

Race Rituals in Higher Education

A Dissertation

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Dedication

To my mom and my dad, you sacrificed everything
so that we could have a chance at something.

Thank you for giving me life, love, and endless support.

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Abstract

In the last few decades, the push for a more diverse student population has become commonplace across college campuses in the United States. With the demands of growing a more diverse student population, institutions have made widespread changes in policy over the years (Gist-Mackey, Wiley, & Erba, 2017). This dissertation examines the phenomena of organizational race rituals (RR) in higher education during the onboarding process, focusing specifically on “race” and “diversity” in organizational communication and assimilation practices as a commitment to diversity and inclusion and its impact on students of color's (SOC) experiences. Onboarding serves to produce, reproduce, maintain, and reinforce norms and values of an organization and provide its participants with a transition from an outsider to insider (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer, 2010; Watkins, 2016; Chillakuri, 2020). As one of the first steppingstones, onboarding is a vital process where most organizations invest a considerable amount of time and money to recruit new talent or students (Graybill et al., 2013). Many institutionalized practices such as orientation, annual events, onboarding, and the like are often ritualized into organizational culture.

As someone who is a student of color, has had the privilege to be a diversity worker, and has participated in the performance of race rituals I am curious and motivated to critically engage in race rituals. I dig deeper into these assimilation and onboarding processes to gain a more holistic picture of the impact that DEI events have on students of color’s experiences. I use autoethnography along with Critical Race Theory and counter-storytelling as a foundation to share the perspectives of my personal experiences, SOC, and staff of color on race rituals and its impact on SOC experiences in predominantly white institutions. The question I ask is “how is race ritualized in Higher Education?” and through my interviews, I was able to

identify three main themes 1) Racial Identities as symbol, 2) (Mis)Representation, and 3) Navigating Difference & Educating White People. Data analysis showed that RR functioned to reinscribe racial identities while at the same time also serving as symbols in RR that often represent something other than its literal meaning. Symbols communicate messages of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are spoken, written, and performed. RR also misrepresents POC on campus as the onboarding events examined in my study often are intentional about who is invited to RR and reflect a specific racial identity for incoming students. On the other end there is importance and value in having racial representation on campus as echoed by many of the students and staff interviewed. Lastly, RR can provide tools and support for student's short term on how to navigate PWI, but a lot remains on student motivation to seek out long term support on campus. RR like the Gopher Equity Project were mentioned by students and staff as mostly helpful for educating white people on how to interact with POC to create a more inclusive campus climate. This was also reflected in the data that was collected and presented on the GEP outcomes that were collected through the university.

In recognizing the different layers of RR within higher education organizations, the student and staff counter stories allow us to gain another perspective on how RR can serve to support as it often appears in the forefront yet behind the scenes communication of racialized identities are continually being reinscribed, reinforced, and maintained. This study has valuable contributions to the field of organizational communication and extends to other fields because it incorporates important aspects of the lived experiences of SOC to DEI work, research, and challenges current ways of producing knowledge. The counter stories shed light on important aspects of DEI that are often overlooked such as the underlying implications of who benefits from DEI, what the work is or isn't doing, and much more. RR, whether

intentional or unintentional, communicates different meanings, values, and impacts for people and organizations alike, and we must look at all the layers to see what we are simply checking off and what can grow towards systemic change.

Key Words: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Race, Rituals, Organizational Communication, Critical Race Theory, Counter Storytelling

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Chapter one

Introduction

Problem Statement

I remember the challenges I experienced as a first-generation student of color in predominantly white institutions. It was anything but smooth sailing and the residue of my experience and how it felt continues to affect me in different ways as a woman and person of color in academia. One of my earliest memories of my college experience was during the first week of my freshman year. I had not attended orientation because I was a transfer student and there were no welcoming events for transfer students, so I had to figure things out on my own. Additionally, I still needed to live in the dorms because I was technically still a freshman and although I was a bit older than the people living on the floor, I was hopeful that it would turn out well. It was welcome week, and there was a lot of chatter in the hallways and pretty much the whole dorm building since it consisted of mostly freshmen. I was debating whether or not I should go to the events because we were almost a week in and I had still not made any friends, I dreaded the idea of attending something like that alone. As I took in a deep breath, I told myself this was an opportunity to meet new people and perhaps make some friends. So, I mustered up my courage and got ready to set out to the welcome week festivities. As I opened my door, I overheard my new roommate say “I think my roommate is Chinese” to her new friends she made from orientation. I overheard some other comments about cats and dogs and giggling and then they were gone. I took another deep breath, I could feel myself getting angry, upset, and disappointed. I wasn’t sure how to process what had just happened, I mean it wasn’t a new stereo type or the first time I had that kind of comment towards me, but somehow it weighed heavily on me, so much so that I did not attend the festivities after all.

Instead, I looked at my computer screen pretending to be busy all the while I felt more alone and different than I had ever felt in a long time. I was truly alone.

I begin with my story because research shows that there are many positive outcomes for students when attending onboarding events such as orientation. Although I did not participate in this specific onboarding event, some of the feelings I experienced during that time of “not being a part of the community” was a result of non-attendance and contributed to increasing my feelings of difference, isolation, and identity as a student. These feelings were deepened through the indirect and direct racial microaggressions and sometimes blatant racist experiences that I would experience throughout my college career at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

Although DEI initiatives have changed since I was an undergraduate, many similar issues that I experienced are still common occurrences. Additionally, in the last few decades the push for a more diverse student population has become commonplace initiatives across college campuses in the United States. With this increase institutions have made widespread changes in policy over the years drawing attention to and for support of growing diverse student populations (Gist-Mackey, Wiley, & Erba, 2017). Although diversity, equity, and inclusion have been etched into the organizational structures of higher education, stories similar to mine continue to trickle in through the voices of students of color to this day.

With the recent events of COVID-19 and the declining enrollment numbers across college campuses, there is even a greater emphasis on the retention of students (Reason & Braxton, 2023). Although enrollment numbers are not where they used to be, there are still success stories despite the pandemic such as this example “U of M Twin Cities welcomes historically diverse, large class of new students” (Kelly, 2022). According to Kelly (2022) the

class of 2026 is the most diverse incoming class in the history of the University of Minnesota and is “driven by record numbers of incoming Black and Indigenous students” (para. 3).

Furthermore, there is an emphasis of academic success directly connected to onboarding as Kelly (2022) puts it

The University has experienced remarkable growth in its four-year graduation rates in recent decades, rising to record levels. Research has clearly shown the importance of a supportive campus environment in fostering student success, and Welcome Week is a crucial part of this. (para. 4)

This message is also echoed by the University of Wisconsin, Madison where the 2022 incoming cohort is described by Erickson (2022) as “The freshman class is the most racially and ethnically diverse in the university’s history” (para. 15). The historical achievement is highlighted by Erickson (2022) who states that “There are 1,431 underrepresented students of color, up from 1,251 last year. These students comprise 16.6% of the freshman class, up from 14.8% last year. Both the number and percentage of underrepresented students of color are at all-time highs” (para. 16). Here we see another example where a University highlights its largest diverse incoming class that also communicates doing diversity well.

We also see this same message highlighted across the US of record numbers of a diverse incoming freshman class from the University of South Carolina, where the headline reads “U of SC welcomes largest, more diverse freshman class” here Stensland (2022) states that

The University of South Carolina’s Columbia campus this week welcomed its largest, and among its most diverse freshman classes in the school’s 221-year history.

According to preliminary figures, 6,596 new freshmen are enrolled for the fall 2022

semester, representing a 6.5 percent increase over last year. Of those, 1,560 — nearly 25 percent — are underrepresented minority students, an increase of 15 percent over last year. (para. 1 & para. 2)

These are just a few examples among many college campuses where we can see that record numbers of SOC enrollment are occurring and considered newsworthy. With the increase of SOC, we need to critically examine if these schools have systems in place to support them and how DEI initiatives come into play.

In this study I examine the phenomena of what I call race rituals (RR) that occur within organizations such as higher education. Here I critically analyze RR in the onboarding process that are focused specifically on “race” and “diversity” in organizational communication and assimilation practices as a commitment to diversity inclusion. By race rituals I mean race performances that are both intentional and unintentional behavior/s that are complex, fluid, repetitive and can be symbolic in both the meaning making process and in mediating human behavior, and most often connected to systems of power (Couldry, 2013; Kertzer, 1988; Manning, 2000; Marvin & Ingle, 1999). I use the term performance as it relates to rituals and how through RR performances DEI commitments are reflected and communicated. As Chvaja et al. (2023) put it “It is through ritual performance that beliefs are communicated, negotiated, and sustained in a population” (Chvaja et al., 2023; Lang & Kundt, 2020; Shariff et al., 2014; Sosis, 2004, 2019). I will provide a more in-depth definition of race rituals later. By focusing on RR we can critically examine how they come to be, for what purpose, and its overall impact for the intended population they serve.

Not all rituals are problematic, however they can be when things like student support and success are expected outcomes of going through the motions. By window dressing

systemic issues of race within the academy the focus shifts away from important conversations rooted in racism. Even though higher educational institutions are sites of producing and passing knowledge, they are not exempt from racism. In fact, we need to challenge and acknowledge that race rituals in the academy have deep roots in coloniality, racism, and white supremacy that stem into the very buildings, curriculum, and policies that are still intact today (Patton, 2016). For example, many higher education institutions sit on stolen land and carry with it history of exclusion, exploitation, and elimination of indigenous peoples which include many land-grant universities such as the University of Minnesota that sit on the homeland of the Dakota people (Ambo & Beardall, 2023, University of Minnesota, 2024).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine DEI onboarding programming or what I refer to as RR, that are intended to welcome students of color into the college community. As one of the first organizational experiences students of color engage in, I want to examine how this process may help or hinder SOC assimilation into a predominantly white institution. These events are often carefully curated and reflect diversity disproportionately to the actual campus community. As someone who has had the privilege to be a student, diversity worker, and have participated in the performance of race rituals, I am curious and motivated to critically engage in digging deeper into these assimilation and onboarding processes to gain a more holistic picture of the impact that RR have on students of colors experience.

Literature that examines the overall impact of onboarding events such as orientation for college students and the role they play on academic success in higher education. This research shows that orientation programs are linked to things such as increased GPA, retention, sense of

belonging, and perceptions of orientation linked to impact (Davis, 2018; Black and Murphy, 2017; Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010). However, there remains limited research on specific onboarding experiences such as orientation for SOC in predominantly white institutions (PWI) (Davis, 2018; Mayhew et al, 2010). I hope to examine the RR that take place in the initial stages of assimilation into an organization to see if there are or are not any major impacts on SOC experiences, especially given that RR are often ephemeral and often do not reflect the reality of being a student of color in a PWI.

Most organizations have some form of onboarding process as it serves multiple crucial factors in welcoming, integrating, recruiting, and establishing organizational values, attitudes, and behaviors (Godinho et. al, 2023). Additionally, organizational onboarding serves “to make new employees feel an integral part of the organization; that they learn about the organizational language, culture, mission, structure, and history of the organization; and, finally, that they fully understand the basic principles of their workplace” (Godinho et. al, 2023, p. 2). Similar to onboarding rituals like orientation and welcome week, DEI specific onboarding processes serve to help students transition into higher education while often missing an important factor in student academic success, which is the intentionality of creating a sense of belonging for incoming students of color (Rueda & Swift, 2024; Carter, Sumpter, & Thruston, 2023). As I continue to argue in this dissertation, race rituals are often created to support DEI efforts to tackle institutional traditions that continue to exclude, silence, and oppress. However, it is even more important that we examine them critically to ensure that these race rituals do not lose their original intent over time.

What I hope to discover with this research is a better understanding of RR and their impact on SOC experiences in PWI. As I stated before, race rituals are not necessarily problematic, however we need to be critical about their purpose and examine if they are meeting the intended purpose, or are they simply being repeated to get the job done. This examination is also important because as D’Lima et al. (2014) states “one in four college students will leave the university during or after freshman year ... the first year of college is crucial for predicting student adjustment and academic trajectories” (p. 341). I am also curious about whether the connections that are or are not made during these short-lived performances go on to play a larger role in the student’s college experience. What types of expectations, community, feelings, etc. do race rituals serve? And how do RR communicate race and community for new students? My hope is that through the stories of students and staff who have taken part in these race rituals we can have a better understanding of their role in the assimilation process, impact on students' experiences, and add to future research and practice. What I mean by assimilation is the transition that newcomers or first-year students make as they become a full member of an organization or in this case the University.

This research is important because it will help to expand on what we currently practice as rituals by pulling at the different components of these onboarding processes and their impact or nonimpact for the people involved. Doing this research and including this knowledge from SOC can help to give a more in-depth picture of the impact or nonimpact that onboarding processes have on student adjustment into college life. Furthermore, this will give a new perspective of race rituals as the voices, experiences, and stories of students, staff, and faculty of color will be included in the conversation, reshaping, and discourses that often serve as foundations for these rituals. My hope is that this research will illuminate new ways to approach race rituals,

onboarding processes, diversity work, and support for SOC and perhaps extend to other organizational RR that are not related to higher education organizations. I hope this work will create ripples of change in long held traditions and rituals on college campuses and to call attention to and perhaps change these systemic issues through counter storytelling and giving voice to the often voiceless.

Rites of Passage

In higher educational settings many institutionalized rituals take place annually. With some of the most familiar being orientation, commencement, memorial services, homecoming, and more (Manning, 2000). As Manning (2000) states “Rituals are events rich with messages, meanings, and statements about the college in which they are enacted” (p. 8). Rituals such as orientation and commencement function two-fold; firstly, to create meaning and purpose for individuals who are a part of the community and secondly, they function as maintenance of structure, order, and power. These events give meaning to the rituals in higher education, which in turn add value to the process and individuals involved. However, to take part in orientation or commencement ceremonies, students must first go through a rite of passage. Van Gennep (1960) defines rites of passage as “ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well-defined” (p.28). In the case of higher education, rites of passage evoke transformation, transitions, create meaning, maintain and promote political (Kertzer, 1988, Manning, 2000). Here we see students transition from high schooler to college freshmen, sophomore, junior, and seniors to graduates. The students must complete processes, rules, performances, and other rituals to move from one status to the next.

However, not all rites of passage are created equal, especially when we examine policies, practices, and traditions in higher education. When we examine higher educational diversity policies, many frame SOC from a deficit perspective and compare their academic engagement to whites as a normative standard (Iverson, 2007). Iverson (2007) states “these discourses construct images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents” (p. 593). From this perspective stereotypes are already placed on SOC and processes are put in place to address these deficits. Such processes come in the form of events attached to diversity initiatives that welcome SOC and the institution's “colorblind” or “equal opportunity” gesture. In addition, rituals of race conceal other things such as how race is maintained, reproduced, and facilitated through performance, as Iverson (2007) puts it “subordination of people of color and reinscribe racially neutral conception of educational policies” (p. 593). RR are usually expected to be performed and carried out by people of color within the institution such as staff and current students that reinforce norms and values of inequality (Iverson, 2007; Patton, 2016).

It was a nice spring day, and I was scrolling through my emails when I saw a message from one of my colleagues from the office of admissions. It was an invitation to be a part of the GE for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. The email read that it was a special event held for multicultural students who were admitted to the university and their families “to learn more about our multicultural campus community” over dinner. It would be after my work hours, but dinner would be provided. I laughed a little to myself about our campus being multicultural, but from my own personal experiences and that of students I worked with; I knew how important it was for SOC to meet other people like them, especially early on in college. So, I said yes of course.

I tell this story because this is not an unusual expectation for diversity workers to be invited to attend RR to showcase diversity on campus, and although it is not reflective of the actual campus environment, they are often seemingly innocent and well-intended practices. During my time working in a student facing role, I was unintentionally complicit with maintaining and passing standards, expectations, and values for these incoming students. With CRT analysis I argue that rites of passage such as the GE, although intended to welcome SOC to campus, may imply the very opposite, and can further make visible the difference of SOC from the majority.

Race Rituals

To gain a better understanding of underlying systemic issues associated with race and inequality within higher education, I focus on what I call RR that are directly connected to the onboarding process as they often serve as a first experience, initiation process, and exposure to the campus community. I define rituals by starting with the term's anthropological roots. According to Kertzer (1988) rituals are "culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs (or at least allowing humans to better understand their place in the universe), and involving the supernatural realm" (pp. 8-9). I add to this definition by combining descriptions from across the literature that describe rituals as symbolic behavior rooted in dynamic, complex, and fluid socially standard behaviors, that are often repetitive, and are involved in meaning making, mediating human behaviors, and connected to power and order (Couldry, 2013; Kertzer, 1988; Manning, 2000, Marvin & Ingle, 1999). I use this description in my analysis as it encompasses the fluid nature of rituals and how that navigates, promotes, supports, and moves through the social, organizational, interpersonal,

and individual as well as the textual, such as policy and media. When we combine race with rituals, we can start to examine its role in politics, policy and the organization; as well as how race rituals transition, shift, and change in nature, meaning, forms, and effects over time as they are replaced by new ones (Kertzer, 1988). The academy reflects this in its onboarding processes of rituals that have shifted and changed over time to become more “inclusive of diversity”.

RR are often practiced meeting diversity initiatives; and if they are properly implemented, they can help with the inclusion, recruitment, and retention of SOC and other marginalized populations. However, many diversity initiatives continue to serve white dominant discourse, norms, and values that often silence the needs, voices, and experiences of people of color. Some may even serve to exclude or further marginalize SOC. For example, although RR serves DEI initiatives for the university they also enhances the “Us” and “them” further highlighting the “other” of the participants of such events, which are students, staff, and faculty of color. These things often go unnoticed due to the power dynamics involved in the processes and structure. As Carter, Sumpton, & Thruston (2023) put it

Structural marginalization is perhaps the most difficult type of marginalization to recognize due to the assumption that our structures and institutions are neutral. At the heart of marginalization is difference, “us” versus “them,” an in-group and an out-group. This difference is socially constructed, and the categories created are a product of and reproduce relationships of dominance and subordination (Bell, 2021). (p.322)

I add to the existing research another perspective on how we view “race” and “diversity” in higher education by examining its evolution into “race rituals”. Here I highlight three ways rituals function through 1) meaning making 2) power in symbols and 3) repetition.

