform their work, support their stakeholders, and provides an authenticity to their interpersonal relationships. This organization clearly looks for people who are adding to the culture rather than merely fitting into it. They are centering marginalized in third DEIB efforts in an effort to continue empowering their employees but their other diverse stakeholders as well—truly centering marginalized communities from both an internal and external prospective as well as fostering community building and collaboration. Collaboration centered to replicate the safe space of BIPOC spaces in spaces with White and non-White people

Organizations like to believe they are committed to DEI goals because they have a few programs, trainings, or initiatives but in reality, BIPOC students and alumni a like think these programs do little to actually contribute to DEI in the workplace.

but there's stupid like they're run by not the fucking people. It's just like it's either run by problematic leadership or people that they are already friends with...colleagues from different organizations. (*anthropology, alum*)

It is clear that there is a lack of shared understanding between the organization and its BIPOC members as many don't remember the trainings and think they don't center BIPOC needs. A BIPOC senior said that “[they] don't really know how [organizations] are supposed to help...all of [their] interactions are extremely interpersonal”, demonstrating how DEI initiatives are not helpful in actually generating change on the organizational or interpersonal level despite their claims. DEI efforts from organizations

are seen as surface level causing BIPOC members to view their organization as ingenuine. Organizations have an evasive approach when addressing DEI and create a culture where “they know how to say the right words”, according to a senior in economics. This culture is easily detected by BIPOC members especially as these values tend to be unaligned with their behavior. These training courses are meant to provide a just and equitable environment but fail to focus on the marginalized identities they aim to include and are too inconsistent to generate any impact or retention from them. Even BIPOC employees forget about it. When asked about the DEI initiatives in her workplace, an alum who majored in Anthropology said “anti racism training...I feel like we did. I think we did...yeah...they're sparse. They're in there.. We have them...” and was so clearly unsure. What is the point in having trainings to make BIPOC experiences in the workplace better if no one remembers them? If this is the case, organizations have DEI programs and anti-racism training simply to appeal to their stakeholder and not to drive actual change. That is particularly clear in this example as the programs are not crafted to address the needs of marginalized people but rather to satisfy their personal goals. Many organizations think the problem is that DEI isn't talked about enough in the workplace, which is true, but it is not the problem that marginalized people have proclaimed. BIPOC members want actual changes to the way they are treated and feel in the workplace. But organizations cannot properly address their BIPOC member's problem by centering their opinions rather than the people these actions are for. Organizations “only understand the basics, not really the microaggressions [or anything else], they're just like not willing to fight for people—they're willing to fight for the corporation” even at the risk of perpetuating harm against their BIPOC employees. Centering their opinions and censoring others is an attempt at control. They don't want to acknowledge too much.

Organizations want to carefully craft the conversation around racism and DEI in the workplace to preserve their image but it causes their efforts for improvement to seem inauthentic. One alumni even expressed that organizational use of “DEI ” is an attempt to simply woke wash their institution and create a barrier for change.

we do not have anti we do not have anti racism training. We have DEI training, which is really different...DEI is really ring around the fucking Rosie—we're all having a good jolly old time, like this is great. Like—oh my god slay for anti racism...that's fucked...they just want to be racist [rather than say] we do not support that, we do not condone that, like, we want to make sure that our workplace is a safe place and a growth space for BIPOC. That is what anti racism is. That is not what my job is. My job has the ring around the rosy approach—Let's all make sure that everyone is included that all opinions can be heard.  
*(sociology, alum)*

This alumni is suggesting that DEI as a whole is completely insincere and does more harm to the BIPOC community than good. DEI is being used as a way for corporations to pretend that they care about their marginalized stakeholders but in reality they only care about protecting their image and appearing culturally aware. They are censoring the very topic they claim to put on the forefront in an attempt to please all of their stakeholders and make no real opinion. With race being a historically sensitive and polarizing topic, organizations are very care with the way the discuss any matter relating to it signals to BIPOC employees that company's care more about their image than their driving force—their employees. Students believe that organizations do not career to make actual change because they only care about profits and they know that DEI is trendy . Instead of implementing actual change, they find ways that they can appear culturally aware without making statements or initiatives that are polarizing. Censorship is a prominent aspect of corporate culture and only evolves through societal demand.

