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Black MPH Internship Experiences in Racialized Organizations: Critical Counter-Narratives for a More Racially Just Public Health Workforce

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BLACK MPH INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES IN RACIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS: CRITICAL COUNTER-NARRATIVES FOR A MORE RACIALLY JUST PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every person who identifies as Black, African-American, or any other racial identity that defies whiteness and experiences life here in the United States. To all of my family and friends. To every student I've ever worked with or taught. To friends of years past and friends to come. Your lives are precious and all of you are so loved.

To all of the racial justice warriors who came before me and to all who will come after; no matter what happens today, we must never lose hope. "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." (Shakur, 1987, p. 53).

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ABSTRACT

Internships are a vital component of Master of Public Health (MPH) programs. Despite 14% of MPH students identifying as Black, limited research has examined their internship experiences. This is particularly troubling given the racial demographics of the public health workforce and the racialized nature of most public health organizations. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and critical counter-narrative as a methodology, this study sought to answer the following research questions: *1) How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?* and *2) What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* Using homogenous purposive sampling, 14 Black MPH students who completed internships from 2020 to 2023 at an accredited school of public health in the southeast were recruited to participate in this study. Data was collected using two semi-structured interviews with each participant. Data was analyzed using a CRT lens through analytical noting and engagement in the literature which resulted in 14 unique participant narratives. The findings of this study suggest that Black MPH interns challenge the majoritarian narratives of a racially neutral public health workforce and Black racial inferiority. Implications from the findings include the notion that Black MPH student voices must centered throughout the internship process, that the public health workforce, particularly at leadership, must become more racially diverse, and that antiracist public health professionals are needed to support, mentor, and empower Black MPH interns. This study is one of the only studies in the public health field to explore the

internship experiences of Black MPH interns and extends previous scholarship that has used counter-narrative to challenge racial myths by using an asset-based lens to examine the lived experiences of Black individuals. Ultimately, a challenge is put forth to act on the findings of this research to create a more racially just internship landscape and public health workforce.

PREFACE

In 2023, my wife and I were celebrating our honeymoon in Savannah, Georgia. It was the peak of summer, and we went to Tybee Beach to escape the blistering heat. As we relaxed in the sun, we saw a young Black boy flying a kite who was simply exploding with joy and laughter. I will never forget his sheer delight and innocence as he flew his kite. In that moment, he was free to experience life fully without the restrictions of racism. I want to live in a world where all People of Color are free to experience life with the same joy and happiness that that young boy had flying his kite. It is my hope that the stories shared here play a small part in moving closer to that world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAC&U ..... Association of American Colleges and Universities

ASPPH ..... Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

ASTHO ..... Association of State and Territorial Health

CEPH ..... Council on Education for Public Health

CLS ..... Critical Legal Studies

CRP ..... Critical Race Praxis

CRT ..... Critical Race Theory

DEI ..... Diversity Equity and Inclusion

ENHS ..... Environmental Health Sciences

EPID ..... Epidemiology

HBCU ..... Historically Black Colleges and Universities

HEIs ..... Higher Education Institutions

HPEB ..... Health Promotion Education and Behavior

HSPM ..... Health Services and Policy Management

NACE ..... National Association for Colleges and Employers

MPH ..... Master of Public Health

PAPH ..... Physical Activity and Public Health

PWI ..... Primarily white institution

YPAR ..... Youth Participatory Action Research

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Internships have become an integral aspect of the college student experience, leading some to consider this epoch of higher education "the era of the internship" (Hora et al., 2020, p. 48). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recognizes internships as a high-impact educational practice that all, but especially traditionally underserved students can benefit from (Kuh, 2008), while the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) cites that "scholarship is consistent in reporting positive effects of internship experiences across disciplines" (Crain, 2016, p. 11). Students who participate in internships are more likely to find work related to their academic discipline (Callanan & Benzing, 2004), develop greater social and cultural capital (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021), and have increased career self-efficacy (Aldas et al., 2010) among other benefits. As such, many academic programs require that students complete some variation of an internship (e.g., practicum, field placement, etc.) to complete their academic degrees, and the field of public health is no exception (Hernandez et al., 2014).

The Master of Public Health (MPH) degree is the premiere credential for public health practitioners. The accrediting body of MPH programs, the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), dictates MPH students demonstrate their competency attainment by completing an applied practice experience which may take the form of an internship or practicum (Council on Education for Public Health [CEPH], 2021). Participating in these experiences allows MPH students to apply learned theoretical

public health skills in real-world settings, expand social networks, gain career-relevant experience, and increase confidence in their abilities as public health professionals (Hernandez et al., 2014; Villanueva et al., 2011). As the importance of internships continues to grow, there are calls for more research examining students' internship experiences (Hora et al., 2020). Understanding interns' perspectives can better inform the policies and practices that higher education institutions (HEIs) use when facilitating internship placements, ultimately ensuring these experiences are meaningful for students (Hora et al., 2020).

While some research has explored MPH students' perspectives on public health internships, most of these studies have not used in-depth qualitative methods to explore interns' experiences. For example, Villanueva et al. (2011) surveyed three cohorts of MPH graduate students to gain their perspectives on service learning-based practicum experiences. Cole et al. (2012), on the other hand, used mixed methods to investigate MPH students' perceptions of their practicum experiences. In addition to these strategies, some scholars have used scholarship to highlight MPH student internship experiences. For instance, Hernandez et al. (2014) provided scholarly reflections of four graduate school alumni from minority-serving institutions about the role that public health internships played in their careers. In a more recent study, Pham et al. (2023) analyzed ten years' worth of MPH students' reflection papers to identify common themes across internship experiences.

When surveying the literature for research that examines MPH student internship experiences, there is a sense that something is missing from this discussion: a meaningful

forefronting of the internship experiences of Black[1] students. Villanueva et al. (2011), Cole et al. (2012), and Pham et al. (2023) provide no demographic data about the students in their respective studies or investigate the role that race might play in these experiences. To their credit, Hernandez et al. (2014) highlight the voices of "students underrepresented in the public health profession" (p. 96) by sharing how internships have positively shaped their careers. However, as may be surmised by the use of race-evasive language (Annamma et al., 2017; Chang-Bacon, 2022), no meaningful discussion about the intersection of racial identity and internship experiences takes place in this scholarly commentary. This is not a problem unique to Hernandez et al.'s study. In fact, much of the research examining MPH students' experiences either minimizes or ignores entirely the importance of race which Love (2004) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) found to be a regular practice in educational research. This problem is only exacerbated by the over-reliance on "objective" research methodologies (e.g., surveys) to examine students' internship experiences without taking race into account in the analysis. The implicit assumption of this approach is that these methods already capture Black students' unique experiences. For example, both Johansson et al. (2014) and Carvalho et al. (2017) investigated ways to enhance an internship program by administering surveys. Each reported race in their demographics (although only Carvalho et al. (2017) had any self-identified Black participants) but like the previously mentioned studies exploring MPH student experiences, race was not a central feature of the analysis or discussion.

[1] Throughout this work, I choose to capitalize terms referring to People of Color (e.g., Black, Communities of Color, Students of Color, etc.) as an emancipatory stylistic choice and choose to not capitalize the term white to symbolically remove the privilege of whiteness. For a full discussion on this topic, see Gotanda (1991).

While Hernandez et al. (2014) take a step in the right direction by allowing "underrepresented" students to share their experiences, a more explicit and robust analysis of the saliency race plays during internships would ultimately highlight the complex racial realities that Black individuals face on an everyday basis (Delgado, 1988). The limited existing research examining Black MPH students' internship experiences is concerning given that approximately 14% of MPH students identify as Black at the national level (Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health [ASPPH], 2022), yet to this point, their experiences have largely been ignored. The governmental public health workforce is mostly white, particularly at leadership levels (de Beaumont Foundation & Association of State and Territorial Health Officials [ASTHO], n.d.) which means that many Black MPH students will complete internships with racialized organizations (Ray, 2019). Understanding Black MPH students' experiences in these settings should provide unique insights into better serving and supporting future Black MPH interns.

PURPOSE & RATIONALE OF STUDY

If public health practitioners are going to answer the call to better understand students' internship experiences in order to develop socially just internship policies and practices (Hora et al., 2020), the perspectives of Black MPH students must be considered because as Trucios-Haynes (2000) artfully reminds us, race does in fact, matter. While few studies in public health have explicitly sought out Black MPH students' internship experiences, other disciplines such as medicine (Brooks et al., 2023; Liebschultz et al., 2006), engineering (Dietz, 2022), and some non-discipline-specific research exist (Bridges, 2020; Marshall, 2016). What is clear from these studies is that researchers tend to focus on the negative internship experiences of Black students such as racial

microaggressions and do not focus on the strengths that Black students bring to their internships. While there is certainly some value in research that only captures the ways that Black students experience racism, two problems emerge from this approach. First, merely documenting racism experienced by interns limits the actionable items to improve these situations. Second, by only highlighting adverse internship experiences, researchers risk employing a deficit perspective that paints Black public health students as inherently inferior, instead of focusing on the strengths of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005).

From a critical race theory (CRT) perspective, deficit lens research only adds fuel to the fire of majoritarian narratives which, as Harper (2009) explained, "are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Blacks are hopeless and helpless) – such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways" (p. 701). Conversely, counter-narratives are stories from outsiders whose voices are traditionally "suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412) that challenge master narratives by "exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23). Counter-narratives, and CRT more broadly, take an asset-based approach to examine the lived experiences of People of Color that resist deficit ideology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As James-Gallaway and Baber (2021) and Miller et al. (2020) have noted, counter-narrative should both forefront People of Color's voices *and* generate the next steps to improve policies and practices. With these insights in mind, this study set out to answer the following research questions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) *How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?*

2) *What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?*

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

There is a paucity of literature sharing Black MPH students' internship experiences. However, some studies have examined Black students' internship experiences in other academic disciplines. In the medical field, Liebschultz et al. (2006) sought to explore how racial discrimination shaped the educational experiences of Black physicians, particularly during their residencies (the medical field's equivalent of an internship). The authors found that Black residents experienced racial discrimination, were held to higher expectations than white residents, reported high levels of social isolation, and faced harsher consequences by supervisors than white residents (Liebschultz et al., 2006). Building on the work of Liebschultz et al. (2006), Brooks et al. (2023) investigated Black orthopedic surgeons' experiences with racial microaggressions during their residencies. A disheartening 96% of Black residents reported experiencing racial microaggressions during their training. Additionally, Black women more frequently reported receiving "devaluing or exclusionary feedback statements" (Brooks et al., p. 676) during their residency experiences.

In addition to medical internship experiences, some literature has examined the internship experiences of Black engineering students. Dietz (2022) explored the impact that engineering internship experiences have on the identity of Black engineering students. Similar to the medical field, most of the engineering workforce is white (Dietz, 2022). As such, white masculine norms, such as "professionalism" permeate the workplace which creates racialized and gendered internship experiences, that ultimately lead Black engineering interns to experience inauthenticity in these spaces (Dietz, 2022).

Importantly, while Dietz (2022) outlined that Black engineering interns experience racial microaggressions, social isolation, and other negative racialized realities, Dietz also highlighted that participants can experience authenticity when Black interns hold strong racial identities. Moreover, Black interns experienced authenticity when there were opportunities to connect with others in a workplace that focused on diversity initiatives (Dietz, 2022).

Some non-discipline-specific research exists examining Black students' internship experiences as well. Marshall (2016) found that while some Black students experienced racial microaggressions during their internships, others did not. Relatedly, Bridges (2020) examined first-generation Black student internship experiences and found that Black students' intern experiences are shaped by racism. Ultimately, Bridges reported that racism forced Black students to assimilate into white norms in order to be more accepted in the workplace (Bridges, 2020).

Regardless of academic discipline, existing literature exploring Black students' internship experiences tends to focus on the negative racialized realities of Black students instead of focusing on the strengths Black students bring to these experiences. Sadly, deficit-informed research has been and will likely remain a problem until the lens on race is shifted more broadly (Ladson-Billings, 2012). CRT scholars have focused on shifting the lens of race research from a deficit-informed lens to an asset-based view. Through her work on community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) captured this concept adeptly in her critique of Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital. As Yosso (2005) explained "while Bourdieu's work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities

are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor" (p. 76). Utilizing CRT, Yosso outlined an asset-based approach to capital that focuses on the strengths of Communities of Color, which includes aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005).

In this same antideficit spirit, Harper (2009) provided counter-narratives that challenged master narratives of Black male college students at PWI as intrinsically "less than" other students. What makes Harper's analysis so beautiful and compelling is that while he captured the racism Black students experienced in these spaces, he rejected portraying Black students "as troubled, oppressed, and hopeless" (p. 709) and showcased the successes and achievements of Black students. Ultimately, using CRT as a guiding framework allows researchers to leverage asset-based approaches to examining the lived experiences of Communities of Color.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Over the years, CRT has been applied to myriad contexts to explain racial inequity and provides ways to combat racial injustices (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In short, CRT offers a framework for understanding and transforming racial inequality in education (Solóranzo & Yosso, 2002). While originally introduced to the field of education by Ladson-Billings and Tate in 1995, since that point, Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) have highlighted the successes, unfulfilled promises, and developments of CRT in the field of education. While there are no universally agreed-upon tenets of CRT in education, several concepts tend to underline CRT-informed research including the understanding that

- Racism is normal, pervasive, and a defining feature of U.S. society (Bell, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano 1997).

- Race is socially constructed and thus, CRT takes an anti-essentialist viewpoint (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; López, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2022).
- Dominant legal claims and societal narratives that claim objective, neutral, and color-blind interpretations are met with skepticism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano 1997).
- Historical or contextual analysis is necessary to understand racial inequality (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013).
- The experiential knowledge of People of Color is "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding" (Solórzano 1997, p. 7) actions that can be used to eliminate racism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997).
- CRT is interdisciplinary in that it borrows from many disciplines to advance the cause of racial justice (Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997).
- Multiracial coalitions are needed to advance the cause of racial justice (Cho & Westley, 1993; Crenshaw et al., 1995)
- CRT works to eliminate all racial subordination (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano, 1997).

In addition to these theoretical underpinnings, Dixson and Rousseau (2006) highlighted other themes in CRT scholarship which include concepts such as whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), a critique of liberalism (Delgado,

1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993) interest convergence (Bell, 2004), and the use of counter-narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Matsuda et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-narratives, often referred to as counter-storytelling, tell "the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) by supplanting deficit perspectives about Black Communities that are so pervasive in the United States. Although at times mis-utilized, counter-narrative holds "transformational potential" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 272) to enhance the lives of Communities of Color (Miller et al., 2020).

CRT is an appropriate theoretical framework for this work based on the research aims of the study and the author's positionality. The purpose of this study is to explore the racialized internship experiences of Black MPH students through an asset-based lens in order to identify implications related to the participant narratives. Using a CRT lens allows the researcher to approach the data with several foundational beliefs including the belief that racism shapes all aspects of society in the United States, that race is socially constructed, and that the experiences of Black individuals are a valid way to understand and ultimately eliminate racial subordination. These beliefs help the author cut through the façade of race neutrality and other "objective" framings that plague educational research that examines race. Additionally, the author of this is uniquely situated to take up the activist component of the findings of this study. This is important because the entire purpose of CRT is to take steps towards racial justice.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Counter-narratives have been used by CRT scholars as both a methodology and method in varying contexts. Unfortunately, scholars are often not explicit about the way

counter-narrative is used in their research. For instance, many authors frame their studies as counter-narrative by simply sharing the experiences of People of Color, while others use counter-narrative as a methodology that guides the research decisions. Moreover, many "counter-narratives" fail to accentuate the social activist component that made counter-narrative so powerful in the first place (Miller et al., 2020). To un-muddy the distinction between counter-narrative as a methodology and method, and underscore the need for counter-narratives to generate social action that brings educational equity, Miller et al. (2020) developed critical counter-narrative as a transformative methodology to improve educational equity. Critical counter-narrative is outlined by three ideological components including the need for CRT to serve as the model of inquiry, critical reflection as a unifying model of praxis for research, and a goal to bring forth educational equity for Communities of Color. When counter-narrative uses CRT as the model of inquiry, the researcher approaches the research process framed by the assumptions and tenets of CRT. For critical reflection to be a unifying model of praxis, researchers must repeatedly examine their assumptions and understandings of the world *and* take actions that can fuel future understandings and generate further actions. Finally, the goal of educational equity for Communities of Color via eliminating racial subordination must be the ultimate focus of the research in order to one day eliminate all forms of subordination (Miller et al., 2020).

While Miller et al. (2020) outline a critical counter-narrative as a methodology, they are not prescriptive in the methods that should be used to conduct counter-narratives. However, they do showcase the versatility of previous counter-narrative research methods which, if paired with critical counter-narrative as a methodology, creates a

unique opportunity for "an emancipatory project that forefronts community relationships and interests" (McKinley et al., 2018, p. 51) and offers "stories of possibility" (p. 51) for a more socially just world (McKinley et al., 2018). Thus, guided by critical counter-narrative as a methodology, this study generated critical counter-narratives of each participant in order to share their stories through an asset-based lens and identify the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships.

Participants were recruited using homogeneous purposive sampling (Etikan, et al., 2016). to identify 14 self-identified Black MPH students who completed internships at the Southeastern School of Public Health (the academic institution where the participants completed their internships) from 2020 to 2023. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice. Following the data collection, participant narratives were constructed, and actionable items were identified under the guidance of critical counter-narrative (Miller et al., 2020), through analytical noting (Glesne, 2016), and continuous engagement in the literature.

SIGNIFICANCE

Despite 14% of all MPH students in the United States identifying as Black (ASPPH, 2022), existing research has failed to examine their internship experiences. While research exists in other academic disciplines that have examined Black students' internship experiences, these studies tend to simply document the racially hostile environments that Black students face without meaningfully focusing on the strengths and successes of the participants, nor do they explicitly focus on improving the lived realities of Black interns. This study is one of the only to not only examine the lived

experiences of Black MPH interns but to do so through an asset-based lens. Additionally, the praxis-based nature of this research is one of the only to do so in the public health experiential education space.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the importance of MPH internships was outlined. This was followed by highlighting a lack of research examining the internship experiences of Black MPH students and the importance of examining their experiences in order to create racially just policies and practices. Given that other research examining Black interns' experiences tends to use deficit-informed research, CRT and specifically critical counter-narrative was offered to avoid this pitfall. This study's guiding research questions were: *1) How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?* and *2) What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* Given the racialized nature of MPH programs and the public health workforce, the significance of examining Black MPH students' internship experiences from an asset-based lens was discussed.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE THROUGH AN ANTIDEFICIT PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the varying definitions of internships, followed by a summary of the importance of public health internships and an overview of studies detailing MPH student experiences. Next, the racially neutral way that MPH student internship experiences have been detailed is critiqued. This is followed by an explanation of how a racialized workforce creates racialized internship spaces. Subsequently, given the lack of scholarship examining Black MPH students' internship experiences, Black students' internship experiences in fields such as medicine, business, and engineering are overviewed. Next, the importance of using an asset-based as opposed to a deficit-based lens is discussed, and how this can be achieved through a CRT lens employing critical counter-narratives. Finally, the importance of engaging in praxis when using CRT is discussed.

DEFINING INTERNSHIPS

Internships are widely understood as a form of experiential learning in which students apply the skills they've learned in the classroom in a practical setting. Despite this general understanding, clearly defining internships has been an ongoing dilemma (NACE, 2018). For example, Taylor (1988) defined internships as "structured and career-relevant work experiences obtained by students prior to graduation from an academic program" (p. 393), while other authors have defined internships as "a short-term practical work experience in which students receive training and gain experience in a specific field

or career area of their interest" (Zopiatis, 2007, p. 65). To remedy the terminology inconsistencies, NACE articulated the following definition of an internship:

> An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent (NACE 2018, para 6).

While each definition varies slightly, each focuses on college students applying skills in a practical setting.

In addition to the definition differences, the term internship is synonymous with several other terms that also are in the spirit of applying skills in a practical setting. For example, practicum, experiential learning, work-integrated learning, and externships are all common nomenclature describing internships (Freudenberg et al., 2010; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). However, as Gardner and Bartkus argued (2014), getting caught up in semantics about defining internships is not helpful, considering that the overarching aim of each of these definitions is to have students apply the skills learned in the classroom out in the "real world." Thus, public health research using the terms internship, practicum, externship, and others deemed to be in the same spirit, are analyzed in this literature review.

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC HEALTH INTERNSHIPS

The MPH is a practice-based degree that prepares graduates to become public health practitioners. This approach contrasts with other graduate programs which tend to

prepare students to conduct research. All public health practitioners share a unifying goal "to prevent disease and promote health" (Stover & Bassett, 2003, p. 1799), particularly for vulnerable populations (Stover & Bassett, 2003). Thus, practitioners must be trained to practice public health in real-world settings. Given this need, MPH curricula have evolved from a primarily theoretical approach to one that emphasizes practice-based and applied learning (Frenk et al., 2015). This evolution is a relatively recent phenomenon (Gummeson, 2021), yet the research that does exist consistently highlights the importance of these experiences.

For instance, Villanueva et al. (2011) found that participating in a community-based practicum allowed students to apply skills learned in the classroom in the real world, expanded students' social contacts, as well as clarified students' professional strengths and weaknesses (Villanueva et al., 2011). These findings are supported by the work of Cole et al. (2012), who found that MPH students who completed practicum experiences gained perspectives on different approaches to running public health programs and developed flexibility for approaching public health challenges. Relatedly, Johansson et al. (2014) reported that student internship experiences helped expose public health students to the broadness of public health, enhanced their public health skills, and improved their self-efficacy as public health professionals (Johansson et al., 2014). In concert with Johansson et al. (2014), Carvalho et al. (2017) outlined how public health field placements increased students' professional confidence to work in the field of public health. Moreover, Sprague and Percy (2014) examined the immediate and long-term impact of practicum experiences and found that these experiences improved students' policy skills, enhanced their general professionalism, and were useful post-graduation in

their careers. Given these findings, CEPH, the accrediting body for schools and programs of public health, requires that MPH students complete some form of experiential learning, which often takes the form of a practicum or internship, to complete their graduate training (CEPH, 2021).

MPH STUDENT INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES

Despite the importance of experiences, surprisingly little literature exists examining MPH students' internship experiences. Existing public health internship research tends to focus on program evaluations of internship programs, and often include more than just MPH students such as undergraduate or medical students (Carvalho et al., 2017; Handler et al., 2021; Humphries et al., 2022; Johansson et al., 2014; McLean et al., 2018; Steigerwald et al., 2016). However, a few notable exceptions do exist.

Villanueva et al. (2011), for instance, found that MPH students who participated in community-based internships had high levels of degree satisfaction, valued learning by doing, increased students' capacity to work in the real world, and developed an enhanced commitment to future community work. Respectively, Cole et al. (2012) analyzed the experiences of global MPH student internships and reported that students appreciated learning about running public health programs in contexts different from their home countries. Additionally, these experiences enhanced students' flexibility in addressing public health challenges. Another strategy was employed by Hernandez et al. (2014) by providing scholarly reflections from four graduate students from minority-serving public health institutions about their perspectives on the benefits of participating in undergraduate and graduate internships. Shared perceptions across the four students included opportunities to build professional networks, practice public health

competencies, gain relevant public health experience, increase confidence in their skills, and share lessons learned from these experiences. The most beneficial experiences were those in which the students had responsibility for a project, opportunities to engage innovatively with the project, and dedicated support from both the university and the placement site (Hernandez et al., 2014). Finally, in a ten-year retrospective of MPH practicum reflection papers, Pham et al. (2023), found six salient themes including turning theory into practice, navigating complex public health practice environments, learning skills, personal reflections, challenges, and important practicum elements (Pham et al., 2023).

While some literature exists examining MPH students' internship experiences, what is absent from this discussion is also palpable. Existing research fails to adequately examine Black MPH students' internship experiences. Rather, studies tend to use "objective" methods such as surveys to share student experiences which often omit any discussion on race entirely. While this emphasis may have value in a program evaluation approach, utilizing a more in-depth qualitative methodology would give more right insights into the experiences of public health students. Sadly, limited research exists that examines Black MPH students' internship experiences. As is argued in the following section, examining Black MPH students' internship experiences is important because of the racialized nature of the public health workforce.

A RACIALIZED PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

Despite the pervasive misnomer that the United States has entered a so-called post-racial era in which social life can be understood outside of race, this remains a façade (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In fact, "race continues to play a fundamental

role in structuring and representing the social world" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 112). Yet how did this come to be? In brief, the concept of race was originally given social meaning with the pairing of settler colonialists "discovering" indigenous communities in the Western Hemisphere and the rise of merchant capitalism and the African slave trade. These actions racialized non-white bodies in the "new" world (Omi & Winant, 2014). The racialization of Black individuals created new social categories that assisted in differentiating who was free and who was enslaved. In order to justify the new racial order, religious groups argued that enslaved Black people were a different race entirely, and thus were not humans. Religious arguments for white superiority ultimately evolved into "scientific" explanations where eugenicists believed that biological differences accounted for racial inequality (Omi & Winant, 2014).

Today, scholars widely agree that race is socially constructed, yet using race as an analysis point for understanding racial disparities remains a contested topic. Post-racialists tout the need to move beyond race as an analysis point since it is socially constructed. However, CRT scholars have explained the importance of considering socially constructed realities. For example, as Crenshaw (1991) contended, to argue that "a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world" (p. 1296). Critiquing socially constructed analysis points becomes even more ludicrous when considering that much of reality is socially constructed (Delgado, 1989). Yet even within the confines of socially constructed reality, as Omi and Winant (2014) explained, simply stating that race is socially constructed and therefore is not worthy of analysis is foolish when

> just as the noise of the "big bang" still resonates through the universe, so the overdetermined construction of world "civilization" as a biosocial manifestation of European subjugation and the resistance of the rest of us still defines the race concept in the present (p. 115).

One example of these reverberations is seen in Roithmayr's (2014) work.

Borrowing from techno-economists, Roithmayr (2014), offered the "lock-in model" (p. 5) to explain why intergenerational racial inequality persists in "labor, housing, education, wealth, in healthcare, political power, and incarceration" (p. 5), despite many white's beliefs that the United States has finally moved "beyond race." Economists have used the lock-in model to describe how once technology companies gain an early lead on other companies in the marketplace, oftentimes they maintain this lead even when the technology for competing companies offers better alternatives. These early competitive advantages become reinforced over time. Applying this model to racism, Roithmayr (2014) explained

> Even if all people everywhere in the US were to stop intentionally discriminating tomorrow, those racial gaps would still persist, because those gaps are produced by the everyday decisions that structure our social, political, and economic interactions. Put in another way, racial inequality may have now become "locked in" (p. 4-5).