Rituals serve many purposes and are diverse in nature such as those that require animal sacrifice to unseen deities to more subtle forms of ritual where we come to see as a natural process of our daily lives like brushing our teeth, combing our hair a certain way, or saying prayer before going to sleep at night. However, rituals also plays a larger role in how we make sense of ourselves and those around us and the meaning that is created through ritual. As You (2006) states

ritual performance also opens space for rhetorical invention. When someone performs a ritual action, he or she not only derives meaning and value from this embodiment, but also strengthens it through his or her contribution of novel meaning and value.” (p.431)

Conceptualizing race as a ritual, challenges us to critically examine how race is performed, maintained, structured, communicated and how it shows up in our daily lives. There is a visible and an invisible aspect to it that sticks onto us whether we are intentional about it or not. Pedelty (2004) states that “Ritual was an important means of political regulation not only for adult men and women, but also for youth” (p. 13). Although Pedelty (2014) talks about ritual and rites of passage for Mexica youth, the process of ritual remains similar in that they are always communicating something (You, 2006; Fischer,1973) often highly structured, repetitive, are symbolic, give meaning to those who take part in it, and are an important means in political regulation (You, 2006; Pedelty, (2004); Kertzer, (1998)). Although the meanings that the performers in RR communicate specific things they want the participants to take away from RR, the process is much more complex. The messages conveyed and made may differ from one person to the other with the potential for unintended meaning and sense making to also occur. Although much of RR are a part of organization and intentionally incorporated into onboarding

to share and set expectations for the newcomers norms, values, and organizational culture as they transition into new roles, there are also other messages and expectations that are being made such as one's role as a SOC.

Symbols

Next, I want to give a brief explanation of the significance of symbols in ritual. Rituals as Kertzer (1988) put it, are “action wrapped in a web of symbolism...Symbolization gives the action much more important meaning” (p. 9). The symbolism associated with RR has different meanings and impact on organizations, the people who participate in performing these rituals, and to those on the receiving end. Rituals can affect us mentally, emotionally, and physically and although they may not all happen at once, thinking about race as ritual can perhaps provide us with a different perspective on how and why RR occurs and for what reasons.

Symbols as Kertzer (1988) describes have three specific properties: condensation of meaning, multivocality, and ambiguity. Condensation refers to the process in which symbols both verbal and nonverbal manifest into things like flags, gestures, bible and the like and become rich with meaning and an embodiment of diverse ideas. These symbols interact with one another to create meaning and can synthesize into new meanings for individuals (Kertzer, 1988). Other examples of how condensation may show up in higher education are through the textual representation of diversity in pamphlets, text like “DEI”, and events. Multivocality on the other hand are the different meanings associated with ritual symbols and can mean different things from one person to the next and important in rituals to build political solidarity in the absence of consensus (Kertzer, 1988). Lastly, there is ambiguity. Kertzer (1988) states that “ritual symbolism is often ambiguous; the symbols have no single precise meaning” (p. 11). Symbols are complex,

fluid, and hold many different meanings and “rituals change in form, in symbolic meaning, and in social effects; new rituals arise, and old rituals fade away” (Kertzer, 1988, p.12). Rituals stem from cultures and through rituals connections, membership, meanings, and new meanings are made, reenacted, maintained, and change.

Rituals are cultural and political and hold power and influence through the different symbols that they are associated with. This is best described by You (2006) who puts it this way “Symbols, when arranged in a particular sequence during ritual, like the notes in a musical score, convey meaning in various ways and possess the power to produce social transformations” (p.430). Whether these symbols appear through text, gestures, or physical items meanings are continually being generated and communicated from performers to the participants. RR are often repeated in organizations through policy, practice, and events. Of these, the most visible representation of DEI for new students is through RR events. RRs become symbolic of an organization’s action and dedication to DEI. Within the RR multiple symbols from the textual to the bodies of the staff, faculty, and students of color who participate in RR, and meanings and communication are being generated to newcomers and their families. This sentiment was echoed in my interviews with students and staff who participated in RR. For example Roy, a staff member stated that “So I do think it was important because I think it it sends the right message, it sends a good message to our students that the institution cares enough to make this a requirement. But I think it also sends another message too”. Or as June a student expressed “Yeah. I think the biggest thing is that I think that they're really, really, really important. And whether or not they work for like 5 people or 2500 people, like that five people is enough. Just because like, Uh, what is? It's like that thing where it's like whether it saves one life or 1000, like one life is enough to keep it going or whatever, like that type of thing. I think it's just like the

positive impact it has, even just a small percentage of people, it matters even if it is small”.

Through rituals we see how race shows up in organizations, the intentional and unintentional communication and meanings it generates when performed and received.

The repetitive nature of RR and their implementation into systems showcase dedication to DEI yet, there are also parts of the organization that are concealed and allow for systemic practices that continue to exclude to continue. For example, Chavaja et al. (2023) stated that

ritual has materializing potential because ritual performance lends the solidity of objects to something previously immaterial and makes it directly accessible to the senses. By enacting a ritual that symbolically binds its performers to a specific set of norms, these norms are materialized in the performance itself. (p. 117).

With eyes shifted to the celebration of diversity, systemic issues that create inequity continue to be created, repeated, and supported collectively. For example, within Fortune 500 companies only 4.8% have female CEO's (Steffens et al., 2019). On an academic level students of color at a PWI reported “significant associations between microaggressions and poor campus climate (hypothetical predictors) with depressive, anxiety, somatic symptoms (hypothetical outcomes) that were indirectly linked through perceived stress, poor sleep, and academic burnout (hypothetical mediators)” (Samek et al., 2024, p. 96). So, although RR are repeated they do not eliminate challenges associated with deeper systemic issues such as racial microaggressions, sense of belonging, and policies and practices that create whiteness as the norm.

By conceptualizing race as ritual we can start to identify how race is used to both reveal and conceal larger systemic issues, critically engage in conversation on why RR take place, and

ask what purpose they really serve. Further, conceptualizing race as ritual can open conversations that call attention to how we are thinking about race in ways that may hurt or hinder needed changes in organizations and society. If race is a symbol, then we need to understand how and why it is being used in RR. Not all rituals are problematic, nor are they performed to serve a single objective, as rituals contain different meanings, experiences, purposes, and affective residues to those who take part in the performance. Rituals serve to reveal and conceal, include and exclude, in addition to maintaining and changing certain ways of doing, being, rites, instances, occurrences, and experiences.

Racism remains a systemic issue within our society, higher education, and education systems; and although it has evolved into subtler forms, the policies and practice within these institutions continue to support a white dominant perspective at the cost of colored people's experiences. Higher education institutions are sites where knowledge is produced and passed onto tomorrow's educators and leaders; we need to start here. As a first-generation woman student of color, I have firsthand experience of the challenges of being a student of color on a predominantly white campus and the toll that it can have on a student's academic performance and personal well-being. Additionally, I also have experience as a diversity worker in predominantly white institutions (PWI) and have unique experience and perspectives on the inner workings of diversity support roles in higher education. Although many (not all) universities have their own unique approaches and programming for SOC during the onboarding process, there remains limited research on the impact orientation programs have on students (Mayhew et al., 2010) and lack of in-depth research on effectiveness and outcomes of diversity initiatives (Patton et al., 2019). How do race rituals add to or take away from the assimilation and academic process?

Theoretical Framework

In this dissertation I examine RR as an organizational process, how it affects SOC experience, and is something that I have both personal and professional experiences with since starting my academic journey. What drives much of what I do in this study is rooted in my personal experiences and those of the SOC that I have had the privilege to work with over the years. The methodology of this study is qualitative and reflects a combination of critical race theory and counter storytelling and autoethnography. I use this approach because CRT acknowledges that racism is woven deeply into organizational structures, policies, and practice, and pushes back on white dominant discourse. Both critical race theory and counter storytelling offer insight on the experiences of the people these DEI programming are intended for and can provide a better understanding of how race rituals impact students' experiences through listening and including their voices in the process. While autoethnography allows me to weave in my own experiences as a student of color and diversity worker in PWI. There is a wealth of information and knowledge that is often overlooked and left out because of what we deem as academic which is often rooted with witness as the norm, especially in academia.

This research also matters because we need to change white dominant narratives and discourses in academia. Critical Race Theory challenges what we deem as “worthy” or “acceptable” scholarly work, especially when it comes to making education more inclusive and diverse. As we continue to grow diversity in higher educational institutions, we cannot hope for an inclusive environment if we turn a blind eye to the current issues such as equity and inclusion in both campus community and pedagogy. There are subtle but clear messages that are being given, repeated, and reinforced when we choose to exclude the voices of people of color from the curriculum. As Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2021) put it

Curricula have also been known to be disproportionately white, heteronormative, and patriarchal, sending the message to students that only certain ways of knowing are valid (Jester 2018). The result of this lack of diverse representation in curricula can be alienation, marginalisation, and differential outcomes for students from marginalised backgrounds. (p. 227)

If higher education is the place that is producing future leaders, teachers, people who will be contributing to society then we need to change how, who, and what is being included. The experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color need to be included in the curricula and how we do diversity in addition to the recruitment and retention of more students, faculty, and staff of color.

The theoretical framework that I will be using is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT acknowledges that racism is systemic and endemic and challenges current colorblind approaches, policy, and practice in the education systems. CRT also allows for reshaping in terms of how knowledge is produced and shared with race at the center and by giving voice through narratives and storytelling of the experiences of people of color as knowledge. As Ladson-Billings (1998) puts it “CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (p. 9). CRT incorporates storytelling to give voice to marginalized narratives and experiences while revealing racist logic that may be taken for granted or appear to be race neutral (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tichavakunda, 2021). For this purpose, CRT can be used to expose and challenge different forms of racial inequalities such as those that are ritualized into practice, policies, knowledge

production, and maintenance (Gilborn, 2015; Hughes & Giles, 2010; Robertson, 2021) in higher education.

Current CRT literature in higher education encompasses history, access, curriculum, and policies (Patton, 2016), diversity initiatives and discourses in higher education (Iverson, 2007), policy discourse (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006), diversity and race neutrality in admission processes (Morfin et al., 2005), literature that recognizes and challenges racism in the academy (Hughes & Giles, 2010), and intersectionality and achievement gaps (Lopez et al., 2016). However, there remains limited CRT research on the onboarding processes such as orientation, welcome week, and the golden evening. So, although there is some diversity specific programming during onboarding rituals, little is known about their overall impact, and they may even function to further exclude students of color from being full participants and members of the campus community.

What I add to the current CRT literature is the impact of onboarding processes in the organizational institutions of higher education that are geared specifically for students of color. Additionally, I expand the current work on CRT and higher education by introducing and examining the performance of race through rituals that are used for diversity initiatives during onboarding stages and how race rituals may serve to conceal and reproduce organizational racism. This will also add to current literature on first year experience and orientation program research as there remains limited information on outcome and impact (Mayhew et al., 2010) let alone for SOC. My work will examine the performance of race through rituals often used to fulfill diversity initiatives and how race rituals may serve to conceal and reproduce organizational racism. I focus on the CRT themes as summarized by Parsons & Plakhotnic

(2006) which are 1) racism is endemic, 2) CRT challenges ahistoricism and pursues a contextual/historical analysis of social issues, 3) CRT is interdisciplinary and 4) CRT should incorporate the shared experiences of the “other” to reshape how knowledge is produced with race as a central framework, and a final theme mentioned by Matsuda et al. (1993) 5) that CRT works towards eliminating racial oppression with a broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

Autoethnography & Counter storytelling

The methodology I use is counter storytelling and autoethnography as both serve to acknowledge and give voice to the lived experiences of people of color while challenging white dominant discourse. As Hauber-Ozer et al. (2021) put it “counter-story is a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tool for documenting, critically analyzing, and resisting majoritarian stories in education” (p. 5). Additionally, as Solórzano & Yosso (2002) stated, counter stories “are grounded in real life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction” (p. 36). By incorporating storytelling of people of color’s experiences, it challenges “the master's narrative” and complicates dominant discourses. As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) put it

We define the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p. 32)

Counter storytelling emphasizes and further supports the critical narrative aspect of CRT through incorporating the voices and stories of people of color and challenges ideologies of race neutrality and exposes the power imbalance in systems like higher education (Ramos, 2013) and challenges white dominant discourses that reinforce deficit perspectives on students of color and minority groups in education (Hauber-Özer et al, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); It will shed light on the impact of race rituals and onboarding processes that are currently limited in existing research.

Autoethnography on the other hand as Adams et al. (2014) put it “Autoethnography is a qualitative method— it offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people” (p.22). Autoethnography as a method also acknowledges that the “crisis of representation” is often motivated by the researcher's lived experiences, feelings, beliefs, identities and are a driving force to the method of approach to the study (Adams et al., 2014). As I previously stated, this study stems from my own personal experiences as a SOC and diversity worker in PWI and the work that I have done with SOC. By sharing my own experiences and those of other people of color (POC) students and staff we provide an insider perspective to work that is meant to be more inclusive of people like us.

Although there will be a number of questions that I will use during the interview process, counter storytelling and autoethnography will guide and shape my interview process. What I mean by this is students and staff were invited to share their personal experiences, impact/non-impact of their choosing from the RR in their own voice to help

us better understand its role in the onboarding and assimilation process for these students. Counter stories are not fictional and as Smith et al. (2006) put it “grounded in real-life experiences, actual empirical data, and contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction” (p. 304). Counter stories allow SOC to share their experiences and their truth on race rituals and its impact on their assimilation into college.

From my own experiences with counter storytelling, I have seen how stories can validate, make visible, and help make sense of experiences as a student of color in higher education. As Gonzalez (2022) put it “their counter stories created an avenue, a foundation, and a possibility for me to write my own stories in academia...without undervaluing the voices” (p. 1) and experiences of people of color. For example, a few years ago, I went to Mankato to give a talk about my experience as a first-generation college student. I was nervous about sharing my failures as an undergraduate and about my struggles in college because I was one of those students who nearly failed out. I was also embarrassed because I was not sure how the audience was going to respond to my story or if they would think that I was another sad minority story. So many thoughts and emotions surfaced for me because I remember how overwhelming it felt to be in a PWI, how I felt like an imposter and the fear of getting caught, and also how it felt to be hyper aware of my race. I also remember how it felt like to be erased from history as I sat in a U.S. Asian history class and read through several chapters on the Vietnam War, with no mention of the Hmong people. When I asked the professor why they didn’t mention anything about the Hmong, he gave a brief and uninterested response “that’s an interesting question” and ended our conversation there. This experience along with many

others further distanced me from my academics. However, I was a success story because I was able to overcome my struggles (just barely), made it to graduation, and eventually went on to graduate school. It was a hard story to share because I was exposing my racial identity, struggles, and vulnerabilities to an auditorium of strangers; however, after the talk several Hmong students stayed after. I noticed that they had all been crying and thanked me for sharing my story. One of them told me, that “I never knew that someone else had walked in my shoes, or that anyone understood what I was going through. Your story lifted a weight off my shoulders and for the first time I can see myself getting through college, and that I am not alone in this experience.” This interaction was powerful, and it changed my own deficit perspective of how I viewed my experiences. I learned for the first time that my experiences did matter and that there was power in telling them.

I give this example because counter stories invite the audience to listen and offer different perspectives of specific events in time, most of which have not been told or heard. If race rituals like these serve their intended purpose, then through this study and the stories that are shared from students and staff, we will be able to have a better understanding of its overall impact. Race rituals like the Golden evening are carefully curated for students of color. For these events there is space that is created and offers a place where they can connect with current students and staff that look like them. However, how do these short instances of interaction impact students' progress or assimilation into college and the college community? These RR take place annually, but what are their impact (if any) and how does that help or hinder the assimilation process

for these students? Additionally, these stories can help to reveal areas of growth and change, especially among diversity onboarding processes and efforts.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I argue that we grow more distant with actual movement towards change and social justice as we have become comfortable with ritualizing race and diversity within the academy; making us not practitioners of change but complicit to coloniality and systems that continue to oppress students of color (SOC). The questions that guide my research are (1) How is race ritualized in higher education? (2) How does the ritualization of race in higher education support or complicate the efforts around diversity work? And (3) If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them?