For example, if you post about Black Lives Matter like in 2012...or anything thing like that...on your LinkedIn...that would not have been okay, but like after 2020, it's corporate okay. (*economics, alum*)

Organizations are not trailblazers, they are followers. Its this mentality that keeps them safe but only at the risk of their integrity. BIPOC employees know that organizations only care about them because of social pressure. Actual efforts for change are not welcomed. This breeds a culture of insincerity form both the organization and it employees. Organizations “have a ton of words and values that [they] uphold and it's just completely different once [they're] in the space”. BIPOC don't care to participate in superficial conversation that doesn't generate any impact. They know corporations have to maintain a facade in pursuit of maximizing their profits while staying culturally relevant. In this way, BIPOC students relieved some of the blame from the organization. Students blamed organizational insincerity on the societal norms of capitalist greed. They blamed the ineffectiveness of DEI trainings on the individual responsibility to be dedicated to racial equity and inclusion. A student explicitly detailed the perception she thinks corporations have about BIPOC and the reaction to that.

I guess there's like mechanisms that already exist to help corporations with DEI , and there's programs and like positions that they can create in their companies that could help. But ultimately, I don't know. I don't know if we can necessarily trust corporations to do the work of uplifting Black and brown people and indigenous people and women. Because at the end of the day, like we're laborers, we're employees, and they don't really owe us anything. Huh...But at the end of the day, like their job is going to be to maintain the status quo. But that's what all people in positions of authority do. That's kind of like what they have to do. Right. So yeah, it gets difficult (*political science, alum*)

Students recognize the lengths an organization would go for their DEI pursuit might be limited but don't trust corporations to make any actual change for their BIOC members. They would rather highlight the small good they do rather than center marginalized people. Opposingly, some students believe corporations can't truly address their issues



because "it's just complicated...[they] feel like a lot of [their] own personal experiences have just been so interpersonal that [they] don't really know how the [any institution] could help that". While an organization cant monitor social interactions, they cant begin to understand how to address these interpersonal problems for BIPOC employees, if they are only focused on the organizational issues and goals. They must center marginalized people to build a shared understand between them. Unfortunately, it is difficult for organizations to have a shared understanding with their BIPOC employees because their objectives are different. A student said that corporations "never do anything that's outside of the motivation for monetary gain" and according to both alumni and students, DEI initiatives no different. Organizations control the narrative when discussing racialized topics ensuring that initiatives remain superficial, causing them to have little to no impact on marginalized communities. Whether its to increase the bottom line or for the halo effect it may have on their stakeholders, alleviating racial issues in the workplace is only seen as tactical. Organizations are overtly insincere if the overall impression is that they cant be trusted because they will center themselves over the people being negatively impacted.

Despite the obvious disingenuity from organizations, BIPOC don't completely blame them and share somewhat similar sentiments as organizations. People of color are positioned to be activists as marginalized people but many of the BIPOC students and alumni interviewed seemed to be resided to the "status quo" that they acknowledge organizations have to maintain. BIPOC students especially had that mentality, several repeating phrases like "that's just the way it is". In some ways students detach their interpersonal experiences within the organization from their perception of the

organization. BIPOC members simultaneously expect their organization to do better while excusing the fact they are slow to change. This causes BIPOC to be their own advocates as organizational efforts fail to support them. BIPOC can't rely on organizations but instead of fully punishing them, they place blame on the BIPOC individual to radicalize the workplace and make an impact for marginalized communities.

Sadly. We represent an entire group. So it is like I can put pressure on myself for myself with like, just that's just because of that also because there's just no way I am one of the few Black people that they've ever interacted with. I would literally do anything for Black woman. I mean it like it's just so important. It's like it's so important. Like it's actually so important. We paved the way for like other Black women... we literally need community and we do not have community if like I just wish we had like the same community that people had like back in like their early 20s and stuff like that we're able to like build in Tulsa. (*economics, alum*)