Even small competitive edges in early markets can be immensely advantageous. To say that whites in the United States have historically had several large competitive advantages compared to non-whites would be putting it lightly. Starting with Jim Crow, racist policies and racist institutional practices have created generational spanning

feedback loops that give whites an unfair economic advantage in the labor market (Roithmayr, 2014). In short, society in the United States is still racialized.

Organizations are one facet of a racialized society that has gained traction in recent years. As Ray (2019) explained, organizations play a specific role in maintaining and reproducing racial inequality at the meso-levels of society. This is because organizations are social structures that are both manifestations of cultural schemas (e.g., unstated social norms) and dictate the flow of resources (Ray, 2019). For an example related to internships, an overwhelmingly white workforce may have certain cultural schemas about the way one talks or looks professionally which excludes Black individuals. If one does assimilate to those cultural schemas, one may be barred from accessing an internship in the first place, reserving an internship spot for someone who is "a better fit." This is an example of how "race shapes occupational attainment in the United States" (Ray, 2019, p. 33). However, this example is only one component of how racialized organizations operate.

Ray (2019) theorized four tenets related to racialized organizations. First, he argued that the agency of People of Color is shaped by racialized organizations. For example, People of Color tend to be omitted from the workforce entirely or when admitted to the workforce, lower on the organizational totem poll than whites. This results in organizations: 1) controlling how non-whites spend their time (e.g., workforce members lower on the organizational chart are limited in their ability to plan life outside of work and plan for the future), 2) robbing time from People of Color and appropriating that time to whites (e.g., racially stratified organizations excluding Black and brown bodies from the workforce will take more time to find a white hire), and 3) diminishing

the emotional expressions of People of Color (e.g., non-whites are expected to be docile and calm in the workplace while whites are permitted to express anger or rage).

The second tenet Ray put forth is that the unequal allocation of resources is legitimized under racialized organizations, as they are seen as normal and fair processes. Relatedly, the third tenet put forth is the concept of racial credentialing. In racialized organizations, whiteness becomes a credential that provides avenues to organizational resources, codifies racial inequalities in the workplace, and expands the agency of whites. Whiteness as a credential is a particularly devious concept given that credentials are typically thought of as racially neutral designations yet as Ray discussed, Blackness in racialized organizations is seen as a negative credential. To accentuate the ramifications of whiteness credentialling, Ray (2019) discussed Harris' (1993) seminal work on whiteness as property to demonstrate how Harris' grandmother was only able to work in a racialized space thanks to her ability to "pass" as white, thus affording the economic opportunities she would not have been afforded had she been perceived as Black.

Finally, the fourth tenet put forward is that racialized organizations' formal policies and rules related to racial equity are typically disconnected from actual practice. For example, organizational rules may be seen as racially neutral yet disproportionately negatively impact People of Color. Additionally, rules that are in place to protect against racial discrimination at the organizational level may not be tied to enforcement mechanisms (Ray, 2019).

Ray's concept of racialized organizations is reflective of the governmental public health workforce in the United States. While the U.S. public health workforce demographic has moved closer to the national average of the United States population

(54% white, 18% Hispanic or Latino, 15% Black, Two or more races 4%, American Indian or Alaskan Native 1%, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander 0.4%), leadership in governmental public health agencies is still disproportionately white with 66% of executives identifying as such (de Beaumont Foundation & ASTHO, n.d.). When excluding federal agencies, the average state demographic decreases in diversity from 54% to 65% white (de Beaumont Foundation & ASTHO, 2022).

Ray offered several directions for future research. One of which is that scholars should interrogate the processes of racialized organizations as they relate to shaping People of Color's future workplace agency. In this respect, examining Black students' internship experiences would prove useful. An excess of research exists summarizing the importance of internships for early career development, but unfortunately, very limited research has examined the racialized internship experiences of Black MPH students. In the following section, the research that examines non-public health Black students' internship experiences is outlined.

BLACK STUDENT INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES

While there is a notable dearth of research examining Black MPH students' internship experiences, some studies exist in other disciplines. In the medical field, Liebschultz et al. (2006) explored the experiences of Black physicians completing their residencies (medical students' internships). Liebschultz et al. (2006) reported that Black residents faced racial discrimination, were held to higher expectations than white residents, experienced social isolation, and faced harsher punishments than white residents. While the authors did find that social support from Black colleagues and patients occurred, the overwhelming focus of the research is on the negative racialized

experiences of Black residents. For example, the authors highlighted that many participants felt "a damaged sense of self and a lack of confidence in professional roles, as well as feelings of being on guard at all times, doubting themselves and being frustrated with the systems that surrounds them" (p. 1446). Overall, the successes of Black residents are not highlighted, and meaningful policy solutions are not provided.

More recently, Brooks et al. (2023) built on the work of Liebschultz et al. (2006) by investigating Black orthopedic surgeons' experiences with racial microaggressions during their residencies. The authors found that 96% of participants experienced racial microaggressions during their residency experiences. Additionally, Black women more frequently reported receiving "devaluing or exclusionary feedback statements" (Brooks, et al., p. 676) in their training. Overall, Brooks et al. (2023) paint a racially hostile environment for Black residents that must be changed for workforce diversity needs. Like the work of Liebschultz et al. (2006), Black residency successes and ways to sincerely improve the living realities of Black medical students are not meaningfully discussed.

In addition to medical internship experiences, some literature has examined the internship experiences of Black engineering students. Dietz (2022) explored the impact that engineering internship experiences have on the identity of Black engineering students. Dietz's findings suggested that all of the participants experienced inauthenticity due to the pervasiveness of white masculine norms masked as "professionalism." Conversely, participants also experienced authenticity when connecting to colleagues in the workplace, remembering the strength of their own racial identity, and feeling a sense of belonging in their organization. Ultimately, Dietz concluded that workspaces must become more anti-racist for Black engineers to feel welcome (Dietz, 2022).

In addition to the medical and engineering studies completed, some research exists examining other Black students' internship experiences across disciplines. For example, Marshall (2016) examined six non-white students' experiences with racism during their internships across six academic disciplines. Marshall found that participants experienced levels of racial microaggressions including subtle, environmental, microassaults, and an absence of racial microaggressions. While Marshall (2016) does include the absence of racial microaggressions, the focus of this study is on the presence of racial microaggressions. Marshall does offer some action items to improve racial microaggressions. For example, the internship curriculum should incorporate space for students to discuss their experiences with racial microaggressions, staff should be trained to respond to students' experiences with racial microaggressions and organizations should be trained about how racial microaggressions may manifest for non-white students. However, the precise steps for implementing these changes are not clear and the actionable items appear more as post hoc solutions instead of being based on students' experiences.

Relatedly, Bridges (2020) investigated first-generation Black interns' perspectives on diversity and inclusion efforts at their predominantly white internship sites. Bridges concluded that interns' experiences are shaped by racism and "organizations are engaging in practices that alienate and suppress black [sic] student interns while encouraging assimilation" (p. 4). To combat these oppressive spaces, Bridges recommended that organizations become more inclusive spaces by embracing an intersectional understanding of identities, not ignoring race, sex, and classism, diversifying the workforce to build networks for young Black professionals, and embracing interns as

integral to organizational success. (Bridges, 2020). The post hoc recommendation approach that is present in Marshall's (2016) work appeared in Bridges' (2020) research as well. Moreover, neither Marshall (2016) nor Bridges (2020) emphasized the success of Black students' internships.

When summarizing the literature on Black student internship experiences, research consistently demonstrated that internship sites tend to be racially hostile environments and that Black students regularly experience racism as a part of everyday life. While these are surely the racial realities for many Black students, focusing only on their negative racialized experiences is problematic for two reasons. First, there is a lack of focus on improving the lived realities of Black students in these studies, as the offered solutions are not typically informed by the student's experiences. Second, research that only focuses on the negative internship experiences of Black students risks employing deficit perspectives as opposed to antideficit perspectives.

ANTIDEFICIT PERSPECTIVES

The racial inequalities between Black college students and other ethnic groups in higher education are well documented. Regardless of the type of college degree being pursued, Black students have six-year completion rates lower than any other racial group (Gallup, 2023), graduate on average with $25,000 more debt than white college graduates (Hanson, 2023), and earn less than their similarly educated white peers (Wilson & Darity Jr., 2022). Regrettably, many interpret these statistics to mean that whether culturally or biologically, there is something implicitly wrong with Black people, instead of recognizing the role that racism plays in shaping these outcomes (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Viewing Black communities in this way is considered a deficit perspective. Before

demonstrating the contemporary issues of race research in education, Ladson-Billings (2012) summarized the historical pervasiveness of deficit thinking employed by researchers in sociology and anthropology. From a sociological perspective, she highlighted how the creator of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, Lewis Terman, a eugenicist and education professor at Stanford, built his studies on giftedness on sampling that excluded non-white communities but was subsequently used to "prove" intellectual inferiority in Black individuals. From an anthropological standpoint, Ladson-Billings captured how anthropologists, who were nearly universally European, gave life to viewing race as a fixed category in which non-whites were inherently inferior to whites. These deeply rooted epistemological beliefs ultimately led to many of the deficit perspectives that plague the research in the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

In 2002, Solórzano and Yosso argued that an effective counter to deficit perspectives that support majoritarian narratives in research is the use of the critical race methodology counter-narratives. Counter-narratives, (oftentimes used interchangeably with the term counter-storytelling) uplift the voices of People of Color by challenging commonly held beliefs about race that employ deficit perspectives, such as Black students do not value education as much as whites, or other racial myths. Miller et al. (2020) argued that in the United States, the application of CRT, and particularly counter-narrative "has demonstrated great success in shifting the terms of debate over the increasingly diverse student population from a community deficit model to one of community strengths" (p. 269). For example, in critiquing Bourdieu's antideficit concept of social capital, Yosso (2005) used CRT to develop the framework of community

cultural wealth which offered an asset-based approach to capital that focuses on the strengths of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). As Yosso (2005) has outlined:

- Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).
- Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).
- Familial capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).
- Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).
- Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).
- Resistant capital refers those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).

Importantly, Yosso (2005) used community cultural wealth as a framework to focus on the strengths communities have as opposed to what communities may lack. Since community cultural wealth's inception, scholars have identified additional forms of capital as well such as confidence capital (Wallace, 2022).

Other scholars have used counter-narrative to challenge master narratives about Black individuals by focusing on their strengths. For example, Harper (2008) captured

how racism shapes the HEI experiences of Black male college students through composite counter-narrative but focused on the successes and achievements of Black males at PWIs, as opposed to emphasizing attrition, disengagement, and other master narratives on Black male college students. Harper (2008) posited that future research examining Black college students "must deliberately counterbalance popular negative dispositions with achievement oriented pursuits" (p. 709). Relatedly, although Greene and Platt (2020) captured the racism experienced by Black male honors students at a PWI, they emphasized the successes of these students in their narratives. Ultimately, these studies using CRT allowed an asset-based approach to examining the lived experiences of People of Color.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In the years following major civil rights victories in the courts, many racial justice advocates became dissatisfied with the courts' glacial pace of progress and overall inadequacy to bring racial justice to the United States. These seeds of discontent sprouted the critical legal studies (CLS) movement, which ultimately argued that using the courts to bring racial justice only legitimized and recreated the unjust social order (Crenshaw, 1988). However, this belief was not unequivocal. Other scholars and activists argued that this view was too theoretical and did little to alleviate the oppression that People of Color experience on a daily basis (Matsuda, 1987). Moreover, critics of the CLS movement believed that, given the complexities of racism, race must be a centrally examined feature of any social justice-oriented framework (Crenshaw, 1988; Matsuda, 1987). This ideological break from the CLS movement, paired with earlier student protests at Harvard Law School for trying to replace the instructor of Derrick Bell's civil rights course with a

white professor, are typically recognized as the founding events of the CRT movement (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Led by several legal Scholars of Color, CRT emerged as a framework to combat racial inequality in the legal system (Matsuda et al., 1993). Since this point, CRT has been utilized by a host of disciplines to examine racial inequality and generate social change (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

CRT was memorably introduced to the field of education by Ladson-Billings and Tate in 1995, in which they applied CRT as a framework to explain persisting racial inequalities and the limits of multiculturalism for addressing racial inequality in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the words of Solóranzo and Yosso (2002)

> critical race theory in education is a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (p. 25).

Twenty years later, Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) articulated the evolving parameters of CRT research in the field of education by highlighting themes they found central to CRT scholarship. What Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) make clear is that there is no one set of CRT tenets, and these will continue to evolve as time moves forward. In this respect, based on the author's review of the literature, the following concepts tend to underlie CRT research including the understanding that

- Racism is normal, pervasive, and a defining feature of U.S. society (Bell, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997).

- Race is socially constructed and thus, CRT takes an anti-essentialist viewpoint (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; López, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2022).
- Dominant legal claims and societal narratives that claim objective, neutral, and color-blind interpretations are met with skepticism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997).
- Historical or contextual analysis is necessary to understand racial inequality (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013).
- The experiential knowledge of People of Color is "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding" (Solórzano, 1997, p. 7) actions that can be used to eliminate racism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997).
- CRT is interdisciplinary in that it borrows from many disciplines to advance the cause of racial justice (Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano 1997).
- Multiracial coalitions are needed to advance the cause of racial justice (Cho & Westley, 1993; Crenshaw et al., 1995).
- CRT works to eliminate all racial subordination (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano 1997).

While these may be some of the central features of CRT research, this list is by no means all-encompassing. Additional themes include whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), a critique of liberalism (Delgado, 1991) interest convergence (Bell, 2004), and the use of counter-narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counter-narrative is a fundamental analytical tool that CRT scholars use to challenge dominant and master narratives rooted in white supremacy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). By forefronting their racialized experiences, counter-narratives challenge deficit thinking about race by having the audacity to ask, "What is right?" (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 117) with Black individuals. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identified three types of counter-narratives, personal stories, the stories of others, and composite stories.

Personal stories are often "autobiographical reflections of the author, juxtaposed with their critical race analysis of legal cases and within the context of a larger sociopolitical critique" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Hughes (2020) provided an example of the personal story approach using autoethnography to create a poem that illuminated Hughes' racialized experiences with school community leaders, undergrads, and administrators at PWIs. Another example is the work of Williams and Ware (2019) who combined features of CRT and autoethnography to share their personal counter-narratives of two Black-biracial academics. Outlining their experiences chronologically, Williams and Ware (2019) highlighted that despite their contrasting contextual upbringings, their experiences were greatly shaped by identifying as Black-biracial.

The second form of counter-narrative outlined by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) is sharing the stories of others. Other's stories are typically told from a third-person perspective and are biographical accounts of the experiences of People of Color. For example, using the experiences of urban educators in the K-12 setting, Milner (2008) created counter-narratives that challenged the notion that teaching styles differing from "mainstream classrooms" (p. 1573) as inferior. In the higher education setting, Greene

and Platt (2020) provided counter-narratives of Black honors college students that showcased their achievements, struggles, and shared experiences of Black honors students at a PWI. Importantly, in both of these examples, the authors explicitly showcase the success of Black students instead of only focusing on their challenges.

The final form of counter-narratives outlined by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) are composite narratives. Composite stories (often called composite counter-stories or composite counter-narratives) are counter-narratives that are grounded in real data but utilize fictional characters and settings to convey the racialized realities of People of Color (Cook & Dixson 2013; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, Cook and Dixson (2013) utilized composite counter-storytelling to examine the experiences of Black K-12 educators following the rebuilding of schools after Hurricane Katrina. In the higher education setting, Harper, (2009) analyzed the college experiences of Black male undergraduate students at PWIs in the United States to demonstrate Black excellence. Composite counter-storytelling is particularly useful for protecting participants' identities who could be otherwise outed, provides a medium to capture the complex and detailed experiences of participants without losing the multi-faceted nature of the experience, and allows the individual experiences to be told in the context of a larger group struggle (Cook & Dixson, 2013). Whether through personal stories, others' stories, or composite counter-stories, counter-narrative is a central methodological technique of CRT education research.

Counter-narrative was always intended to uplift the voices of People of Color and to improve their lived realities (Miller et al., 2020). Unfortunately, many educational researchers who use counter-narrative have left the social activism component of counter-

narrative unfulfilled. To recenter educational research on the praxis component, Miller et al. (2020) offered up critical counter-narrative as a methodology that outlined how counter-narrative can be used as a "transformational methodology for educational equity" (p. 292) in educational research. While critical counter-narrative is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, a brief mention of the work of Miller et al. (2020) was warranted here before turning to a discussion about the importance of praxis when engaging in CRT work.

CRITICAL RACE PRAXIS IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

Originally coined in the legal field, Yamamoto (1997) defined critical race praxis (CRP) as a combination of "critical pragmatic socio-legal analysis with political lawyering and community organizing for justice by and for racialized communities" (p. 875). Inspired by Freire's (2005) notion of praxis (anti-subordination action combined with reflection), Yamamoto (1999) highlighted four tenets of CRP including conceptual, reflexive, performative, and material. The conceptual tenet examines and critiques racialized realities in conjunction with other interconnected factors such as class, gender, or sexism, while the reflexive tenet focuses on theory building based on anti-racist conflicts. The performative tenet focuses on outlining pragmatic steps to improve a given issue, while the material tenet focuses on "the remaking of the democratic structure of public institutions, in the material conditions of racial oppression" (Yamamoto, 1999, p. 131). While Yamamoto originally wrote about CRP for lawyers, Stovall (2020) encouraged educational researchers to embody these tenets. Stovall highlighted how the academy typically better prepares researchers to engage in the conceptual and reflexive tenets but the performative and material "require a more intense, authentic, critical, and

long term engagement with communities and/or organizations" (p. 257). In other words, fulfilling the performative and material tenets of CRP is best done within community.

Blaisdell (2021) offered a glimpse of the power of community CRP in his ethnographic critical race work with City Elementary. In addition to spending nearly ten years building relationships and working on racial equity work with the institution, Blaisdell was a former teacher at City Elementary and has lived in the school district for over 20 years. Being a part of City Elementary's community, as opposed to an outsider has allowed for several victories for racial justice including "creating a more racially affirming workplace for faculty of color, building an antiracist collection of library and classroom resources for students and teachers, reducing in-class racialized tracking, and reducing the school's discipline gap" (Blaisdell, 2021, p. 7). Another CRP success story in the K-12 setting is captured by the work of Stovall (2018) who worked with the Greater Lawndale/Little Village School of Social Justice (SOJO) to provide access to college courses at a high school that traditionally was not afforded such classes. Instead of simply conducting a study or subcontracting out a college instructor to teach the students, Stovall actually went and taught in the high school setting and collaborated with the students in the spirit of youth participatory action research (YPAR) and community-based participatory research (CPAR).

CRP is central to CRT work because the goal is not to simply document those racial disparities and that racism exists, rather, the focus of CRT work is to actively change the lived realities of People of Color (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano 1997). In CRT scholarship, counter-narratives are often used to expose racism in the lives of Black

individuals, yet as Blaisdell (2018), Miller (2020), and James-Gallaway and Baber (2021) explained, counternarratives have yet to live up to their potential because the social activism component of counter-narrative is often ignored.

Communities play an important role in generating social activism. For example, Freire (2005) argued that no true social change can take place without community. In fact, he went as far as to argue that those who could not take communion (e.g., those who were not a part of the community) could not truly generate social action. Expanding on this notion, Horton and Freire (1990) contended that to generate social change, both external (e.g., laws, policies, leadership) and internal (e.g., community-driven) struggles must be in place. Bohonos and James-Gallaway (2022) offered a similar argument when discussing diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) programs. As they explain, DEI initiatives can be beneficial but "some efforts can and should be driven by actors who are outside of the formal control structures of racialized organizations" (p. 169) to ensure that DEI efforts are not co-opted and relegated to corporate jargon. Freire (2005) termed this type of social action "false generosity" (p. 54) in that social change that is only generated from leadership without the insights of the community is not in good faith. Thus, a CRP that engages community members is integral to the success of developing counter-narratives that improve the realities of Communities of Color.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the importance of internships, and specifically public health internships, was discussed. This was followed by surveying the limited internship literature that has examined MPH internship experiences and Black students' internship experiences in other disciplines. Given the racialized nature of the public health workforce, the importance of examining Black MPH interns' experiences through an

asset-based lens as opposed to a deficit lens was discussed. This was followed by a discussion about CRT which is the theoretical framework for this study. Ultimately, the importance of engaging in CRP when conducting CRT work was put forward.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this chapter, I share my researcher positionality before outlining the setting of the research. This is followed by a dialogue on critical counter-narrative as a "transformational methodology for educational equity" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 292). Subsequently, I share how I collected and analyzed the data. Finally, I discuss my strategies to ensure the data were trustworthy and some potential limitations.

POSITIONALITY

"To go forward, you must go back" (Martin, 2002, p. 583). The advice Quaithe gives Daenerys in my favorite book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is useful for contextualizing why I became interested in this research topic and why I am engaging in CRT as a white person. While many authors place their positionality after outlining their methodology, I have chosen to share mine first to highlight who I am, the journey that led me to study this topic through a CRT lens, and how I am approaching the research.

Research interests tend to be given life through personal experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This holds true for my research journey as well. Entering the fifth year of my undergraduate studies as an exercise science student, I came across a small paragraph about public health in one of my textbooks which deeply piqued my interest. When I went to class the next day, I asked my professor to help me differentiate between exercise science and public health and I will never forget his response. "Exercise science is like trying to hug one tree at a time, while public health is like trying to hug all of the trees in the forest at once." Once I heard that, I knew I had to pursue public health further

because from my perspective, the health challenges that communities in the United States face can not be solved individually. Rather, they require community approaches that involve collective action. To continue my exploration, I knew that I needed to gain some practical experience with public health. Based on the recommendation of another faculty member, I contacted a research group at the Southeastern School of Public Health to see if I could intern with them for a semester. Fortunately, they permitted me to join their team as an unpaid intern, and that changed the trajectory of my life. During my internship, I gained invaluable practical experience and made social connections that opened up the door for me to pursue an MPH. If it were not for my internship experience, it is unlikely I would have been admitted to the program given my subpar academic performance in undergrad, lack of social capital, and minimal understanding of the higher education application process. While the entirety of my MPH program was a meaningful and beneficial experience, once again my internship played a vital role in the meaning-making portion of my academic career. During my internship, I was challenged to learn and grow professionally by enhancing my tangible skills and critically reflecting on this process. As I started talking to my classmates, it became clear that everyone's experience was not as formative as mine. This saddened me because I knew how important this process was for me and I wanted others to share this experience.

As I graduated and entered the workforce, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career that merged my love of public health and experiential education. By the luck of the draw, a job opportunity that did just this became available at the Southeastern School of Public Health. I applied, interviewed, and was offered the position of Workforce Development Associate which has since evolved into the role of Director of Applied

Practice. Thus, I went from an MPH student to an MPH practitioner and have held this role since 2017.

During my tenure in this position, I have seen an even greater range of internship experiences which only stimulated my interest in experiential education further. Questions such as, “What makes a meaningful experience”? And “How are these experiences shaped by factors such as family background, gender, or racial identity?” were always at the forefront of my thoughts. To better answer these questions, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. and focus my research on these topics.

Once I officially decided to pursue a Ph.D., I read *Beyond Learning by Doing* (Roberts, 2012) in which Roberts discussed the historical and theoretical origins of experiential learning. As I read through the pages, I found myself consistently highlighting quotes from an author whom I was not familiar with, Paulo Freire. Shortly after finishing *Beyond Learning by Doing*, I acquired *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2005) and started reading it. I was stunned by the words inscribed. Although I did not entirely understand all of the concepts, the passages I did understand felt like they were taken directly out of my stream of consciousness. I felt like I had uncovered some kind of hidden sacred text that needed to be spread like gospel. The concept of humanization struck a deep chord in me, and I wrote about humanizing internship experiences in my personal statement when applying to my doctoral program. At the time, I had no idea that Freire was a leading voice in critical scholarship, no idea what a critical perspective was, and CRT was a completely foreign concept.

During my first year, I learned about research paradigms and that the way I tended to view the world was through a critical lens. Happy to finally have a name for

understanding how I viewed the world, I began exploring how critical methodologies and theories could be infused with my interest in experiential education. I became enamored with CRT during this process but had sincere reservations about attempting to employ this framework because I was unsure if white individuals could or should use CRT and feared "doing CRT incorrectly." During my doctoral studies, I heard professors complain about there being many misinformed dissertations completed using CRT, which they found shameful. Pairing this with the fact that my advisor at the time, although it was never explicitly said, was not particularly supportive of me pursuing CRT as a theoretical framework, I abandoned the idea of using CRT in my dissertation. Despite my desertion, CRT continued to beckon through coursework, readings, and conversations.

At the start of each semester, I would peruse the syllabi of my courses for any CRT work that I would have to look forward to. Each week that CRT readings were assigned, I would make a special note in my calendar that it was going to be a good week. I treasured these readings and the classroom discussions that ensued. Some particularly memorable weeks included reading Yao et al. (2019), Cabrera (2019), and Yosso (2005). In between course readings, I continued to read CRT-inspired work on my own time such as *One Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race,* (Blay, 2013). In this beautiful book, Blay (2013) masterfully contextualizes readers to the social, political, and legal constructions of race in the United States and specifically focuses on what this meant (and means) for multiracial individuals. She then goes on to profile scores of multiracial individuals through photos and text. I discovered *One Drop* around the same time that I read Rousseau Anderson's (2020) *The Contrarieties of Mixed Race* and Yamamoto's (1997) *Critical Race Praxis* pieces. Rousseau Anderson's (2020) work discussed how

multiracial individuals are a paradox of racial progress yet experience the salience of race simultaneously, while Yamamoto (1997), captured the importance of actively engaging in a praxis that makes a difference in the lives of People of Color. These key readings challenged me to think more about my interest in CRT, but the primers for these readings came from conversations with my partner.

Respectively entering our third decades of life, my partner and I began seriously discussing bringing children into the world. Becoming parents is something that we have always dreamed of. My partner identifies as Black, and I as white. The conversations about raising our children made me realize that the stories I tell my children about navigating the world will not serve them in the same way they served me, because the world views me as white and will likely view our children as Black. The idea of passing on stories and ways of knowing started infiltrating other key aspects of my life, including my career. I began considering the knowledge and advice I gave to specifically the Black students I worked with about navigating their internships which led me to my initial drafts of this project.