Organization of Dissertation

I begin with a review of literature and end the chapter with research focusing specifically on scholarship that analyzes higher educational institutions and organizational practices that mask colonial, white, male dominated discourses. Chapter 3 is my methods section where I go over Participants, Procedure, Interview questions, Data collection procedures, and Limitations. The section following this will include my data analysis in chapters 4 and chapter 5 which answer my research questions, and I end with Ch. 6 by discussing potential ways that we can start to engage in these uncomfortable conversations and challenge these problematic rituals of race and diversity in higher education, with focus and movement towards social justice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In my journey of reading literature for this study I often found more times than not in both past and current research on academic achievement and/or recruitment and retention of students of color (SOC), they are almost always presented from a deficit perspective and compared to white students as the norm; with many often shifting blame onto SOC for their lack of academic achievements (Hauber-Ozer et al., 2021; Iverson, 2007). Although many college campuses have increased the demand for SOC over the years, there is still a disconnect with SOC needs and supporting a multicultural campus. As Mayhew et al. (2010) put it:

These results reflect a consistent, disturbing trend at colleges and universities: as access increases for students of color on college campuses, institutions have failed to re-constitute what is normative in the face of diverse students who bring varied learning styles and social needs to the college community. (p.338-339)

This disconnect also shifts when you include intersectionality of identities into the mix. For example, first-generation women of color reported challenges in their early college experiences with hypervisibility, code switching, imposter syndrome, and so on as a result of trying to adjust to “appropriate” behaviors and norms of campus life (Jackson et al., 2022). There is even less research on graduate SOC and their first-year experiences, a group for whom there are even less onboarding processes in place. Continuing this trend is problematic because it allows issues of systemic racism to persist while normalizing white normative standards accepted in American society and higher education as mentioned by Critical Race Theory scholars (Iverson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton, 2016; Perez et al, 2005). Our

inaction to challenge and change how we present SOC and their experiences further perpetuate visible and invisible forms of racism which are experienced intentionally and unintentionally, reinforcing norms, values, and traditions that continue to exclude, silence, and oppress. By incorporating voices of POC and SOC we are not only challenging white normative discourse but also expanding what is accepted as knowledge and how that shapes practice and policy in organizations. In this chapter I give a review of literature that I build off of and will provide context to a) critical race theory and higher education, b) rituals, c) onboarding, d) organizational assimilation, e) organizational communication and socialization, f) race, g) racial microaggressions, and h) diversity, equity & inclusion in higher education.

Critical Race Theory and Higher Education

Critical race theory is as Ladson-Billings (1998) explains is “both an outgrowth and separate entity from an earlier legal movement called critical legal studies” (p. 10) which started in the 1970’s with Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in protest to slow progress of racial reform (Ladson-Billing, 1998). Critical race theory was then introduced to mainstream American society in 1991 as a way to challenge racial disparities; and was later applied to education within the disciplines (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006, Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory acknowledges that racism is a norm in American society and that racial inequalities are maintained and reproduced in policy discourses which center around whiteness as the normative standards (Iverson, 2007; Ladson-Billings,1998; Patton, 2016; Perez et al, 2005). Furthermore, as Ladson-Billings (1998) puts it “CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction:

deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (p. 9). Additionally, CRT may incorporate storytelling to give voice and reveal racist logic that may be taken for granted or appear to be race neutral (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tichavakunda, 2021). For this purpose, CRT can be used to expose and challenge different forms of racial inequalities such as those that are ritualized into “practice, policies, knowledge production, and maintenance” in higher education.

What I add to the aforementioned work examines the performance of race through rituals that are used for diversity initiatives and how race rituals may serve to conceal and reproduce organizational racism. I focus on the CRT themes summarized by Parsons & Plakhotnic (2006) which are 1.) racism is endemic, 2.) CRT challenges ahistoricism and pursues a contextual/historical analysis of social issues, 3.) CRT is interdisciplinary and 4.) CRT should incorporate the shared experiences of the “other” to reshape how knowledge is produced with race as a central framework, and a final theme mentioned by Matsuda et al. (1993) 5.) that CRT works towards eliminating racial oppression with a broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

There has been a number of growing literatures with a focus on CRT and higher educational institutions over the years; adding to work from Ladson-Billings & Tate who brought racial inequalities in education systems into view in 1995 (Patton, 2016). Current CRT literature in higher education have examined the history, access, curriculum, and policies (Patton, 2016), diversity initiatives and discourses in higher education (Iverson, 2007), policy discourse (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006), diversity and race neutrality in admission processes

(Morfin et al., 2005), literature that recognizes and challenges racism in the academy (Hughes & Giles, 2010), and intersectionality and achievement gaps (Lopez et al. 2016). However, there remains limited CRT research on the performance of race in higher education through diversity related to onboarding processes and events, like orientation and welcome week for SOC. As Iverson (2007) states “A university’s diversity action plan may construct a world for racial minorities that disqualifies them from participation, even as it strives to include them as full participants” (p. 592). More scholarships grounded in CRT that examine onboarding processes in the organizational institutions of higher education are needed.

Rituals

CRT is interdisciplinary and challenges the ahistorical ways that knowledge and meaning are produced (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006). To gain a better understanding of what rituals are and how that relates to higher education, I start by examining its anthropological roots. According to Kertzer (1988) rituals are “culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs (or at least allowing humans to better understand their place in the universe), and involving the supernatural realm” (p. 8-9). In addition to this definition, there are variations of what rituals entail; the following are commonalities across the literature that refer to rituals as symbolic behavior rooted in dynamic, complex, and fluid socially standard behaviors, are often repetitive, and are involved in meaning making, mediating human behaviors, and connected to power and order (Couldry, 2013; Manning, 2000; Marvin & Ingle, 1999, Kertzer, 1988). The second description of rituals is what I borrow and refer to for this analysis. I use this perspective as it encompasses the fluid nature of rituals and how that navigates, promotes, supports, and moves

through the social, organizational, interpersonal, and individual as well as the textual such as policy and media.

I start with the process of race rituals, and I borrow from Manning (2011) who discusses Genep (1909) three stages of rites of passage in context to higher education where “change” actually occurs which consist of three main parts:

1. Separation (preliminal): The first stage of the ritual where the participant is disconnected either metaphorically or physically from their present social state. This phase also signifies symbolic behaviors of moving or detaching oneself from a previous fixed group or culture to another. In the case of the GE, students and their families are invited to campus where they are no longer in familiar territory and are entering a new environment.

2. Transition (liminal): This second stage is considered the most enigmatic of the three stages as it is ambiguous, paradoxical, and dangerous. In this phase the participant is in the liminal space of the old and the new. This is also the phase where change of social status is to occur, and the rite of passage takes place. A space where the participant must choose to be either admitted into the new world or to not pass through. The GE and MKO becomes a transitioning space where admitted students establish their membership. This transition space connects these students to “members” who help with the transition and welcome them into the university; and where their status as a high school senior is soon to be that of a college freshman.

3. Incorporation (post liminal): The last stage is where the participant is welcomed into the new community as a member. This stage signifies the participant's role and adaptation to the community as well as rights, behaviors, obligations to these new norms (Manning, 2011). This phase would take place after the GE and are reflected in MKO and GEP and other rituals on campus like orientation; where students learn and engage in norms, values, and behaviors as a member of the community.

I use these three stages to show how they function as key phases of transformation which are often what rites of passage are intended to do. As Hasty et al. (2022) put it “rites of passage mark social transformations in people’s lives and establish a change in social status within their communities” (para 5). Rites of passage serve important roles in RR because it is through onboarding events that outsiders are invited and initiated into the community. These steps help to identify the different stages that occur during rites of passage to achieve that transition “from their old social position or status to a new one” (Hasty et al., 2022).

The three stage processes outlined are critical in understanding how RR functions within organization from onboarding to organizational assimilation. Rituals as politics, policy, and racism are not static and the meanings, forms, and effects change over time as they are replaced by new ones (Kertzer, 1988). The academy reflects this in its onboarding processes of what I refer to as rituals that have shifted and changed over time to become more “inclusive of diversity”. As Manning (2000) states “Rituals bind us in the most primordial levels through community and culture-binding, individual and communal celebration” (p.1). Rituals play an important role in producing, reproducing, and maintaining power, norms, and values that often shape and define whether an individual is or is not a part of the community.

Rituals such as the GE, MKO, and GEP are public rituals which serve this purpose. Public rituals as Chwe (2001) describes “can thus be understood as social practices that generate common knowledge. For example, public ceremonies help maintain social integration and existing systems of authority; public rallies and demonstrations are also crucial in political social change” (p.3). I connect public rituals to organizational communication and assimilation practices and focus on these three specific annual rituals intended to reflect diversity inclusion.

Rituals such as these are complicated as they may appear to be inclusive but can be problematic long term as they serve to create common knowledge through creating norms and expectations that maintain and support authority within social systems such as campus culture (Manning, 2000). As Koshmann & McDonald (2015) out it “organizational rituals also have latent meanings and unintended effects beyond human intentionality not reducible to the efforts and goals of members yet exhibit the capacity to perform and accomplish things beyond their intended purposes” (p. 230). Rituals serve to disseminate, normalize, and produce a common knowledge of social interactions such as ways of being, belonging, and navigating the university in addition to unintended outcomes. I argue that rituals, such as the GE, MKO, and GEP were created to maintain power and conceal racial inequalities that exist within the organization.

Onboarding

Onboarding programs serve a multitude of purposes and among them are the ritual aspects of transitioning students into a new community through performance, interaction and communication that often involves sharing and teaching them of the norms, values, and

expectations of membership once initiated into the institution. The overarching issue that I will explore looks specifically at higher educational institutions and onboarding processes for SOC. Onboarding serves to produce, reproduce, maintain, and reinforce norms and values of an organization and provide its participants with a transition from an outsider to insider (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer, 2010; Chillakuri, 2020; Watkins, 2016). As one of the first steppingstones, onboarding is a vital process where most organizations invest a considerable amount of time and money to recruit new talent or students (Graybill et al., 2013). Some may argue that the onboarding process is different from things like orientation because it is a stand-alone event. In contrast, I argue that stand-alone events in higher education, such as orientation and welcome week, are a part of the onboarding process because they are intended to minimize attrition, ensure that new students are acclimated to their new environment and ready to go when the semester starts, and help with students transition and assimilation into the organization (Chan, 2019; Gruzka et al, 2019; Mayhew et al., 2010).

The quality and attention given to the onboarding process in higher education varies from one to the next, as not all colleges use the same approach; however, as Mayhew et al (2010) states “One long-standing programmatic intervention related to student transition is the formal orientation program, with over 96% of colleges and universities reporting some form of new student orientation programming” (p. 321). However, studies show that onboarding have been linked to better transitions into organizations which is supported by Schilling et al. (2022) who state that

Adjustment-related stress in first-year students has been associated with high dropout rates of these students after arriving. Thus, this adjustment phase—also referred to as

onboarding —is an important procedure for higher education institutions to protect and hold their new students.” (p. 1)

From these recent studies we know that onboarding has been known to have a significant impact on helping students transition from high school to higher educational institutions. The dynamics can get more complicated when you add intersectionality to students transitioning experience. Therefore, as some of the first experiences that expose and engage SOC to the campus community we need to be critical of RR onboarding as they function as an initiation where outsiders are selected to come in, celebrates and showcases diversity, and displays and communicates the university's dedication to SOC and at the same time reinforces difference, race, and organizational structures that may not be as inclusive as they appear to be at RR.

Organizational Assimilation

Organizational assimilation, on the other hand, refers to the transformation of one’s acceptance or membership into an organization. Assimilation is successful when the new employee or students have learned to adopt the organizational norms, values, and expectations and have adjusted their identity to fit in with the culture (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018; Meiners, 2019; Myers & Oetzel, 2003). There have been considerable amounts of research on first year experience and how critical this specific phase is to the success of a student's collegiate success. The first-year experience for college students are often used to predict the retention of students as research over the years have shown its high correlation with transition, adjustment, sense of belonging (Dixion-Rayle & Chung, 2007; D’Lima et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2022; Mayhew et al., 2010). According to D’Lima et al (2014)

Given that one in four college students will leave the university during or after freshman year...the first year of college is crucial for predicting student adjustment and academic trajectories...Performance in college, particularly in the first semester, is a strong predictor of eventual college retention. (p. 341)

As such, onboarding practices and rituals in higher educational organizations such as orientation and similar programming are often introduced to incoming students as a first formal engagement in their transition to the institution. Therefore, this process plays a key role in assimilation to the organization as these public ceremonies serve as a formalized introduction for newcomers to the new job/role, as well as the organization's goals, values, rules, responsibilities, procedures, and culture (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer, 2010; Chillakuri, 2020; Watkins, 2016). Onboarding rituals like orientation are intentional as they serve to help students transition into college life. Whether these onboarding processes in higher education are successful or not are still to be explored as Mayhew et al (2010) puts it

The primary mission of orientation programs is to aid in the successful transition of new students to college, but orientation professionals are often ill equipped to provide evidence related to the efficacy of their programs. This lack of evidence leaves orientation programs open to criticism from the various stakeholders who may have a limited understanding of the critical role that orientation programs can play in the early collegiate experience of students. (p. 321)

Yet we know from existing research that finding community, social support, and involvement on campus along with college preparedness, and support resources lead to higher retention rates for students (Jackson et al., 2022; Lamar & Ingamells, 2010). For

example, onboarding events such as orientation and welcome week rely heavily on peer leadership, which is almost always made up of current students to take on leadership roles to guide and help new students transition into campus life (Gruszka et al., 2019).

Organizational Communication and Socialization

Organizational communication and socialization practices function to maintain race rituals in higher educational institutions. The repetition and communication from the performers to participants from RR serve to build and maintain borders, create meaning through symbols systems, and enforce and reinforce policy, practice, norms, and values of that system. As Kertzer (1988) puts it “Social rituals create a reality which would be nothing without them. For it is very possible to know something and then find words for it. But it is impossible to have social relations without symbolic acts” (p.12). In this case organizational communication and socialization practices such as organizational assimilation are key in integrating newcomers into the culture of an organization and its environment (Jablin, 2001, Allen, 1996). The three RR each serve similar functions in that participants are exposed to symbols, totems, and culture where communication and meanings are being made and internalized about the institution and what it means to become a member, more specifically a SOC. RR reinscribe one’s racial identity, and whether students are aware or not, through participation students and participants are reinforced of their differences and similarities to the communities they may soon be a part of.

The three RR serves as the preliminal and liminal phases of ritual where students transition from outsiders to insiders. The Separation or preliminal phase as described by Manning (2011) is the first stage of the ritual where the participant is disconnected either

metaphorically or physically from their present social state. This phase also signifies symbolic behaviors of moving or detaching oneself from a previous fixed group or culture to another. In the case of the GE, students and their families are invited to campus where they are no longer in familiar territory and are entering a new environment. The second phase, known as the transition or liminal phase, is considered the most enigmatic of the three stages as it is considered to be ambiguous, paradoxical, and dangerous. In this phase the participant is in the liminal space of the old and the new. This is also the phase where change of social status is to occur, and the rite of passage takes place. A space where the participant must choose to be either admitted into the new world or to not pass through. The GE becomes a transitioning space where admitted students establish their membership. This transition space connects these students to “members” who help with the transition and welcome them into the university; and where their status as a high school senior is soon to be that of a college freshman. Although Manning (2011) discusses three phases of change in the assimilation process, the GE encompasses these two phases as the third phase consists of the post liminal where students are fully integrated into the community as a member. Since GE is among one of the first organizational communication and socialization processes that an outsider engages in and is performed specifically for SOC; this event can provide insight on the impact or not of diversity work and initiatives during the onboarding and assimilation process.

The GE is a primary example of the separation and transition phases as mentioned by Manning (2011). Each year these rituals take place at the institution's best venues where a GE takes place for American Indian students, another for African American Students, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) students, and Latinx students. As a ritual focused on symbolizing diversity, the admissions office often calls upon the colored faculty, staff, and

diverse student leaders on campus to volunteer their time in this one-night event for these specific groups of students and their families. GE are among one of the first organizational communication and socialization processes that an outsider engages in and are sorted by racial groups, where there is a specific night dedicated to each of these racial groups.

In addition to the racial grouping of the students; the faculty, staff, and student leaders who are invited to attend these GE rituals are also racially selected to represent the incoming group. As a prior diversity worker who had participated in a number of these rituals, the invitation to participate is not exclusive in language, however, are specifically selected and with a preference for the invited person/s to attend the GE who's race they identify with; such that only the date and time of the GE that they racially identify with are included in the invitation. For example, one of the invitations that I received while working as a staff member read "The University of Minnesota Twin Cities Office of Admissions will be hosting Special Events for prospective multicultural students this March, and we would be honored if you would join us!

At these special events, students and their guests will learn more about our multicultural campus community, ways for them to get involved as a student at the U of M, and the next steps for them to become a member of the U of M's Class of 2023. We invite you to share your wisdom and experiences with these students and their families while hosting a table during dinner. Your participation in this event will make a difference as they finalize their college plans for fall 2019." Following this information were the different Golden Evenings for each racial group and the times and dates to RSVP. Although this event may have seemed optional, the nature of my role as a student facing staff member who is a POC, I was "highly

encouraged” to attend while my white colleagues on the other hand had no such commitments, even though they were also in student facing roles.

The evening came when my fellow AAPI colleagues and I attended the Golden Evening. It was grand, the dinner was held in the VIP room of the stadium, the students' names were projected on the stadium screens and could be seen from the streets, and the space was full of Asians. Even I was taken aback by the view; as a staff member working in diversity, I rarely came across other Asian staff members (unless it was intentional) and students outside of the ones that frequented the cultural centers. I felt uncomfortable, this was not reflective of the “actual” campus, but I also couldn't discourage the smiling faces of proud parents and their soon to be college students.

As my colleagues and I entered the VIP lounge, the admissions staff instructed us to mingle with the students and their families. We were handed our name tags and as instructed, walked around engaging in conversations. Along the wall of the lounge tables were set up where AAPI student organization leaders and members populated the space. They were all eager to recruit new members into their organizations and talked extensively about getting involved. Each table had prepared poster boards showcasing photos of their members, events, activities, and involvement on campus. Upon entering the GE, it is difficult to not be affected by the number of colored bodies that one can identify with: creating a sense of “diversity” and a sense of *communitas*.

Although symbols give power to rituals, it is through the rites that make an experience real, create, and maintain a culture or political identity for its members (Kertzer, 1988). As a rite of passage, the GE is part of the first stages of initiation signifying the transition as a high

school student to a college freshman. In this phase, the symbolizing and performance of diversity are key in making this experience and possibly influencing the student's decision to commit to membership. By having a display of people of color to represent a multicultural campus, the performance of diversity inclusivity is hard to dismiss. This performance helps to create symbolic gestures, behaviors, and expectations for these students and a sense of communitas, solidarity, and membership. For the institution, this ritual gives a surface level ideological snippet of its "diversity" inclusion efforts.