Organizational efforts to increase diversity and be inclusive do not translate to their experience in the workplace. Because there people of color are still the minority, they feel the pressure to impress White counterparts as to maintain a good image to their oppressors. By forcing a small part of a community to represent the whole, it homogenized the BIPOC experience and demonstrates organizations lack of shared understanding with tier BIPOC employees. This is example of where BIPOC members don't feel like their organization cares about them as an individual and therefore cannot support them or their larger community. Several participants echoed this same sentiment of representing the entire BIPOC community and paving the way for future BIPOC laborers. BIPOC employees want the workplace to be diverse and equitable but if they cant rely on the organization to support those initiatives, they must do so themselves. Historically, this has always been the case but BIPOC are tired of being the ones to solve a problem that someone else created for them. They want organizations to be responsible for improving their work environment but know that their goals no not align and they

must be the ones to create the change they want to see. BIPOC students and alumni express that this responsibility is “really frustrating because...[they] can't change [anything] unless [they are] also in that in that space”. The burden of being both an advocate and a representative for their entire community weighs heavily on the shoulders of BIPOC members. BIPOC members may look to their organization to solve racial issues in the workplace but in reality they don't blame the organization, rather they take the responsibility themselves. While BIPOC members want a more inclusive workplace, it comes at the cost of their personal well-being because organizational support doesn't center on the true need of the BIPOC community.

Furthermore, White peers also pressure BIPOC members to do the work of DEI in the workplace, making the responsibility that of the BIPOC employee rather than the organization. BIPOC members are tired of excreting themselves more than their White counterparts when it comes to racialized topics.

If I kind of just want to be like a passive group member, and I just want to contribute the same amount as everyone else, I can kind of feel that there's a little bit of disappointment. Like, they're like, damn, you're not you're not that Black activist that we thought you were (*political science, sophomore*)

BIPOC members in White groups are often looked to as the expert on race and it is aimed that they will be the people to advocate for the safety for other people of color. Whether that is because they are too afraid to misspeak or because they are simply unaware, the cause of the additional emotional labor stems from the lack of shared understanding between BIPOC members and their White peers. This extends even to supervisors and professors as they expect their BIPOC members to be the experts when they aren't. This is a moment where White members may feel a low sense of psychological safety as they are apprehensive to advocate for their BIPOC counter parts. This only further

demonstrates how the two groups do not have a shared understanding as BIPOC students also believe they are not the racial experts and can't speak for every person of color and their experience.

I think that being a person of color. Sometimes I feel like I know everything about the POC experience. And I know like more than anything else in terms of like, how peers you feel about certain things like yadda yadda yadda, or like the class just learning a lot about just even Asian American experiences with Black people and how there's like a lot of trauma in that too. like I really don't know anything and just because like I am a POC person doesn't mean that I know everything about what it is to be POC and like the intersectionality between everyone's identities. (*economics, senior*)

This student shares how they differ from another race and lack a shared understanding in some ways. Despite this feeling, she is still positioned as the expert to White peers. By organizations and White individuals creating pressure on their BIPOC members to make direct impact on the inclusivity of BIPOC employees in the workplace, they only further homogenize people of color and their experience and fail to understand them. By BIPOC taking on this level of responsibility, they alleviate blame from the organization for their DEI initiatives failing. This responsibility has such a pervasive impact as BIPOC takes on the complete responsibility of pleasing their White counterparts for their own safety and wellbeing. Despite being hurt by the environment, they must stay for the sake of advancing their careers. There is not a shared understanding between BIPOC and their peers or BIPOC and the organization, but BIPOC have a clear understanding of them.

It's hard to explain it when you're, it's hard to explain it when you're not BIPOC. Like, if you're not in the environment already, it's really hard to articulate the ways that we have to protect ourselves in the workplace. But it is like cultural, and it is knowledge that many BIPOC in corporate have that they have passed on to others. But I have to be careful, I have to be careful because I can't trust my coworkers because they're White. And I have to code switch because I need to make sure that they're not going to be racist towards me. Even if I am trying to be myself, there's a couple of things I would never say at work or never do at work are never where I work to make sure that you know, they still they still they still

see me as someone that they want to hire elsewhere. Like these are future. These are future employers. These are future coworkers. These are future networks. Like I need to make sure that I'm putting my best foot forward and my best foot is Black with a little bit of White (*sociology, alum*)