In my earlier drafts, I tended to focus on using qualitative methods, particularly, "counter-narrative" (I use quotation marks because I was misinformed on what a true counter-narrative was) to capture the ways Black students experienced racism during their internships. As I continued to read more about CRT and the uses of counter-narrative and discussed my readings with members of my community, I began to realize that I was falling into a trap that so many do when researching racism: I was taking a deficit-based approach that only focused on racism without attempting to change the lived realities of the Black students I work with. This finally became clear to me during a

meeting with one of my committee members where I was challenged to re-examine my research questions and ask myself whether they were taking an asset-based approach to the work. This experience humbled me because from the outset of the project, I claimed to want to complete a project that would actually make a difference for the Black students I worked with, yet I was drafting a research project that did the opposite. I was focused on highlighting the negatives instead of the strengths of the community. This realization led me to shift my research questions and methodology to use CRT in an asset-based approach to examine the lived realities of the participants.

Similar to Ladson-Billings (2000) using CRT because of "the political and personal stake [she has] in the education of Black children" (p. 273) for me, the research I am interested in is personal, but it is not about me (Blay, 2013). It is about the Black students that I am so incredibly proud of and their narratives that challenge myths of racial inferiority. Although inspired by my experiences, my personal connection to the topic and the participants is not a "hall pass" for accessing Black MPH students' lived experiences. Engaging in the research process from that perspective would surely employ false generosity (Freire, 2005). Researchers are not saviors and true social transformation can only be completed if researchers engage in authentic communion with our participants (Freire, 2005). Ultimately, by working with a community of former students, many of whom I have developed relationships with, I aimed to amplify their internship success stories to challenge master narratives about race. As I embarked on this journey, it was important to recognize that my identities shaped the entire research process from the development of research questions to the data collection, analysis, and write-up. I am a white cis-gender male researcher who is an alumnus and current employee of the

Southeastern School of Public Health. My whiteness, gender identity, and professional standing undoubtedly mediate my relationships with the participants and the institution in which I am employed. These identities also shaped how I interpreted what was found meaningful in the data and how those meanings were portrayed in the research findings. With this in mind, I must engage in a critical reflexivity (Glesne, 2016) that positions my identities in relation to the research and how each of these components impacts the other components of the research.

SETTING: ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

Every year since the implementation of the new accreditation standard by CEPH in 2018, over 20,000 students per year have pursued MPH degrees across the United States. Of these students, approximately 14% of MPH students identified as Black each year (ASPPH, 2022). One of the institutions that make up this number is the Southeastern School of Public Health. The Southeastern School of Public Health is a fully accredited school of public health that offers a range of graduate programs including MPH degrees across five departments including environmental health sciences (ENHS), epidemiology (EPID), health promotion education and behavior (HPEB), health services and policy management (HSPM), and physical activity and public health (PAPH). In any given cohort, there are approximately 45 MPH students enrolled at the Southeastern School of Public Health. This number includes face-to-face and distance students. Across each cohort, approximately 10 students identify as Black making up 20% of each cohort, which is 8% higher than the national average percentage of Black MPH students enrolled at CEPH-accredited institutions. Comparatively, the Southeastern School of Public

Health also has about 15% more white students on average compared to the national average of other schools of public health (ASPPH, 2022).

Prior to graduating, all MPH students must complete a practice experience which takes the form of an internship with a public health organization. While the exact time requirements vary slightly from each department, students typically spend an average of twenty hours a week working with the organization over a 16-week academic semester. Central to the practice experience is the demonstration of public health competencies through at least two work products that students create with the organization. Through the work products, at least two foundational competencies must be demonstrated, and three additional foundational or concentration competencies must be selected by the students. While students may secure internships of their own volition, the Southeastern School of Public Health assists in the student placement process in a way that is responsive to students' professional interests, personal needs, and career goals.

Since the Fall of 2017, I have served as the internship coordinator for the Southeastern School of Public Health. In this role, I collaborate across MPH departments to find public health practice organizations where students can complete their internship experiences. In short, my role is to know and understand students' needs and interests and assist in pairing them with public health organizations. Given the nature of my position, I spend a large portion of my working hours meeting with and getting to know students. Through these interactions, I have been honored to develop both professional and personal relationships with a host of former students who are now doing amazing work as public health professionals. My first glimpse of their professional capabilities often occurred during their internships. When the research aims of this study became clear, I

knew that these were the (former) students I should complete the project with because CRT-inspired work is not completed by detached and neutral researchers. Rather, utilizing CRT (should) mean engaging in CRP to actively improve the realities of Communities of Color.

METHODOLOGY: A BLUEPRINT

While counter-narrative is the "bread-and-butter" of many CRT scholars in the field of education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018), a haze surrounding counter-narrative as a methodology and as a methodological tool has materialized. For example, some authors use counter-narrative as a methodology, while others only use counter-narrative as a research method (Miller et al., 2020). To evaporate this haze, Miller et al. (2020) systematically reviewed the literature on the uses of counter-narratives in educational research and practice. While Miller et al. suggest that counter-narrative emerged from the academic disciplines of social work, Latino/a studies and critical pedagogy (Miller et al., 2020), many CRT scholars recognize that origins of counter-narrative can be traced to the CLS movement. Borrowing from storytelling traditions in Black, Chicana/Chicano, and American Indian communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), legal scholars such as Bell (2004; 2018), Delgado (1989), and Torres and Milun (1990) originally used storytelling to showcase the absurdity of race-neutral interpretations of the law that countered the lived realities of Communities of Color. Ultimately, the use of counter-narrative was adopted by educational researchers using CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and has since become a central feature of CRT research in education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018).

Despite counter-narrative being used regularly in CRT education research, Miller et al. (2020) found several inconsistencies in the use of counter-narrative in the field of education. Some use counter-narrative as a full research methodology, while others use counter-narrative only as a research method or pedagogical practice. Although not often explicitly stated, many CRT scholars frame counter-narrative as a major feature of CRT and focus on uplifting People of Color's voices as a methodological decision influenced by CRT. On the other hand, many scholars only use counter-narrative as a research method. Within the research methods, two types of studies tend to form which Miller et al. (2020) articulated as the whole narrative approach versus the narrative factors approach. Although "data collection and analysis methods vary considerably" (Miller et al., p. 278) in the whole narrative approach, most research uses methods consistent with narrative inquiry. A notable distinction between the whole narrative approach and traditional narrative inquiry is that racism is analyzed and featured throughout the research process and a majoritarian narrative is critiqued and challenged through the creation of the narrative (Miller et al., 2020). The narrative factors approach, on the other hand, uses participant narratives as one of the multiple sources of data to construct a counter-narrative. Similar to the whole narrative approach, researcher methods in the narrative factors have varied widely (Miller et al., 2020).

In addition to highlighting the uses of counter-narrative as a methodology, research method, and pedagogical tool, Miller et al. (2020) also made poignant commentary about the (mis)uses of counter-narrative in the field of education. Counter-narrative, when done as intended, uplift the voices of those on the margins by sharing their perspectives *and* uses these experiences to identify action items for creating a more

socially just world. Sadly, the latter has largely been ignored by counter-narratives in the field of education. As Miller et al. (2020) explained, the CLS movement (which would eventually sprout the CRT movement) used People of Color's experiences as counter-narratives to highlight the absurdity of race-neutral and decontextualized interpretations of the law. An important distinction between CLS counter-narrative and contemporary counter-narratives in the field of education is that sharing counter-narrative in a court setting holds "transformational potential" (Miller et al., p. 272) for changing material conditions (e.g., ruling on court cases) as opposed to simply sharing new research findings (Miller et al., 2020).

While sharing the experiences of People of Color is useful in and of itself (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the full potential of counter-narrative is not met until these experiences are used to generate social action that brings about educational equity. In order to refocus the potential of counter-narratives as a praxis-oriented research methodology for racial justice, Miller et al. (2020) offered up critical counter-narrative which they defined as

> a methodology for critically analyzing the racialized social reality in the education system and society by narrating the authentic lived experiences of people of color, searching for and acting upon emancipatory solutions, and transforming the educational system in order to provide equitable education for people of color [sic] (p. 275).

As visually illustrated in Figure 3.1, Miller et al. (2020) identified three components that must be present within critical counter-narratives including:

> CRT as a model of inquiry, critical reflection and generativity as a model of praxis that unify the use of counter-narratives for both research, and pedagogy and transformative action for the fundamental goal of educational equity for people of color [sic] (p. 271).

CRT is considered the model of inquiry when researchers utilize the major tenets, constructs, and themes in CRT in order to illuminate the role racism plays in facilitating educational equity.

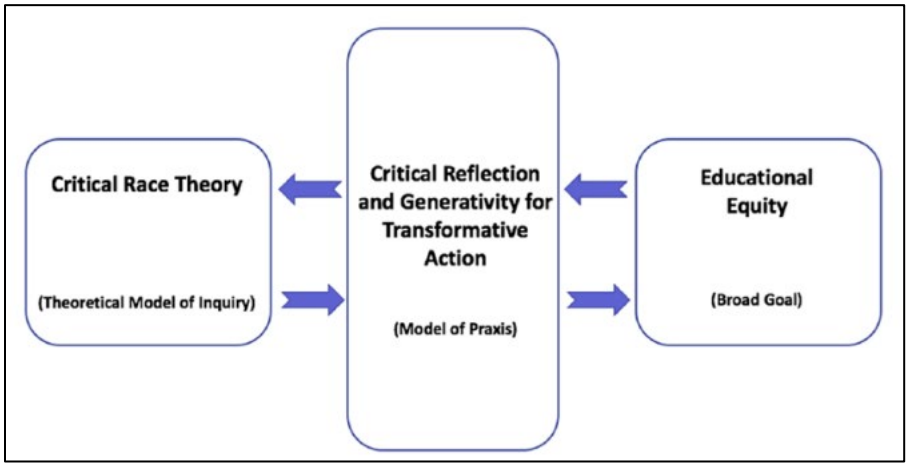

Figure 3.1 *Critical Counter-Narrative as a Transformative Methodology for Educational Equity*[2]

If researchers are using other theoretical frameworks to guide "counter-narrative," they risk losing the actionable items to create a more socially just world (Miller et al., 2020). In that spirit, the unification of counter-narrative as a pedagogical and research practice must be present for counter-narratives to be most fully effective (Miller et al., 2020).

[2] Reproduced from From: Miller, R., Liu, K., & Ball, A. F. (2020). Critical counter-narrative as transformative methodology for educational equity. *Review of Research in Education*, *44*(1), 269-300. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x20908501

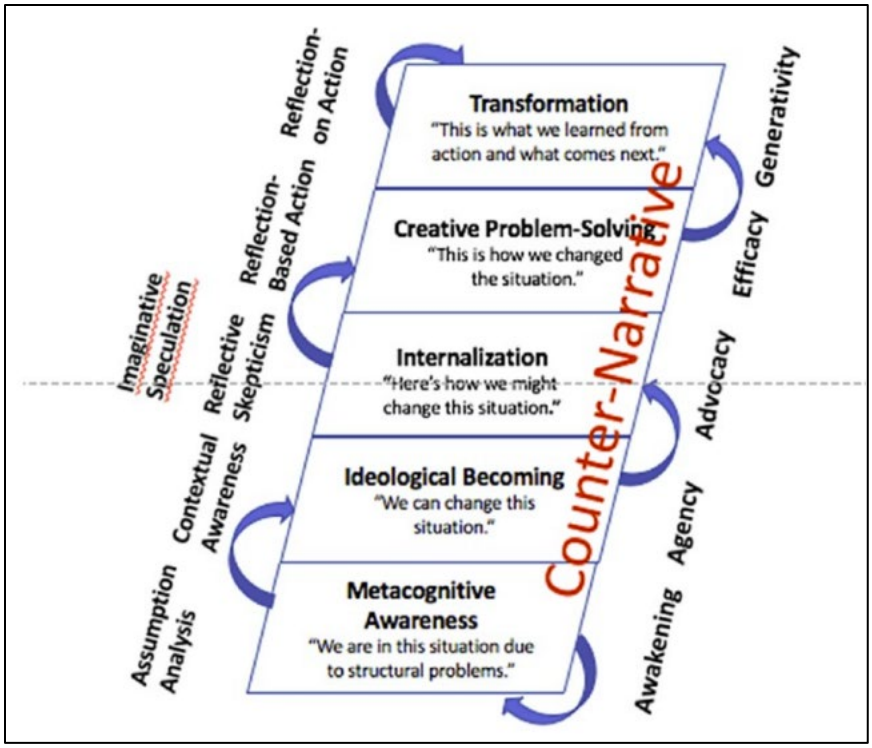

Figure 3.2 *Critical Reflection and Generativity: A Model of Praxis for Critical Counter-Narrative*[3]

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, Miller et al. (2020) combined the hermeneutic cycle of critical reflection for transformative learning and the model of generative change to create a model of praxis for critical counter-narrative. This cycle includes metacognitive awareness (e.g., there are structural problems causing inequity), ideological becoming (e.g., the structural problems can be changed), internalization (e.g., here are potential solutions to the structural problems), creative problem-solving (e.g., the ways the problems were solved), and finally, transformation (e.g., what was learned from the process and what next steps should be taken to continue the change). In short, not only are the racialized problems that People of Color face identified but the solutions and

[3] Reproduced from From: Miller, R., Liu, K., & Ball, A. F. (2020). Critical counter-narrative as transformative methodology for educational equity. *Review of Research in Education*, *44*(1), 269-300. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x20908501

actions are outlined through the uplifting of the counter-narrative (Miller et al., 2020). Lastly, the entire research and pedagogical process should be guided by eliminating educational inequity, which is a precursor to the ultimate goal of eliminating racial subordination via engaging in CRP.

In this light, a dialogue has emerged to grow the use of counter-narrative in a way that improves the lived realities of People of Color through changing or maintaining policies and practices (James-Gallaway & Baber, 2022). Despite a commitment to social justice being one of the core tenets of CRT (Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), there are few examples of counter-narratives being used to promote social activism (Blaisdell, 2021; Bohonos & James-Gallaway, 2022; Miller et al., 2020), particularly in the educational research context. This is troubling given the entire impetus for CRT being developed was to actively improve the lives of People of Color by working within systems of oppression (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Thus, this study used critical-counter narrative as a methodology to not only share the racialized internship experiences of former Black MPH interns but to also use their narratives to identify action items that can improve the policies and practices related to internships for future Black MPH students.

PARTICIPANTS

To identify participants for this study, I used homogenous sampling, a subcategory of purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Homogeneous purposive sampling is a non-random sampling strategy that intentionally chooses participants "who share similar traits or specific characteristics" (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 3). In this study, those characteristics were being a former self-identified Black MPH student at the

Southeastern School of Public and completing an internship between 2020 and 2023. Using this timeframe meant that all of the research participants completed their internships under the same accreditation criteria, meaning their experiences were somewhat comparable. A list of 27 potential participants (approximately nine students per year which is approximately 20% of the annual student enrollment of 45) during this time frame was generated based on enrollment data by the Evaluation and Academic Assessment Office at the Southeastern School of Public Health. I used personal contacts (e.g., cell phone numbers, personal emails, etc.) LinkedIn, and word of mouth to recruit all eligible participants. I contacted participants from 10/25/2023-10/26/2023 and 14 of the 27 eligible participants consented to participate in the study. As outlined in Table 3.1, 10 women, three men, and one Cis femme/Cis woman participated in the study. Participants' ages ranged from 25-36. All participants identified as Black, Black/African American, African American/Black, or African American except for Tallia, who identified as Biracial- Black/white, and Corienne, who identified as Black American. From a departmental perspective, Three PAPH, five HPEB four HSPM, and two EPID students participated in the study. Each academic department was represented in the sample except for ENHS, which did not have students enrolled over this time frame.

Table 3.1 *Participant Demographics and Information*

Alias	Age	Racial Identity	Gender Identity	Sexual orientation	Department	Graduated	Number of internships
Allison Moore	26	African American/Black	Female	Heterosexual	HPEB	Spring 2022	1

Billy	29	Black/ African American	Male	Straight	PAPH	Spring 2022	2 or more
Brianna	27	Black/African American	Female	Straight	EPID	Spring 2020	2 or more
Columbo	36	Black	Female	Heterosexual	HPEB	Spring 2022	1
Corienne	30	Black American	Cis femme/ Cis woman	Bisexual	HSPM	Summer 2023	1
K	25	Black	Female	Heterosexual	HSPM	Spring 2022	2 or more
Kate Rogers	29	Black/ African American	Female	Lesbian	HPEB	Spring 2022	1
Lee	27	African American/Black	Female	Heterosexual	PAPH	Spring 2021	1
Marie	29	Black	Female	Heterosexual	EPID	Spring 2022	2 or more
Micheal	25	African American	Male	Heterosexual	HSPM	Spring 2023	1
Morgan	26	African American/ Black	Female	Straight	HPEB	Spring 2022	2 or more
R	25	Black/African American	Female	Heterosexual	HSPM	Spring 2021	2 or more
Tallia	29	Biracial - Black/White	Female	Straight	PAPH	Spring 2023	1
Tobias	26	Black	Male	Heterosexual	HPEB	Spring 2022	2 or more

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

I collected data for the counter-narratives via semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a common data collection technique for qualitative researchers in which researchers have some predetermined questions but leave space for follow-up questions based on where the participants lead the conversation. Oftentimes, qualitative researchers will revise their initial interview questions throughout the research process to

better capture the phenomenon at hand (Glesne, 2016). This study developed and redeveloped semi-structured interviews similarly. The final interview guides, which can be found in Appendix A, had distinct purposes for each interview.

The purpose of the first interview was to assist in developing the participants' narratives. As such, broad questions about the participant's background, academic, internship, and professional experiences were explored, with a specific focus on the racialization of these experiences. The second interview had two primary aims. The first of which was to take an asset-based lens to the lived experiences of the participants. This was done by eliciting their personal and professional growth during their internships and having them reflect on how their personal and professional successes challenge majoritarian narratives about Black individuals in the United States. Additionally, the second interview used elements of the critical counter-narrative framework (Miller et al., 2020) to frame the questions to generate actionable items that could improve the lived realities of future Black MPH interns. Follow-up questions from the first interview were also asked during the second interview.

I interviewed each participant twice, 11 of which were conducted virtually on Zoom, two of which were conducted in person, and one participant completed a virtual and in-person interview. Interviews were completed from 10/31/2023-1/17/2024. The length of most interviews ranged from 20-60 minutes except for one interview which lasted approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. The reason for this outlier interview stemmed from my inexperience with facilitating semi-structured interviews. At the point I interviewed this individual, I had not considered that any of my participants would exceed 1 hour of being interviewed. As such, I had no guardrails to steer the conversation

productively. I amended my protocol from that point on to keep all participant interviews to approximately one hour to be consistent with the previous interviews. Once each interview was recorded, I transcribed the interviews using the software Otter.ai and generated transcripts which were stored in a secure database that only I had access to.

CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVES

Using CRT as my theoretical lens and following critical counter-narrative as my methodology (Miller et al., 2020), I constructed the participants' counter-narratives via the whole narrative approach (Miller et al., 2020), in which participant stories are shared (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Sharing narratives is important because as Berry (2018) posited "In CRT, narrative is counter-storytelling" (p. 88). I did this by having participants reflect "through the narrativization of personal experiences" (Ball, 2009, p. 27). During my initial analysis phase, I began taking analytical notes throughout each interview. Analytical noting is a data analysis method that encompasses "problem identification, to changes in research design, to question development, to identifying patterns and themes" (Glesne, 2016, p. 77). After completing each interview, I took additional reflexive notes to capture any important details (e.g., participant mannerisms, reflexive thoughts, preliminary data analysis, items to follow up on, etc.) from the interview experience to ensure that nothing of consequence was lost in translation from the interview to the recording (Glesne, 2016). I then carefully listened to each participant interview twice, taking additional reflexive notes throughout this analysis phase. During this stage, I started outlining key moments and conditions that contextualized the participants' experiences related to the research questions. Placing the narratives in these parameters was important because "Stories always refer to a particular context, place, and

moment" (Lawrence, 1992, p. 2281). In addition to outlining key moments and conditions, I also started making deeper connections to the CRT literature by analytically noting potential connections in the data through a CRT lens. Once I developed the narratives, I listened to and read each interview transcript again to ensure that I was not excluding any major discussion points from the interviews related to the research questions. Moving forward throughout the analysis process, I iteratively engaged in the participant narratives, CRT literature, and experiential education literature to make meaning of the data. This process ultimately brought me to the discussion and implication section outlined in Chapter 5. The length of each narrative was determined by how much the participants shared related to the research questions during the interviews.

When developing the narratives, several stylistic choices were used. One example is that "filler" (e.g., um, like, you know, kind of, etc.) dialogue in participant quotes was omitted for clarity's sake and to not paint the participants in a poor light. Another stylistic choice was to not explicitly define features of each internship such as the state, organization, preceptor name, and so on. The primary reason for this was to protect the participants' identities from any vocational repercussions that could ensue from their reflections on their racialized internship experiences. Thus, instead of specific states, general geographic locations are used (e.g., Southeast, Midwest, etc.). Organizations are not explicitly named, but the functions of the organization are described (e.g., a non-profit focused on eliminating obesity, a research institution focused on rural health, etc.). In this same light, all participants chose pseudonyms to use for the study. All other non-participant names mentioned in the narratives are also pseudonyms.

As far as additional stylistic choices, I chose to end each participant's narrative based on the final interview question I asked each participant which was “What is one thing you want everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships?” This question prompted some of the most powerful answers during the interview and served as a way for the participants to have the final say about their stories. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained, part of the beauty of counter-narratives is that allows People of Color the power of "naming one’s own reality” (p. 56). In this same spirit, each participant had the opportunity to review and approve their narrative to ensure that the story being told was one that portrayed their lived experiences as accurately as possible. Of the 14 participants, 11 reviewed their narratives. Eight of the participants approved of the initial narrative while three had some suggestions to clarify certain elements of their stories which I incorporated into the final narratives.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Oftentimes, qualitative research does not seek to identify universal truths or knowledge but instead recognizes that reality is socially constructed (Delgado, 1989). As such, qualitative researchers are typically more concerned with the trustworthiness of a study than validity in quantitative research (Glesne, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness in this project, I used several strategies outlined by Glesne (2016) including prolonged and persistent observations with the data, clarifying my subjectivities in a reflexivity statement, keeping a research journal and field notes, and sharing the narratives with the participants as a form of member checking (Glesne, 2016). However, I want to be clear that while I used strategies to make my data more trustworthy,

> narratives are mediated communicative events … These narratives are also produced under conditions dictated by academic research norms. In other words, these stories are constructed; there is no pure, complete story out there waiting to be recorded. Such a story can never be captured nor does it exist. Whatever story we do record is necessarily constructed by the individuals engaged in the interview process. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the value of such stories as testimonies to racism and other forms of oppression (Fernández, 2002, p. 49).

The wisdom of Fernández (2002) is important to keep in mind when reading the participant narratives.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

One possible limitation could be the author's professional standing within the Southeastern School of Public Health. While the author's close relationship with many of the participants may be viewed as a strength in that participants could share their experiences freely and with trust, it is also possible that the author's professional standing influenced who participated in the study and what was shared in these exchanges. Another limitation is the variation in internship experiences completed by the participants. For example, some participants completed internships fully in person, while others completed their experiences in virtual settings which undoubtedly shaped their experiences. Moreover, 13 of the 27 eligible participants did not participate in the study. Additionally, no MPH students from the ENHS department were included in the sample since no ENHS students were enrolled during this time. Finally, while this study outlined ways to create more racially just internship experiences for Black MPH students, the

precise steps of implementing these actions remain more complex than they are presented here and will vary slightly based on the needs of each student body.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I outlined my positionality to contextualize readers to how and why I am approaching the research. I also contextualized the setting of the Southeastern School of Public Health. This was followed by an overview of the distinctions of critical counter-narrative as a methodology. Finally, I shared how I collected and analyzed the data for the critical-counter narratives and ensured that the data was trustworthy, as well as outlined potential limitations.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

What follows in this chapter are the participant narratives of the 14 Black MPH interns who participated in this study. Each participant is unique. Every story is sacred. Here are their counter-narratives.

ALLISON MOORE'S NARRATIVE: I'M NOT A SCIENCE PROJECT

Allison Moore is a 25-year-old Black woman who grew up in the Midwest and Southeast. She is a proud third-generation college graduate who comes from a very highly educated family. She graduated with honors with a bachelor's degree in biology during the COVID-19 pandemic and knew that graduate school would open doors for her in the future, as it has for other members of her family. Ultimately, she found herself enrolled at the Southeastern School of Public Health pursuing her MPH.

While this experience was educationally comparable from a quality perspective to her previous studies, socially, it was "100%" different. Allison Moore completed her bachelor's degree from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) where her instructors and colleagues looked like her. While she went to predominantly white middle and high schools, the change in social environment in the graduate school setting provided a much different experience than undergrad. Questions as to "Oh, should I wear my natural hair? Should I not be fully expressing myself? Making sure I don't come off as this way or that way" became important parts of navigating the Southeastern School of Public Health. Allison Moore found graduate school

> challenging, I think, trying to find your place, if that makes sense. There isn't a sense of where you fit in there. At least that's how I felt like, "okay, where do I fit in?" Because you kind of don't really fit in.

This contrasted with her undergraduate studies because developing social connections and being accepted was "automatic" in a predominantly Black space. Allison Moore noted that one can't help but feel isolated being surrounded by those who do not look like you particularly when considering the history of Black individuals in the United States, and particularly Black individuals in the South. While no one explicitly made Allison Moore feel isolated or ostracized, she espoused skepticism about race neutrality and felt that she would feel less isolated if individuals were less racially neutral. As she put it

> thinking about the history of this country, and the racism and all that, especially being in the South that edges that on further, if you don't state, where you are, I just assume that you're either neutral, or you're not really with me, because if you don't explicitly say, "I'm here to support you" … you don't really care that much … so it's better to clearly state that you're an ally.

While her graduate school environment was socially isolating at times, Allison Moore did become very close with one of her only other Black classmates whom she is still very close with today. Having someone who could relate to her was an important and meaningful part of her graduate experience because many of her colleagues could not.

Allison Moore originally secured an internship with a non-profit organization but as the internship experience was supposed to be taking off, the group backed out on her at the last second leaving her without a site to complete her degree requirements. This led to Allison Moore completing her internship with a research group in the southeast that

specializes in evaluation. For her specific project centered around maternal and childhood health, she took an asset-based lens to examine a county in a southeastern state where sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy rates were outperforming areas with similar characteristics. While Allison Moore is interested in maternal and childhood health, the actual internship experience left something to be desired. “Because it was kind of last-minute … I don't think it necessarily brought me any growth specifically on the [career] path that I wanted to go down.”