Race

As CRT posits, racism is endemic. Race and racism are rooted into the history, policies, and practice of higher education and over time have evolved into more subtle and less explicit forms. CRT analysis challenges race-neutral and colorblind approaches that continue to saturate our institutions. CRT scholars such as Patton (2016) used it to make visible the role that higher education has with historic racism. Patton discusses how a number higher educational institutions and their founders relied on stolen land of Indigenous people (Morfin et al., 2005) and used slave labor to maintain and support their institutions. In addition, college campuses across the United States are known to enact gentrification of urban areas that were predominantly inhabited by people of color to expand universities. Patton (2016) also states that although "higher education institutions are heralded as spaces in which knowledge for the consumption and benefit of the larger society is centrally produced" (p. 321) colleges have failed in this area for a number of reasons. This is reflected in teacher education literature which show that students in these areas are often ill-prepared and have little to no understanding of race (Patton, 2016).

If higher education is a site of producing and passing knowledge, then it is also an area where we must remain critical and continue to challenge. This is further supported by Parsons & Plakhotnic (2006) who state that “In the theories we practice, teach, and pass on to our students’, historically underrepresented groups are either excluded, pseudo-included, or alienated” (p. 167). Only when we can disrupt these rituals of maintenance can we start to undo how racism is maintained and reproduced through students who graduate and go on to continue the cycle of within the system.

Racism is rooted in the academy and extends beyond policies, architecture, and ways of knowing and producing knowledge. As Gladson-Billings (1998) states

Thinking of race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives. On the other hand, thinking of race solely as an objective condition denies the problematic aspects of race - how to decide who fits into which racial classification...our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to “make sense” we continue to employ and deploy it” (p.9).

When it comes to race, things get complicated. However, these rituals are also used as opportunities to “do good” and to “make right” past wrongs to people of color to achieve its ideal and as a response to healing (Ahmed, 2014; Shick, 2011). We see the desire to “do good” or “feel better” in the push and significance placed on diversity inclusion in our institutional policies and politics (Schick, 2011). This is not to dismiss the importance of diversity work but to call attention to the question of are we doing diversity for the right

reasons? And how is the “diversity” work that we are doing creating a more equitable experience from a local and systemic level for SOC and students of marginalized identities?

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are a part of race that is deeply interwoven into our society and are not exempt from RR. Racial microaggressions are as Sue et al (2007) put it

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities.” (p. 271)

With a consistent emphasis on DEI whether through textual or visual representation of diverse students on campus brochures and websites in higher education, this redirection can fail to illuminate the subtle nature of implicit biases which are harder to identify and remain invisible while having a deep impact on the wellbeing, self-esteem, and standard of living for POC (Sue et al., 2017) and conceal unequal power distribution in addition to financial gains of the institution (byrd, 2019). Racial microaggression plays an important role in RR as they occur on a day to day basis and are often invalidated or unaddressed due to its subtle nature. For this reason, racial microaggression are included to raise awareness as it does have significant impact on SOC experiences.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Higher Education

The work in diversity gained momentum across college campuses around the 1960's, where investment in hiring personnel or "diversity professionals" to directly focus on diversity related work started becoming part of the initiative in higher educational settings (Griffin et. al., 2020). This was further reinforced as described by Morfin et al. (2005) after the *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* reverse discrimination cases in the admission process that "the U.S. Supreme Court upheld racial diversity as a compelling state interest with respect to state institutions of higher education taking affirmative measures to diversify their colleges and universities" (p. 250). Although diversity is often associated with social justice, equity, and race neutral practices to tackle racism within the institution (Ahmed, 2007, Morfin et al., 2005); SOC still report being less satisfied with their college experience than that of their white peers (Park, 2013) and it is estimated that 75% of students who drop out or withdraw from college during the first semester are more likely to be students of color and non-traditional students (Soria et al., 2013, Tinto, 1993; Gardner, 1986).

The ways in which diversity navigates higher education are often represented by dominant discourses of institutionalizing diversity associated with race. Such "commitments" and "values" can be seen depicted in recruitment materials and events like the GE, where colored bodies are used for recruitment and retention purposes; race rituals that are subtle and often go unnoticed and unquestioned. Additionally, race rituals around diversity are often celebratory and conceal the real issues present in our education systems such as inequities and systemic racism that continue to coexist in how we practice education (Gorski, 2016). As Ahmed (2007) discusses, diversity has a critical role in the political and documentation performance of an institution and is what helps organizations like universities to exist. It is accepted as normalized practice used to shape, describe, and show an institution's

commitment, priorities, and values (Ahmed, 2012). Diversity initiatives project the image of the university's values and “doing well” and are further enhanced as it appears within symbols of importance such as documents of policy and practice.

Within race rituals, diversity “serves as a shield against terror” (Kertzer, 1988) as it conceals problematic structures within these institutions and functions as “a means of gaining and maintaining power” (Kertzer, 1988) through the institutional construction, production, and performance of “diversity”. Diversity appears in institutional statements and programming, often celebratory, which do not add to social justice and change but contribute to maintaining the status quo. As Ahmed (2007) states “such statements of commitments might work to block rather than enable action” (p. 601). Although Ahmed makes this statement geared towards diversity documentation, we can also expand this to rituals revolving around race and diversity inclusion. As Chwe (2001) states

Public rituals, rallies, and ceremonies generate the necessary common knowledge. A public ritual is not just about the transmission of meaning from a central source to each member of an audience; it is also about letting audience members know what other audience members know.” (p.4)

Through the colored bodies represented at the GEs, and the passion and energy by current members. This event transmits a certain message to those who are taking part in the ritual that it is inclusive and diverse, while concealing the deeper institutional structures that do not support SOC. The challenges that SOC face is reflected in the lower graduation rates at four year institutions, specifically among Hispanic students at 54%, African American students at 40%, and American Indian Students at 39% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Additionally, SOC are more likely to drop out of four-year institutions with an average dropout rate of 36% for American Indian Alaskan Native students, 30.6% for African American students, and 21.4% for Hispanic students (Educationdata.org, 2019). With the focus on recruitment efforts of SOC, these rituals often conceal what is actually being done in terms of retention and academic completion.

Utilizing the current research on a) CRT, b) rituals, c) onboarding, d) organizational assimilation, e) organizational communication and socialization, f) race, g) racial microaggressions, and h) diversity, equity & inclusion in higher education this dissertation expands on the current research and incorporates marginalized voices and experiences as vital information to understand RR and its impact on students of colors experiences while providing a new perspective of examining race as ritual and what it means for onboarding processes that are meant specifically for DEI. This is fundamental in shaping how we do DEI in higher education, and that is with the knowledge and experience of POC.

Chapter 3: Method

In this chapter I discuss 1.) the methodology for my research which consists of qualitative, counter storytelling, and autoethnography 2.) the research site 3) the three race rituals that I will explore that are specific to the University of Minnesota which include the Gopher Equity Project (GEP), Golden Evenings (GE), and Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence Kick-Off (MCAE; MKO). The sections following that will include 4.) participants 5.) Procedure, 6.) research questions which will be focused on SOC and staff of color and their experiences and knowledge on the impact/outcome of attending the GE, MKO, or GEP. I end with 7) data analysis.

Methodology

My method for data collection and analysis is qualitative in approach with purposeful sampling. CRT as a conceptual framework draws on the experiences of racialized others and centers around race within systems of power and inequality (Long, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic). 2017). Here I use counter story and autoethnography as methodology and I use qualitative approach for data collection. Counter story as a methodology decenters whiteness and allows for minority voice to support and guide the research while also serving as resistance to dominant cultural narratives (Andrews, 2004, p.1; Frandsen, Lundholt, & Kuhn, 2017, p.2). In my study I will use autoethnography and counter story as methodology and interviewing for data collection specifically because I think this will best reflect how RR are created, understood, communicated, and impact SOC. As such, their stories and narratives are used to shape my study and will be directly told in my dissertation to provide context, meaning making, and used as a form of knowledge in better understanding RR. Additionally, some quotes will be lengthy as they are intentionally incorporated into the sections to provide context to what my participants are sharing. By providing longer snippets of their stories, I believe that readers will be able to gain a better understanding of the significance of their experiences to how RR both support and complicate SOC experiences. Longer quotes or stories are also a part of the counter story as Miller (2020) states

the three reasons for naming one's own reality in legal discourse: (1) much of social reality is socially constructed, (2) stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation and for lessening their own subordination, and (3) stories help members of ingroups enrich their own reality—through the dialectic process of telling

and listening to stories “we can overcome ethnocentrism and the unthinking conviction that our way of seeing the world is the only one” (Delgado, 1989; Miller et al., 2020, p.272)

As such some of the stories are left longer intentionally to fully encapsulate the process of telling the story and listening to stories.

Counter storytelling and autoethnography will shape my data collection process in three ways, 1.) the population that I interviewed were students, faculty, and staff of color who have taken part in the specific RR mentioned, 2.) The questions are focused on their experiences and knowledge on the impact/outcome of attending the RR, and 3.) Their stories and narratives will be directly told in my dissertation to provide context, meaning making, and as knowledge of this RR. In this process I reached out to the culture houses, student of color organizations, admissions offices, and departments on campus to recruit my sample population.

Counter Storytelling

During my undergraduate years I took an Asian American history class and it got to the part where we were learning about the Vietnam war. I remember reading the chapter carefully because this war was where my people, the Hmong had served as secret soldiers to help the United States. It was because of the Vietnam war that the Hmong could no longer stay in Laos, went into hiding, and thousands of lives were lost. Yet there was nothing, not one sentence that mentioned the sacrifice, involvement, displacement of my people. So, as I listened to the professor end his lecture on the chapter, I nervously raised my hand and asked him, “*professor, what about the Hmong? They played a big role in helping U.S. troops during*

the war, how come there isn't anything on them?" The professor looked at me and rubbed his chin and said, *"that's a good question, I'm not sure."* That was how the conversation ended. In this interaction what I learned was that my people didn't matter, we were irrelevant to U.S. history, insignificant, invisible. I remember feeling upset, embarrassed, and misplaced.

I tell this story because although the interaction may have had no ill intent, the consequences of that interaction really impacted my experience as a student of color. When we think about diversity, equity, and inclusion, this interaction is an example of how it was not. In fact, it served to further exclude and silence my identity as a student of color in a PWI. This is why CRT and Counter storytelling are needed and incorporated in my dissertation as it serves to challenge ahistoric approaches to dominant narratives. As a methodology, Counter storytelling like counter narratives are "the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance to, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews, 2004, p.1; Frandsen, Lundholt, & Kuhn, 2017, p.2). Dominant and normative narratives often "center the White, male, heterosexual, middle class identity as the norm" ((Delgado, 1995; Aleman, 2017, p. 75). Whereas "Majoritarian stories function as master narratives and reinscribe the myths of meritocracy and colorblindness, purport neutrality and commonsense, and invoke stereotypes that vitiate people of color as dim, criminal, and deprived and exalt whites as intelligent, lawful, and moral" (Aleman, 2017, p. 75-76). To better understand how Race Rituals impact students of color, it is important to incorporate their voices and the voices of diversity workers for a more wholistic perspective on the impacts of DEI work.

Furthermore, oral cultures of sharing and passing knowledge is still a common practice of communication that we see reflected in the classroom, politics, our communities, and so

on. The challenge is whose voice gets to shape history and dominant narratives within institutions and who is left out. Counter storytelling can function to bridge the gaps by build community through the inclusion of voices of people of color, challenging and deconstructing dominant discourse, and providing new perspectives to both white and people of color (Valencia, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic; 2001; Aleman, 2017). CRT counter storytelling as Yosso (2006) puts it “Counter stories do not focus on trying to convince people that racism exists. Instead, counter stories seek to document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy” (p. 10). Stories and experiences help us to better understand the implicit and explicit impacts of racism, so that we can work towards social justice and inclusion which are often the center of DEI initiatives.

Within CRT there are three approaches to counter storytelling which include autobiographical, biographical, and composite (Yosso, 2006). For my dissertation I will be focusing on composite counter storytelling because it allows me to pull from multiple peoples experiences and existing data for analysis. Additionally composite counter stories have the ability as Griffin et al. (2013) describe to

vocalize perspectives from the margins; reveal struggles for equitable treatment and opportunity; validate R.A. Griffin et al. and build community among those who suffer similarly; expose barriers that inhibit success and derail social consciousness; creatively position quotidian experiences as critical cultural commentary; teach those unfamiliar about marginalization; and challenge and transform the imposition of domination. (Baszile, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b; Smith, Yosso, et al., 2007; Griffin et al., 2013)

By incorporating counter stories as a methodology, we can begin to explore RR, unravel, and critically examine these onboarding practices to examine whether we are heading towards a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse campus community or if they might serve to conceal and reinforce systems of oppression. Counter stories allow narratives to provide context, fill in the gaps, deconstruct, and perhaps unify us in ways that other methods may not.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography allows researchers to share their experiences as knowledge while holding them accountable for the knowledge they are producing. It is both artistic and real and draws attention to the importance of the story. There are three core ideals to Autoethnography that Adams et. al (2014) note as:

1. Recognizing the limits of scientific knowledge (what can be known or explained), particularly regarding identities, lives, and relationships, and creating nuanced, complex, and specific accounts of personal/cultural experience
2. Connecting personal (insider) experience, insights, and knowledge to larger (relational, cultural, political) conversations, contexts, and conventions
3. Answering the call to narrative and storytelling and placing equal importance on intellect/knowledge and aesthetics/artistic craft
4. Attending to the ethical implications of their work for themselves, their participants, and their readers/audiences.

An example of how autoethnography is used is from the opening of my dissertation. I used autoethnography because it serves to give context on the nuanced and complex ways that

relationships, communication, personal, and cultural experiences shape how we make meaning and navigate PWI. My story connects my personal insider experience to better understanding the dynamics that POC experience on larger institutional issues around RR and DEI. The incorporation of my experiences is intentional as it shifts from dominant white narratives and allows for my own experiences as a POC importance in the ways that we produce, value, and share knowledge on this topic. As such, autoethnography serves to give voice and shape writing and research by foregrounding the researchers experiences which can shape how we make sense of our experiences, use and show reflexivity, illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/experience, describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices, and seek responses from audiences (Adams et al, 2014). Autoethnography is another form of challenging dominant narratives as Chavez (2012) states “it calls attention to how dominant forms of assimilationist ideology function within educational institutions in shaping students’ behaviors in schools” (p. 339). In my own experiences of navigating PWI, I often rejected aspects of my identity as a Hmong American woman, in hopes to assimilate into spaces like higher education that originally weren’t created for or with people like me in mind.

Research Site

I specifically chose the University of Minnesota (UofM) because it is a large institution that is situated in the heart of the Twin Cities where there are some of the largest minority populations such as Hmong, Somali, Karen in addition to other diverse populations. The UofM is also proactive in DEI initiatives and programming for SOC despite being a PWI which made it an ideal location for my study. As such I focus on the organizational communication and socialization practices as they are vital in maintaining race rituals in higher educational

institutions and the UofM hosts a variety of programming for its incoming student population with a few specifically for SOC. Organizational communication and socialization work to build and maintain borders, symbols systems, and functions to enforce and reinforce current structures, norms, and values that are being transmitted from one person to another within the system. With the GE, MKO, and GEP rituals being among the first experiences that expose and engage SOC to the campus community; it functions as an initiation where outsiders are selected to come in, it is a celebration of diversity, and an example of the university's dedication to SOC. For this research I examined three very specific onboarding event held at the University of Minnesota called the Golden Evening (GE), Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE) Kickoff (MKO), and Gopher Equity Project (GEP) and explore how race is ritualized in this process. What I mean by examine is that I critically incorporate personal and student and staff experiences to the three RR which serve as onboarding for new SOC. The stories will guide and provide perspectives to these RR and its impact on SOC that are often overlooked.

The Three Race Rituals

The first race ritual I examine is the Golden Evening (GE). The Golden Evenings are events that are arranged by the admissions office for students of color or as the site reads “these special events, admitted students and their guests will meet members of our multicultural communities of student scholars, world-class faculty, and friendly staff” (UofM, 2024, para 3). Having attended a few of these race rituals the GE is actually three separate events that are catered specifically towards different racial groups. For example, one GE invites Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) students and their families to come to campus and have dinner with current students, faculty, and staff who also identify as AAPI. The other groups who

are invited to attend race specific GEs are African American (AA) students, Latinx students, and American Indian (AI) students. Since this event is by invitation only, students now must register in order to attend. The GE typically takes place annually and before orientation to confirm new admits and welcome them to the campus by showcasing the diversity, resources, and diverse student groups the university offers.

The second Race ritual is the MCAE Kick off (MKO) which also occurs annually and around the same time as welcome week and orientation. Here first-generation SOC are invited to come to campus and move into dorms one day early. In this event SOC gets a chance to meet other incoming SOC, staff of color, whom many are direct staff from the Multicultural Center, different staff from various departments on campus, and student leaders who are also (SOC) on campus. This event reads

MCAE Kick Off is an annual event designed to connect incoming first-generation students, students of color, and Native and Indigenous students to the MCAE office and other campus resources, develop their sense of belonging and build community amongst their peers, and equip them with skills and advice in navigating their first year at the U. (University of Minnesota, 2024).

This event typically takes place before orientation where SOC gets a chance to engage in various activities centered around connecting, community, and providing students with resources.

The last RR that I examine is the Gopher Equity Project (GEP), which is the newest of the three RR on this campus. The GEP was “piloted in 2019 “to solicit student feedback” (University of Minnesota, 2024), and officially launched as an online module in 2020 for

“undergraduate students on the Twin Cities campus, follow-up discussions in first-year courses or campus-wide Discussion Groups, and a website with additional resources” (University of Minnesota, 2024). The training consists of an online module that includes different scenarios focused on DEI. The language for the module reads “First-year students take the online training as part of your transition to the U of M campus prior to the start of the semester. Follow-up conversations are part of many colleges first-year experience courses” (University of Minnesota, 2024). As a project that included the collaboration of several different units across the Midwest university, it is also made available to students who started before the 2020 school year and also to faculty and staff as well by request.