BIPOC must have a clear understanding of their White peers because their success in a White workspace is dependent on it. In this way, BIPOC members take on the responsibility of DEI in the workplace as they strategically make themselves palatable so that they, and other people of color, can be seen in a pace they are historically overlooked. Strong DEI is a way to mitigate racism in the workplace but while that continues to not work, BIPOC assimilate to the dominant White culture so that they don't experience racism. Organizations and their DEI efforts are at a standstill. Organizations front for their stakeholders and use DEI to seem socially conscious while maintaining their corporate bureaucracy. White people front for their BIPOC peers in an attempt to not seem racist—while only amplifying the harm. Meanwhile, BIPOC members have to front in order to even be in the space and to ensure they are welcomed for years to come. And at the end of the day BIPOC members know that organizations have to maintain a certain image and so do they. Organizational initiatives for DEI, at this point in time, are extremely difficult to make actual impact on the experiences of BIPOC members as an alum claims.

They just a little bit harder than them just because when people look at me automatically, they're going to make assumptions that they want to make like I'm a Black woman like that comes with its own thing that comes with its own thing, like we're one of the least dated and least hired like so I'm like I already know that I'm gonna have to work really, really hard for that and my job. My job is doing the best they can with their ring around the rosy the approach. (*sociology, alum*)

Organizations have to control the language around racialized topics, making superficial impact that does little to help BIPOC members. If their programs were more direct about the issue and their approach to addressing it, it could spark movements for actual change.

Instead, the status quo remains and is perpetuated. If the status quo was instead acknowledged and implemented critiques, BIPOC wouldn't feel the large of a need to assimilate and gain the vast amount of social capital as they do now, being in White dominated spaces. Despite this “ring around the rosy” approach that never truly addresses the needs of BIPOC employees, BIPOC members know that they are confined to the support their organization is willing to give them. BIPOC understand their role as laborers in the eyes of the organization as the organization. They understand that the organization must maximize their profits. They understand that organizations must maintain a barrier between DEI in the workplace and actually addressing the needs of marginalized people, inhibiting them from ever understanding their employees and other stakeholders alike. People of color find ways to thrive in a homogenous environment because they must. The workplace has proven to be no different.

### **Conclusion**

Centering BIPOC members through developing a shared understanding emerged as a potential solution to developing sincerity and efficacy in organizational DEI initiatives. It serves as a bridge between organizational strategy and corporate culture, fostering a more impactful effect on BIPOC individuals and a sincere image of the organization. Without shared understanding tension breeds between organizations and their BIPOC members. Furthermore, interpersonal tensions amongst BIPOC employees, tier supervisors, and their peers' festers as well.

The work that organizations do towards DEI in the workplace affects the perception of BIPOC students—prospective employees—years before they enter the workforce. In order to make an impact on the experiences of BIPOC employees, their

perception of their DEI efforts must align with their needs. This can only be done through a shared understanding. For BIPOC alumni, the degree and authenticity of diversity is monumentally important in their experiences and perception of the workplace, emphasizing the need for representation of specific positionalities and community support. This differs from the student perspective of diversity, simply seeking intentional organizational decisions to create an overall influx of BIPOC membership in the workplace. The idea of quotas was mentioned by a student to ensure that that organizations are intentionally seeking out people of color. Others deepened this idea with an intersectionality lens. Intersectionality is overlooked in organizational diversity efforts, further exacerbating the perceived insincerity of organizations and the challenges BIPOC employees face in the workplace. They believed an authentic representation of diversity would mean to curate communities of color with a shared understanding. Students prioritize increased diversity in the workplace, while alumni emphasize the need for representation of specific positionalities and community support. These perspectives further illuminated the need for shared understanding within an organization of BIPOC perceptions of diversity. Shared understanding is not merely an inherent concept between people of color or even people of color from the same race. Shared understanding comes from a genuine effort to acknowledge and appreciate the varying perspectives, experiences, and needs of others. BIPOC students and alumni. The criticism of workplace diversity is expected to grow as BIPOC students transition to BIPOC employees, as they hold the common desire for an increase diversity but have different perspectives of what an authentic pursuit of it means.