The evaluation team that Allison Moore worked on was somewhere between 70-80% white and racial microaggressions regularly occurred in the workplace. They tended to be committed in an ignorant and curious way that asked her to explain certain elements of “being Black.” She was quick to point out that there is no one Black culture or way of knowing and that it is not her responsibility to educate or entertain her colleagues’ inquiries about race. She punctuated this point with the statement “I’m not a science project.”

Despite the challenges of the social environment and the patchwork nature of her internship, Allison Moore found ways to grow as a professional by experiencing something new. She enhanced her collaboration skills, bolstered her understanding of how to navigate office dynamics, gained more professional confidence by using her voice in meetings and presentations, and developed professional relationships to expand her social capital. In addition to growing in these areas, Allison Moore demonstrated resiliency in still finishing her degree on time despite her initial internship site backing out on her mid-semester, a truly impressive accomplishment.

Allison Moore is mindful that if workplaces are going to shift the lens on race, organizations need to become more self-aware about the role race plays in racialized workplaces. As she explained “I think that self-awareness is really important. Knowing who you work with and knowing ways to make them comfortable. Because I feel like the truth of the matter is, is most times we’re uncomfortable.” Allison Moore acknowledged that in workplaces “sometimes there's a blindness to color” which is not a productive way to view the world. For Allison Moore, color-evasiveness strips away from the beauty of humanity. As she explained, “we are different. And that is perfectly okay. That's the point that everyone is different. And that's the beauty in it.” While Black workers are viewed in a color-evasive manner, their workforce experiences tend to be anything but this because oftentimes, “Black people are not looked out for in the same way that a white coworker will look after their white coworker.” Importantly, she also noted that diversifying leadership is an important part of acknowledging the realities of Black public health workers but takes special care to recognize that diversifying leadership intersectionally (e.g., Black women becoming leaders instead of other racially minoritized males) is an important part of changing organizational attitudes about race. Thus, increasing workforce diversity is also an important component of changing attitudes about Black individuals in the workplace.

Yet even if the workforce cannot be instantly diversified, Allison Moore recognized that some type of mentor/mentee pairing with other Black individuals or racial justice allies is important for supporting specifically Black MPH interns. One thing that Allison Moore wanted everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships is

> I don't think I can speak for all students, but I think I can speak for me. I think, that just from a student perspective, one, that they may be a little insecure, right? They may be a little bit nervous about this role and what they can actually do to shine. And I think that there's another layer on that if you are a Black person, and then I think there's another layer on that if you're a Black female. I think that they want to show up, most people want to show up as their best selves, and that you want to try to cultivate an environment for someone to show up as their best. And like I said, if it is not clearly stated, [given] the [racial] background that we have of this country, I may not know that you're my ally. So, I'm not saying that you have to walk up to them and say, "Hey, you Black, intern of mine, I am your ally!" But just letting them know, "Hey, we're happy to have you happy to support you. I see, and I recognize that, we may have this difference, but I'm actually here to truly support you." And I think that people should know that. You may be, they may also be uncomfortable, and may be uncomfortable telling you, they're uncomfortable. So I think it just goes in with having that space, having the energy the effort to want to make everyone comfortable.

BILLY'S NARRATIVE: BEING BLACK DOESN'T LIMIT ME

Billy is a 29-year Black/African American Male from a southeastern state. Billy went to a nearly all-Black middle school, and high school, and studied at an HBCU. During his undergraduate studies, he learned about public health and decided to pursue an MPH at the Southeastern School of Public Health.

Billy completed two distinct internships during his graduate training which he described as "two completely different experiences." The first of which was with an

organization that focuses on policy efforts which he enjoyed less than his latter experience. Billy described the policy entity as “a place where it was just all about business.” The workforce was almost entirely white and overall, this group did not go out of their way to make him feel included. People rarely smiled and typically did not acknowledge his presence when he was in the office. Billy shared that while “it makes you feel some type of way naturally” he does not hold anything against them. He does not take it personally because it never felt personal towards him, he just felt that “they weren’t really personable people.” While he did not pursue internships solely to personally connect with employees, making personal connections at work makes work more enjoyable for Billy. When it would be time for the office lunch break, Billy almost always ate his lunch alone. When tasks need to be completed, his preceptor typically delegated tasks to him through one of the other members of the team. Many of the tasks he completed were fairly low stakes such as copyediting, but Billy still grew in these opportunities by enhancing his professional editing skills. Billy also enjoyed learning more about public health policy work. Seeing policies go from the draft phase to the legislation phase was enjoyable for Billy because it made this concept he learned in the classroom come to life.

Billy’s experience interning with the policy group was his first time working in a predominantly white work setting. Billy’s professional confidence grew during this time because he was in a new environment. “It was cool it helped me grow personally, definitely, because it was new. It’s that simple.” He also noted that those who are unable to intern in new environments could be at a disadvantage compared to him who has

completed an internship in a new space. Billy also noted that interns of different racial identities could also benefit from working in new spaces.

> I feel like [working in a new work environment is] helpful for anybody to experience. The same way for like, white people going into, a Black environment. I feel like that can make them grow. Or not even Black [environments] it could be Asian or Hispanic [environments] I feel like that helps you grow as a person.

Another area that Billy grew professionally during this experience is that working on policy showed him the "seriousness" that goes into public health legislative work.

Billy's subsequent internship experience with a community outreach arm of a hospital was far more positive. While this workforce dynamic was slightly more racially diverse than his previous experience, it was still mostly white. However, the environment and attitudes of the people he worked with were completely different from his first internship experience. Team members made it a point of emphasis to make Billy feel included and unlike his previous internship experience, Billy made lasting connections with members of the community outreach team. He developed mentors who gave him career guidance and held regular meetings with him to support his professional growth. One mentor he connected with in particular was an older Black male, who has now passed away. Billy's primary responsibilities were aiding in the strategic planning and coordinating community events. This involved working on COVID-19 prevention efforts at nearly every school in a major city of the state he interned with. This experience has helped Billy realize his love for community work.

> At [the community outreach team] I enjoyed the community work and that showed me that I actually do want to participate in community involvement. It

> seems like community involvement doesn't really have too many opportunities that pay enough for you to like, succeed in life. But it showed me that in my heart, that's something that I like. I like being in community.

While Billy "never had any issues where [he] felt people were really racist or discriminating or anything of that such" in his graduate program or internships, his current workforce dynamic is much more complex. Billy hesitated to describe some of the behaviors of his current colleagues as racist because, for Billy, comments that come from ignorance are not necessarily racist. When asked if he would describe these experiences as racist, he replied

> I wouldn't say racist. But if I had to guess, I would say the average person would say that it's racist. I just don't want to be the one to say it's racist, because technically at the end of the day, nothing is intentional from what they're doing. I think they're just unaware of how the things that they say, and joke about are technically racist … they're just inconsiderate and unmindful.

While he hesitates to use the term racist to describe some of these behaviors, he noted that in his current workplace "there's definitely some people who are not helpful for minorities period, and that's not just Black people. I'm very observant of it and I can see it." For Billy, these types of people are "inconsiderate of other's cultures. That's how I feel about them. They never ask, 'How you are doing?' And they are strictly about business." Contrasting sharply with his community outreach internship experience, his current workplace has members in leadership who diminish the humanity of the communities they are serving. "I've heard multiple comments from the higher-ups that belittle the underserved populations who are more at risk, the communities that we're

supposed to be serving." None of these comments are made directly in front of Billy. "They don't know that I know what they said, and I don't think they would say it in front of me." Billy noted that leadership othering the communities they are supposed to serve creates a divide between the workforce and communities.

> I definitely see the 'us v. them' [mentality] [in his current workplace]. Some talk kind of badly and poorly about the people that you're trying to serve. Like, you claim that you understand, you write this grant because you want to help these people, but then when we're doing implementation, you're talking bad about the people in a joking manner, but I don't think, you can't joke about certain stuff. Especially in front of people who are like [references to himself].

Discussing these comments further, Billy observed

> I think like a lot of people try to make other people laugh. In just about every situation that I'm talking about, and I think that's what leads to it like it's supposed to be like jokes for other people. Cause those who are saying this, we're talking about grown folks. It sounds like stuff like high school middle school stuff, but it's actually 20, 30, 40, 50-year-old men and women.

It is difficult for Billy to discuss these aspects of his current job. "I know I'm stuttering, it's just hard to talk about your job. They cut your checks."

Despite some of the challenges with his current employer, Billy remains focused on all of his positive professional experiences. While acknowledging that there are "people who are not helpful for minorities period," he was quick to add "But there's so many more people who are not that way, like [points to the interviewer]. There's so many better people, that when [those who are not helpful for minorities] do show their true

colors, it doesn't really matter." Another reason Billy chooses to focus on the good experiences is that these pale in "comparing [those experiences] to the bad, like the real, real, bad stuff that could be said."

While Billy is cautious to never assume ill-intent behind someone's actions, he is cognizant of how his personal and professional successes challenge some of the racial stereotypes about Black individuals. As he shared

> I believe there is a pretty common stereotype of Black people, especially young Black males. So, in this scenario, I have to assume how they're feeling or not, which I don't do that with anybody. I never do that. But if they are one of those people, I prove them wrong by you know, staying focused, not getting in trouble, don't go to jail. Keep my job, do well at my job, show up on time. Do what I'm supposed to do. I think anybody who feels that way, they feel like I'm not gonna do what I'm supposed to do so just by doing what I'm supposed to do and doing better at it, the best that I can.

Additionally, Billy highlighted awareness as a key aspect of shifting the lens of Black individuals in the workplace from a deficit-based lens to a positive one.

> This is an opinionated answer because I don't know, strictly opinionated if I had to guess maybe just having diverse environments, inclusion. But at the same time, I do think that the best person for the position, no matter how that plays out, probably should be in a position. But everybody should have opportunity for diversity, and equity in the workforce, and friendships with each environment.

For Billy, bringing awareness about the lived experiences of Black individuals in the workplace is vital to changing their lived realities. As he shared

> awareness, like what you're [the researcher] doing, bring the awareness up. Because if we don't talk about it, nobody's thinking about it. And so, on a normal day, these people who we are referring to [those who hold deficit-based views of Black individuals], they're not just thinking about this, because like I said, I don't think they are mindful of what's going on. So, I think it's just awareness, constant awareness, and … not necessarily just [awareness about] Black folks like, just a reminder of inclusion [for all]. Respect, all that stuff.

Billy extended this discussion later when he added

> I think it comes down to just like that constant reminder for everyone. Not just targeting white people but it should be a message for white people to white people, for white people to Black people, from Black people to Black people, from Black people to Hispanics, Hispanics, to white people, etc. Just like people in general. Just that constant reminder has to be made.

Billy cited that perhaps a strategy similar to the anti-bullying campaign in primary school could help shift the lens on how Black individuals are perceived in the workplace.

When thinking about the actions the Southeastern School of Public Health and the researcher could act on, Billy felt many of these actions were already happening. "I think you're already doing it. Being supportive, showing you care. Showing that you are a true person who wants everyone to succeed. I believe that about you. You show that you want everyone to succeed." There are multiple benefits to treating students this way. As Billy explained, "Well, at least for me, it makes me want to be supportive to other people as well. So, I think there's a lot of benefits to it."

When reflecting on racialized experiences in the workplace, Billy shared

> I feel like I'm kind of a tough person to do this [be interviewed] with because me as a person, I don't ever want to feel like, I'm making excuses … Honestly, I never want to come off like I'm, ever making an excuse. Or like, being Black limits me or anything like that. But at the same time, I'm kind of iffy about it. Because I don't want to come off that way. Ever. Like, with anything we're talking about, just like when I say I brush it off, I don't take it personal I'll never come off as any type of way. But at the same time, I am aware of the history and highlight that "you've already had a disadvantage." So even if it's not me, I do think it's helpful. I don't want to be the person saying, "Black people are disadvantaged." But I am aware that we are disadvantaged, and that [policies to support Black MPH interns are] helpful, if that makes sense … I'm saying that I don't ever want to let the Black stereotypes and what we face, make it look like I need a crutch because none of that stuff makes me need a crutch. I am aware that other people might not be as strong mentally or might be way more disadvantaged. So I do think that this stuff [actions to support Black MPH interns] should be implemented because I think a lot more people will benefit from it but just my mentality in general, I don't ever want to feel like I need that crutch.

BRIANNA'S NARRATIVE: BLACK PEOPLE ARE NOT A MONOLITH

Brianna is a 27-year-old Black woman from a southeastern state. Originally genetics major at a PWI, Brianna discovered public health and specifically epidemiology

through one of her courses which inspired her to apply to MPH programs around her state. Ultimately, this led her to the Southeastern School of Public Health.

Brianna felt her program prepared her well for her profession, but she does note that "there wasn't really a focus on diversity or making sure that there were resources for different types of students … everybody was under the same umbrella." In other words, no one specifically reached out to racially underrepresented students to support them. One component of her graduate training she enjoyed is the racial and expertise diversity amongst the faculty. An important component of her graduate experience was when Brianna connected with one of the professors in her department, a white woman, who supported Brianna in finding a graduate assistantship and ultimately her internship.

Brianna completed her internship with a research entity where she explored "the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of stakeholders who work with individuals who might be susceptible to substance abuse, specifically with opioids." She did this by interviewing a host of participants including employees at addiction and treatment centers and general community centers. Her internship was more qualitative than quantitative, which was a great area of growth for Brianna. In addition to enhancing her technical skills, Brianna also grew professionally by getting out of her comfort zone. She is "very much an introvert" and grew socially by engaging with stakeholders which ultimately made Brianna a stronger public health professional.

Brianna emphasized the point that Black people are not a monolith, and she demonstrated this through her professional and personal successes. She knows that in public health, while some may *not* be surprised to see Black individuals doing community work, they *would* be surprised to find a Black woman working as a data

scientist, yet she bucks this trend. By being her authentic and true self, Brianna shatters the racial stereotypes that others hold about Black women in the workplace.

If racial stereotypes are going to be eliminated in the workplace, Brianna saw mentorship and internships as two vital pieces of the puzzle. From the mentorship perspective, Black MPH students should be paired with practice mentors who guide their career development and support their employability journey. When it comes to internships, Brianna felt that internship programs that put an emphasis on diversity and recruiting Black MPH students would be one way of diversifying the mostly white public health workplace. Related to mentorship and internships, graduate programs should create spaces where Black public health students can share their experiences and give feedback to universities regarding their experiences.

When it comes to completing internships, organizations should tailor these experiences to the needs and interests of Black students. This would allow students to grow as professionals and ultimately benefit their organization and the field of public health as a whole. Put another way, tailoring internships to Black students' interests and enhancing organizational goals are not mutually exclusive, they are compatible.

One thing that Brianna wanted everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships is

> that we bring, valuable experience and that we bring insights from our personal experiences …that can help expand the field and … figure out why something's happening in certain populations … Because we have different experiences than what a lot of people that currently work in a community can bring. And I think just having those different backgrounds, different experiences, different

> communities is what the field of epidemiology is about … this in general, will help us reach [the field of public health's] goals.

COLUMBO'S NARRATIVE: PERSPECTIVES FROM A PREDOMINANTLY BLACK COUNTRY

Columbo is a 35-year-old Black woman who works as a dental hygienist in the predominantly Black Caribbean nation where she was born and raised. For her undergraduate degree, Columbo studied at a mostly white international school in Canada where she received her bachelor's degree and hygiene diploma. Columbo has a passion for educating others about oral health which inspired her to pursue an MPH virtually at the Southeastern School of Public Health while maintaining her full-time dental hygienist position.

Something that stood out to Columbo during her graduate training was just how prominent racial disparities are in the United States.

> I think learning a lot about the racial disparity disparities in health and getting a more clear understanding of how that works in the US. I've always had a surface understanding about that, just because of our close proximity to the U.S., but not really knowing and understanding how deep it goes.

While Columbo had a surface-level understanding of how race affects health in the United States, as a Black immigrant in Canada, she did not remember experiencing any prejudice while seeking health and dental care at her university or in the private sector. Learning about the severity of racial disparities in the United States is an eye-opening experience for Columbo but she made it a point to differentiate her lived experiences from her Black classmates in the United States.

> A lot of people tend to think that because we're the same color, we may have shared experiences, but it is a little bit different, especially being in a Caribbean nation that's predominantly Black. So when we were talking about any health issues, or health disparities, particularly with Black people in the U. S., I couldn't relate because a lot of the health issues that we have here aren't necessarily race-related. It's more about class and social stature and social economics. But not necessarily, because you are Black.

When speaking about her experiences with those who essentialize Black individuals, Columbo made a point to share that many of her classmates during her undergraduate program in Canada would refer to her as "African-American" but she and her colleagues would always explain to them that they are Black, because they do not have the same experiences as Black individuals who have lived in the United States. As she explained it "I am unfamiliar with nor have I lived through the issues that African Americans face in the U. S."

When it came time to find an internship, Columbo struggled to find an opportunity that would work with her unique situation. In Columbo's country, public health is still thought of as a primarily clinical field as opposed to a preventative one that is taught at the Southeastern School of Public Health. As such, the opportunities to get involved in public health work are few and far between. Another complication that Columbo faced was that she needed to find a site that would work with her schedule as a full-time employee. Columbo initially found an opportunity with an organization that focused on diabetes prevention. This project was going to allow her to combine her dental expertise with diabetes prevention to develop and evaluate a public health

program. This project also had a personal connection to Columbo since she herself is diabetic. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on the organization which caused them to close just as she was supposed to start her experience. Many organizations at this time are weary of bringing outsiders into their organization for safety reasons related to the pandemic.

Ultimately, she completed her internship experience with her place of employment where Columbo developed educational materials to get more individuals screened for sleep apnea. During this time, she got more comfortable with public speaking and developed her skills as a health educator. This experience has solidified the fact that she would like to transition from dentistry to public health when the time is right.

Because Columbo's country is predominantly Black, the colleagues she works and worked with are predominantly Black, as are the communities they serve. Race is not a divisive feature of this country. As Columbo explained, "We don't really look at race as something that differentiates us, between work and in health care, because you're going to see Black faces at the top levels of many places."

Columbo recognized that the United States could benefit from having more people from having more practitioners who look like the communities they serve. For students completing internships, she felt that working with and serving communities that are different from one's own could be an important aspect of growing as a person. Columbo wanted everyone to know that for Black MPH students completing internships

> The experience is going to be different for everyone, whether say for example, if I were to be a white person or a Brown person, doing my [internship], my

> experience is always going to be different. So, I don't want to be used as the marker for how all Black people would take on or how they would experience that [internship]. Because there's always going to be difference whether again, if you come from the absolute same environment, and socio-economic status, and everything just based on culture and race, your experience is always going to be different, in some way, shape, or form from anybody else who would have had the exact same internship experience as you so just even the kind of more culturally than race, but again, everything is so racialized in the US that there's going to be some form of a difference.

CORIENNE: NAME IT, SHAME IT, RECLAIM IT

Corienne is a 29-year-old Black American Cis/woman. Originally from a southeastern state, Corienne's horizons were expanded at the small Midwestern liberal arts college she attended. With a psychology professor and researcher, she experimented with conceptual framing to unpack how people understand the causes and potential solutions of complex societal problems. The most lasting impression on her career came from a project relating people's attitudes toward "the obesity epidemic" and propositions from the public health establishment to address it. Corienne realized she was more motivated to get the bottom of the public health implications as an end itself rather than just one topic of many to use research. Pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology would have allowed her to continue her work, but she decided to seek a different career route. Combining the analytic skills she learned as a researcher and healthcare industry knowledge she had learned from her parents who also work in the field, she got her first professional experiences in health analytics. She found herself asking big-picture

questions as to how healthcare works and who it works for. As time passed, she met the director of a graduate program who stressed to her "that this [higher education] is where you need to be" which changed the trajectory of her life. Corienne enrolled in a dual degree program which included the MPH program at the Southeastern School of Public Health, while continuing her full-time employment like Columbo.

The first year and a half of graduate school consisted of Corienne's other dual degree program, which she ended up dropping to focus on her MPH studies in the Spring of 2020 right as the first months of the pandemic closed everything down. While not her preference, her graduate studies were completed almost completely virtually due to social distancing orders. One thing Corienne wished the program did more of was get into the nitty-gritty of the professional competencies necessary to advocate and reform systems to reduce the health disparities that most know exist, as she felt many of these conversations were more values-based than competency-based. Corienne felt like most of her graduate experience left something to be desired which ultimately led to her taking a leave of absence from her studies. She continued working full-time but a layoff from her tech job responding to the declining economy opened a window for her to come back to school, finish her internship, and ultimately, complete her degree.

Corienne interned remotely under a member of city government in a southeastern city where she conducted a literature review "of past and current diabetes prevention-related research and public health initiatives" and conducted a stakeholder analysis on the city official's behalf. This was a very important experience for Corienne because, while she had always been adept in data skills, she wanted to complete an experience that got her outside her comfort zone. As she described

> I had a lot of anxiety, I still do have a lot of anxiety about putting myself out there as a as a community leader. That has a lot to do with my personal nature and nurture, all mixed up together. And I know that I have challenges with interpersonal skills, etc. But I also have almost no practice either. And I really wanted to emphasize collaboration and having to work with others.

One of the ways that Corienne got out of her comfort zone during this time was by planning and conducting 16 interviews with stakeholders and program managers from various non-profit organizations. Before completing this experience, Corienne had sincere doubts as to whether she had learned anything or earned her status as a public health professional. Ultimately, Corienne described the culminating experience as

> [saving] the MPH program for me. I would say that without that experience, I really don't know that I would have walked away from the program feeling good about myself [or] feeling proud of the degree that I had been awarded. It's the difference between saying that I was awarded a degree versus I earned a degree. The worst-case scenario of how I felt versus the best-case scenario is somewhere on [the] spectrum of "someone handed me this" versus "I did this." This piece of paper means something or reflects something that's different about my capacity now that I didn't have when I started. And it really was very gratifying because it was the first time that I felt that it might even be possible that the labor I'm putting into this could, theoretically, someday, help someone.

One area where Corienne experienced professional growth during this experience was enhancing her ability to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders of various organizations. For example, understanding that different stakeholders she interviewed

had different understandings of the content areas she was exploring allowed her to see herself as a peer of her participants with partial ownership of the outcome of her work and a responsibility to lead strategic conversations as the person collecting a city-wide view of program activities. Sociological models of wealth and health disparities were well-rehearsed themes in the MPH program, but fundamentals of project management were missing from her professional toolkit.

As far as racialized internship experiences, Corienne does not feel like her internship experience was racialized. She felt this is likely because she is less likely to racialize her interactions with others and often holds "a higher threshold" for interactions to be considered racialized. One reflection Corienne shared about her experience is that she knows that had she not received a severance package from her tech employer that parted ways with her, she would not have had the time and energy to work for free completing her internship experience for two and a half months. She noted that having MPH students complete unpaid labor is not a Black-only problem, it cuts across racial groups.

Corienne felt like the Southeastern School of Public Health should have better prepared her to find an internship experience, which could have been completed through more career development and training based on her intersecting identities. As she outlined

> the concept of where to get my [internship] was like if you asked me which NBA team I think I want to go where it's just like not a real option, like, "what do you mean?" I am a student, I have very little framework for what the next five years of my life will look like. So I don't know what organization would walk me in that

> direction. I don't know what direction I'm going in. I don't know what the questions are to ask. And I have no one to ask. I'm a 25-year-old Black woman with very few connections. I've got a job [as a resource] but what phone call am I making? I don't know what that has to do with, or if it is possibly exacerbated by, by my particular kind of clinical profile specifically as it as it relates to my personality and neurodivergency. But I just felt like I was being asked to manifest something out of thin air, because I don't have anyone to call. And I don't have anything to tell them when I call them. I'm a student; I have no framework. And again, we haven't been talking about job roles, this whole program. So even if I had someone to call, I don't know what to do, I don't know what opportunity to ask for that would help me long term. Because I don't know what I want long term … I felt personally clueless, frustrated, angry, and abandoned at worst. The very simple and optimistic notion of "You can do your [internship] anywhere" is not gratifying because that doesn't mean infinity options. It means anywhere based on the options you have and I had none.

Part of Corienne's frustrations came from the fact that because she worked full-time, she was limited on the experiential education she could achieve outside of work which put her at a disadvantage for securing experiential opportunities. She described internships and graduate assistantships as "that invisible hand" that helps students "fail forward", a luxury she, and many other Black students are not afforded. In her own words, "I'm a lone Black woman who's interested in fighting the power. I need to be twice as good to get half as much, much less equal. And I don't have the invisible hand."

When it comes to racial stereotypes, Corienne felt that “challenging stereotypes is easy because stereotypes are superficial … I’m a Black woman. I'm a computer scientist and programmer. I'm already well out of field of a stereotypical career.” As far as professional success, she was unsure if she challenged racial stereotypes because she felt the field of public health tends to be social justice-oriented and wants Black students to succeed. Despite this, she recognized

> I've been told many times that people assume I'm from a higher socioeconomic class…maybe I come off as someone whose parents probably went to an Ivy League school and if that's what you assume, then it's not so surprising that I'm a data scientist and computer programmer. My parents didn't go to Ivy League schools.

When considering how Black MPH interns combat racial stereotypes in the workplace, Corienne shared she is uncertain

> if that’s something students can do in the moment. I think that ties back to how I might challenge stereotypes as a Black women programming analyst. If I challenge them, great. If I don’t, then oh well, because I’m just living my life. I think I would have to know what the stereotypes are about Black students or Black MPH students to attempt to fight them back.

While identifying structural changes to shift the lens on race is challenging for Corienne, she felt enhancing the business communication and project communication skills of early career Black public health professionals would go a long way in disintegrating those stereotypes. Having those skills is particularly important because while white counterparts might be allowed to fail forward and learn those skills as they progress in

their careers, Black individuals may not be given those opportunities and "need to come out swinging."

Corienne felt strongly that Black MPH students should not complete internships "where they exercise skills they already have … that is a waste of time and money. And those are two things that on average, we can't afford to waste." Rather, Black MPH students should be challenged to aggressively network and increase their professional capacities before shedding the "student" label. She also felt that Black MPH interns could greatly benefit from the exposure to the "executive thinking" that a preceptor does on a daily basis. As she explained, "exposure and context is what young professionals need to understand what spaces look like before they are expected to run those same spaces." One way that she envisioned the Southeastern School of Public Health supporting Black MPH students in this capacity is by pairing them with practice mentors who could guide students throughout their program and into the public health workforce.