Participants

Firstly, the participants in this study needed to identify as a POC and have attended at least one or more of the RR since these programs are intended for these specific groups. Secondly, my questions were open-ended and there were also clarifying questions that emerged as a result of the interview process. Third, the interviews were conducted in the participants setting over zoom. Fourth the data analysis consisted of identifying themes from the interviews and from those themes I had to interpret what the data meant.

In this study I had 16 participants who identified as POC and varied from students to staff who are in diversity serving roles. The student participants ranged from freshmen to seniors, and at least four or more students represented a different racial group which included African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, LatinX, and other POC. Although these are the reflected racial groups, it is important to note that they are not a monolith and different race ethnicities were represented in these groups. Their stories and experiences will

help to give a fuller picture of long-term impacts of onboarding RR such as the Golden evening, MCAE kick-off, and Gopher Equity Project. Since my methodology focuses on counter storytelling, interviewing was most effective in capturing, documenting, and telling the stories/experiences of students and staff of color. The questions will explore and revolve around their participation in the RR, its impact during and after the event, and their experiences with this specific onboarding ritual and its impact on the assimilation process. All questions and documents have been approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB).

Participants were 16 current students and staff who identified as people of color (POC) at in University in the Midwest who ranged from the ages of 18 through 60 and included freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students, and staff who are currently in diversity serving roles. My sample consisted of 5 people who identified as black/African American, 9 Asian American Pacific Islander, 1 Latinx, and 1 who identified as other POC. Of the 16 participants, 5 reported as staff, 1 as a graduate student, and 10 as undergraduates.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the University of Minnesota and were recruited in three different ways, the first being via flyers. Flyers containing information about the study, requirements to participate, and my contact information were provided on the flyers and were distributed across campus. The information provided gave participants some context to my study and it's focus on DEI onboarding and SOC experiences. The requirements to participate were that participants had to identify as a person of color, be currently at the university, and have participated/involved in one, two or all three onboarding events, and my contact information included my email address and phone number. Second, I emailed different

departments, programs, and student groups with a recruitment message along with an attached flyer. Lastly, I asked students in communication courses with instructor approval if they would be willing to participate in my study for extra credit. Once participants contacted me via email or text message about their interest in participating, I arranged a date and time and sent them invitations with a zoom link for the interview along with a consent form and any additional information they may have requested.

The interviews were conducted over zoom and lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. I started the interviews by going over the consent form and answering any questions that participants may have had prior to moving onto the interview questions. Since the interviews were recorded participants gave verbal confirmation before any recording began. The interviews consisted of nine interview questions that differed slightly in content for students and staff and the Zoom interviews were recorded upon getting verbal consent from participants.

Before starting all interviews, participants were aware that recording and participation was voluntary in nature and that they could withdraw, or I could stop recording at any point without any consequences. Additionally, participants were told about confidentiality and that they would remain anonymous as I would use generic names to conceal their identities. The names that I assign for each of the participants will reflect their assumed gender. I also went over confidentiality and security by letting participants know that all recordings would be stored secretly, and disposed of properly after my research was complete. Lastly, participants were asked if they would like a follow up once I was done with my study. Since all interviews were conducted over zoom and there was no in person interaction participants did not need to

sign the consent form. Instead, each participant was given a HRP-587 as approved by the IRB.

Data Analysis

I followed Creswell (2011) five steps to data analysis and the process is as follows 1) I gathered the data, 2) I organized the data, 3) I read and listened to all the interviews collected, 4) I coded the data through Nvivo and applied manual themes, and 5) interpreted my findings. I started by organizing all of the interviews into folders separating students and staff interviews since the questions were slightly different for the two groups. Once the interviews had been organized, I transcribed each interview and listened to all of them, noting similar themes and themes that were directly related to my research on NVivo. Some of the themes that emerged were “Awareness”, “perceptions of representation”, “educating white people”, and “short term impact”. The quotes were then grouped into larger sections and the data analysis was constructed into chapter 4 and chapter 5.

Chapter 4: How is Race Ritualized in Higher Education

The United States and its institutions, traditions, values, politics, ways of being, and knowing are all deeply rooted in coloniality and racism. Through the decades we have seen many forms of systemic racism evolve and change over time such as microaggressions. However, there are patterns which remain consistent that continue to subtly promote systems that continue to be inequitable, oppressive, violent, and maintain power over “the other”. Higher education is not excluded from this. In the matrix of coloniality, higher education’s roots are deeply embedded in white cis male dominated discourse. In this section I discuss how race is ritualized in higher education through critical analysis of the three previously mentioned onboarding RR; The Golden Evening, MCAE Kick-Off, and Gopher Equity Project and share the stories of students and staff at the University of Minnesota to provide context on how onboarding function to ritualize race into organizations.

Rituals are complex as they can serve different purposes, but many are similar in that they are often legitimized through acts of repetition, fixed sequences, or prayers and are endowed with symbolic meaning (Hasty et al., 2022; Kertzer, 1988). When we look at RR they are often repeated and in the case of the three RR they occur once a year with a sequence of actions and processes that lead up to the ritual itself. Some of the sequences include things like when the RR occur, for example GE, MKO, and GE all take place at the beginning of fall semester as they serve to onboard new students, other things to consider are selection process of who are invited to attend and participate, what kinds of symbols will be used such as race or POC, Goldie the gopher, Maroon and Gold, other SOC who are successful, what kinds of messages will be repeated, and so on.

In this chapter I will use autoethnography and select quotes from my interviews with students and staff at the University of Minnesota. The quotes are of their personal experiences, thoughts, and memories of participating in the three RR; Golden Evenings, MCAE Kick off, and Gopher Equity Project and some are intentionally left longer to provide context. Within these interviews the students and staff will share their experiences of being POC in a PWI and through their stories I will begin to answer my research questions

1. How is Race Ritualized in Higher Education
2. How does the ritualization of race in higher education support or complicate the efforts around diversity work?
3. If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them?

In this chapter I focus on answering the question “how is race ritualized in Higher Education?” and I break it down into three parts 1) Racial Identities as symbol, 2) (Mis)Representations, and 3) Navigating Difference & Educating White People.

Racial Identities as Symbol

So, the question is how is race ritualized in higher education? From my own experience as a participant in the GE, I was an insider who was participating in this ritual to welcome new AAPI students. Race is a symbolic aspect of this ritual since there are race specific GE for Black and African Americans, American Indian, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Latinx that are held on different dates for each racial group. Race as a symbol in ritual is reflected through the bodies of the students, staff, and faculty of color who participate in this

event, and the racial selection and identity of the students and their families who are invited to attend. As Manning (2000) puts it “College rituals brim with symbols and meaning which are metaphors to represent something other than their literal meaning or appearance” (p. 18). The messages of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are spoken, written, and performed, and the communication of racialized identities are reinscribed, reinforced, and maintained. As someone who entered this ritual knowing that my identity as an Asian American woman was the reason I was invited to attend and that my racial identity would be used in a way to recruit, represent, and get commitment from AAPI students. Even with this knowledge, upon entering RR even I was taken aback by the numbers of AAPI students and staff in this one space. By being there, we were all participating in reinforcing RR and racialized identities, our racial identity as a symbol of DEI in the university. By being there, we were saying that we are African American, American Indian, Asian American Pacific Islanders, Latinx, but most of all we are saying that we are not white, we are diversity, we are here, you can also be here and we want you to be one of us.

To give some context, RR are filled with symbolism which can be more important than the ritual itself as Kertzer (1988) states “symbols provide the content of ritual; hence the nature of these symbols and the ways they are used tell us much about the nature and influence of ritual” (p. 11). Symbols serve in three specific ways which include meaning, multivocality, and ambiguity (Kertzer, 1988). Meaning are created through RR or a process called condensation which refers to how symbols represent and unify a diversity of meaning whether verbal or iconic and manifests itself into physical form such as a flag or in the instance of RR racialized bodies that somehow embodies and brings together these diverse ideas (Kertzer, 1988).

Symbols draw out ideas, interact with other ideas, and become associated with it over time, and

in RR we see that DEI have come to be associated with Race among other things and through RR the perception that DEI is upheld by the university while maintaining the power that allow these rituals to exist. When power is enforced on others it is often met with resistance, however as Manning (2000) puts it “Ritualization is a play of power...Power, as expressed in ritual acts, is particularly effective when indirect claims to power are made” (p. 9). RR are important because racism, inequality, and exclusion exist; yet at the same time we are only able to hold RR because it also serves those in power. So, although I and many others did not believe that the RR is reflective of the University community, many continue to participate in RR because they also serve as spaces that seeds may be planted. Additionally, staff and students also mentioned how the RR reflected the University’s commitment to DEI.

The following are statements from staff and students who expressed their own thoughts and experiences on participating in RR. I start with Ben who is African American and has worked in a student serving role for a few years at the U of M said:

“Some of the black people are there because of their job, but even those you know. For example, I know a good guy, you know, who's the assistant director or associate director of housing, and for the most part he's only going to deal with students who have issues who live or are living in the residence halls. Most of the students are not going to have any interaction with him. You know, years ago, there was a African American woman who was Assistant director for the honors program, and only people in the honors program would have any interaction with her. Black or white or otherwise, and so you know. And so she was there because of her role, but also because she was a woman of color.”

In this interview Ben brought up an important aspect of RR that are often overlooked which include the appearance of a diverse campus that does not reflect the kinds of interaction that students will have with the student leaders and staff that come to RR. Ben, like many other staff of color participates in RR because of his role in addition to the symbolism behind representation.

Another staff member Roy who also identified as African American and has served at the University for several years said:

“I think it's important. I think it's important for an institution to say you know, we're going to talk about this, and this is something you need to know about as important as you needing to know about alcohol and sexual assault and anything else that we require. And to be honest, we don't require a lot of our students, in many ways or our staff and faculty, in some ways. So, I do think it was important because I think it sends the right, it sends a good message to our students that the institution cares enough to make this a requirement. But I think it also sends a message to students that diversity equity inclusion, at least it's something the university cares about. People could argue about how much that care or is universal, or how much more can be done, but I think it from a symbolic standpoint, I think it's important, but it also has meaning, you know can hopefully impact you know, the student experience. You know what's not clear doing this in your freshman year, you know? Do you forget it? Are you just doing it? You know you have to watch the videos and do all that, but are you just doing that to finish it? And you're not, really. Taking it in and it's not really impacting how you engage; you know so that. You know, I don't have a good insight into.”

In this interview Roy discusses how RR like the GEP show the Universities care or dedication to diversity equity and inclusion. From this quote we can see that RR are symbolic from a number of different perspectives to both incoming students and to current campus community. Although impact is unclear for incoming students who have taken the GEP, symbols when arranged in a particular way during ritual can have deep and meaningful impact and can legitimize those who are performing and receiving from the RR. Racialized identities become symbolic in GEP as they are used to portray DEI, and more complicated issues around race that can teach or communicate the different layers associated with race and racism in the institution and day to day communication.

AJ who is also African American and a staff member who has spent over a decade at the U also thought that the GEP was a great improvement to DEI and said:

“I’m just gonna be honest with you. I think it’s one of the best things the University of Minnesota has done since I’ve been here. That was intentional. So, when you’re intentional and if it’s done right, you’ll have an impact. I think based on the reports and the new report that that module has had an impact on all students. Now some guys say this is a liberal education you’re trying to brainwash me. No, we’re trying to get you to see how do you fit into this global citizenship? Because I’ll just give you one quick example, I’m a history minor. I’m a double minor history insight. I didn’t know anything about them, the Hmong people with the University of Maryland. I didn’t learn about Hmong people until 2005 when I got to Minnesota. So, when you have this eye-opening experience, that’s not totally into anti-racism work and sometimes social Justice for students. And if you’re engaged in them right in the classroom and you’re able to unpack

things and not just sweep it under the carpet, students are gonna be really engaged in the process, even if they have this minimization or, you know, they commit micro invalidations of micro assaults. For other people, it just depends on how it's done.”

Like Roy, AJ was very optimistic about the GEP RR and the process of how it started and where it could go. For AJ the GEP was symbolic in a way that exposed race in a way that conversations could happen and continue on and off campus. Racialized identities are symbolic they serve as visual markers or cues to things like racism and make these issues more visible while allowing students to take part in social justice if they wanted to.

The next statement is from June a senior who identifies as AAPI and participated in the GE as a panelist said:

“I was just on the panel, but it's kind of like a success story that you can follow from someone that's that looks like you UM, so you know, we can talk about success stories all the times of CEOs of companies or leaders of organizations and then we look and then they're all men or they're all white like it's, you know I want to see someone that I can look up to that has been through similar struggles like me. That's me. So, I feel like it provides a place for you to find role models. That share similar like cultural backgrounds, so I really like that.”

In this snippet from June, she highlights two important takeaways from her experiences in participating in RR. The first was that she was a success story and secondly that there is value and importance in being able to see yourself within the organization. What June highlights are how racialized identities serve to portray ideal SOC who are successful and take on active roles

in things like RR. Through racialized bodies there is also a confirmation of POC membership to the organization where incoming students can see themselves as a part of the larger community as reflected in RR and by the current students, staff, and faculty of color.

Another senior Mary, who also identified as AAPI and was also invited to attend GE as a panelist said:

“I would say the Golden Evening did a really good job in addressing like the programs that the U has to offer that are for AAPI students or just BIPOC students in general like talking about ASU, BSU, or bring up topics that like you can make your own coffee if you want to and then inviting students from those org’s, like AAPI Greek life to come present API mentorship program like Aspire to come and talk to students. So, I think that's something that was really nice to see.”

Mary was like June where she was also a student leader, a success story, and invited to attend RR as a panelist to share her experiences with incoming students. This is another example how racialized identities can be used to reflect systems of support that often call for other POC to serve POC while not holding all campus partners accountable in creating a DEI campus community.

From another perspective Jin who is AAPI and a sophomore had attended the GE said:

“So for those type of diversity events for me, I'm more of a introverted person, so it's a little bit difficult for me to get to know people in the beginning. So especially you know, as a new student, it's awkward. Most of the times, but I think it helps and I'm speaking on my behalf and some of the friends that I have, I think it helps with

connecting minority students with other minority students and know that there is a large population of minority students that exist on campus. UM, you do feel supported through those events for sure.”

Jin is a student who came from a diverse community into a PWI and talks about feeling supported at RR as it connects “minorities to minorities.” From my interview with Jin the visual representation at RR created a sense of community at a PWI that made the idea of connecting with others more available at the moment, especially for students who maybe introverted or less likely to interact with others on their own.

From these interviews we can see how RR creates and communicate racialized expectation, affirmation, meaning, and experience to students as they enter the university and even staff members who have been at the university for some years. The symbolism of having all that diversity in one space and providing a space for dialogue like the GEP reaffirmed the university's dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion as reflected in the interviews. While most of the interviewees talked about RR in a positive light, we were also able to see the parts of RR that are often concealed which are the unequal distribution of who is doing diversity work, the misrepresentation of POC in PWI, and how racialized identities can be used to symbolize deeper messages in RR.

(Mis)Representation of Race

When I first attended a Golden Evening a few years ago as a transfer student coordinator, I was quite taken aback by the sheer number of diversity or should I say Asian faculty, staff, and students at this event for incoming and potential incoming students to the

University. I had been to three different universities as a student and staff member, but this was the first time that I had been invited to attend something like this: something specifically for students of color. For example, the first PWI that I started my academic journey had little to no emphasis on DEI or gatherings of diverse people; if they did, I had no knowledge of it nor was I invited or participated in any onboarding process. I quickly became hypervigilant of my difference, and this was enhanced when I was on my own, living in a dorm full of mostly white students, and one of the few people of color in all my classes. My feelings of being an outsider were enhanced when I experience racial microaggressions such as being asked where I'm "really from", my roommate making comments about cats and dogs, and being left out of in-class group conversations because my peers assumed I was international or might not speak "good" English. I became withdrawn and had little motivation to leave my room unless I had classes or to get my "grab n' go" lunch bag to only return and eat in my room. I never felt like I was a part of that community and my mental health, and grades suffered greatly as a result. I was put on academic probation several times and almost did not graduate.

My experience as SOC who did not attend any RR onboarding played a large role in shaping my experience on campus. What I had experienced would seep over into my working years and how I would represent as a staff member; a moral duty to attend a program by the University specifically for welcoming their new SOC despite it being after work hours. I also worked in a predominantly white department and specifically with transfer students who were mostly white, yet as an Asian American I was both expected to attend and at the same time I felt an obligation to show up. This was mainly because I knew how important it was to see yourself reflected on campus. Although I thought that the GE was a great idea and kind of wished I was able to attend something like this in my undergraduate years or even as a graduate

student, I also felt guilty because I knew this was not reflective of what the campus actually looked like. It was actually pretty lonely as a staff member of color in a predominantly white department and I had to take it upon myself to seek out and be intentional about joining communities of color for support. I knew this would be similar to the students who attended these events and especially for the ones who weren't used to PWI. Once the event was over, navigating a PWI as a SOC would pretty much be on their own efforts.

This sentiment was echoed by Ben a staff member at the University of Minnesota who said:

“that's a piece where I feel like that once again needs to be revitalized, especially these last few years where the gaps of how we intentionally center racial justice and DEI efforts needs to be more proactively pursued. It can't just be incrementalism due to ease of convenience, because this is the way we've done things like the MCAE kickoff, because after that students are like, OK, what the hell now? like, what is it? And there there isn't anything else really intentionally going on and that's a big thing too.”