Farther than diversity, BIPOC members seek multiculturalist environments that promote and celebrate marginalized communities, requiring a shared understanding between the organization and their BIPOC employees, as well as BIPOC members and their peers, non-White and White. If the workplace undervalues their BIPOC members' diverse perspective or outwardly micro-aggressed their employees of color, then both current employees and students proclaimed their sentiments of distaste, as they consider leaving the organization. BIPOC students are entering a White workspace with an open mind, but they are apprehensive and aware of the potential harm a community without diversity and cultural understanding breeds. Alumni detail a threshold for a lack of shared understanding that is dependent on positionality. Those with a background studying social structures and imbalances are expected to have a shared understanding with BIPOC members—to an extent—but they are perceived as insincere when they perpetrate harm on BIPOC members.

Despite the effort organizations and BIPOC employees pour into creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces, people of color can't be authentic in the workplace as they assimilate and impress their White counterparts to pave the way for other people of color in the future. Meanwhile, organizations claim to be DEI focused but have little impact on these issues. They tend to woke-wash themselves and take pride in goals they hardly achieved. Within recent years for organizations to be more diverse, equitable and inclusive, it is clear that organizations need a shared understanding with their BIPOC members but in the perspective of people of color, they lack it. It is difficult to create a shared understanding between two groups who are fronting for each other. From my analysis it's clear that BIPOC wants a shared understanding between both themselves and



other BIPOC members, as well as themselves and White members. Because of the cultural shift. There is a cognitive dissonance that the organization, the White members, and the non-White members in the organization experience. The organization believes that they are committed to DEI in the workplace because they have the initiatives and trainings, but their stakeholders continue to say they are missing the mark. Alumni suggests that DEI as a whole is completely insincere and does more harm to the BIPOC community than good. DEI is being used as a way for corporations to pretend that they care about their marginalized stakeholders but in reality, they only care about protecting their image and appearing culturally aware. Organizations implement a “ring around the rosy” approach to DEI to ensure they control the image and never directly center or address the root of the problem and the target for the solution. White members in the organization believe that they are socially conscious but continue to inflict harm upon their Black and brown counterparts as they demand them to be the voice of people of color and the gatekeeper other knowledge. They place the responsibility on their BIPOC members to help them gain a shared understanding while BIPOC members take on the full burden of understanding their White peers and White organization. The most fascinating part of the battle is the conflict that BIPOC have internally as they navigate being a part of a world, they simultaneously critique but excuse. They understand they “ring around the rosy” approach organizations must maintain the status quo and protect their profits so they take on the responsibility for workplace change addressing DEI. They see themselves creating paths for future BIPOC employees by understanding the way the dominant culture in the workplace operates rather than expressing themselves. They learn how to fit into the culture—even during DEI initiatives—rather than the opposing culture seeking to build a shared understanding with them as well. Even people

who are supposed to have a shared understanding with their BIPOC peers inflict harm on them by centering their own voice, leading BIPOC members to feel like their beliefs are insincere. Because of the complexities of navigating racial dynamics in the workplace, when trying to address issues around DEI, it is vital to be focused on marginalized identities and their experience rather than the normal way of doing things, the corporate way of doing thing or the safe way.

In summary, the recurrent theme of shared understanding encapsulates the pivotal role it plays in bridging the gap between organizational aspirations for diversity and the real, nuanced experiences of BIPOC members within predominantly White institutions. It underscores the imperative for organizations to move beyond superficial and controlled gestures to prioritize genuine inclusivity through centering marginalized experiences, when addressing their concerns, and cultivate environments where shared understanding is both valued and celebrated.

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Appendix A

Participant	Status	Graduation Year	Major	Race or Ethnicity	Sex F/M	Institutional background
1	Alumni	2023	Sociology	Black	F	Predominately White workplace, small, conservative
2	Alumni	2023	Economics	Black	F	Predominately White workplace, large corporation, male dominated
3	Student	2024	Philosophy	Latina	F	Predominately White College, small, liberal philosophies
4	Student	2024	Economics	Chinese	F	Predominately White College, small, liberal philosophies
5	Alumni	2023	Anthropology	Pilipino, Jewish	F	Predominately White workplace, small, community of BIPOC employees, seeks to employee people with lived experiences with social injustice
6	Student	2022	Political Science	Black	F	Predominately White College, small, liberal philosophies

7	Student	2022	Race, Ethnicity, and Migration	Black, Latino	M	Predominately White College, small, liberal philosophies
8	Student	2022	Computer Science	Latino	M	Predominately White College, small, liberal philosophies