What Corienne wanted everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships is that they

> are very clever, educated people. If you're assuming they went straight undergrad to grad school and that's it, then that is a blank slate with a lot of potential. You will do more service to them and to the communities they will serve over their career by remembering that they only just graduated, and any other skills or competencies or personal qualities that they don't have and need [to have], you might need to explain [that to them] explicitly. [In] my professional experience, there is a really, really high tendency for long-standing leaders in a field to really forget the basics of their own profession, which makes sense because they're so

> many years in the [field]. There comes a point where you can't relate to being a novice anymore. [You] think that everything you know and everything that's common sense to you is obvious. Professionals taking on recently-graduated MPH Black public health professionals, their mentors and bosses and contribute by actually mentoring us. Take us with you to your leadership meetings, put us in the way of opportunities, and provide a hearty endorsement of young Black professionals. We'll have fewer doors opened on average. Open doors more for the young Black professionals in your sphere of influence, and don't let us fail forward ALONE so that we can actually "learn on the job" the way the MPH program assumes we'll be able to. It's not anyone's fault. But be aware that a newly minted MPH is a blank slate. And much of what school teaches is in direct contrast to what is effective in the business world, and a lot of students because of systemic bias, don't even have that. But that doesn't mean they're not bright. It means they're just still a student, actually. So the idea that someone graduates and just stops receiving support is a farce. And we as a collective profession are stealing from our own future by doing that.

Ultimately, when it comes to the racial stereotypes that Black MPH students face in the workplace, Corienne contended that Black MPH students need to

> Name it, shame it, and reclaim it. In general for public health advocacy, I think name, shame, reclaim is the PDSA (plan-do-study-act) cycle we're always on, fighting for incremental systemic improvements. If we can locate the places stereotypes hide, then we should go there too to identify, call it out, and take that back too.

K'S NARRATIVE: TAKING OFF THE ROSE-COLORED GLASSES

K is a 25-year-old Black woman from a southeastern state. She described her personal graduate student brand as an "academic baddie" who is beautiful young and very smart. The roots of K's interest in public health run deep. Her entire family earned public health degrees from the Southeastern School of Public Health, but this is not the only factor influencing her professional pursuits. She also chose a career in public health because she holds a core belief "that everyone deserves all the things that they need in order to be healthy, they shouldn't have to struggle in order to achieve health."

K completed two internships during her graduate studies. The place she spent the most time was at a health center in a southeastern state where she developed a public health campaign centered around developing and implementing programs to improve sexual health awareness. While initially entering this space in a student role, K ultimately took on the role of interim coordinator when her preceptor left at the beginning of her internship experience. While the workforce is mostly white, K never felt like she was "completely surrounded by white people." She credited this to her Black colleagues working in her department and the diverse group of undergraduate students she interacted with during this time. K felt that the hierarchical nature of the organization created more division between employees than any sociocultural or racial factors. Despite this, K questioned some of her experiences at this organization that centered on employee conflict. "There were certain things that happened that I felt like, had I've been somebody else, maybe I would have been protected more." The particular employee conflict she is referring to is primarily based on a disagreement about how the sexual health campaign should be run. This southeastern state is quite conservative, and the health center had

some reservations about K's strategies to improve and run the sexual health campaign. While the conflict was eventually resolved, this created division between K and the higher-ups which caused K and her Black colleagues to disengage from more senior members of the organization. While K felt supported by her academic department, she did not feel supported by her internship site. "I felt like more people could have stopped in and checked on me could have said like, 'Hey, do you guys need anything? Do you guys know how to do this?'" It was only towards the end of the experience that K started to feel looked after and these attempts felt more like the organization trying to save face than a genuine effort at supporting K. As she explained

> I think we had gotten frustrated, or we've maybe gotten kind of cold enough that it was like they were kind of doing it to save face, which also became a thing of coming from a Black student, coming from a Black woman, I don't think you ever want to be seen as like the angry Black woman.

Navigating this tension was challenging because as interns about to enter the workforce, there could be serious vocational repercussions for not navigating the situation in a way that would not upset the organization. As K shared

> it just definitely made it even harder knowing that "okay, if we don't do this the right way, we're going to be portrayed as the angry Black people, they're going to make us look bad." We have jobs that we went after this, they may call [the health center] for recommendations.

K's internship experience with the health center was complicated by her elevation to interim coordinator because the lines between student and professional became blurred,

from the health center's standpoint. Most students are given off finals week to study but this organization tried to force K to work during finals week. As K explained

> Normally, we're given the week of finals off because we have to study, we have to get prepared, I was graduating, and I said that I had to [get prepared for finals week]. And it was kind of oppressive. "Well, we still need you here because we still have testing to do" and it's like, well, I'm still a student. I might work full-time hours, but I'm still a student, I still get student privileges.

The health center's pressing for K to work during finals week is particularly ridiculous given that K had already been working over her expected hours to meet the demands of the position. As K put it "I have a backlog of things that I have more hours than you could technically pay me for even if I were to stay through this week, like overtime hours." Part of the reason K was so aware of how many hours she has already worked over 40 hours, is because as a Black woman, she was being surveilled more closely than others and needed to be hyper-vigilant in the workplace. She knew

> that as a Black person, as a Black student, I always have to keep a paper log of everything that happens I have to keep evidence of what's going on, who said what, just keeping all that paper trail stuff together … I have I feel that extra layer of scrutiny of like it has to be perfect. It has to be done right the first time people are watching. People are, not that they're waiting for you to mess up, but they have a certain expectation and they're not expecting that you're gonna reach that expectation. So me, kind of always having that that edge of like, it has to be super perfect, it has to be clean.

This extra pressure and surveillance added undue stress to K's internship experience which, while it did not derail her experience entirely, preoccupied time and energy that could be used to focus on growing as a professional.

> It just was an extra stress that I feel like I should not have had to deal with. And it just did not make it enjoyable. I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed the experience. I enjoyed everything that I learned I'm super, super proud of us in the work that we did. But I wish I could have learned more about how to be a professional in this space, how to network, how to be a leader from people that were supposed to be that source for me when I was there.

Despite these unique challenges K was able to focus on the growth she experienced during this time and is proud of what she accomplished. One of the major ways that she grew during this experience was by developing her professional voice as a young Black woman, which is difficult in these spaces. As K described

> The dynamics of being in that space as being a young person, being a young Black person. Being a young lady, I mean, it is really hard to be a girl at work. It is so hard people question you all the time, even other girls question you and it's like "I know that you know that I know what I'm talking about."

K's development of a professional voice allowed her to "stand up for myself in situations where people didn't agree with me." K also used her professional voice to have conversations with leadership at the organization. She also credited this experience with enhancing her media marketing skills, which is something that she uses in her current role.

K also is proud of how visible she and her graduate student counterpart, another Black woman, were during her time at the health center. The woman K took over as interim coordinator for was also a Black woman, and K felt that her relationship with the organization left "some tension" between K's office and the rest of the organization. To dissolve this tension, and challenge any "angry Black women" stereotypes, K and her Black colleague made it a point to dress well, be seen, and participate in organizational outings.

K's second internship was with a Black senator in a predominantly conservative state. Most of K's responsibilities were administrative such as reading white papers or talking the senator through public health policy implications. Sometimes, she would run errands, print out papers, or deliver documents to other departments. The political environment in this state is still quite divided but K has seen behind the scenes some of that division is an act to please constituents and noted that "we're really not as divided as you think." This workforce here was "predominantly white, of course." Fortunately, K felt supported and respected by the senator she worked under, whom she viewed as a professional uncle of sorts. While she never had bad experiences under his supervision, "the reality of it is, is being a young Black woman" she has heard other coworkers say inappropriate comments which reminds K that she always needs to be aware of where she is and how she is representing herself. K also recognized the challenges that Black women face entering professional spaces.

> Being Black, being a young Black lady, I want to be presentable as somebody that can be respected. I want you to take me seriously I don't want there to be anything on me that's so distracting. That makes you think something different of me other

> than the image that I'm trying to persuade you to believe … you gotta be sharp, you gotta be honest because that's just kind of the nature of it all.

Elaborating on working in a divided and racialized environment, K shared

> when Black people come into certain spaces, we feel the need to kind of whitewash ourselves by dressing a certain way, talking a certain way, carrying myself a certain way, not having certain conversations or certain opinions. And if you have a certain opinion and there's another Black person in the room, y'all might just kind of make that that nonverbal communication, have an eye contact or look of like, "Okay, you heard that too?"

Another positive component of this experience is that K's cousin, who is also a Black woman, served as a mentor in navigating this racially charged environment. While both internships had unique challenges, she also had the opportunity to grow as a professional through these experiences which contributed to K's current public health success in her current role as a program manager.

As K traversed into the public health workforce as a full-time employee, she continued to face complex racialized work environments. In her first role out of graduate school, she worked for a clinic where one of her supervisors held very sexist views towards all women in the workplace, but particularly Black women. As K put it "he wasn't interested in me having an opinion or an idea." As a proud, intelligent, Black woman and public health professional, K refused to be subjugated to his backward beliefs, and as such, they often butted heads. Although her supervisor was not interested in her having ideas, he had no issue taking K's ideas and passing them off as his own. K shared an idea with the team that her supervisor hijacked, passed off on his own, and

resulted in nearly 2 million dollars of funding to the site, or so her supervisor claimed. K questioned how true this statement really is given her previous untruthful experiences with him. Assuming that the project was actually being implemented, the most frustrating aspect of his hijacking her idea is that the idea is not being delivered as effectively as it could have been if he incorporated K from the beginning. “Maybe had he been more open and have we had a better relationship where he was willing to cultivate that idea with me, we could have launched that sooner, we could have done it better.” Ultimately, K was let go from this organization.

Fortunately, this parting of ways was a blessing to K as her current workplace, while not perfect, is a much more positive environment. Although still mostly white, K’s current workforce experience is quite diverse involving a host of racial, ethnic, and religious identities which she enjoys very much. Another positive component of her current experience is her supervisor who is a Black woman and several other Black women in the organization serve as mentors to her. K’s Black colleagues give her freedom, independence, and trust to complete her work. K credited their shared life experiences as one of the ways they empowered her in the office. Her colleagues remember what it is like to be a young Black woman in these spaces, and this allows her to achieve more and be more fulfilled at work. K felt that having Black mentors is an important aspect of shifting the lens on race. While she acknowledges that it is difficult to find Black mentors, she put forth that

> it shouldn't be hard for your Black employees to find Black leadership mentors in your organization. And it shouldn't be hard to find ones that are good at championing for you. Because that's just that's just part of it. You need someone

to champion for you because some things aren't going to change structurally [unless there are champions for Black individuals]

Moreover, from a DEI perspective, K contended that many DEI efforts in organizational settings are "sugar-coated bubble gum" and are not effective, whereas more intense DEI efforts are needed that center the lived reality of Black workers. She explained that the current efforts of DEI are "just not going to change at the office level. 'Oh, we can send everyone home with the packet and the program and there'll be that's just how that works.' Unfortunately, that's just not how it goes." K also acknowledged that documentation and accountability for authentic DEI practices are also key to diversifying the workplace to ultimately provide more mentors for young Black professionals.

K is proud to be a Black woman in the workplace. As she shared

> I am a Black woman, I wear my natural hair, but I don't have four C-type natural hair. I have super kinky hair, I have curly hair. So I can kind of skate the rim a little bit. But I do try to make sure that I am also as Black as I can possibly be like, I do still get box braids, I do wear my hair in cornrows, I do wear wigs and weaves and my outfits and the things that I wear, I try to be Afro expressive, but not as Afro expressive as possible. Because I think I'm not naturally like that, but I also understand that my image skirts the line of like acceptable in that space. So I kind of just have to use that to navigate, and it plays as a benefit. And that just is what it is. And I'm just aware of it. But I do think I definitely skirt the mold.

K views internships as a means of showing the boomer generation that young Black public workers are not lazy or obsessed with technology, rather they are the sparks that will innovate the field to meet tomorrow's public health challenges. K also identified

feedback and support during internships, particularly from the leadership of the organization as an important aspect of internships.

> I think it's very important that young people have someone that believes in them. That is leadership. It's nice to have your peers believe in you and say, “Oh, you're doing so good.” Or to have people that may look one or two steps above you like “Oh, that feels nice, too.” But until you're your leader [says] “Oh, good. Good job, young man. Nice job, young lady. This looks very nice. This is a good job.” You don't really feel like you're doing too much. It feels good. But sometimes you need that extra pat on the back to say like, “okay, imposter syndrome no more. I don't suck as bad as I think.”

For K, these interactions in the internship boost the professional confidence necessary to succeed in the workplace. As such, she suggested that some type of professional public health practice mentorship with Black and racial justice alumni could serve as a conduit for facilitating some of these experiences for Black and non-white MPH students. Ultimately, K wanted everyone to know that Black MPH students completing internships

> can produce a quality of work that is just as high if not higher than everyone else. They're just as productive. They are just as impactful and necessary to the culture and the environment, the innovation and development of the organization. And it's just necessary, it's important to build the workforce. It's important to have diversity not because you want diversity, but because you want to have different ideas and thoughts and if you actually believe in your organization's success, that's something you'll want naturally anyway, to have a lot of different opinions and perspectives. And that these kids want a chance people want a chance, we

know already that the odds are stacked against us. And some of us fill out our job applications, and we don't even put our race. We already know the odds are stacked against us. So just give us a chance.

KATE ROGERS' NARRATIVE: BLACK MPH INTERNS ARE INNOVATIVE

Kate Rogers is a 28-year-old Black woman from a small rural town in a southeastern state. Initially a biology major with plans on becoming a physician, Kate Rogers quickly realized that she had "no interest in learning about fish" which accompanied her biology coursework. However, when she discovered public health after talking with her academic advisor, she was hooked. Kate Rogers graduated undergrad from a PWI and entered the public health workforce as a program coordinator where her team focused on women and maternal health, but her infatuation with public health didn't stop there. Kate Rogers decided to continue working full-time and went back to school to earn her MPH from the Southeastern School of Public Health.

Distance learning provided a unique challenge for Kate Rogers to make connections with colleagues and mentors and she was unsure just how many Black students were even enrolled in her program. Building community is important for Kate Rogers and she knows this would have been easier in graduate school if she had been surrounded by people who had similar interests and looked like her. At times, being a distance student made one "feel like you're doing it on your own … and it does not feel good." While distance learning was challenging, Kate Rogers found her coursework and projects interesting, which made the experience more enjoyable.

When it came time to find and complete an internship, Kate Rogers was stressed. This was not aided by the fact that when she reached out to a faculty member to express

these concerns, they were somewhat dismissive of her reservations by saying “I hear you, but there's nothing else that can really be done on that.” Despite this, Kate Rogers persevered and found an internship with a non-profit organization that focused on diabetes prevention in a southeastern state. Her particular project focused on communication strategies around rural food-insecure areas. Working with this population was meaningful for her because Kate Rogers is from a similar rural community. Kate Rogers primarily worked with one individual during her internship experience, Jay. While Jay is a white male, working with him is one of the highlights of Kate Rogers’ experience. Although the internship was completed completely virtually, he made her feel comfortable and safe in a virtual space, which she recognized as “a very special talent” which allowed Kate Rogers to be herself during her internship. Jay was open, honest, communicated well, and was not afraid to spotlight her hard work to his supervisors. He also was willing to teach and learn from Kate Rogers which made her feel he would make an amazing professor.

Jay challenged the ways that many public health professionals talk about at-risk communities and how oftentimes terms like “low-income” are code words for Black communities in public health work. His willingness to have these difficult conversations and challenge the way his organization discusses Black communities was empowering for Kate Rogers. A key moment of the internship was when it came time to present her findings to leadership. Jay warned her that this group could come off as a “little standoffish,” which prepared her to navigate the virtual space in which the spotlight was on her, and she was the only Person of Color on the call. Jay used this opportunity to showcase all of the hard work that she had done and praised her efforts and contributions

to the team. Although Kate Rogers was nervous, she reminded herself that Jay "saw something in me that that he wanted to work with. And he saw my ideas. And he thought it was valuable. So I am in the position because I deserve to be."

While Kate Rogers can be shy at times, her internship experience allowed her to develop her professional voice by using her expertise to speak up for communities that look like her and have her voice respected. It is during this time that she realized the true importance of being prepared and organized. Kate Rogers has already achieved so much as a public health professional. She worked full-time in public health, went back to school, and continues to be willing to learn new things. When reflecting on her accomplishments, she shared "I don't always brag on myself, but I've done a lot. I've done a lot and I've definitely succeeded at some things and I think I even surprised myself sometimes, by the things that I can do."

When it comes to racial stereotypes in the workplace, Kate Rogers recognized that "there are ways that people have kind of created a narrative about a group of people that's not actually true. And then that narrative gets reinforced over and over again in the world." Because of these false narratives, she understands that for those in the workplace,

> It's kind of hard to not believe the things that you keep hearing. And then especially if you see maybe one example of that type of behavior, then you're gonna kind of assume that it's that way with all people. In fact, it's not. We're all individuals.

Kate Rogers felt that internships can play an important role in shifting the false narrative about Black individuals, by giving Black MPH interns a chance and incorporating the interns' professional goals and expertise into the dynamic. As she explained

> I would say give them [Black MPH students] a shot. I think public health is an industry where professionals get in, and they may hold their position for a very long time. And then, when new students or early professionals come around, it's kind of hard to navigate certain situations, because there are people that are obviously your senior, so they've been doing things a certain way. And they've been getting results. But it's like you can see a way for improvement, but they can't see improvement just yet. So I would say definitely give Black people a shot. Because we do have ideas that are innovative.

Thus, internship access can play a key role in changing perspectives about Black individuals. However, feedback from Black individuals to public health organizations is also an important component of eliminating racial stereotypes. The feedback that Black MPH interns give to organizations and schools of public health during these experiences must be taken seriously even *before* there are racialized problems in the workplace. As she shared

> If you want to improve the [internship] experience for Black students, then you definitely have to listen to them. And you have to create a space for them to be able to have their voice heard. Don't wait until the situation gets really agitated to where we're angry.

Moreover, hiring more Black individuals in the public health workplace also would help "Because you feel more comfortable around people that look like you or share the same ideas." One thing Kate Rogers wanted everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships is that "Black students are capable and we are willing to learn. Put

us into positions that will not only showcase what we have learned but introduce a challenge for us as well, because that only helps us grow as people."

LEE'S NARRATIVE: BLACK PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF LEADERSHIP

Born in the northeast but raised in a southeastern state, Lee is a 26-year-old Black woman and first-generation citizen of the United States. Lee grew up in an environment that made caring for others second nature. She credited her mother, a nurse, for inspiring her to pursue a professional field that increases the quality of life of others. However, the stories from her mother's time as a critical care nurse were enough to make her consider alternative careers outside of nursing where she could still help others. Combining this with her fitness background, Lee found her way to the field of public health.

Lee always maintained a high grade point average during undergraduate studies but when she was in the process of applying to graduate school, she received advice *not* to study for the graduate record examination, which led to her being admitted to graduate school "with conditions." Being admitted with conditions meant that she could not fall below a certain grade point average or she could be dropped from her program. While Lee knew that her standardized test score was not indicative of her intelligence, this created an extra layer of stress navigating graduate school in the first semester. Fortunately, Lee persevered through this stressful environment, and from that point on, she deeply enjoyed her time in graduate school. It was comforting and empowering to her when she entered most classrooms and saw people who looked like her in the graduate school setting. While the student body was diverse, the faculty was far less diverse, which is disappointing for Lee. Despite this, she particularly enjoyed that her professors in graduate school held high expectations for her and all of her colleagues and pushed

them to produce excellent work. Lee was also appreciative of the supportive and accommodating environment the faculty brought throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as this is when Lee completed her degree. When it came time to complete her internship, the pandemic impacted this experience deeply.

In 2020, as the pandemic raged on, Lee contacted five or six different organizations to complete internships with, all of whom were unable or unwilling to work with her in her final semester. This experience was frustrating for Lee, and she couldn't help but notice that one of her cohort members who is a white male and the same age as her had no trouble at all finding an internship. She noted that aside from that difference, she and her white male counterpart had nearly identical graduate experiences. Ultimately, while it took several swings to find her internship opportunity, once she found her internship experience, it was a home run.

Lee worked with a research group in the southeast focused on enhancing the physical activity of children. This was a very enjoyable experience for Lee because of the breadth and depth of the opportunities she had in the organization. The research team Lee worked on was small and she was the only Person of Color on her team. Given that she completed this experience during the pandemic, the research team worked on a hybrid schedule, and as such, office interactions were limited. While Lee was somewhat intimidated by her direct supervisor, who is a legendary figure in the physical activity and public health space, Lee felt supported by him and the rest of the research team.

One of her responsibilities as an intern was to compile comprehensive lists of physical activity resources and divide them into national and local categories to better understand what physical activity resources are available to parents in various

communities. Another initiative she got involved in was evaluating a physical activity program in Central America. Not only that, but Lee worked with a national committee that created physical activity campaigns through her work with the research group. These are projects that were meaningful to her, and her team trusted her to carry out her tasks independently. While she was given autonomy in completing her work, her colleagues also provided meaningful feedback to improve her work, which Lee deeply enjoyed. From a professional standpoint, Lee's internship taught her what it means to be accountable as a valued team member and the importance of professional preparation to succeed in the workplace.

Lee recognized that her personal and professional successes in her career and internship challenge the notions that some hold about Black individuals in the United States. She defied notions that Black individuals are lazy and showed this by working hard and always presenting herself professionally in the workplace. Through her internship specifically, she was responsible for managing and overseeing several initiatives. She was not in a boots-on-the-ground position where she was being told what to do, she was responsible for the management side of the project. Lee knew that all too often, Black individuals are not in leadership roles, but she broke this mold by being a person administratively responsible for operations behind the scenes.

If the United States is going to eliminate racial stereotypes about Black individuals in the workplace, Lee viewed increasing the number of People of Color in behind-the-scenes and managerial roles as an important component of shifting the lens on race. Lee explained that part of the reason that Black individuals are prevented from leadership opportunities is based on trust. She captured the idea of trust this way,

> I think, what I want to say is that there's a lack of trust, and a sense, of, "Can they [Black individuals] do it? Are they going to be adequate enough to be able to perform what needs to be formed to handle that type of workload and more of the background work?" … So it's really just allowing people that look like me those opportunities. It's as simple as that.

Lee explained that while she wishes this was not the case, the reality is that specific programs and opportunities are needed for racial minorities to gain access to internships, entry-level jobs, and leadership positions if the public health workforce is going to become more racially just. These types of programs would ultimately ensure that Black individuals gain entry into the field and go beyond boots-on-the-ground roles to more leadership roles at some point. Because such opportunities are currently limited, Lee viewed having a "reservoir" of preceptors who are willing to work with students would be a step in the right direction. Ultimately, Lee wanted Black MPH students to know that

> internships are beneficial, they are helpful, and they give you the inside scoop that you may not get if you're just on outsider looking in. I would say, "fully immerse yourself in the experience, look for more opportunity, look and ask around, talk to the people you are working with because they have unique experiences, they have unique, different connections, you just never know. So really open yourself up to the experience and really get the most out of it."

MARIE'S NARRATIVE: A MULTI-RACIAL APPROACH TO RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE WORKPLACE

Marie is a 28-year-old Black woman who was born and raised in a small town in a southeastern state. After earning her bachelor's degree in biology, Marie started working

in an environmental health lab that specialized in testing for foodborne pathogens with local restaurants and grocers. It was during this time that Marie started to sit on calls that discussed the epidemiology of how pathogens get spread which sparked her passion for foodborne epidemiology. With her newfound inspiration, she enrolled at the Southeastern School of Public Health where her love for the topic only grew as she learned more about foodborne epidemiology.

Graduate school was a very enjoyable time for Marie despite the discomfort that accompanied her when spending time in this mostly white space. With so few other Black students around, Marie knew that she "definitely needed to put my best hat on and try my absolute best." This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that her other Black classmates were non-traditional students who already had professional medical careers, whereas she had only completed her bachelor's degree at this point. As Marie explained "not to say I was an oddball. No one ever treated me like an oddball. But I think internally I knew "you really have to like make your mark … make them see you as competent and capable." An extra layer of stress and intimidation was added to proving herself because Marie did not grow up with or have access to the resources that some of her classmates were afforded. As she articulated

> I didn't have the resources available for me to only focus on school. So because of that, I had these jobs. I knew I couldn't let that show in my work, I still had to be top dog in my schooling and in my work just balancing it all. It can get a little intimidating, if you're not that confident in yourself, especially when you're working together on projects with others, and they have that access to other information and someone can give them advice, or, someone else they can refer

to, and I personally didn't. So, it can get a little intimidating. Like, “Do you really know? Are you really capable? Do you really know what you're talking about in this in this area?” But I think, it's just a lot of self-encouragement with that. And like I said, no one ever came up to me and was like, “You're not smarter, you can't do this.” But I think just feeling alone in that space. Because you feel more comfortable with people of your own that you can talk to and bounce back on.

Fortunately, as she progressed through the program, Marie made professional connections who supported her graduate school experience. One of which was with a faculty member who is a Black woman who empowered Marie in the academic space. The second mentor she connected with during her graduate assistantship, who is also a racially minoritized individual, provided mentorship and network opportunities that were outside the scope of their professional relationship, which was a deeply empowering and meaningful experience for Marie. Overall, Marie described her graduate school experience as enjoyable but just “a little lonely.” In a better world, Marie envisioned how hiring more Black faculty and creating spaces where other Black MPH students can share their experiences and bond together would change the graduate experience for Black students in the future. Despite some of the self-doubt stemming in part from her loneliness during graduate school, Marie ultimately resolved to prove that she was a capable graduate student and could balance work and school responsibilities.

For her internship, Marie worked with an outreach arm of a hospital system in the southeast that focuses on reducing youth gun violence. This organization achieves this through storytelling and teaching youth skills to avoid situations where gun violence can occur in a host of settings including schools, student organizations, youth detention

centers, and other areas in the community. The group even brought some members of the priority population into the trauma center in the emergency room to accentuate the seriousness and severity of gun violence which Marie knows carries more weight than simply telling teenagers about the issue. Marie enjoyed her work during this time so much that it didn't feel like work to her. She described it as "a great positive experience that was needed." Marie worked on a small team that had both Black and white men and women who offered unique perspectives on gun violence. Some had direct experiences related to the topic while others did not. Marie was able to offer a unique perspective of someone who has had people close to her experience gun violence and how that experience indirectly impacted her quality of life. While her indirect experience with gun violence in the past was anything but positive, Marie felt good that she used this experience to prevent future gun violence and help others navigate similar situations. While the team has people who come from a host of different backgrounds, one thing they did have in common is that they were all passionate about preventing gun violence in youth. This was important because Marie knew that each unique perspective is needed if gun violence in youth is going to be prevented. She also felt that because the group consisted of a multi-racial coalition that is passionate about preventing gun violence, this deracialized the project in a way that could be viewed as a "Black-only problem." In addition to the health promotion education component, Marie knew that their programming efforts also showed Communities of Color that there are People of Color who work in public health for a living which may inspire and empower them to pursue similar careers. Marie felt pride in knowing that her internship experience was a very well-planned and executed project that made a difference in the communities she worked

with. When describing her internship experience, Marie shared “I love it. I love it. I can talk about it all day long. I love it.”