During this part of the interview with Ben, he brings up an important part of RR which are it's short-term impact and the misrepresentation of POC. After the RR is over, there is often not much intentional outreach to students to continue this dialogue of DEI and support. Which can leave many students feeling unsupported or blind sighted from the contradicting messages and experiences from RR to actual campus life.

Lee, an AAPI staff member who also worked directly with SOC in his role mentioned a similar message during his interview saying:

“Like we're here. But you know we're not the true representative of the full body of staff at the university. Let's be honest, like CLA. Some offices in CLA are really diverse and some of them, most of them aren't too diverse. When we're talking about diversity, we're talking about like different identities, right? And so what matches API, black African, Muslim, you know, there's also the LGBTQ plus community and so, I feel like sometimes they need a splash of color and so they pick some offices that have that or where those events are mandatory. By the way it is mandatory for our offices to attend so yeah... It's more like playing the University Games right, how I feel and I use the word “games” for a reason because there's always a bunch of...the idea of what if your program wasn't there when you're diversity, it's our diversity event you know? Like How? How do we show up to these events when, when our own offices run events that are about DEI work? And if y'all don't show up at the event, but we are like considered mandatory to go, because we're also looking for our numbers as well. You know, we also want to be there too, even though it's like mandatory we recognize that we need to be active participants for students, that's like academic life here at the U.”

Lee who is a staff member that has been in his role for a number of years also brings up an important point in terms of misrepresentation and points out systemic issues that are often unaddressed or concealed which are related to the political aspects of organization that often call for staff of color to participate in RR. These are often unspoken expectations for staff of color that serve to add a “splash of color” to the university events and are often not required or an expectation for white staff. On the other hand, by not participating in RR staff of color can also be seen as unsupportive since many of these events are hosted by diversity related

departments. There are several layers associated with participating in RR that can complicate how RR impact SOC experiences in PWI.

Another staff member Roy also mentioned:

“With Groups of students who they and their parents identify within a specific identity. I think one of the challenges is that they can create a false picture of the university and what students will see when they get here. You know, many of the people who are in those rooms are not people that students are going to interact with on a daily basis as they go through their life. And So what's more important or what needs to happen is? You know, they give the perception that, wow, there are a lot of black faculty and staff here or Asian Americans or whatever, whichever their group is. But what needs to happen is how do we make sure that when a student is in CLA or CBS or CSE or whatever, if you're an African American student, some of the advisors are African American. Or when you go to the counseling center. Or when you, you know when you go through your life as a student, your faculty, that you that you get your TA's, the staff who work at the rec Center, just kind of mirror what we put on show in terms of, you know, and some people are there because of their role, but some people are there because of their identity and you know, it's nice to have some more black faces in the room or more Asian faces in the room etcetera.”

In this snippet Roy provides a great example of how RR are often misrepresenting actual POC on PWI and the issues that continue to persist in terms of hiring on campus. As Roy and many others have echoed, there needs to be some accountability and intention in the university on

recruiting and hiring POC in the different roles on campus so that it mirrors what is reflected at RR and are not just for show but a part of daily campus life.

From the perspective of students who attended the GE and MKO, students reflected on the events with positivity. However, they also expressed a similar point that the staff members had on misrepresentation of POC on campus, especially after the RR have ended. This next example is from Leah who is a freshman who came from a predominantly white high school discusses her initial reactions to the MKO. Leah who identifies as an African American said:

“A predominantly white institution. Well, I'd say it's not too different from my high school and my previous school experiences because I grew up in suburban Minnesota. But I just say it's just things I'm used to. However, when I did MCAE Kickoff, I kind of forgot I was in a predominantly white institution. So, after I was shocked, I guess, to be like one of the only people of color in my welcome week group.”

Leah looked at her experience with MKO in a positive light but did bring up as a shock factor in her experience the contrast of SOC at MKO to the actual campus community. She had been shocked to see how many SOC there were at the RR which occurred a second time because there had been an expectation from the RR that once school started this would be representative of the campus, which it was not.

For Mary, she came from a predominantly diverse area and had attended the MKO online due to COVID-19, here she said:

“I was born and raised in Hawaii, and I moved to Minnesota for college and in Hawaii, it's predominantly... they not white. I don't know what the predominant race is, but it's

predominantly API, but also like Asian American versus Pacific Islander. I don't know what the statistics look like, but it is. So I grew up in a very predominantly diverse community and going to the U of M was my first time besides like traveling for like a week or two, but first time living working, going to school, everything in a predominantly white community like never experienced it so I would like to say that the experience that Asian Americans or just people of color students have in like kindergarten or first grade and like going to school in elementary school is the experience I had as an 18 year old. Like when you know you're like your friends at school are like ohh your lunch is stinky because you're eating Asian food. Like I never experienced that growing up. But I experienced that for the first time in college when I was like, sitting at the table because I lived in a sorority my first year and I was sitting at the table and they were like Oh, what's that? That smells weird. And I was like I've never heard anyone tell me that because, you know, like eating, eating food was normal to me. So, my first ever experience at anything predominantly white it was Interesting. It was hard to adapt. I feel like it took me years to fit in, but I really, really felt like I was supported by the Community I had at the U Of M specifically APARC, the Asian Pacific American Resource Center like that is where I found my support and my space to explore my identity. So yeah, it was rough first time talking about identity, first time relating my identity to my like school, and work, and career. And it was really weird. But now I'm here now. I talk about it often now. I love exploring it with other people and it's kind of opened my eyes to kind of a narrow mindset that we have at home in Hawaii. So, from like predominantly API to predominantly white. Now I like have the view of both sides, so I really like that I am able to experience that. I don't know if I

wasn't a part of APARC, I don't know if I would know that the things, the feelings I felt and the things that like I was experiencing was valid. Because I had not. Well, first I didn't know really what microaggressions were, but I remember exploring that a little bit at APARC and I didn't have many Asian friends or friends of color cause, so like I moved into a sorority my freshman year first semester because they had asked, like, hey, we have an open spot and my dorm got pushed back. It was this whole thing. So they're like, we have guaranteed housing. You can move in. You don't have to join us. But I did. I ended up joining. But so I was living there and I didn't. I was only exposed to the people that were living there, it was also on Saint Paul campus. So it was like kind of secluded and like without APARC, I wouldn't have had a tie to the Asian community and that would have been hard for me because like you know, I never experienced a PWI, so I would have never known that my experiences weren't great. Like I wouldn't have known that I was struggling because I wouldn't have known they were microaggressions. I would have just thought, oh, they're just Ignorant or something and I would have like just let all that go. But in reality, because I was thinking about identity and because I was conscious with the work that I was doing at APARC, I was able to recognize things that I shouldn't live just live with. I shouldn't, just like let it go because it's not something that like if I want to talk about DEI, I should be able to talk about DEI, especially in a PWI.”

In Mary’s experience she came from a diverse background and RR as a first experience was positive because it made her aware of the kinds of interactions she may have as a SOC in addition to the perception that the campus was diverse. However, as Mary shared with us, she was on a PWI and experienced racial microaggressions as well as invalidation during her time

on campus; and although these topics were brought up in RR, experiencing these things were much more different and did have some negative impact her overall experience. Mary however was a success story and she found support in APARC where her experiences were validated, she was able to talk about these issues with staff and other students, and she was able to go on to help other students navigate the day-to-day experiences of racial microaggressions, invalidation, and being a SOC on a PWI.

Another student Tou says this about RR:

“Yeah. Because when you're in the kickoff or these like events that are for multicultural students and you sort of see them as a really welcoming place. It seems like this could be the whole year, but it's just in that area where you get that sense of community and safeness. Once you get up, actually go to classes, your social life every day, it's like, it's not always like that. The UofM is so big and the multicultural students that you were with makes up just a small percentage of that, so some ways it may give you a false sense of security in a way. But actually, when you really think about it, it's like a safe space and thinking about the greater University campus most of the students are not multicultural students, they're white folks, and they're very different backgrounds from all over the world, and they're experiences are very different from someone who is participating at kick off or around that space. So they're just I don't know if the word cost, which is the right word in the situation, but makes you realize that situation is different from all the things if you expand your bubble a little bit because of when in the MCAE space like this is the space where we hang out with, this is where I'm comfortable, but if you go beyond that this is what the university experience is actually

like. They're not always with people that are like-minded or open-minded to the conversations that you're having or the expressions that you have, they have very different experiences. Even though the MCAE place is full of diverse experiences and people from all over the world, like once you bring in that race factor definitely changes quite a bit into how we view the world how we navigate it.”

During my interview with Tou there were points of intense emotions as he reflected back on his experiences on campus. Tou had attended the U of M as an undergraduate and now as a graduate student in a predominantly white program. In Tou's interview he brings up important aspects of misrepresentation during RR which is not reflective outside of certain spaces and does impact students or in Tou's case in many ways. They discuss the challenges associated with being a SOC and day to day processes that can contribute to not feeling like they belong outside of specific spaces dedicated to multicultural students. Additionally, Tou also discusses how these issues persist inside his classes and interactions with professors as well. Touching on the different layers of DEI that are often not included as points of conversation or interest at RR.

The representation and misrepresentation of race on a PWI had different impact and outcomes for students and staff. From my own experience as a staff member there were a lot of unwritten and unspoken expectations that at DEI events we need to show up, even if it wasn't an honest representation of campus climate. DEI is complex and that doesn't go away with RR, rather a lot of that complexity is transferred over to students and others who attend RR and the cycle is repeated. Rituals as Seigel (2008) states:

“These rituals concern the process by which students are initiated into the campus community and inculcated with the various norms, values, and behaviors extant on campus. Essentially, students are vested in the process of becoming a student at that particular college or university, and they become part of a larger group of similarly situated students.” (p.13)

These spaces can at the moment intensify one’s feelings of belonging through representation, but can be short lived as there are somethings that are hidden or not as visible at RR such as mis-representation and how it might feel like to be in a PWI vs. talking about being in a PWI if that conversation happens at all during onboarding. There are also larger systemic issues that may be prioritized such as the university’s commitment to DEI in order to move forward as they serve to reinforce existing structures that remain problematic such as institutionalized white racism which facilitates divisiveness and distinction between people with privilege and those who do not which are largely associated with race (Lomotey & Smith, 2023; Colon, 2016).

Navigating Difference & Educating White People

The GEP is different from the GE and MKO in that it is less focused on celebrating diversity and incorporated as a ritual that serves to educate and set expectations for new students through an online module. Since the GEP is a module and in person communication is expected to occur through first-year experience courses, the first step in this mainly consist of interacting with an online module focusing on DEI and navigating difference on campus for all new students. The GEP also function as RR because rituals can be textual, are repeated annually, focuses on race, and serves as DEI training or education for students. The main

differences are it's module based, all students regardless of race and as stated by the GE website that "First-year students take the online training as part of your transition to the U of M campus prior to the start of the semester. Follow-up conversations are part of many colleges first-year experience courses" (Gopher Equity Project, nd. Para 2.). As such the response from students and staff to the GEP differs slightly in terms of impact. For example, the GE and MKO showcase race, while GEP states that "The online training guides you through concepts about identity, inclusion and belonging, and power and privilege, and is important to creating a foundation of equity and inclusion on our campus" (Gopher Equity Project, nd., para. 1). The GEP also collects data on impact which I was also able to use in my analysis, whereas the other two RR did not. From the interviews of staff and students there was a strong emphasis on the GEP and its role in helping white students interact with students of color.

Since the GEP was less focused on connecting students to a "diverse" campus community and more focused on improving campus climate, the interviews reflected responses to process and education. The staff who shared their experience with GEP were involved in the creation of the content for the modules, either through committees, leadership roles in the creation of the project, or facilitating groups during the pilot phase of the project. The first example is from Ray a staff member who discussed how the GEP came to be and states:

"If I'm remembering correctly, this project came out of the Multicultural Student Success Committee, which is now The University Student Equity and Success Committee, then I became involved with it as the pilot project. You know, we did some traveling tours, we talked to students. There was another connection to this, it was the racial Academic Advisor Committee that I served on, which was this broad report about

academic advisors and what they need to be closely attentive and responsive. And you know, some things we're talking about like a not wanting to cause harm, they need professional development. They need to know about BIPOC students with intersecting identities and students who are part of this as well. So that report also led to the racial justice train. The trainer program... So we piled it with MLK, PES, I think housing, College of Liberal Arts, Undergraduate Education, Office of Student experience, and I think some areas in student affairs. So, this was the pilot project.”

In this interview with Ray, he discusses the importance of educating advisors and raising awareness to the different intersectionality BIPOC student identities. Ray also talks about joint efforts in creating something that is supportive, inclusive, and brings awareness to BIPOC student experiences. Although the levels of involvement from each department are not made clear, the joint effort was received positively from students and staff who engaged in this process as it worked towards supporting students in creating a more inclusive campus climate through awareness and educating white students and staff on how to engage in different scenarios.

Another staff member who was involved during the earliest parts of the GEP May had spent her undergraduate at the U of M and was highly involved on campus as a student leader. After she graduated she started her role at the university as a staff member that worked directly with SOC. With her experience in diversity work she became involved in some of the earlier phases of the GEP, here May said:

“Let's see, so I think that it emerged out of this, I think there are a lot of layers to this, but the biggest would be to fill in this gap of trying to get students to understand one

another, I think it was formed. It's meant to bridge gaps between, you know, students of color and white students. The Gopher Equity project was kind of developed hand in hand with the office that I used to work in, and we had like student workers who oversaw sections of first year experience courses. And so those section leaders, those students, and student workers who oversaw them so like their supervisors. So, we call them team leaders, they were responsible for getting the training done to process the Gopher equity projects because we understood that students, this might be their first-time hearing about microaggressions. For this project, you know it could be triggering for someone of color in their experiences. So, some of the thoughts behind this and we had a lot of thoughts like we have processing groups for you know affinity, different affinity groups. But then how do our white folks process with each other like? Wouldn't it be a better experience if they got to process with someone different from them? What does that mean? Why is it the responsibility of these student leaders to host these processing sessions? The student leaders went through a lot of training, not a lot. I'd say like more like a retreat basis as much as they could soak in. It was like a I think a series of two-day retreats where they would get trained by someone very experienced and facilitating race conversations. I unfortunately was not part of those trainings. That's not required to go but, but also like as the only person of color on the staff I just chose not to participate in that space because I wanted to allow the room for other people to take up space if that makes sense. Uh, people who could benefit from that growth so like I really wanted my white counterparts to be hands on with this Gopher equity project. I didn't want to lead it, I didn't want to you know feel like I'm taking charge of it, you know even though I was really passionate about, you know, some of the movements

that were happening, but we didn't take on a huge part. We collaborated more so with the Martin Luther King program. So, you know, they were the ones who kind of really formed it and UM, I think the U took part of it for undergraduate education, so lots of different hands in the pot. But our role specifically was for the facilitation piece and whose responsibility is it to process these things. I think ultimately, I don't remember if it happened or not. These processing sessions like I don't know if... I remember. I think we went on COVID and I don't know what happened with that Gopher equity project because then I you know, I like stepped away from my role. So, like so many loose ends. But ultimately, I think GE emerged to kind of fill these gaps and also as we're moving into a more diverse generation like it make it made sense to, like, bring about awareness about some of the issues that you know their BIPOC peers were experiencing.”

In May's experience she was someone who had experiences both as a student and now staff member at the U and participated in the early phases of the GEP because of her current role and her understanding of the importance in social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. From May's perspective she felt that this was a wonderful opportunity for her white counterparts to really engage in something that could be beneficial to them since she and her colleagues of color were often expected to volunteer and participate in DEI related work. However, as May explained there were no volunteers or interest from her white peers so she was nominated to be involved. Additionally, as May mentions in her interview a lot of the work required SOC to share their experiences as points of teaching which could be triggering, and the interactions were often with SOC engaging in conversations with other POC which could have been opportunities for white students and staff to also engage in this work. This is especially

important to note since as May discussed much of the focus was on “bridging the gap between SOC and white students” and helping white people process all this information.

Roy another staff member said this about the GEP:

“You know, I see it supporting in that you know again providing particularly as it as it relates to white students providing information that ideally will help them be better friends, better colleagues, better classmates, better roommates, just better university citizens in this space. You know, I suppose the complication can be, you know, just talking about those issues may not sit well with some of those white students, and you know why are we talking about this and you know that they could act in a certain way. You know that there may be, in an odd way there. You know, there are some students, there are some BIPOC students that have diverse identities that you know might prefer that. We didn't really shine a light on what makes them different, and you know, they just kind of want to blend in and put on their maroon and gold sweatshirt and be a Gopher and not be black or not. And not saying that they're not proud of whatever their heritage is. A student I knew years ago he came from Romania, you know, moved to the suburbs and I remember him saying he just wanted to kind of be as American as possible. Like he didn't want people to know he was from Romania. He just wanted to fit in and so there could be some students where they think require something like this, particularly if it doesn't sit well with their peers. You know, then they may feel a certain way about that, you know, and so they, you know, not that it's their fault, but that they that might present them with complications. I suppose you know. I can't believe that you know, we had to spend time doing you know because we have people, we have

diverse students in our class, and you know so. But yeah, that's the only way I could see it. Complicating, you know, the other thing I would say even for BIPOC students, they don't identify as a black person, I don't know all that I need to know about all of the different ethnic groups or, you know, with regard to sexual orientation or religion or disability. So, you know, I think everybody has something to learn.”

In Roy’s interview he notes that the GEP was helpful in helping white students to be more aware and learn to be better peers, community members, and etc. to their BIPOC peers. The missing pieces that the GEP does not focus on too much are the different intersectionality of identities that can contribute to how students navigate and engage with one another.

Additionally, it may serve to reinscribe racial identities to students that although may be black, Asian, Latinx in appearance but may not identify with being in a racialized category for whatever reasons may also complicate their experiences.

For the students I interviewed they also talked about the GEP providing them and white students with the verbiage to navigate situations and people that they may not be familiar with. Take for example Ann who was an undergraduate at the U of M and now a staff member said:

“with my experience I well, I was also discriminated by white student because my major was like a sociology at the beginning, but when I was attending group project there's like two white kids and they are like treating me like really like invisible person, so I'm like, oh, my goodness, that's really disrespectful. And then I decided to drop out sociology major and then change it to communication major. So, in my opinion it's really important for the university to you know let students know the importance of the DEI because we are living together and yeah that's really important. But back then I

didn't know that there's a helpful resources. So yeah, just you know, more like a being thoughtful and knowledgeable to the student, that should be really important.”

Ann experienced racial microaggressions that resulted in her changing majors because she didn't feel supported, and her experiences were left invalidated. She found value in the GEP because it helps with raising awareness for white students when interacting with SOC, something that she felt was missing from her own experience as a student.

Another student Jessi a junior who identifies as Latinx thought that the GEP did a good job of providing terms and scenarios for white students. Jessi said:

“Yes, I think people especially like probably like the people with like probably origins of like European or something like that. They probably don't necessarily understand like what people of color like necessarily go through, or they probably aren't aware of, like the questions or things they say to people of color. So, I think like implementing that was really just educate them and even if, like, they're ignorant, at least the school is doing something about that. The project does a really good job with educating them and so I've seen like a decrease of those questions. But again, those questions do occur occasionally. It's just like I'm glad like that some. That the U was doing something to try to prevent those questions from being asked to other individuals to be targeted.”

For Jessi she discusses how she thinks the GEP was helpful in providing terms and scenarios that white students may not necessarily be aware of that can have negative effects on SOC. She also felt that this was a positive move from the University to try to address these types of issues.

Leah, another student talked about how it was helpful for navigating difference especially across different cultures. She said:

“All the Gopher Equity project those scenarios where they made you make decisions and what would be like the best decision in that specific scenario, I feel are really good for people who are not of that culture or ethnicity to kind of reflect on their actions. Maybe if they ever think back to what their responses were in the Gopher Equity Projects.”

Leah adds to Jessi’s statement that the GEP offers opportunities for all students to be at some level of awareness such as different cultures since these interactions are also common occurrences. However, she does make an important point which is the requirement of students to reflect back to the GEP on how to navigate these interactions which can be complicated due to the noted short-term impact of RR as mentioned by students and staff.

Another student Tae who is a sophomore had a different perspective where he felt that the GEP helped him become more aware of himself as a Black male and said:

“Yeah. So when I when I took it. At first, I was kind of just like what is this? But As I went through it and I took all of the scenarios questions and read through it, I actually thought it was super helpful and informative just because it kind of, when I was taking the Gopher Equity Project, there was a lot of times where I was thinking to myself that well, like I’m actually learning a lot about myself, even just going through with the through the project, you know just with all the scenarios that they provided and like what you would do? And even the surveys within them, and how the questions that they

would ask so. I thought from that standpoint it was interesting, and then even also just learning about like Equity inclusion and things along those nature for students and even just regular life scenarios. I thought it was, it was amazing. And I think people should definitely consider doing it, especially people of color. Just because it gives you a perspective of something that you may not really think about too much or even consider when you're just, you know, in the midst of doing your schoolwork and things like that. So, I liked it.”

From Tae’s interview he was excited to see that there were scenarios related to SOC and their experiences. He, like Leah and Jessi thought that there were things that all students could take away from the GEP such as the scenarios related to ability and disability. The snippet made him more aware of his own assumptions which could be harmful even though there was no ill intent in the interaction. The GEP in this case was helpful for students in navigating across difference.

Apart from my interviews the GEP collected their own data and made that available on their website that showcased 75% of students reported willingness to intervene in biased based incidents, 45% agreed in playing a role to create an inclusive campus climate, and 80% believed that the University of Minnesota took DEI seriously (Gopher Equity Project, n.d.). The site also highlights quotes that state “It contains very important information and could educate people on how to be a contributor to making the U of M a welcoming place.” “As a PWI [predominantly white institution] there are many students who don't learn about any of this in their high schools, because diversity is such a big topic at U of M it allows the freshman to be ready for the conversation.” Although this specific RR collected data on impact, I wonder

if there would be a follow up on actual change in behavior as a result long-term for students or if it remains a “good enough” likert scale result for the institution when giving reports. There needs to be further examination on the overall impact on SOC experiences connected to RR.

Conclusion

Although each RR is different, they all impacted students and staff in ways that shaped their perceptions of the University’s DEI efforts. As Hastey et al. (2022) put it

Even when rituals are scripted and parts are carefully read and followed, individual participation and collaboration will subtly change a ritual each time it is enacted or performed. Rituals are never exactly duplicated, and not all rituals serve the same purpose. Some are primarily performed to affirm, strengthen, and maintain solidarity within the group; some are social markers of life transformations for individuals, families, or groups; and others address healing and the need for renewal.”(p. 417)

RR as onboarding processes serve multiple functions and through the interviews we see that race is ritualized through the racialized identities as symbol, (Mis) representation of POC on campus, and through the GEP verbiage and tools to navigate difference and education for white students on how to interact with people of different cultures and backgrounds. Despite the students and staff discussing the challenges of misrepresentation of POC on campus, they also mentioned time and time again how it served to affirm, strengthen, and show that the university cares about DEI.

Ch. 5: How does the ritualization of race in higher education support or complicate the efforts around diversity work? And If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them?

In this chapter I will go over 1) how the ritualization of race in higher education supports or complicate the efforts around diversity work and 2) If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them? I will include direct quotes from the staff and students that I interviewed to shed light on the complexity of DEI and the ways in which we can try to address them.

To start higher education onboarding processes and diversity work on campus rarely offer opportunities for potential newcomers to hear of real experiences of SOC on campus and often focus on maintaining current ways of doing, through things like assessments and celebrations. When students are given the opportunity to share their experiences, they are often students who are ideal SOC, meaning that they are often doing well, are well integrated into the community through their involvement with student orgs, centers, or other university programs, have some sort of leadership role, or success stories that are represented. This does not mean that these students did not struggle or experience things like racial microaggressions or other race related events as SOC, but what is often highlighted in RR are unspoken expectations for SOC entering PWI and the success stories that shape them.

When I first attended a GE I knew that I was invited because of my racial identity as an AAPI. By participating I was agreeing that I am not white, that I was different, the minority and that I was there to support the university's DEI efforts. During my time working at the university, I don't think I have seen anyone who was white at these RR. In fact, when I started

my dissertation and called to speak with someone from admissions about the GE, the person I spoke with and sounded like a white male knew nothing about the GE. They even suggested that I may have been confused about who hosted the events. Yet, a few weeks later one of my committee members who is also a POC forwarded me an invitation she received for the GE. I had known from my previous experiences attending GE that there were few if any white people who attended, so I was always curious and critical as to why that was so. Through this conversation it was an affirmation that although many of us are doing similar work such as the people in admissions, the kind of work especially around DEI are not balanced. My participation in RR also made me complicit in these institutional processes that conceal a larger issue we rarely address which are the unequal distribution of work when it comes to DEI which from my experience were predominantly POC and white women. I was also complicit in representing something that was dishonest to incoming students and their families because the numbers of AAPI individuals at this event, once dispersed on campus would look a lot different, the environment in which students were first being exposed to would also change, and the different kinds of interactions they would have with their peers may not be as understanding as those in this space, yet we were representing a message of diversity, equity, and inclusion. I along with many other faculty and staff of color participated in RR on our own time outside of work hours, unpaid because we wanted to support incoming SOC. I participated because I had hoped that I would be able to make a small difference to students in those short engagements and that perhaps they would be able to take away something to help them navigate a PWI. For example, a lot of the conversations that I had with students and parents on how to be successful revolved around asking for help, finding a community of support which also went hand in hand with getting involved on campus. I also

brought along my cards to give to parents and students as a contact person if they ever needed support, knowing that my role was very specific and my chances of interacting with them beyond this event was slim, unless students directly reached out to me, if I took up additional roles such as being an advisor for student groups, or volunteering my time to DEI events.

Aside from my personal experiences of being complicit in the complex and deeply imbedded system, the RR also highlighted ideal SOC which are student leaders, students who were active in organizations, and students who were doing academically well. Diversity “achievements” are often displayed or highlighted in documents and online. Through these highlights much of the focus is shifted to the University’s DEI work and achievements such as the examples I gave at the beginning of my dissertation on “largest incoming classes of SOC”. Other examples of these achievements are reflected in the showing of enrollment or graduation numbers, which are often easily accessible and found on campus websites and recruitment materials, pictures of SOC in fields that often do not have many SOC, or in the case of RR the invitation of SOC leaders. This complicates efforts around diversity work as too often there is little attention to the voices of students and people of color in higher education who are not in leadership roles or are not involved on campus. In addition, as mentioned from my interviews, much of onboarding RR remain short lived performances such as those experienced at GE. For example, studies continue to show that SOC report that they don’t belong on campus or are not accepted as insiders (Morfin et al., 2005). When we mainly highlight SOC success or experiences from a deficit perspective, we ignore a deep rooted issue that is often concealed such as the centering of whiteness in our institutions and organizational systems. As Gorski (2016) states:

The tendency for educators to try to remedy injustice-based problems with culture-based strategies is all too common- somewhat of an epidemic...incredulous over the popularity of “Culture of poverty” approach for resolving these disparities...this approach is based on the indefensible premise that we can achieve equity by ignoring inequity. (p.222)

By ritualizing race in higher educational institutions much of what drives how we understand, talk about or resort to are “feel good” or “do good” approaches that do not address deeper systemic issues of racism and inequity. Many of the stories shared in my dissertation touch on many of these issues indirectly and directly such as the need for more staff of color vs. showcasing what we have which is not reflective of the campus, educating white folks so that we can have a more inclusive campus climate, or RR reflecting the University’s care towards DEI.

Although RR are both needed and function to conceal it is the reason why we need to be critical of the work that is being done. As Kertzer (1998) states:

Part of the cultural struggle is a struggle over the dominant symbolic paradigm, the struggle for hegemony. It is a battle that never ceases, for, in Fox’s words, “domination has to be constantly re-created.” It is the struggle of the privileged to protect their positions by fostering a particular view of people’s self-interest. It is a process that involves defining people’s identity for them.” (p.175)

RR perpetuates whiteness as a norm from an institutional and systemic level, whether consciously or unconsciously. RR defines who gets invited and represented as “diverse”

through the racialization of potential incoming students and current members such as faculty, staff, students leaders, and student groups of the university who fit into these racial check boxes. RR also reinscribe race to students' identities as expressed by students in my interview who were made more aware of their "racial" identity by being invited to RR which can help students to feel supported and represented on the other hand it can also make students feel uncomfortable, especially if they are from predominantly white areas as expressed in my interviews. The following quotes will first highlight the positive aspects of RR and how they may support or appear to support DEI on campus.

In this first example Jessi, a student who took the GEP said:

"For the Gopher equity I think it was kind of refreshing or nice to see like that a school like so big is doing something to educate everyone on like, to be able to include everyone and make sure that everyone is equally treated and know like how to exactly start conversations that won't necessarily make someone feel weird or uncomfortable. So especially coming from a background of like going to school with like a predominantly white school. So, I think it was just like, really refreshing to see like the U of M was doing something to change that. It was, It was nice. It's the first time I was doing that and it felt good to like, It felt like it was like, ohh! Like they're finally doing something, change is happening. Like, of course, this won't like necessarily, like end, like racism or discrimination or anything like that but it's definitely a start. So, I was happy to see like that this was being implemented for students at the U."

During the interview Jessi spoke in a positive tone when it came to discussing how RR support DEI efforts and expressed feeling supported, and visible, and that the GEP was a good start to starting conversations on DEI and race.

Another student Ann also felt that RR support DEI by saying:

“I feel like it helps support and again, just not to like echo things I've said before, but like it creates a space for like API individuals to kind of like, they're like, hey, you know, there's like others like me at this school, even though it's like a predominantly white institution. And that's always nice. I think like they also if I remember, go over like certain resources like you know, introducing APARC which I think is like an amazing resource.”

During my interview with Ann, she expressed both positive and negative aspects to RR, since she was someone who was made more aware of their racial identity by attending RR which was somewhat uncomfortable for her as a first experience. However, as a student leader who participated on a panel at a RR Ann talked about RR in a more positive light and supporting DEI efforts as expressed in the quote that it shows SOC that there are other POC on campus who look like them and that there are resources that they can access or get involved with as well.

In terms of supporting student experiences another student June states:

“In terms of support, I think it really again like makes it obvious that there's an effort being made and creates that community for students. Because for me, like, I don't feel like it was the most, like the best experience of my life and you know it really affected

my college journey. But it didn't like change my college journey. But it, I mean, it did, but it wasn't like a drastic change. It just like, helped support me. I felt supported. I felt like if I needed to run to a community because I was suffering to find struggling to find one, like I knew that I could go to that community. So, like it's it's person to person whether it supports or complicates it for them. Some people, like are like, oh, I'm just gonna, you know, at least during zoom times, it was easy to just turn off your camera and go do whatever you want. So, I think there's good, there's the bad, and there's the neutral so.”

Although June did express that RR can support DEI in ways, she also emphasized the kind of impact it had on her experience. For June RR showed that there were efforts being made towards DEI and offered students a chance to be exposed to the different kinds of diverse communities on campus that students could access to find support. She also did not feel like RR played a deep or impactful role in her college experience, but instead offered her a feeling of support or that she would be able to find support if she needed it.

For Mei, a staff member she states that RR support DEI efforts in similar ways to what students had expressed. She said:

“Yeah, I feel like, I feel like if I was a student of color, I mean, I was. But you know what I mean. I think it would have made me feel seen like, you know, like we're doing a module with people who look like me and we're doing a module that like talks about experiences and gives me language to talk about it with, like my peers. I think I think that's kind of what my takeaway would be.”

Being a former student at the University and now a staff member, Mei was involved with the early stages of the GEP. Although there were some mixed feelings about RR, Mei did express how RR like the GEP could serve to support DEI efforts for incoming students through representation of diverse scenarios involving POC and other marginalized populations and language that students could use to navigate challenging race related interactions on campus.

Another staff member Roy also mentioned something similar that RR support SOC experiences by saying:

“You know, I see it supporting in that you know again providing particularly as it as it relates to white students providing information that ideally will help them be better friends, better colleagues, better classmates, better roommates, just better university citizens in this space.”

Roy was also involved in the GE during the trial phase and discussed RR supporting DEI in that it provides information and scenarios that could potentially help to provide white students with tools to build better campus climate.

From the different perspectives that students and staff provided we can see that the three RR play some role in supporting SOC experience through 1) the representation of POC, 2) helping incoming students be more aware about the different resources and centers that can serve as a form of support, and 3) providing things like verbiage and scenarios to help both white students and students of color to potentially navigate race related interactions to create a more inclusive campus climate. Although many did express the short-lived impact of

onboarding RR, they were still received in a positive light for the most part and deemed as important for incoming students to experience.

How does the ritualization of race in higher education complicate the efforts around diversity work?

In this next part I discuss how RR can complicate efforts around diversity work. Here I include quotes from my interviews that highlight these challenges. To give some clarity I provide both perspectives because DEI work is not black and white and there are a lot of grey areas that can be overlooked but are directly connected to RR that can complicate the work on DEI in organizations.

I start with Ann a student who said:

“I was invited to the golden evening when I was first accepted into the U and I'm a first-generation college student and my parents like didn't, weren't really able to like offer me a lot of support. And like, you know, applying to college and like going to these type of things at the UofM, so I didn't really ask them to come at all and like, I don't know. I don't think they would have been able to or would have wanted to take off work and it's also just like English isn't their first language, so they're just not very comfortable. Like, I guess, like being in these spaces and I don't know... Going to these kind of like onboarding events, I come from a really predominantly white kind of like area. I grew up in the suburbs and I like obviously, I never felt like white, but I never really felt like Asian either, because there wasn't a super, like strong community of that. And my parents weren't involved in that community and as I went to college, I noticed that there

was like, a really strong community of like, you know, my parents are like Chinese and Viet. And like, I noticed that there was like a strong community of like those two kind of ethnicities that I noticed that a lot of people who were involved in, those, like communities, their parents had gone to college. And so, I became like, really involved. But I just like, feel like it. It's hard for me because like, sometimes, you know, I don't know. I just like a lot of the people who are involved in those communities, like their parents had already, like, known each other, so they knew each other from childhood and like They all kind of like, like it seemed like I had to put in extra work. You know what I mean? And maybe that's what I was feeling the first time.”

During my interview with Ann being at the GE made her feel uncomfortable due to the community that she came from which was predominantly white, but also the minimal interaction that her family had with other AAPI community members. By being at the GE she was made aware of her AAPI identity, which she didn't really associate with. This experience also made her reflect on her own experience as a first-generation college student and her parents and their involvement in her academics in comparison to other students at the event who she felt were more supportive or “batted” for their children and may have been more educated. This story is important because although RR like the GE expose new students to groups of people who in this instance AAPI, can be welcoming to others while excluding them at the same time. This RR also made Ann aware of her racial identity, which was in a way subtly forced by attending, which she reported feeling overwhelmed and uncomfortable. Ann, however, was a success story, as she was able to move from being uncomfortable and embrace her AAPI identity by motivating herself to get involved with the AAPI community on campus.