As Marie has continued into the workforce, she has started realizing that even public health professionals hold racialized views about the populations they aim to serve, particularly around Black maternal and child health. As an epidemiologist who is a Black woman from a small town not unlike those who are disadvantaged, Marie uses her data analysis skills and professional voice to advocate for the communities she currently works with. “I think my being a Black woman in my role, I'm able to hold more power in a sense and bring it up these conversations.” When contemplating what would need to change structurally to remove negative ways of thinking about Black public health workers, Marie felt that “more inclusive leadership” of Black individuals would be a great start. As she explained

> I don't want to get political but honestly, you got all these white people who have been in there for years, and times have changed from when they were first initiated in the company. They’re going off of the 1960s, and as you know, that is not the best time to refer back to [for Black individuals]. So yeah, let's get some younger people, let's get some racial minorities, let's get some women in there to, to break that up.

Marie emphasized that there are not many overtly racist people working in public health but that “sometimes, that don’t see color thing isn’t the best way to go about it [treating Black public health workers’ experiences].” Ultimately, if more People of Color are in leadership roles that share the lived experiences of other Black workers, they will be more understanding and willing to advocate on behalf of other Black individuals in the

workplace which will lead to more Black individuals who can advocate for communities that look like them.

While hiring more representation in companies is important, Marie espoused skepticism of current DEI initiatives. She felt that human resources tend to focus on protecting companies' interests instead of the Black public health workforce's interests. Companies tend to only address racial justice issues once something bad happens in the workplace. This makes these efforts feel more like attempts at saving the public image of companies so they don't lose profit. Marie felt that more open and safe lines of communication are needed between companies and the workforce to check the pulse of Black public health workers. Many of these issues are rooted deep in the culture of the United States.

> I think in the U.S. a lot more than we realize a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of stuff goes back to slavery, it's just deep in our roots. We can't escape it. I mean, a lot more than we realize it ties back into just slavery.

Efforts to shift the lens on race cannot be one-off events but rather, these efforts must be

> Constant and consistent We can't get one thing and then slip off you know, like, like "Okay, we're good" and then back up a little bit. I think once we hit one milestone we go to the next one and really, really, really let everyone know "hey, we mean business"…And I think that's the only way. We have to be in their face at all times. No matter where they go. No matter where they turn.

Marie is mindful that providing internship experiences to Black MPH students that allow them to utilize both their professional and lived experiences would be a meaningful step in changing the interconnected nature of the internship to career pipeline. Not only would

this be helpful for Black public health professionals, but it would also benefit the public health field as a whole. As Marie explained,

> I feel like a lot of times there are ways to do things better. And I think we won't know that until we get different perspectives and cultures and fresh brains and all that in there to just open the door. And it can be really beneficial. So I think all of this is just interrelated but we got to start from the head, start from the top.

Additionally, Black MPH internships should be designed around the interests and expertise of Black students. Until these changes take place, racist stereotypes will continue to persist in the workplace. As Marie explained, leadership tends to set the workplace environment that either extends or diminishes these beliefs about Black individuals by creating open spaces or whitewashing and shutting down Black voices. This only extends the need for bold leadership who is not afraid to speak up and advocate for Black public health professionals.

Part of what motivates Marie to continue to advocate for Black individuals in the workplace is based on her own lived experiences in public health and healthcare. As a teenager, she was accused of being pregnant, being on cocaine, and having other negative healthcare experiences when she was simply unwell and seeking treatment. Marie knows a better public health workforce is possible. If enough people care about something or complain about the individuals who continue to commit racial microaggressions, she knows that change is possible. It's "definitely not going to happen overnight, it's gonna take a lot, a lot of people, a lot of work, a lot of advocates, just, it's a lot of work that needs to be done."

Part of the work that can assist in shifting the lens on race is opening up a space for discussion of the lived realities of Black MPH interns. Importantly, non-Black individuals in the public health workforce should be a part of this conversation as well. “Because I think a lot of times, people just really don’t know [about the lived realities of Black individuals].” Marie felt that incorporating this into the internship process is an important component of working with Black MPH interns because sharing the experiences of Black MPH interns is a vital component of changing the narrative of Black students. She felt that students need to feel safe and they must be encouraged to speak up especially if they are feeling a negative internship experience. This is particularly important because interns are often the lowest on the organizational totem pole.

Ultimately, Marie wanted everyone to know that Black MPH students completing internships are capable and will advocate for other oppressed groups in the workplace. As she shared, Black MPH students completing internships are

> Completely capable. But I think even with the Black experience, we can still relate to and advocate for other minorities as well. I want them to know that we are capable of doing that. We can advocate for all people. I don't want them to think “Oh, we're just about Black issues and not other minorities.” Because that's not true. We have a lot of similar experiences. I want other minorities to know that we are trustworthy and that we really want and are willing to work for the greater good … I don't know anyone who was advocating only for the Black experience, we like to stand up for all the issues, whether it's racial, whether it's LGBTQIA. I just feel like being oppressed, in whatever sense, once you're

> oppressed, we're all for [fighting] it because we know what it feels like. And so I think as Black students completing an internship, we can take what we learned from that, and still apply it to other groups of people, and they can feel advocated for in public health as well. And so I want them to know, we're capable, it's okay to trust us.

MICHEAL'S NARRATIVE: A COMFORTABLE DRIVE AND A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Originally, from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, Micheal, a 25-year-old African American man, moved to a southeastern state in middle school and speaks with "a mix of southern and northern slang." His journey to public health was somewhat of a happy accident. Originally intending to become an athletic trainer, he learned about public health during his undergraduate studies at an HBCU in a southeastern state and ultimately enrolled at the Southeastern School of Public Health. Micheal's graduate training was a drastic cultural difference from his undergraduate experience. During his bachelor's degree, he was used to being around mostly Black students. This contrasted with his graduate school experience which he explained to others that he

> always felt comfortable but kind of felt left out because I'm used to being around more African American students. And I use this in the most positive nicest way. When other people were asking "How was my experience?" I will always tell them that "I'm the Black dot in the classroom, but I'm a comfortable Black dot." So it was positive, I actually enjoyed it. I loved it. It made me grow as a person, because I got to the point where I actually realized that my perspective of lifestyle became too one dimensional. So I'm happy I was able to experience that.

His experience with the faculty in the program was overwhelmingly supportive as well, and his positive experiences extended into his internship.

Micheal completed his internship with a non-profit organization in a southeastern state that improves health in rural populations. This mostly white organization primarily focuses on obtaining grants to support communities. While initially scared and nervous to enter the non-profit and grant-driven world for the first time, this was an enjoyable and important professional experience for Micheal. He applied his public health training in the workspace by creating charts and diagrams for the organizations, served as a liaison for other public health entities applying for grants, and facilitated and led meetings. When reflecting on how this experience made him feel, Micheal shared

> I felt important … I can say it with my chest that I feel important. I [felt] like [I was] actually incorporating something that I went to school for. And I never felt like that before. Even now with my current job. I [felt] important. But I feel like my internship, I still think about and I miss it, and I hope I can do something similar to that in the near future.

While the work is primarily what made Micheal feel important in his role, he acknowledged members of the organization for creating a safe and supportive environment that allowed him to flourish. While this is certainly a positive aspect of his experience, he is very self-validating and does not require a lot of external validation to succeed in his work.

Micheal's preceptor, a white woman, was another positive aspect of his internship who he described as "wonderful." She had great communication skills, was very responsive, and worked at a very fast pace. Her leadership skills also set her apart. She

displayed professional confidence but also kindness in that this was Micheal's first experience in the public health workforce. She supported him in the areas he needed growth but recognized his strengths and efforts in other areas where he was strong. She also was open to having difficult conversations and created a calm and welcoming environment.

Micheal never felt his internship workplace environment was racialized but did feel concerned at times that his rural background put him at a disadvantage as far as the professional learning curve. "I did feel a little concern sometimes … I always felt like I was always behind, just a little bit … I always thought in the back of my head that I need to work harder." He also felt that the people he worked with never treated the populations they served in a racialized way but acknowledged that Black communities face "a lot of negative problems for some unknown reason." When asked as to why this might be, Micheal shared "I'm pretty sure there's a reason but I just don't know." He felt that some of the negative problems facing Black communities stem from two sides of in-group division with one side identifying as Black, and the other identifying as the racial slur for Black individuals.

During his internship, Micheal started dressing professionally in a way that he was comfortable with which allowed him to exude professional confidence. Some of the Black communities that Micheal worked with questioned his stylistic choices, but he felt that dressing professionally was an important part of rejecting an aesthetic stigmatism that is often placed on Black individuals. Micheal felt that organizations need to take "an iceberg approach" to viewing racism because different generations may have different beliefs about race underneath the surface. By understanding divergent perspectives about

race, the public health workforce can create a more inclusive work environment for Black public health workers. Micheal views internships as an opportunity to open one's worldview and create entirely new horizons in life. Micheal wanted everyone to know that Black MPH students completing internships will

> Definitely love it. It is a very, very great opportunity to see the world from a different outlook, to see the world you're coming from, and see the world where you're trying to approach to. I think I see it as a very comfortable drive. You might have a speed bump here and there. But you're definitely going through and once you make it to your destination it is a very good breath of air.

MORGAN'S NARRATIVE: IMPOSTOR SYNDROME NO MORE

When Morgan, a now 26-year-old African American/ Black woman was four years old, her mom took a job at a PWI in a southeastern state. She grew up spending lots of time with her mom on campus and became intimately familiar with the university. When it came time to enroll in college, she ultimately chose to pursue her undergraduate degree in chemistry at the same university. Her time as a chemistry student made Morgan realize that was not the best career fit for her and was encouraged to explore public health by her mother. It was during a global public health class when Morgan recognized public health as "an amazing way to affect change." This ultimately led to her pursuing her MPH at the Southeastern School of Public Health, which is housed in the same university where her mother was and still is employed.

When Morgan was admitted to the program, she couldn't help but feel like someone must have made a mistake by letting her in. Morgan felt that some of her undergraduate grades "were not the best" and she "was a little nervous that I didn't quite

meet the qualifications to get into the program or succeed in the program." She couldn't help but question whether she was primarily admitted into the program to add diversity to the student body or if she was admitted based on her own merit. Deep down, she wondered "Maybe they got me because I'm Black." These suspicions contributed to Morgan's "impostor syndrome", which she battled throughout her graduate studies in part because she was surrounded by people who did not look like her in the program.

One place where Morgan battled her impostor syndrome the most was during her internship. Morgan worked with a non-profit organization in a southeastern state that focuses on improving rural health. During this experience, one of the main deliverables she completed was a literature review on the air and water quality of urban vs rural areas. Morgan shared that she

> enjoyed what I did there, I liked digging into the research. And I was kind of, I don't want to say left alone, but I was kind of left alone to do the work in that role. And so that's the kind of work I thrive in when I'm just kind of left alone to figure it out. And so I enjoyed that a whole lot. I had a great practicum experience. You know, I dealt with a lot internally, but yeah, I had a great internship experience.

What Morgan was dealing with internally is impostor syndrome. Morgan's mother played a role in securing her internship with the non-profit organization by using some of her contacts she knew at the organization. Similar to her admittance to graduate school, Morgan dealt with feelings through the experience of

> "Oh, you really weren't qualified for this. You just kind of connected. So they gave it to you." And "maybe they don't want you in the office, actually." But

> they're like, “Oh, she's connected to someone at [the university]. So let's just give it to her” you know?

When asked if Morgan would have felt differently if she leveraged one of the faculty or staff members at the school to secure her internship instead of a familial connection, she felt that the only way she would have felt differently is if she contacted the group herself and participated in a more formal selection process. While Morgan’s mother and members at the Southeastern School of Public Health consoled Morgan by explaining that the way she got her internship is very common, it was important for Morgan to prove she has earned her spot “It's always been like, kind of my thing. I just want to prove my worth, if that makes sense.”

When describing the racial diversity of her internship site, Morgan shared that at times going into the office, she would feel a “little othered” or by herself because “there weren't a lot of people who looked like me there.” The workforce at this organization was mostly white women. Morgan did bond with the only other racial minority who works in the office, an African gentleman. Fortunately, Morgan’s work can mostly be completed on her own, which is enjoyable for her given the lack of diversity in the workplace. When asked if a more diverse workforce would have aided in assuaging her impostor syndrome and improving her internship experience, Morgan shared

> I think so. I think it definitely would have. It may have not helped totally with the imposter syndrome. But it would have helped me to know that “okay, there's other people here who are like me, who've done some of the similar work I've done who've had some of the same life experiences I've had. So I can be confident that

> I can do this job." I don't know, it seems out there, but I think I think it would have helped.

While Morgan's impostor syndrome was tested during her internship, this was also a significant area of growth for her as a professional. She learned how to communicate professionally in the workplace with other public health professionals. Importantly, she also learned to trust in her abilities, which ultimately enhanced her professional confidence in the workplace. Morgan also recognized just how hard and independent she worked during this time. As she explained,

> I would say I did a lot of hard work. And I did it often by myself, just so people could know that I could do it by myself, I didn't need a lot of help. And I think in some ways that kind of crippled me, I think it would have been nice to reach out for help and feel competent when I needed it. But I felt like I needed to do things myself so people couldn't say, "Oh, I took her on, and she doesn't know what she's doing." So I did a lot of work alone.

By working independently, Morgan proved to herself and others that she was capable of succeeding in the workforce and yet she recognized that asking for help may have been beneficial as well.

Now that Morgan has officially entered the workforce as a full-time employee, she has started to put her impostor syndrome to rest.

> I would definitely say that I look back and I'm like, "Yeah, you kind of deserve to be where you were." Now that I can see my performance and my job, I'm kind of getting credit for that. I'm like, "Yeah, you did deserve to be where you were", I think this is something I grappled with a little. But, you know, I guess I'm just

> constantly reminding myself, although that's over, "You did deserve that. You were fine there. You achieved there."

One component that has helped Morgan release her impostor syndrome is that, unlike her internship experience, her current place of employment is more racially diverse and there is "intentionality about bringing people who look like me into spaces at my job … and that kind of helped me feel a little more at home on the job." Morgan knows that because of her Blackness, she needs to make a conscious effort to always do her best work because sometimes, people expect lower quality work from Black workers. She noted that even when she completes what she described as good but not exceptional work, colleagues are surprised by the quality of her efforts. For Morgan, this reinforces the idea that Black individuals are not expected to achieve as much as other racial groups. Although Morgan knows she needs to always provide her best work, she acknowledged that "the pressure of feeling like you need to outperform is unhealthy" and that this point should be specifically discussed with other Black colleagues in public health. Morgan wanted others to know that Black MPH interns "Are capable. We come in capable. Asking questions, isn't a defect or something in you that's wrong that other students aren't doing, you know? Yeah, just [know] that you're capable. You can get this done."

R'S NARRATIVE: RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT BLACKNESS

Growing up in a military family, R felt like she is not from one particular place but is "a little bit from everywhere." R, a 25-year-old Black woman, studied political science at a university in the northeast. During this time, she completed her senior and honors research on the intersection of public policy and public health and how these forces shape health outcomes. This intersection deeply piqued R's interest and she

wanted to learn more about public health as a career field. After having several conversations with her undergraduate advisors, she decided to pursue an MPH at the Southeastern School of Public Health.

R described studying at the Southeastern School of Public Health as a deeply enjoyable experience. She loved that the program allowed her to explore her interest in Black maternal and child health and felt very supported by her graduate advisor. She did describe the racial demographics of her experience as "interesting," because it is a PWI but is situated near several HBCUs. While she might see people who look like her down the street, she rarely did in the classroom. Most of her classmates were white women but R gravitated and connected deeply with the few other Black women in the program.

R completed several internships during her graduate studies. The first of which was in a peer mentorship role where she supported students across the university by helping them create goals to be successful in college. R loved working in this role because it allowed her to branch out of her silo as a graduate student by connecting with and mentoring a host of different students, particularly other Black students. Given that R was the only Black woman in this type of position at the university, she found that Black students often requested to work with her because they are more comfortable working with someone who has more shared lived experiences with them.

R's second and third internship experiences were with a non-profit organization focused on enhancing the health of rural health populations and a non-profit organization focused on providing evaluation services. R deeply enjoyed both of these experiences, despite both being primarily virtual due to the pandemic. She felt like her experiences would have been better if they were completed in person, but ultimately found meaning

in both internships. Like her graduate student experience, most of the people she interacted with were white women. The rural health non-profit she worked with focuses on promoting health in rural populations which were mostly white. R explained that "it was very interesting, as a Black woman and a Black public health professional to be in that space" because typically, communities with health disparities are implicitly thought of as Black communities in the public health space. Some of the major features of R's experience with the evaluation group were conducting phone interviews, assessing behavioral outcomes in K-5 children, and improving the accessibility of behavioral resources to the priority population. Part of her internship involved educating and working with parents to better support their children with behavioral issues. The population she served in this project was mostly Black students. R noted that it was an eye-opening experience seeing "how school systems leave students behind, especially Black and Brown students with behavioral issues." R acknowledged that the work she completed during this time was very important, given the stress and pressures that are on teachers and families in supporting students that public schools label as behavioral issues.

R grew professionally during her internships simply by being in environments that modeled how to interact and engage with other professionals in the workplace. She also developed personally during this time by "coming out of [her] shell." R is "really more so an introverted and shy person" but during her internship, she became more comfortable speaking in professional settings and maintaining professional relationships.

Now that R has entered the workforce, while her health topic of HIV prevention is typically very racially diverse, the specific organization she works with is mostly white.

Similar to her graduate school experience, she finds her and her Black colleagues bonding together to navigate racialized situations. R gave an example of this by sharing

> I find myself sometimes on calls or in meetings, with people at my job and … something crazy gets said, something not the best is said and you have to in that moment, become a teacher. A lot of these times, I'm a lot younger than these people that had been in this field for a lot longer than me. And so it makes it very uncomfortable. I don't know how my MPH experience prepared me for that. I don't think it did. I don't think that is something that it could have prepared me for. It's an actuality of having to feel like you have to correct people. And let them know "Hey, what you said was not appreciated. It wasn't appropriate" and trying to still also maintain work relationships, and not getting that label of like, "Oh, angry black woman" or "unfriendly" or "hard to work with." So it's so difficult to navigate through.

R explained that these challenges are made much more manageable by the relationships she has with her Black colleagues because they collectively counter the racial stereotypes that some hold in the workplace. As she explained

> There's a lot of negative stereotypes about Black individuals, there's some very specific ones that are specific to Black women. And I think just me as myself and the other Black women and other Black individuals that I work with on a daily basis. We constantly dismantle a lot of those stereotypes. I mean, the thing about stereotypes is that they're unfounded, there's not a lot of evidence behind them.

R realized just how many people in the workforce hold these racial stereotypes during her internship.

> [My] internships helped me to be conscious of those stereotypes, to never be ignorant of the fact that like, yes, somebody is thinking, this of me, they might think, “Oh, she doesn't know what she's talking about, oh, she's too young. And she might not have an idea of what she's talking about.” And so being conscious about those stereotypes, and really putting that forth in my work ethic and the questions that I asked at work.

If racial stereotypes are going to be eliminated many changes are needed but a great place to start would be

> to create an environment for people to have the conversation. I think, more often than not, it is Black and Brown people who are bringing up the conversation, and it makes other people uncomfortable, so that you don't want to have the conversation. And then that makes the conversation not productive, right? The people that need to be engaging in the conversation don't want to have it. So really if we can get in these spaces where people could feel comfortable … that can help … not feel that like, “Oh, I'm gonna say something bad, or it's gonna get me canceled.” It's like, just say it, and I'll tell you if it's alright.

R felt that internships should play an important role in shifting how Black individuals are viewed in the workplace. She explained this when she shared

> I think exposure is everything. It's very easy to keep thinking [racial stereotypes] about a certain group of people if you're never exposed to them. It's very easy to say, “Oh, somebody doesn't have the work ethic,” or “Oh, somebody's not smart enough to be here.” Which we'll never know if you don't have them in those

> spaces. So I think internships really open up that door to change people's perceptions of Black individuals and Black women.

To better support Black students completing internships, R felt that having open communication channels for feedback with faculty members who look like them is needed. Similar to how students in R's mentorship internship preferred to work with her based on her lived experience, R felt that being able to share experiences with Black faculty members is essential. As R articulated,

> I know, for me, it would be hard to open up my [white graduate director] about any racial issues I might be experiencing in an internship. Honestly, I think it would be good to have representation at that supervisory level for Black MPH students, I think that makes a world of difference. It's not that we don't want to talk about those experiences with our white counterparts, it's that sometimes we feel like we know that somebody else that looks like us would understand where we're coming from. We don't have to go through the fear of it being dismissed, or not taken seriously. So I think having that representation can mitigate some of that fear of holding it all in and not talking about it if there is an issue.

Ultimately, the public health workforce needs to abolish the "one size fits all" approach by recognizing, not ignoring each individual's Blackness. One thing that R wanted everyone to know about Black MPH students is that "we are open and eager to learn about public health issues. Sometimes, we just need that extra push, that little extra support of being seen."

TALLIA'S NARRATIVE: BLACK MPH STUDENTS ARE RESILIENT, CAPABLE AND WE WILL PERSEVERE

Tallia is a 28-year-old Biracial (Black/white) woman from a southeastern state. After earning her bachelor's degree in psychology and competing as a collegiate athlete, she completed a master's degree in sports psychology. However, Tallia was a part of the COVID-19 pandemic and was not able to engage in graduate school in the traditional manner. Pairing this with the limited vocational opportunities for sports psychologists, she enrolled in her MPH program at the Southeastern School of Public Health.

Tallia was drawn to public health's broad career opportunities for improving health in a host of different roles and settings. Since Tallia already had experience in graduate school, she knew

> that there's not going to be too much diversity… I don't even know how to explain it, it's just more so all the steps that you have to go through to get to grad school. I think just overall as a whole, the entire system is not very kind towards minority students, just because of all the different things that you have to go through

Much to Tallia's surprise, her graduate experience at the Southeastern School of Public Health was much more diverse than her first experience in graduate school. There were at least several other Students of Color and while there was little to no Black faculty, the professors in the program gave her a comforting and inclusive vibe. Unlike her previous graduate school experience, Tallia did not feel the need to overperform or racially codeswitch to be accepted. This was partially due to this being her second experience in graduate school and no longer feeling like she needed to be someone she was not, partially due to there being other Students of Color in her cohort, and partially due to the

welcoming environment that the Southeastern School of Public Health Practice created. Tallia made it a point of emphasis that her graduate and workforce experiences are not inclusive of all other Black students or Black women. As Tallia put it

> I always like to say I know, I am biracial. And I like to always just say that I know my experience, regardless is going to be different than someone who is fully Black, even just because I don't consider myself like white passing I guess. But there are times when I feel like I probably would maybe get a little bit of differential treatment, per se than if I had like a classmate who was fully Black and I completely understand that. So I just like to make sure like, my experience definitely does not necessarily account for anyone who is who identifies as just fully Black because I know, at the end of the day, even though I do identify more so with my Black side, I'm perceived completely different depending on who I'm around.

Overall, Tallia had an overwhelmingly positive experience during her MPH studies which culminated with her internship experience.

Tallia completed her internship with a faith-based wellness organization in a southeastern state. While she initially hoped to intern with a department that focused on building community with cancer survivors, the supervisor in charge of this initiative had recently taken on a different intern and did not have the capacity to oversee two internships. Fortunately, the site did offer Tallia an internship with the wellness division of the organization under a different supervisor who was focused on the wellness branch of the organization. During Tallia's time here, she spent time improving processes, providing cost analysis breakdowns, creating a survey, and developing a workshop

geared towards increasing physical activity in older adults. Tallia was incredibly proud of and pleased with the actual work she did during her internship, but the workplace experience itself was a more nuanced matter.

After Tallia's first day at the internship site, she "knew what she was getting into." The organization's demographics were overwhelmingly white, as were the clientele who visited the wellness center. Early in her experience, Tallia connected with the few Black employees and clients and quickly realized that at this particular organization, "they don't like Black people." Tallia recognized that part of this dynamic is because the city where the organization is located is "very segregated." When Black individuals would enter the facility, employees instantly started following them, as if they were somehow trespassing merely by entering this space. Tallia even saw a difference in the way that employees treated Black unhoused individuals and white unhoused individuals who wandered into the facility. Seeing a faith-based organization treat racial minorities like this was particularly infuriating for Tallia.

In addition to witnessing racial microaggressions, Tallia also experienced them. At times, her white colleagues would approach her and say "the most out of pocket things." When these instances happened when other Black individuals were around, she non-verbally connected with them as if to say "Like, yeah, they said something crazy to you." Tallia was happy that her Black clients and colleagues felt safe enough to trust her with their perceptions about how the organization racializes People of Color, but as an unpaid intern, there wasn't "much that I could do. I was like, I'm just the intern, sorry. I don't even get paid. Most people here don't even know my name."

One of the most challenging aspects of Tallia's experience was with her direct supervisor, a white male who constantly committed racial microaggressions. This individual made it a point of emphasis to remind Tallia on nearly a daily basis that he grew up playing basketball "in the hood" and has "lots of Black friends." Tallia captured this absurdity of her supervisor's actions by highlighting that she gets that

> you're trying to relate to me, but what makes you think that you saying that you grew up in the hood just magically is going to relate yourself? … I didn't grow up in the hood. I don't know if you just assume that. And it's one of those things that happens entirely too often to where it's just, it's kind of annoying.

She also acknowledged that if her supervisor had as many Black friends as he claimed to, he would not feel the need to constantly say so. If this isn't insulting enough, he also participated in some type of racial codeswitching to make himself sound like what he imagines a Black person would sound like whenever talking to Tallia using phrases like "Yo dawg!" that was not a part of his vernacular with other members of the organization. Part of Tallia wanted to speak up and correct these constant racial microaggressions that she was witnessing and experiencing, but this is complicated by the fact that she is "just here for an internship, I'm not going to be here that long. Is it really worth like me wasting my breath? … I'm just an intern. I don't even work here for real." While these situations were far from fun, Tallia felt that now she understands how to navigate difficult and racialized situations in the context of the workplace. Whether it be interactions with her supervisor or other patrons, she felt that these experiences allowed her to handle "those types of things in a more laid back but professional way."

In addition to constantly experiencing racial microaggressions from her supervisor, he also attempted to use his position of power to coerce Tallia into working on his personal business projects. When Tallia was not responsive to working on these side projects, her supervisor essentially refused to sign off on her hours unless she completed work for his personal business. At that point, Tallia reached out to the Southeastern School of Public Health who intervened and made sure that her internship stayed true to the original agreement. Tallia noted that in addition to her supervisor being in a position of power, the combination of being both a racial minority and a gender minority played a key role in him treating her the way he did in this situation. She shared "I don't even think that situation would have even occurred if I was a white boy." She felt even more validated in this assessment when towards the end of her internship, a new intern was being interviewed who was also a racially minoritized woman and he started pitching the idea of having her work on his personal business projects in addition to the internship experience. Tallia also noted that if she had been a paid employee, there would have been some types of protections in place to navigate this situation in the workplace but for interns, "you're not even just an employee, you're an intern, they can just be like, 'alright, well, we don't want you here anymore.' And boom, what are you going to do?"

Despite the negative components of her experience, Tallia walked away from her internship with positive experiences as well. A particularly memorable component of her internship was being able to connect with a client who was a visually impaired Black woman in her 60s. When she would enter the facility, Tallia would escort her to her treadmill where she would walk and dance for an hour. When the woman finished her exercise, Tallia would escort her out of the facility as well. After realizing that Tallia was

also a Person of Color, their bond was strengthened even further. The elderly woman would also share information about the racial disparities that exist in the United States with Tallia. This was an important moment for Tallia because seeing that someone visually impaired could still see that racial health disparities existed affirmed that there was hope for recognizing and alleviating health disparities in the United States.

From Tallia's perspective, internship access and experiences play a key role in the interconnected nature of graduate school, employment, and opportunity for racial minorities in the public health workforce. By diversifying MPH cohorts, more racial minorities and Black students would be able to participate in internships. When Black students are given this opportunity, she felt strongly that Black students should be their authentic selves because if they do that, they will "challenge everyone's notions and preconceived ideas and stereotypes that they hold." For Tallia, being one's, authentic self is important because society needs to let go "of the feeling that like, every successful person has to look the same." Tallia felt that if the public health workforce were more diverse, this would be easier for racially minoritized students to do. In the meantime, the public health workforce could and should be more vocal about their allyship to Black students. In the longer term, diversifying the workforce is a key component of supporting Black MPH interns. This could allow a space where Black MPH students could be mentored and supported by Black individuals in the workforce as well as racial allies. Tallia wanted everyone to know that Black MPH interns

> obviously know we're capable, we're extremely capable of accomplishing everything that everyone else is capable of accomplishing. And I think, too, in some ways, it speaks to [our] resiliency and perseverance. Because like I said,

we're dealing with additional factors that other people might not be dealing with. But yet, we're still able to come out on the same playing field, you know what I mean? So I want people to know it can get rough for us at times, which sucks, but also, we're still killing it. And I think it may not necessarily be reflected right now. But I think with what you're [the researcher] doing, and just kind of trying to amplify voices and use what we say to inform different policies and things like that, it'll start to get better for the next upcoming groups as they come along. So just know that we're gonna persevere, we're going to be resilient in our own special way. And like I said we're, we're just as capable as anybody else. And in that same sense, I don't even really know how I want to put it but, knowing that there are some of those additional barriers, also just know that we don't necessarily need pity … Yeah, we have all these other things that we may encounter and may deal with, but also in that same breath, I don't need you to feel sorry, because I'm still going to do my thing. But bringing light to the things and us bringing lights and things that do happen. It's informing [you] so that they can hopefully be changed. So other people don't have to deal with that. So when you do have people of minority groups speaking up about things, it's not necessarily because we want a pity party, it's because we want change. And we're using our voices to hopefully, bring about that change.

TOBIAS' NARRATIVE: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

"It's almost unheard of for Black people to go to school and become educated. I mean, it's almost like, higher education is something that is reserved strictly for white people, People of Color [other racial minorities], but not Black people." Tobias, a 26-

year-old Black man from a small town outside a major coastal city in a southeastern state, is certainly shattering this societal perception that some people hold about Black individuals. After completing his bachelor's degree in exercise science at a different PWI, he enrolled in the Southeastern School of Public Health to pursue his MPH. At the start of his graduate studies, the COVID-19 pandemic was still raging. Spread-out classrooms and not seeing other students' faces outside of computer screens made things "a little different" in the beginning. This unusual beginning did not prevent Tobias from instantly noticing that there were only three other students who looked like him in his cohort. As the pandemic waned, Tobias connected more with his classmates including his Black colleagues. Ironically, it turned out he has had classes with one of his Black classmates in an undergraduate lab and another was from the same geographic area as Tobias, and they knew many of the same people. He noticed that many of his Black colleagues were driven to give back to their communities and were interested in eliminating racial health disparities. As he continued to bond with his Black colleagues and traversed through his graduate studies, they collectively started realizing that there were almost no Black faculty or advisors in the program. Educationally, Tobias does not feel that anything was taken away from him by being a Black student, but seeing Black faculty members and advisors who are at leadership levels would have increased his comfort with being in these mostly white spaces. Despite this, Tobias was impressed with the level of care and attention that his professors provided him in graduate school. They were very personable and were willing to go above and beyond to support the students. This was a pleasant surprise, given that most of the faculty are white and the pandemic could have potentially depersonalized the experience.

Tobias completed two internships during his graduate studies. The first of which was with a non-profit organization that goes into faith-based settings to empower youth to make healthy choices regarding their physical activity and nutritional choices. Tobias loved that most of the students he worked with in this setting were also Black because he could relate to the students, and they could relate to him. He was also aware that by being a Black man in a position of power, Communities of Color are able to gain a sense of "Oh, okay, they're actually here to help us. They look like me and this is what I can also do in the future. If I push through, this is what I can be." This was important because when people work in communities that don't look like them, it can create uncertainty if they are truly there to help their community or not. Another key positive component of this internship experience is working with his preceptor, an older Black woman. Tobias developed a deep professional bond with her during this time and to this day she gives him professional advice and continues to support his career growth and journey.

Tobias completed his second internship with an organization that specializes in evaluation. During this time, he completed a process evaluation of physical education resources in schools where he saw the full display of funding inequities between predominantly white and Black K-12 schools. Seeing one "school [that] can't even afford 10 basketballs, as opposed to [another] school that has a soccer field, tennis courts, and every sports equipment available in real-time is definitely an eye-opening experience." Collaboration and communication skills are two areas that Tobias grew the most during his internship experiences. Being able to work on a team, develop presentation materials, and communicate that information with different levels of stakeholders are meaningful

aspects of this experience. Overall, Tobias had two enjoyable and meaningful experiences that prepared him for his professional role today.

In his current role, Tobias is a community health planner in a southeastern state. Fortunately, he has joined a "multicultural team" and the chief executive officer of his organization is a Black woman. While he does not discount others' potentially racialized workforce experiences, Tobias felt fortunate to have avoided these experiences himself to this point in his career. While he felt skeptical about mandatory DEI training in the workplace, Tobias knows that seeing other Black individuals in positions of power is an important component of changing the racialized public health workforce. As he explained

> Representation on all fronts is something that can break down so many barriers. Having people see Black people in positions of power and People of Color in positions of power, as opposed to seeing only their white counterparts in positions of power [is important].

For Tobias, while this would be far from a silver bullet to breaking down all racial stereotypes that Black individuals face in the workplace, "that's where the building blocks are going to start."

Another component of shifting the lens on race is bringing awareness to the experiences that Black individuals face during these spaces. In particular, public health professionals could use "their platform and their knowledge to get that word out there." If people are aware of the racial injustices that are happening to Black individuals in the workplace, public health practitioners can help prevent them. Internships can also be a part of changing this dynamic. For starters, creating spaces where Black MPH students can discuss their career aspirations and internship experiences would be a great step in

supporting Black MPH students. Tobias also felt that allowing Black MPH students to complete internships where they have the autonomy to showcase their skills and fulfill their career interests is an important part of the internship process. And while many Black students are driven to eliminate racial health disparities, he cautioned organizations against putting Black public health professionals in strictly Black-facing positions. Rather, internship experiences should be tailored to the individual career interests of each student because "we all have completely different interests." Ultimately, Tobias wanted everyone to know that Black MPH students completing internships

> are capable of doing the work, they're capable of being in the same space, as their white counterparts … Everyone's multifaceted. Everyone's just as equally talented. And they can do any [internship] role they're applying for … They're very adept in their abilities, and they should be able to just be in that same space and have the same seat at the same table as anyone else.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the participant narratives were shared. These narratives were constructed based on the interviews with each participant. The purpose of sharing their narratives was to assist in answering the research questions *1) How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?* and *2) What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* Chapter 5 discusses the narratives in detail.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to answer two research questions which were *1) How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?* and *2) What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* In answering the first research question, the findings of this study suggest that Black MPH interns challenge the majoritarian narrative of a racially neutral public health workforce and the majoritarian narrative of Black racial inferiority. In answering the second research question, several practical implications emerged including the importance of centering the voices of Black MPH interns throughout the internship, the need for a more racially diverse public health workforce, and the need for more antiracist public health practitioners to mentor and support Black MPH interns.

COUNTERING THE MAJORITARIAN NARRATIVE OF A RACIALLY NEUTRAL PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

There is a common majoritarian narrative that the United States has progressed to a racially neutral society in which race is no longer an important feature of social life (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In the context of public health internships, this looks like MPH interns of all races, interning with public health organizations and gaining the benefits that come with completing internships such as enhancing public health skills (Hernandez et al., 2014; Pham et al., 2023), developing professional networks (Hernandez et al., 2014), and being better prepared to work "in the real world." (Villanueva, 2011). A one-size-fits-all approach is used to evaluate and improve

internship experiences which is typically administered via a survey. Race is not discussed in these spaces because the United States has moved beyond racism, particularly in a social justice-oriented profession such as public health.

What is clear from taking the vantage point of the participants in this study is that white supremacy maintains a powerful force in shaping the internship landscape. It shapes who has access to internships, and how Black MPH interns experience the phenomenon of internships. While there are few instances of open racial hostility in the public health workforce, "the master's method has shifted … from domination to hegemony (Lawrence, 2015, p. 9.) in creating and maintaining social institutions that reify white supremacy in the form of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019). A CRT lens begins with the understanding that race and racism are institutionally grounded features of society in the United States (Bell, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997). As such, the societal narrative claiming objective, neutral, and color-blind interpretations (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997) of a racially neutral public health workforce and internship experiences is met with skepticism. Matsuda (1987) has argued

> that those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen. Looking to the bottom–adopting the perspective of those who have seen and felt the falsity of the liberal promise–can assist critical scholars in the task of fathoming the phenomenology of law and defining the elements of justice (p. 324).

When "looking to the bottom" through a CRT lens to Black MPH internship experiences, it is clear that the narratives of the participants in this study counter the stock story of a

racially neutral public health workforce. Allison Moore specifically highlighted that "sometimes there's a blindness to color" in the public health workforce which runs contrary to her experience as a Black woman in a mostly white workforce. Marie echoed similar sentiments when she shared that "sometimes, that don't see color thing isn't the best way to go about it [treating Black public health workers' experiences]." Throughout the narratives, the role that white supremacy played in Black MPH interns' experiences is impossible to ignore.

For example, K explained how white supremacy shaped her internship experience with the health center. As a Black woman interning in a racialized organization, she is cognizant

> that as a Black person, as a Black student, I always have to keep a paper log of everything that happens I have to keep evidence of what's going on, who said what, just keeping all that paper trail stuff together … I feel that extra layer of scrutiny of that it has to be perfect. It has to be done right the first time people are watching. People are, not that they're waiting for you to mess up, but they have a certain expectation and they're not expecting that you're gonna reach that expectation. So me, kind of always having that that edge of like, it has to be super perfect, it has to be clean.

K understands that people are expecting her to fail and that her white colleagues do not trust her. This extra pressure and surveillance add undue stress to K's internship experience which, while it does not derail her experience entirely, preoccupies time and energy that could be used to focus on growing as a professional. She described this as

> an extra stress that I feel like I should not have had to deal with. And it just did not make it enjoyable. I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed the experience. I enjoyed everything that I learned. I'm super, super proud of us in the work that we did. But I wish I could have learned more about how to be a professional in this space, how to network, how to be a leader from people that were supposed to be that source for me when I was there.

The extra stress that K had to deal with occurred because of white supremacy functioning via racialized organizations. where whiteness is "seen as normative and neutral." (Ray, 2019, p. 38). Adding to her stress, the health center attempted to use the interim coordinator role title awarded to her during her internship to coerce K into working more hours than their agreed-upon work schedule. As K explained

> Normally, we're [students] given the week of finals off because we have to study, we have to get prepared, I was graduating, and I said that I had to [get prepared for finals week]. And it was kind of oppressive. "Well, we still need you here because we still have testing to do" and it's like, well, I'm still a student. I might work full-time hours, but I'm still a student, I still get student privileges.

She wanted to speak up against this atrocity but knew that

> if we don't do this the right way, we're going to be portrayed as the angry Black people, they're going to make us look bad." We have jobs that we went after this, they may call [the health center] for recommendations.

K must artfully navigate this experience or risk being typecast in the gendered racist stereotype of the "angry Black woman" which will do her no favors when it comes time to enter the labor market. K's internship experience navigating this racialized

organization is consistent with other research examining Black women's workplace experiences in PWIs. Williams (2023), for example, found that Black women administrators' behaviors in PWIs were policed in a way that limited their physical, emotional, and communication expressions which added undue stress to their lives (Williams, 2023).

Tallia's experience with a faith-based wellness organization also is shaped by white supremacy and challenged the notion of a racially neutral public health workforce. Only one day into her internship she was aware that at this organization "they don't like Black people," an insight that is shared by the other racially minoritized individuals at the internship site. As Tallia explained, the organization where the wellness center is located is still very segregated, and when Black bodies enter this white space, they are entering a place they are not welcome. Tallia's articulation of how she and the other racially minoritized individuals she worked with were in a sense trespassing in this racialized space is similar to Lawrence's (2015) description of non-white individuals occupying space in PWIs. For Lawrence, "when people of color [sic] come to the academy, a place where inequality is institutionalized and rationalized, we trespass on white property" (Lawrence, 2015, p. 9). In addition to trespassing on white property, she was constantly subjected to racial microaggressions from her direct supervisor and witnessed other People of Color experience racial microaggressions as well. Smith et al. (2006) defined racial microaggressions as the

> 1) subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed at people of color [sic], often automatically or unconsciously; 2) layered insults, based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and

3) cumulative insults, which cause unnecessary stress to people of color while privileging whites (p. 300).

While Tallia knows "those things are gonna happen pretty much everywhere you go" her racist encounters during her internship confirmed that even if she was offered a job post-graduation, she would not continue working for this organization in the future.

A pivotal moment that captured white supremacy on full display was when Tallia's white male supervisor tried to take advantage of the power dynamic that existed between her as a racial, gender, and vocational minority by using hegemony to work on projects related to his personal business. When she resisted these pressures, her supervisor tried to deny signing off on her hours which was an agreed-upon element of her internship experience. Tallia noted that it is a combination of her minoritized racial and gender identities and her employment status as an unpaid intern that permitted her supervisor to use his power coercively. She punctuated this point by sharing that she doesn't "even think that situation would have even occurred if I was a white boy." What Tallia experienced was racist ideology and hegemony at work (Crenshaw, 1988). Her white supervisor saw his attempt at coercing her as justified because of the existing racial order and the potential way she would benefit by working on his personal business. However, Tallia denied his attempt to manipulate her. Tallia's preceptor's actions throughout her experience were racist, sexist, unethical, and completely unacceptable. An irony that is only underscored when considering that this is a faith-based public health organization. Ultimately, Tallia's experience with her preceptor takes place because of how white supremacy permits "institutionalized privileges, societal norms, and racialized

hierarchies to proliferate as normative and naturalized" (Christian et al., 2019, 1735) in racialized organizations.

Furthermore, Allison Moore captured how white supremacy and racism shaped her internship experience as a Black MPH intern in a racialized organization. During her internship with the evaluation team, her white counterparts committed racial microaggressions (Smith et al., 2006) by asking her questions that essentialized the perspectives of all Black individuals. As she shared, "a lot of people will say "Oh, we're curious" or "oh, we don't know," or "oh, this and that." And it's like, Black people don't know either … I'm not a science project." These racial microaggressions are not something that she would have experienced if she were white. As she put it "As a minority, I never go into a space and question another race or anything that white people do."

Believing that there is a Black singularity falls under the viewpoint of essentialism, which a CRT perspective is diametrically opposed to. As Ladson-Billings (2022) explained, "Essentialism is a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways" (p. 37). Because Allison Moore is interning in a racialized organization shaped by white supremacy, she is one of the only Black individuals in the workplace and is expected to speak and act on behalf of all Black individuals. The essentializing of Allison Moore's racial culture by white peers is consistent with research that has examined Students of Color's racialized experiences in higher education and student affairs programs (Harris & Linder, 2018).

In short, K, Tallia, and Allison Moore's excerpts provide examples of how the participant narratives shatter the mirage of a racially neutral public health workplace and

demonstrate how white supremacy manifests in racialized organizations in the United States. What is clear from their experiences is that race and racism do play a key role in how internships are experienced in the field of public health. To further demonstrate the façade of race neutrality, a discussion of Ray's (2019) racialized organization in the context of the participants' narratives ensues.

INTERNSHIP SITES AS RACIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS

Ray (2019) offered racialized organizations as a CRT-inspired framework for understanding the role that organizations play in maintaining a racial hierarchy and institutionalizing racial inequality. Two of these tenets, "Racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups" (Ray, 2019, p. 26) and "Whiteness is a credential" (Ray, 2019, p. 26) were present in the participant narratives.

From the perspective of the first tenet, organizations either enhance or dimmish Black MPH interns' agency through several functions. The first of which is by allowing the individuals to complete internships in the organization in the first place. Lee, for example, struggled to secure a placement while her white male counterpart had no problem finding an internship site. Relatedly, Allison Moore's original internship site backed out on her at the last minute, leaving her to deal with the fallout of finding another organization to complete their internship. If Lee and Allison Moore had not found organizations to intern with, this would have ultimately delayed their graduation, entry into the workforce, and the financial benefits that come with doing so. In other words, public health organizations' willingness to work with Black MPH interns plays a key role in shaping Black MPH students' agency. This finding is similar to previous research conducted by Wolfgram et al. (2021) who found that minoritized students face an

"intersectional amplification of barriers" (p. 458) to accessing internships which mediates the benefits these students can receive that are associated with internships.

Additionally, the quality of projects that organizations allow Black MPH interns to complete also impacts their agency. Many of the participants completed internship projects that enhanced their employability, but the scope of the projects is ultimately determined by the organization. For example, during Billy's first internship with the policy organization, he primarily completed "just small tasks that they needed. I didn't do any type of projects or anything, it was just an internship, getting to learn and see what's going on there." This differs from his latter experience with the community outreach team of the hospital, where he worked with strategic planning and coordinated community events around COVID-19 prevention efforts.

Lee's internship experience with the physical activity research group, on the other hand, is an example of an organization enhancing the agency of Black MPH interns by giving them autonomy to work on several high-level projects. Lee was given meaningful tasks of compiling comprehensive lists of both national and local physical activity resources, evaluating a physical activity program in Central America, and working on a committee creating national public health campaigns. Lee enjoyed the responsibility that came with her projects during this time, and felt that this gave her "a good glimpse of what you would see if you were to actually get a job in the physical activity, and public health [field]."

Moreover, Corienne captured the importance of public health organizations allowing Black MPH interns to work on projects that enhance their agency. Instead of completing internships "where they exercise skills they already have," Corienne feels that

Black MPH interns need to participate in projects that enhance their skill sets in order to gain labor market advantages. An opportunity they may not be afforded again compared to their white peers. Thus, the quality of projects that Black MPH interns work on is important for enhancing or diminishing their agency.

In summary, the types of projects that organizations allow Black MPH interns to complete either enhance or diminish their agency. Billy and Lee's narratives provide examples of this in action while Corienne's narrative punctuates the importance of this concept. This finding aligns with the framework put forward by Rogers et al. (2021) who argued that task characteristics (e.g., task autonomy, and task significance) were among the important factors in determining internship job satisfaction and vocational self-concept development.

Finally, organizations enhance or diminish Black MPH intern agency via the quality and quantity of social capital afforded to them during their experiences. For example. During Billy's first internship with the policy group, he was largely excluded from becoming a part of the workplace dynamics. During his second internship experience with the community outreach team, he was included in the workplace dynamics and developed relationships with mentors who supported his career growth. Billy's first internship diminished his agency while his second experience enhanced his agency. Moreover, Tobias, Allison Moore, and R also cited developing social capital as a key area of growth during their experiences which is detailed more in a subsequent section. Corienne also identified the importance of exposing Black MPH interns to the "executive thinking" that preceptors complete as internship supervisors. An opportunity that can only happen under a high-quality social network at the organization.

In summary of Ray's first tenet of racialized organizations in the context of internships, racialized organizations either enhance or diminish Black MPH agency in three ways. The first of which is via internship opportunities. The second is via the meaningfulness of the internship project or skills used in the internship. The third is through the quality and quantity of social capital afforded during internship experiences.

Ray's (2019) third tenet posited that whiteness serves as a credential in racialized organizations by "providing access to organizational resources, legitimizing work hierarchies, and expanding White [sic] agency" (Ray, 2019, p. 40). One example of this can be seen through Lee's experience in finding an internship. She struggled to secure an internship site while her white male counterpart instantly found a placement despite the fact their graduate school experiences were very similar outside of their race and gender. It is impossible to know whether it was his whiteness or maleness that facilitated the ease of his placement, but through a racialized organization lens, this is how whiteness as a credential can operate in internship placements for Black MPH students.

Tallia also provided an example of how whiteness as a credential in the workplace operates. As she shared

> I always like to say I know, I am biracial. And I like to always just say that I know my experience, regardless is going to be different than someone who is fully Black, even just because I don't consider myself like white passing I guess. But there are times when I feel like I probably would maybe get a little bit of differential treatment, per se than if I had like a classmate who was fully Black and I completely understand that. So I just like to make sure like, my experience definitely does not necessarily account for anyone who is who identifies as just

> fully Black because I know, at the end of the day, even though I do identify more so with my Black side, I'm perceived completely different depending on who I'm around.

Thus, Tallia feels that her Biracial identity provides a certain protective factor in white spaces compared to her fully Black counterparts. Lee and Tallia's experiences suggest that whiteness is a credential that is weaponized to legitimate the property interest in whiteness in accessing and experiencing internships.

The first finding of this study is that Black MPH interns challenge the majoritarian narrative of a racially neutral public health workforce. By applying a CRT lens to the participant narratives, the findings suggest that white supremacy, race, and racism shape Black MPH internship experiences in racialized organizations. This finding differs from previous non-critical research that has examined MPH student internship experiences. The limited MPH internship literature that exists captures how internships strengthen students as public health professionals (Cole, et al., 2012; Hernandez et al., 2014; Pham et al., 2023; Villanueva et al., 2011) but have not explicitly examined Black MPH students' perspectives about their racialized internship experiences. The implicit assumption in not centering Black voices in these studies is that race does not impact the internship experience, yet the findings here suggest that white supremacy influences Black MPH interns' access to internships and internship experiences in racialized organizations. The notion that race and racism shape Black MPH internship experiences does align with previous research examining Black students' internship experiences in other disciplines (Bridges, 2020; Brooks et al., 2023; Dietz, 2022; Liebschultz et al., 2006; Marshall, 2016), as well as research completed examining Students of Color's

experiences at PWIs (Harper, 2009; Harris & Linder, 2018). Moreover, there is evidence that Black MPH internships are at least partially shaped by racialized organizations (Ray, 2019).

COUNTERING THE MAJORITARIAN NARRATIVE OF BLACK RACIAL INFERIORITY

Another majoritarian narrative that the participants challenge in their counter-narratives is the notion of Black racial inferiority. Because race and racism are interwoven into the structural and societal fabric of the United States (Bell, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997), this has led to racist, ignorant, and unfounded negative societal narratives about Black individuals. These ideas of racial inferiority are so deeply rooted that they permeate educational research examining race (Ladson-Billings, 2012). A CRT vantage point, and specifically counter-narrative, provides a direct challenge to notions of racial inferiority by "exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Relatedly, a CRT lens shifts the conversation to focus on Black communities' strengths as opposed to what they lack (Miller et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005). From a CRT perspective, it is clear that many of the participants in this study conspicuously experienced or have faced racist social narratives in their lives, particularly in the context of the workplace. Yet, they are not "troubled, oppressed, and hopeless" (Harper, 2009, p. 709) as a deficit perspective would proffer. Rather, the participants in this study challenge the far-reaching racial myths that plague Communities of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) through their professional successes and strengths.

Morgan, for example, shared that there is a societal narrative that Black individuals are lazy or unmotivated. Yet she challenges these notions through her work ethic. As Morgan explained

> I feel like I challenge all of those stereotypes and notions in the work that I do … I went into things knowing that I needed to give it my all. So people wouldn't have those notions about me or my abilities, because of how I looked … I did a lot of hard work. And I did it often by myself, just so people could know that I could do it by myself, I didn't need a lot of help. And I think in some ways that kind of crippled me, I think it would have been nice to reach out for help when I needed it. But I felt like I needed to do things myself. But people couldn't say, "Oh, I took her on, and she doesn't know what she's doing." So I did a lot of work alone.

Lee also experienced similar racist stereotypes about the professional capabilities of Black individuals and identified her work ethic and how she presents herself professionally as ways she countered this racist stereotype. As Lee stated

> I feel like the way I conduct myself and the way I always put my best foot forward and work hard. Also, just the overall understanding of being professional. I feel like people like me aren't necessarily viewed as professional as other counterparts. But I always do good work. Present myself professionally. And I feel like that kind of combats some of the stereotypes that are, again working against me.

Similarly, K shared that Black women in the United States are often cast as bitchy, standoffish, lazy, not engaged, or unintelligent but

> that's the total opposite of me … I feel like my successes at work have shown that I feel like the I've been able to take it to a different level … I feel like I definitely beat those stereotypes or I beat those, preconceived notions of what people think it's like to be with me or to work with me.

Furthermore, R spoke about the negative stereotypes that Black individuals face in the workplace and how she and her colleagues deconstruct these stereotypes. As R discussed

> I think just in general, there's a lot of negative stereotypes about Black individuals, there's some very specific ones that are specific to Black women. And I think just me as myself and the other Black women and other Black individuals that I work with on a daily basis. We definitely dismantle a lot of those stereotypes.

In addition to these examples, Brianna and Corienne both challenge the idea that Black women are not interested in or good at math through their data analysis skills and Billy defies the belief that Black men are unmotivated or not good workers. Moreover, seven of the 14 participants completed two internships during their graduate studies when only one was required for graduation. This in part captures how industrious and high-achieving the participants in this study are and how they challenge notions of Black racial inferiority.

By analyzing the participants' narratives through CRT, it is clear that Black MPH interns in this study challenge the myth of racial inferiority and are indeed capable of success. This extends previous research that has used counter-narrative to demonstrate the successes of Black students (Berry, 2008; Greene & Platt, 2020; Harper, 2009; Palmer, 2022) and Black educators (Jones Jr., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner,

2008). In addition to their successes, participants in this study also demonstrated strengths consistent with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH DURING INTERNSHIPS: USING SOCIAL, NAVIGATIONAL, AND CONFIDENCE CAPITAL FOR INTERNSHIP SUCCESS

Community cultural wealth is an asset-based framework inspired by CRT for understanding the various capitals that Communities of Color offer that are typically neglected and unappreciated (Yosso, 2005). This framework has been used in the educational setting to challenge the false belief that Communities of Color lack cultural capital (Acevedo & Solórzano, 2023). While Yosso (2005) originally identified six forms of capital, scholars have expanded the community cultural wealth framework to include additional capitals such as confidence capital (Wallace, 2022). In this study, three forms of capital were seen including social (Yosso, 2005), navigational (Yosso, 2005), and confidence capital (Wallace, 2022).

Yosso (2005) defined social capital "as networks of people and community resources" (p. 79). Not only can social capital be used to leverage existing resources, but it also "can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). Many Black MPH interns in this study both utilized social capital to enhance their careers and as an emotional support mechanism in navigating racialized workplaces.

From the expanding social capital perspective, Billy and Tobias both developed relationships with mentors whom they received guidance from both during and after their internships. While Billy's mentor from the community outreach team has since passed away, Billy shared "I was going to his office even after the internship was over, if not

every week, bi-weekly. Just talking, getting guidance, on the steps I should be taking [to advance his career].” Tobias, on the other hand, shared that even after his internship with a non-profit organization, he “still continued talking with my faculty [sic] advisor … we still have communicated through just, she's a little bit older than I am. So she's given me advice with school and how to go about certain things and whatnot.” Moreover, Allison Moore, and R both cited developing and maintaining professional relationships as key areas in which they grew during their internships. This finding is consistent with other research that has shown that racially minoritized doctoral students used social capital to complete graduate school and ultimately secure professorship (Acevedo-Gil & Madrigal-Garcia, 2015). Relatedly, Harper (2008) found that high-achieving Black undergraduate male students used social capital to advance their academic and professional careers. From the public health perspective, this finding aligns with Villanueva et al. (2011) who found that MPH internships expanded social contacts.

Several participants also used social capital with colleagues as emotional support for navigating a racialized workforce. Tallia, for example, connected with other racialized minorities who worked and frequented the wellness center where she interned. K on the other hand, cited instances of social capital as emotional support in both of her internship experiences. During her time at the health center, her counterpart in her office, another Black woman, was a key component of not feeling socially isolated despite most of the workforce being white. In her second internship, K’s cousin served as a mentor and counselor for navigating the senator’s office. Additionally, Morgan connected socially with an African gentleman, the only other racial minority, in her internship at the rural health group. The finding that Black MPH interns utilized social capital as emotional

support aligns with previous research. For example, Martin et al. (2020) found that social capital was an important factor in first-generation students persisting in engineering programs.

In addition to social capital, participants also demonstrated navigational capital. Navigational capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions (Yosso, 2005, p. 79)." The Southeastern School of Public Health and the racialized public health workforce are two spaces that were never designed for Black individuals to succeed in. Despite the institutional challenges they face, the participants in this study navigate these spaces adeptly by completing their internships and ultimately their degrees. Some specific examples are as follows. Tallia navigated a racially hostile internship environment where her internship supervisor tried to coerce her into working on his personal business projects. Allison Moore's initial internship site withdrew their placement offer at the last minute, yet she still secured an internship and graduated on time. During Billy's first internship with the policy entity, he also navigated an unwelcoming environment. From a navigational capital standpoint, the participants' narratives are consistent with other research that has shown Communities of Color using navigational capital to navigate racialized environments (Vesely et al., 2013).

Finally, participants in this study demonstrated examples of confidence capital during their internships. Confidence capital refers to "the ability to maintain confidence and self-assurance in one's skills and abilities despite deficit messages from society" (Wallace, 2022, p. 537). Because race and racism are entwined in U.S. society (Bell, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997), Black individuals face negative racialized messages and stereotypes. Through nearly all of the narratives, participants displayed

confidence in their abilities. For example, Kate Rogers acknowledged that "I don't always brag on myself, but I've done a lot. I've done a lot and I've definitely succeeded at some things and I think I even surprised myself sometimes, by the things that I can do." Another example of professional confidence is seen through Micheal's ability to be self-validating in the work he completed during his internship. Moreover, in their closing statements, Marie, Morgan, Tallia, and Tobias participants exuded confidence that Black MPH interns are capable of succeeding in internships.

In this section, the study's first research question *How do Black MPH students describe their racialized experiences in their internships?* was discussed. This question was answered by demonstrating how the Black MPH interns in this study challenged the majoritarian narratives of a racially neutral public health workforce and Black racial inferiority. In the following section, the second research question is answered and the implications for practice are discussed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

For counter-narrative to "result in transformative action of educational equity" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 269), it is important to "go beyond telling stories … and move into action" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 293). The call to work toward eliminating racial subordination (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano 1997) is perhaps the most important tenet of CRT because ultimately, CRT was developed to improve the realities of People of Color, not simply document disparities. With this in mind, the second research question this study sought to answer was *2) What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* When examining the narratives from a CRT

perspective, several practical implications emerged including the importance of centering the voices of Black MPH interns throughout the internship, the need for a more racially diverse public health workforce, and the need for more antiracist public health practitioners to mentor and support Black MPH interns.

CENTER BLACK MPH VOICES THROUGHOUT THE INTERNSHIP PROCESS

From a CRT perspective, the experiential knowledge of People of Color is "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding" (Solórzano, 1997, p. 7) actions that can be used to eliminate racism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997). When analyzing the participant narratives through a CRT lens, it is clear that Black MPH interns must have a platform to share their internship experiences, and that their experiences ultimately drive the development of internship policies related to Black students. For example, Kate Rogers captured the importance of this when she shared

> If [schools of public health] want to improve the [internship] experience for Black students, then you definitely have to listen to them. And you have to create a space for them to be able to have their voice heard. Don't wait until the situation gets really agitated to where we're angry.

Marie also emphasized the importance of schools of public health centering Black voices but stressed that these efforts must be continuous and not one-off efforts. As she shared

> But just having the intern, intern or whoever come in and say, "I see what you're doing. But you're missing this over here … how can we do this better?" And I think doing that not letting that be a one time thing, I think letting them get in

there and it's kind of like a two way thing they're learning how to do the job but from their own personal experience, once again, letting them be heard.

Kate Rogers, Marie, and several other participants emphasized the importance of centering Black MPH interns' voices. This is a direct challenge to the racially neutral approach that plagues existing research examining MPH internship experiences.

While the idea that schools of public health should center the voices of Black MPH interns can be generalized to all schools of public health, the specifics of this process should vary by school and be determined by the Black MPH students at each respective school. Keeping these efforts local is important because as Kendi (2016) has discussed, the most effective protests against racial injustice have been fiercely local. When Black MPH intern experiences are approached with the understanding that race, racism, and racialized organizations will shape these experiences, it frees both scholars and practitioners to explicitly center Black voices in order to combat racism during the internship process. It must be iterated that centering Black voices to combat racism is not complaining for the sake of complaining, it is shedding light on the experiences of those whose voices are not often listened to. Tallia captured this point poetically when she shared that when Black students' voices are listened to it is

> Bringing light to things that do happen. It's informing [you] so that they can hopefully be changed. So other people don't have to deal with that. So when you do have people of minority groups speaking up about things, it's not necessarily because we want a pity party, it's because we want change. And we're using our voices to hopefully, bring about that change.

However, while centering Black MPH voices to understand the racialized nature of internships is important, it is also vital that the voices of Black MPH students are centered in a way that celebrates their strengths and successes.

Counter-narrative is used to analyze and expose race and racism in the lived experiences of Communities of Color, but it is also a way to share their unheard and unique perspectives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Focusing on the strengths that Black MPH students bring to their internship experiences, shifts the focus from a deficit perspective to uplifting the inherent strengths Communities of Color already possess (Yosso, 2005). The participant narratives make it clear that these participants are personally and professionally successful. They provide examples of Black MPH students applying and enhancing their public health practitioner skills as well as demonstrating various forms of community cultural wealth including social capital (Yosso, 2005), navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), and confidence capital (Wallace, 2022) during their internships. Thus, whether through additional counter-narratives, media campaigns, or student spotlights, schools of public health and organizations should celebrate the successes and strengths that Black MPH interns bring to their experiences by amplifying their voices.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE MUST BECOME MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE PARTICULARLY AT LEADERSHIP LEVELS

Another concept that emerged from the participants' narratives is that the public health workforce must become more racially diverse, particularly at leadership levels. Many participants felt that having more Black public health professionals in organizations would help in two ways. First, it would inspire hope and help combat the

racist stereotypes that Black individuals deal with in the workplace given the role that white supremacy plays in shaping the existing workforce. Second, it would increase the comfortability of most Black MPH interns and workers. From the inspiring hope perspective, several participants explicitly outlined the importance of racially diversifying leadership in public health. Tobias shared one such example when he articulated that

> Representation on all fronts is something that can break down so many barriers. Having people see Black people in positions of power and People of Color in positions of power, as opposed to seeing only their white counterparts in positions of power [is important].

For Tobias, seeing People of Color obtain leadership positions is paramount because of what it symbolizes for other racialized minorities. While there are certainly limits to what symbols can do for racial equity, symbols are still important in inspiring a sense of belonging (Bell, 2018). While more racially diverse leadership would help inspire hope, it would also create spaces where Black interns could be more comfortable in the workplace. For example, Morgan felt that

> [more Black individuals in the workplace] would have helped [her] to know that "Okay, there's other people here who are like me, who've done some of the similar work I've done who've had some of the same life experiences I've had. So I can be confident that I can do this job."

Kate Rogers, on the other hand, stressed the need for public health organizations to hire more Black individuals "Because you feel more comfortable around people that look like you or share the same ideas." In order to achieve more racial diversity in the public health workforce, several strategies could be employed.

As Coronado et al. (2020), have outlined, strategies to diversify the public health workforce typically fall under: "(1) diversifying the educational pipeline; and (2) developing organizational strategies to improve worker recruitment and enhance worksite climate and inclusivity" (p. 2) both of which are important. From the HEI perspective, schools of public health must remove and reduce the barriers that Black and other racially minoritized students face to enter MPH programs. For example, Sullivan et al. (2022) recognized that not only is the graduate record examination a barrier to admitting historically underrepresented students to MPH programs, but it also is not a good predictor of graduate student success. Other research has suggested that underrepresented students are typically recruited into public health programs through institutional linkages (e.g., professors), collaborative partnerships (e.g., career service boards), and interpersonal contacts (e.g., alumni) but specific strategies to leverage these activities remain unclear (Caldwell, et al., 2021).

One potential strategy to diversify the educational pipeline related to internships is to have schools of public health provide internship funding for racially minoritized MPH students. Given the barriers that racially minoritized students face in securing internships (Wolfgram et al. 2021), schools of public health could provide funding to these students in order to support their completion of internships. Some schools of public health have begun providing funding internship funding for specific types of internships (Bersi, 2022) but explicit funding for racially minoritized students would be useful in reducing the burden of taking on unpaid work in order to complete a degree. A burden that disproportionately impacts Students of Color (Wolfgram et al. 2021).

From the organizational perspective, several strategies could be employed. One of which is that organizations should monitor, assess, and share information about workplace diversity at their own institutions (Coronado et al., 2020), with a specific focus on internships. Currently, there are no national efforts to track racial diversity across all facets of the public health workforce (Coronado et al., 2020). While the Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS) does provide information about federal and state governmental employees employed in public health (de Beaumont Foundation & ASTHO, 2022), it does not capture non-governmental organizations' workplace diversity. If the PH WINS data is any indication of the true racial demographics of the public health workforce, it still is not nationally representative of the U.S. population (Coronado et al., 2020). Another concern arises when considering that People of Color at state and local health departments are mostly represented "in administrative and clerical positions" (Coronado et al., 2020, p. 2). If organizations captured employment information and reported it on an annual basis, this would provide a more accurate picture of who is working where in the public health workforce and could serve as a guide where racial diversity efforts are needed the most.

Relatedly, public health internship information should also be tracked and reported at a national level. Unlike apprenticeships, there are no high-quality reporting standards about the number of internships completed each year or the funding provided for these experiences (Perlin, 2012). Understanding how many MPH and undergraduate public health students complete internships, the racial demographics of interns, where internships are being completed, whether experiences are paid, and other information

about internships would be useful in contextualizing the public health internship landscape.

Another strategy that organizations should consider is developing and incorporating policies and practices related to diversity and inclusion (Coronado et al., 2020), with a particular focus on recruiting and retaining Black interns. For example, paid internships that are reserved specifically for racially minoritized individuals that lead to employment would create a pathway for diversifying the public health workforce. Other examples could include memorandums of agreement with HBCUs to place Black public health interns with their organizations. When implementing such policies, it is important to vocalize the support for these initiatives. This is important given that many DEI initiatives are under attack by political reactionaries (Harper, 2024). As Harper (2024) proposed

> A 'lay low' DEI strategy also strongly conveys to women, people of color, queer people, persons with disabilities, people from non-dominant religious groups, and others who make organizations diverse that they aren't worth fighting for and protecting (Harper, 2024, para 8).

Harper's (2024) statement accentuates the point made by Allison Moore when she shared

> If you don't state, where you are, I just assume that you're either neutral, or you're not really with me, because if you don't explicitly say, "I'm here to support you" … you don't really care that much … so it's better to clearly state that you're an ally.

Thus, organizations should develop and implement DEI policies related to internships as well as vocalize their support for such initiatives.

ANTIRACIST PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ARE NEEDED TO SUPPORT, MENTOR, AND EMPOWER BLACK MPH INTERNS

Another implication for practice that is related to diversifying the workforce is that antiracist public health professionals are needed who will not only provide internship opportunities, but will also support, mentor, and empower Black MPH students during these experiences. Racialized organizations either enhance or diminish Black MPH intern agency via internship access, the meaningfulness of the projects, and the quantity and quality of social networks afforded to the intern during the internship experience. In public health internships, this is largely dictated by the preceptor of the internship. While increasing the number of Black public health professionals will likely aid in this regard it is not a prerequisite. The history of antiracist struggle shows that it takes multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalitions to combat racial injustice (Cho & Westley, 1993; Crenshaw et al., 1995).

In addition to the examples of Billy and Tobias developing mentors during their experiences, Micheal and Kate Rogers provided examples of non-Black public health professionals supporting and empowering Black MPH interns. Micheal interned with a mostly white organization where his internship preceptor was a white woman, yet his experience never felt racialized. In fact, he cited his interactions with his preceptor as one of the positive aspects of his internship. While Micheal entered the internship space slightly anxious, his preceptor created a calm and welcoming environment that set him at ease. Moreover, Micheal's preceptor supported his professional development in the areas he needed to grow yet acknowledged his strengths and efforts in other areas. Kate Roger's preceptor Jay, a white male, was also a positive aspect of her internship experience. He

was open, honest, and communicates well. Importantly, he is not afraid to have difficult conversations about race and public health efforts. When it came time for Kate Rogers to present her findings to the research team, he adequately prepared her for the audience and used this moment to showcase all of her hard work during her internship.

Micheal and Kate Roger's narratives provide examples of non-Black public health professionals empowering Black MPH interns. Given how white supremacy shapes the public health workforce, antiracist professionals of all racial and ethnic identities are needed who are willing to mentor and support Black MPH interns. Just as teachers from any racial or ethnic background can effectively teach Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), public health professionals from any racial or ethnic background can effectively mentor, support, and empower Black MPH interns.

As it currently stands, there is no external reward system for public health practitioners supervising public health interns. Public health preceptors essentially "pay it forward" by bringing in public health interns and supervising the next generation of public health professionals. This is often a time-consuming task that requires them to essentially train a new employee to work with the organization. This model, while useful from an academic standpoint, provides an organizational challenge to retain the talent they invest in during internships, as it is unlikely that the organization will have funding to bring on the intern as a full employee after the internship ends. This is especially true if the internship was already unpaid, as many public health internships are. If there were federal, state, or local funding mechanisms that incentivized public health practitioners to take on Black public health interns, this could open up doors that were previously closed for internship opportunities. While increasing the number of public health practitioners

who are willing to supervise Black public health interns is important, practitioners may need additional training to successfully mentor and support Black MPH interns. Fortunately, some useful mentorship models exist.

The Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity: Promoting Opportunities for Diversity in Education and Research (BUILD PODER) (Vargas et al., 2021) is a CRT-guided mentorship training that provides a template that could be adopted to train public health professionals on how to adequately mentor Black MPH students. Originally designed as a mentorship training for white faculty members working with Students of Color in order to diversity the biomedical research field (Saetermoe et al., 2017), BUILD PODER has since been conceptually expanded as a mentorship training across HEIs (Vargas et al., 2021). Central to the BUILD PODER mentorship training is the concept of advancing "CRT-informed strategies for respectful interactions by elevating critical consciousness and formulating intentional practices around race and its intersections with other social identities. It also encourages faculty to transform racist institutional practices" (Vargas et al., 2021, p. 1048). In other words, the training acknowledges the centrality of racism and intentionally has mentors reflect on their identities in relation to the racialized social structures of the United States. Importantly, this model also trains faculty members to acknowledge the inherent strengths that Students of Color bring to academia in order to empower students navigating these predominantly white spaces (Saetermoe et al., 2017). Adapting a mentorship training like BUILD PODER that uses CRT to situate the racialized nature of mentorship mentee relationships and focuses on the strengths of Black MPH interns would allow schools of public health to provide

adequate training for preceptors who work with their Black MPH students in a culturally responsive and responsible manner.

Relatedly, pairing Black MPH students with public health practice mentors is one strategy that participants identified to support Black MPH students as they prepare to enter the public health workforce. Public health practice mentors could mirror faculty advisors in academia but give professional advice and support related to the career aspirations of each student. These relationships could be cultivated and incentivized through alumni associations or personal contacts at schools of public health. Building these connections could also sow the seeds of opportunities related to internships, future jobs, and other professional growth opportunities. Pairing Black MPH students with public health practice mentors who are trained using the proposed adapted BUILD PODER model which acknowledges the strengths of Black mentees could prove to be a potent weapon in the arsenal of experiential educators fighting for racial justice.

In this section, the study's second research question *What are the implications of Black MPH students' narratives for policies and practices related to internships?* was considered. This question was answered by examining the participant narratives and indicated that Black MPH interns' voices should be centered throughout the internship process, that the public health workforce must become more racially diverse, and that more antiracist public health practitioners are needed to mentor and support Black MPH interns.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First and foremost, more research is needed examining the internship experiences of Black MPH students. Internships are an important component of public health training

yet to this point, most of the research on this topic is focused on program evaluations that do not explicitly capture the lived experiences of Black MPH interns. This study is one of the few that has centered the lived experiences of Black MPH interns. However, examining other Black MPH interns' experiences in other professional settings and regions would provide added insights into how Black MPH students describe their internship experiences. For example, while many organizations in public health are racialized, there may be public health organizations in the United States with predominantly Black employees as well. Columbo provided an example of a Black MPH internship experience in a predominantly Black work setting in the Caribbean but understanding Black MPH interns' experiences in predominantly Black work settings in the United States would also be informative. Additionally, in future research addressing Black MPH students' racialized internship experiences, researchers must continue to leverage an asset-based approach that builds on the inherent strengths of Black MPH interns in order to avoid deficit thinking about Black individuals. Doing so would build on the findings of this study by potentially identifying additional strengths that Black MPH interns exhibit during their internships.

In addition to Black MPH internship experiences, more research that examines the internship experiences of Black undergraduate public health students would also be useful. Much like the research available on Black MPH internships, these studies focus on program evaluations or do not explicitly seek the experiences of Black students. Understanding Black undergraduate internship experiences would add additional nuance to the types of experiences that Black undergraduate interns have, as these experiences might differ from MPH internships given that MPH internships are typically more

applied and academically rigorous. Moreover, Black undergraduate internship experiences could provide more understanding of how to diversify the public health workforce through internships. Importantly, these studies should also use an antideficit lens to focus on Black interns' strengths.

In addition to student-centered research, future studies should also dive deeper into the early, mid-, and senior-lived racialized career experiences of Black public health professionals. The participants in this study identified racially diversifying the public health workforce and particularly leadership as an implication of enhancing Black MPH internship experiences. Understanding the early, mid-, and senior-lived workforce experiences of Black public health professionals may provide insights into their career trajectories and how they successfully navigated their own racialized experiences in racialized organizations. Their experiences could ultimately provide insights into creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace environment for interns and employees alike. Moreover, such research would continue to build a strength-based research foundation centered on the lived experiences of Black public health professionals. Such research could be achieved through additional critical counter-narratives (whether they be personal stories, the stories of others, or composite stories) (Miller et al., 2020) or critical race ethnographies (Duncan, 2002).

Furthermore, as remote internships/work continues to become more common, understanding how the modality of work impacts racialized experiences is important. Many of the participants in this study completed internships in three-dimensional spaces that required them to enter the physical areas of racialized organizations. When internships are completed virtually, there may be fewer opportunities for personal

interactions and by proxy, fewer racialized internship experiences. Exploring these distinctions as well as whether students enjoy remote internships and gain the same career benefits through virtual internships is also important.

Furthermore, a better understanding of how schools of public health support preceptors mentoring racially minoritized interns in racialized settings would also be useful. It is currently unclear the extent to which schools of public health are providing resources to public health practitioners supervising non-white interns. Exploring current efforts around this would provide a baseline as far as the next steps for supporting preceptors. Moreover, while the BUILD PODER model offers a compelling CRT-inspired framework to prepare white mentors to support non-white interns, this model would ultimately need to be adopted and evaluated in order to effectively support Black public health interns.

One final consideration is that more research is needed that examines equitable strategies for dismantling the institutionalization of racialized organizations. The participants in this study tended to only discuss the importance of diversifying the workforce on a more individual level as opposed to dismantling the racially hierarchical structures that racialized organizations are. As such, the strategies outlined here focus more on small-scale changes as opposed to completely reimagining these institutions. Future studies could explore ideas of completely reimagining racialized organizations as social structures.

CONCLUSION

The findings that Black MPH interns challenge the majoritarian narratives of a racially neutral public health workforce and Black racial inferiority extends work from

other scholars who have used counter-narrative to expose similar racial myths (Berry, 2008; Harper, 2009; Milner, 2008). This study also assists in shifting the lens (Blay, 2013) on how Black individuals are perceived by using an asset-based lens to examine their lived experiences. Moreover, this research extends Ray's (2019) work on racialized organizations in the public health context. Finally, the implications give direct action items that schools of public health and public health organizations can engage in to start creating a more racially just internship landscape.

Given the applied nature of public health as a discipline, internships have been and will likely continue to be a vital educational component of MPH degrees. To this point, internships have largely been posited as racially neutral experiences in which the racial identity of the interns and the demographics of the organization are not important. For many Black MPH interns, their lived realities run contrary to this notion. Because white supremacy was so deeply intertwined in the inception of the United States (Kendi 2016), this has created the current reality where racialized organizations exist and Black MPH interns' experiences are shaped by white supremacy. Despite this, Black MPH interns are not "troubled, oppressed, and hopeless" (Harper, 2009, p. 709). On the contrary, they are resilient, accomplished, and hope-inspiring. Ultimately, organizations are social structures, and social structures are not fixed, they are malleable (Ray, 2019). A more socially just world is possible *but* to move towards this point, the voices of Black MPH students, interns, and public health workers everywhere must be listened to *and* acted on.

Critical-counternarrative was created to unify "CRT as a model of inquiry, critical reflection and generativity as a model of praxis, and transformative action" (Miller et al.,

2020, p. 271) to ultimately bring about racial equity for Students of Color. This study has reached the third stage of critical reflection and generativity internalization, which seeks to explore how to change the situation. While this stage is critical "for the consideration and generation of action in the school and the community" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 290), without the actions of actively changing the situation and reflecting on these actions, the effectiveness of this study and all counter-narrative research is limited. Boots on the ground are needed so public health students and professionals will continuously act and reflect for a more racially just internship landscape, workforce, and world. This scholarly pursuit has come to an end but the fight to eradicate white supremacy entirely from *all* social structures continues.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Interview

Focus	Questions	Notes
Background	• Tell me a little bit about yourself including where you are from originally, how you became interested in public health, and what job(s) you currently hold. • Describe your experience in the MPH program as a Black student. • What did you find enjoyable, what did you find challenging, and what else stood out to you about your experience as a Black MPH student in the program?	Break the ice and build rapport.
Practice experience overview	• Tell me about your practice experience. • Which organization did you complete your experience with? • What work products did you create to complete your practice experience?	Break the ice and build rapport, begin unpacking practice experience.
Practice experience organization	• Tell me more about the organization you worked with. • What were the organization's demographics like? • Describe your practice experience with the organization as a Black MPH student. • Did this experience feel racialized? • Do you have any questions for me?	Contextualize organization where practice experience was completed at.

Second Interview

Focus	Questions	Notes

Follow up on questions raised from last interview that were not touched on	• TBD	Remind participants of previous conversation, follow-up on questions
Practice experience successes	• Thinking back to your practice experience…What areas do you feel like you grew the most professionally and personally during this time? • Some people hold racial stereotypes about Black individuals in the United States. To what extent do you feel like your professional and personal successes challenge those ideas? • In what ways did you challenge those ideas through your internship experience?	Showcase practice experience success.
Critical counter-narrative: ideological becoming	• What structural changes would need to take place in order to eliminate racial stereotypes about Black individuals in the workplace?	Engage participant in a way that shows the narrative can be changed.
Critical counter-narrative: internalization	• How can we as public health practitioners continue to challenge racial stereotypes about Black individuals in the context of the workplace? • What role might internships play in challenging those ideas? • What types of actions could the ASPH do to support Black MPH students through their internship experiences? • Are there policies that the ASPH could enact to support Black MPH students in their internships?	Discuss ways of how the situation could be changed.
Closing thoughts	• What is one thing you want everyone to know about Black MPH students completing internships • Any other questions for me?	