This next example is from a student Yang who had a different experience than Ann's. Yang shared holding multiple identities such as being AAPI, LGBTQ, and immigrant that they felt made it difficult to fit in and they struggled to find community and friends. Yang was very emotional and expressed feeling invalidated by many of their instructors in addition to feelings of loneliness and not fitting in. Yang said:

“Yeah. So honestly, when I took it, I'm like constant every like every time I take it, the program. You know, I go through it. I keep looking at it thinking like, oh, you know, like I experience all of this all the time and I'm like I feel excluded all the time, and then I'm taking like something in, in an environment that tells me to practice it, but I constantly feel excluded, but it's almost like contradicting the purpose of it. So, it's like, it's hard to say because it's, you know when I apply to jobs for example, I feel the same way as when I came. To the U of M like they claim to be inclusive, they claim to be diverse and that's very emotional sometimes, right? Yeah, I think about it very strongly, and it's kind of like, why are you saying something that you don't practice? Or why do you, why do you pretend right? Why do you pretend that? It's like it's like all my identities and it's very... So it's not just because I'm wrong, it's not just because I'm Hmong, I'm stateless, not heterosexual, and it's almost like all my identities don't fit in. When I get into this topic, it's very emotional.”

During my interview with Yang, they were very emotional on talking about DEI and their experience. Yang felt that the messages being conveyed in the GEP and what their experience was like was a contradiction. There were many layers to Yang's identity that made it difficult for them to feel supported and mentioned how it was also not reflective of what they

experienced in the classroom and on campus. Although Yang was graduating, they expressed how DEI was not how it could be because it was not something that everyone practiced, with the most emphasis on their professors who were and were not supportive.

June another student who had been at the U for some time said also points out that DEI doesn't mean that students will assimilate or get involved and may actually take away from their experience. June said that:

“I think that it could sometimes take away from like students of color, like their experience or the work that they've already done. Or it might seem repetitive to them because maybe they've been doing this for a while. Yeah. So, I think for some people they aren't as like, heavily impacted by those events or that onboarding because, you know, they've done it, they've been there done that. I don't know if it's safe, like, assimilated or maybe they've, like, totally rejected that DEI and kind of keep to their own group, things like that. I don't know what it could be, but I know that a ton of people that never got involved in anything else but are people of color. So, I think that maybe for those people it might complicate that, complicate their journey at the UofM.”

June was another student who was involved with a number of different organizations on campus as well as a student leader. Her experience with other students showed that onboarding RR may have little impact on how students assimilated into college life and may even take away from their experience since some information may seem repetitive, or for white students may not be of interest. During our interview she also expressed that she was mostly self-motivated to seek out resources and organizations to become involved from emails since she forgot a lot of information that was given to her during RR.

From a staff persons perspective Ben highlights deeper issue that are connected to RR, but extend to systemic challenges of the institution. Here Ben said:

“I see that they complicate students of the experiences of students of color probably more than one way, but two ways come to mind. One, again on their preparedness. It's not giving them maybe the full initial foundational tool sets that they, that we want them to have in their tool belt, so that then whatever they continue to do from there, they're building off of again like a stronger foundation. And I if I have tools in my tool belt, but I don't fully know what they are or how to use them on their own or in tandem with each other. That defeats the point of having them in my tool belt in the first place, they're just taking up space. So like that, that's kind of again like that, that continuum of preparedness and reengaging with MLK through other intentional means or again like with the Gopher Equity Project, once you're done or throughout that like we prioritize students going back to those continuation sessions that do exist and folks were going to those like, how do we make that much more of an expected and explicit built-in continuum piece versus, again, things drifting off to be so optional? Like just because something's optional doesn't mean I still can't highlight the intent and impact and purpose that this still needs to be highly valued, just like the initial first thing that got that started. The domino effect to begin with. So that's sort of what leads to the other secondary point you know, and how these collective initiatives complicate and complicate more than support I would say students of color experiences is the complacency within the different levels of the institution that we have these Golden Events, we got the Gopher Equity Project, we got MCAE kickoff boom! We good. We, we can settle again for complacency and not see that again like these are great level.

These are great things, but if I'm to give like a ground or in-depth metaphor, these are maybe touching things on levels like one through three, but there needs to be things on a transformational levels going to those deeper layers of four through six to get at the roots of things that are holding up this institution. Otherwise, again, you are not revitalizing the soil of the land that you are on, like metaphorically, but also like somewhat realistically recognizing too like we're on stolen Dakota and occupied land and there's a whole truth project and a whole ton of explicit demands that the institution is choosing to go around its interest convergence and what's convenient for the institution more than the indigenous folks who have been asking for explicit things, you know, so again, if you're not doing things to go through different layers. You're not going to have that through line of transformation that ethically and morally you, I would argue you should have as well as what students are asking for. Again, it's gonna things aren't going to be revitalized enough to produce the fruit and strength that you want to then better equip and nourish students so they can navigate the different seasons they're going to experience while they're here.”

What Ben addresses in this comment is that although RR are highlighted as DEI, they barely touch the surface of truly creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable space. These RR often are presented at the forefront while concealing deeper systemic issues such as ignoring the demands of the Dakota people and opting for things that better serve the institutions’ financial and political interests.

From the stories we can see a bit clearer on how the ritualization of race becomes problematic when we conceal the deeper systemic issues that go untouched. Many of the

students and staff shared their experiences of systemic inequalities that persist. Race rituals have become standardized norms or as Ahmed (2007) puts it “check box” which turn diversity and equity into things that can be measured or assessed and dismiss the voice and lived experiences of people of color on campus. This is problematic because it takes away from the problems that persist as attention is centered around diversity checklists that can justify and show the institution's racial achievements, “good diversity practices”, or being “good at racial equity” (Ahmed, 2007; Schick, 2011). RR supports and complicate change in many ways as described above, and like many institutions value is placed in assessments and numbers, not that of SOC experiences. Universities want to show that they are doing good work with diversity and as Ahmed (2007) states

The documents become a fetish object, something that ‘has’ value, by being cut off from the process of documentation. In other words, its very existence is taken as evidence that the institutional world documented by the document (racism, inequality, injustice) has been overcome. (p. 597)

As such RR complicates processes of change as higher education institutions become comfortable with “being good at race” via the numbers and assessment results, while institutionalized inequalities remain intact and in practice. We see this from the student stories where they had discussed experiencing racial microaggressions and invalidation at some point in their college experience and this was also echoed by the staff members who also face these challenges on a different level in the organization. This was also reflected in the findings where misrepresentation was an issue that was brought up time in time again. These checklists

reveal what is often in the best interest of the institution while concealing the very reason why these checklists exist in the first place.

Additionally, I bring into view power over the other dynamics reflected in the additional labor of students, staff, and faculty of color, who are often called to represent and tend to issues, events, and concerns revolving around race and diversity. For the GE, it generally takes place on a school night, starting from 5:45pm until 8:00pm; where the “ask” is that students, faculty, and staff of color in addition to their full-time roles, spend the evening in a performance of diversity inclusion. Being a diversity worker within an organization like higher education means to submit to its rules and norms. Other examples are from Mei who intentionally did not volunteer to take on a DEI leadership role because she thought it was important for her white counterparts to take advantage of this as a learning opportunity and to step up in DEI work but did not happen. As Ahmed (2012) puts it “people of color are welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by “being” diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity (p. 43). Here we can see how CRT brings into view the aspects of ritualizing race that are concealed and stymie actual change.

What are some ways we can address them?

RR carries different consequences as a result of performance. Through the interviews we saw that RR functions as a form of support for incoming students by creating a sense of community, providing resources, and verbiage and scenarios to help students be more aware of their own interactions with SOC and each other. On the other end they were also noted to have minimal impact on most students long-term, continue to reinforce and conceal

problematic issues that persist within the organization such as hiring more faculty and staff of color, consistency in DEI initiatives and application. The following quotes are from the students and staff that provide feedback and ways that might help with addressing these issues. I start with Yang who found it hard to find their place on campus and that a lot of the RR were contradicting to what the campus was like.

Here Yang talks about the challenges of RR as needing to have some level of awareness or interest on race and racism and said:

“It would be nice, right? If I was more white, because I feel like unless I feel like what was in the project I feel like it's only, you're only aware of it if you're kind of like, if you're looking for it, right? If, if I wasn't looking for it, then I probably would have not even noticed it. That's the honest truth. So, I feel like it's almost like it's on sort of on the side, unless the teacher brings it up and it's interesting because I think the only teacher I ever brought that up was Latino teachers that I've had but I've never really had any other teachers bring it up. I think that it would be nice if more teachers were aware of that. I'm pretty sure they're aware of it, but they don't really bring it up because it doesn't matter to them and I think it would make a big difference if we did bring it up. If the teachers, instructors, or you know Important people who work with students would bring it up and you know, because the teachers who brought it up, they made me feel more honestly, more comfortable. Being who I am and being more aware that ohh, it feels like a safe, a safe place. Versus a place where they don't bring it up and I'm like, oh, I'm just, I'm just there to study and I'm writing my paper and that's it and it feels like Western versus the teacher who brings it up and they talk about it and they express it in

the class and it's part of our part of the curriculum and it feels more inclusive and I feel like if we have DEI under the U then the instructors themselves should practice it. Making it more inclusive in the classroom. Like even though I was successful myself in the classroom, no matter who the instructor was. That's because I kind of push myself like, OK, I'm just gonna you know, shut those kind of like, shut those dealings and shut those doors. Yeah, so I can get through the class. And yeah, honestly, at the U, my, my best experience was with teachers of color. And I did have like a few teachers that were not, you know, teacher of color, that that was very inclusive, and I think that was very helpful. And they they talk about it, you know, they talk about being inclusive all the time, and there's a difference. It's like there's a difference between the teacher who's white and talks about inclusivity versus the teacher who doesn't. And like it doesn't exist kind of and I feel those environments being different. I always feel like because I, you know because the campus has so many students, I kind of feel like I'm just walking through the campus. To another class and I'm closing my doors unless I know somebody. That's the only time that I ever talk to somebody. But I feel like it's like, I kind of wish there was more group orientated things like that. That comes in classrooms and brings in the inclusivity versus walking through the campus and feeling excluded because they're like, oh, I don't feel like I'm part of the group. I don't feel like I match this group, so I'm just going to go straight to my class. That's how I felt to be honest, yeah.”

During the interview Yang talked in depth about the different interactions they had with their instructors as these were the interactions that most impacted how they felt on campus. Yang also talked about explicitly signing up for classes with faculty of color or whose name

sounded like they may be a person of color because the classes often were more inclusive vs. those they had taken with white faculty. Yang explained that there were several white faculty who intentionally incorporated DEI and made time to talk about inclusivity and diversity which helped them feel more comfortable and seen in those classes. A critical point that is made in this example is that although RR serve to showcase DEI, the need for it to extend beyond these short-lived experiences are needed such as the intentionality of incorporating inclusive pedagogy and practice inside and outside of the classroom.

Another student Tou who had attended as a undergraduate student and is now a graduate student also expressed some areas of DEI that we can start to address and said:

“So like in the Humphrey Graduate School there's a DEI processes as well, and then like or I guess administratively, the way that they frame surveys and take responses is done in a way as to able to collect responses in a fast and quick manner, but it also does tend to really generalize. Situations and challenges quite a bit sometimes, so they're just again to the details sometimes, which is kind of hard for students to articulate if they just ask, like, yeah, on a scale of one to five, like, how would you what, what are your opinions or feelings on this on this one to five scale or give a short sentence? ... I think it's just sad sometimes. I don't feel like, you know, just from my experience, that's how I've been. The one thing I mention, and it's been kind of hard is a lasting unified approach by the university and maybe that's because it's such a big entity that it's kind of hard to do that. The U's like being more open and willing to have those open-ended answers or testimonies from students would be helpful as well because as helpful as it is to have some of these training for all students multicultural and also like students,

there's still a big discrepancy in how they seek to implement diversity equity and what is actually happening not just at the service level, but also like the microaggression levels. That's still quite apparent at times. Yeah.”

In this example Tou talks about some ways that can be problematic in terms of how we collect data through things such as surveys to convey what we are doing with DEI. For example, Tou talks about quick survey questions that are supposed to convey students' experiences with a Likert scale, rather than hearing their stories or experiences. Things like this can come off as surface level DEI that doesn't address deeper systemic issues like racial microaggressions. They also serve what the institution or departments need to show their DEI efforts, but do not lead to any kind of change or movement towards creating spaces that are more diverse, equitable, and inclusive to those students. This opens possibilities for how we can start to be more mindful and intentional about the types of information we gather and for what purpose towards change and DEI they serve when asking students to complete surveys that involve DEI and their experiences.

Another sentiment that was mentioned and echoed throughout the different interviews on creating space, building foundations, and consistency are best conveyed by Ben, a staff member who said:

“Those of us who you know, offices and units who put them on, we're done. Job is done, task is done. That's it. So that's where unfortunately again like these things have impact, but again it ends up just being again like it ends up being the short term. It doesn't foster enough to take and plant roots to then be something to then be something for a deeper continued foundation and support for students if they ever choose to turn

back to it... Very much speaking from my experience as an advisor, it has consistently been of both and of their own continued self-advocacy and agency and being explicitly supported by my mentorship by my colleagues membership as a whole office in a unit. You know, there's a lot of, excuse me, a lot of ways where students know more than they are given credit for, but rarely are they given the space, support, and affirmation to like apply the knowledge that they already have or to work through what they're deepening their their learning on without it being tied to extra expectations and obligations. Whether that again is around coursework or ways of perfectionism, aspects of imposter syndrome, especially again, we're talking about being at a predominantly white institution. You can't be talking about denying on an institutional level that whiteness isn't a thing, and that dynamic isn't here. It's a predominantly white institution. Yet then you're going to go bossing around and tokenizing your students on your ***** account. Things like you wouldn't need, you wouldn't be needing to do that to highlight that as a growth or initiative if it wasn't already existing as a predominantly white institution. So, there's a lot of ways that cognitive dissonance on an institutional level is there, and students, especially students of color have very much in some ways, I'm sure experienced that type of messaging already. But because you're also at a college level where the range of how this shows up as well as the expectations of your societal mobility increasing, it just takes things to a whole deeper level where, again, maybe upon what high school you went to where you're geographically came from, which your familial environment is. There may have been maybe a bit more sheltering, whereas like boom societally, it's like boom college, full throttle again like you are a newer aged adult now and like you're swimming in the deep end with us right

out of the gate. You know that's been the piece where students have found their self-agency out of need of survival and then thankfully if they feel they have the trust and support to do so, will turn to their advisors like myself or others who they know and trust are going to fully show up for them and show up for them in ways that are sometimes going to be behind them. Giving them space and grounding to land sometimes beside them to do the journey along with them, and then sometimes in front of them, giving them the institutional protection and of, you know, not being directly impacted as much. By problematic power dynamics that again, they don't need to be on the front end facing of all the time.”

The examples that Ben gives in his interview touch on many different levels within the institution that can be and need to be brought to light if we genuinely want to address some of these issues.

The main themes that emerged as a result of the interviews were firstly, the misuse or over representation of SOC or POC at RR when in reality the institution is a PWI and many of the issues that SOC experience are ongoing occurrences but are hidden in plain sight due to the highlights of the “Universities commitment” to DEI. Secondly, there is a need to provide consistency in the support, spaces, and programming that we have in the name of DEI. Aside from ephemeral RR, what kinds of foundation are we laying down for the long term? How are they being implemented? And how are we keeping ourselves accountable? Lastly, there is value in educating white people on DEI, but it should not have to come at the cost of SOC and POC’s wellbeing. As mentioned by many of the staff members these RR offered a number of opportunities for white students and staff to engage in diversity, but often do not happen. To

build foundations of support for all students there needs to be on a systemic level commitment and intentional action and if we can all start to think about these questions as DEI work is unfolding on campus perhaps, we can start to address things like checking off the box and move towards actual change.

Conclusion

From the interviews many of the students mentioned about the perception of the University's care towards diversity through RR however there were minor details on what that care entailed. The few that were provided were more closely related to the GEP which provided language for their white peers and the representation of POC at the onboarding events. Other forms of support that students expressed were needed or impacted their experience were the spaces that allowed for them to talk about race, process their experiences, and feel supported by staff members of these spaces such as APARC, MCAE, & MLK. Most of the students in my interviews utilized these spaces which provided them with support and community.

Next, we also see how RR complicates DEI work because there are deeper systemic issues that go unseen in plain sight due to the focus on celebratory events around DEI. As mentioned previously, the perception of care was something that was met with disappointment from many of the students in their later years who felt that the DEI messages were contradicting to their overall experience. Other things that came into view are the misrepresentation of students, faculty, and staff of color in PWI. At RR what is reflected is a large community of color, but once the event is over students may never interact with any of them again. For the centers that run these events as expressed by Ben are that once these

events are over, they're over. There isn't much foundation or follow up in terms of helping students to utilize the tools they may have just received, in addition to having consistency in DEI work that are intentional and allow students to grow, find grounding, and support not just from cultural centers but the greater campus community.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Implications

My interest in this topic came from my own experiences as a student of color navigating predominantly white institutions. As a student I truly believed that I was alone and struggled to assimilate into a culture that didn't seem to make any efforts to include me. Many years later when I was a staff member working specifically in DEI, I would hear similar stories from the students that I worked with. I was not shocked but disappointed and saddened that although there were more DEI initiatives, programming, and staff since I was an undergraduate student, these issues persist. As someone who had been in all the different roles from student to staff, to instructor I was able to see the different sides of DEI work which was also a motivating factor as to why I decided to explore this topic for my dissertation.

As a undergraduate student I don't recall any time where I was asked to participate in large scale DEI initiatives and it wouldn't be until I was in my Ph.D. program that I would serve on a DEI committee to incorporate student voice. As a staff member working in DEI much of the decision making for the initiatives and planning were from the top down or from faculty and staff committees within the organization. Rarely were students included in organization wide DEI initiatives that were not celebratory and their stories and experiences were mostly unheard in these discussions. This is also why I chose CRT as it utilizes knowledge and voice of people of color as critical in understanding racial subordination (Delgado et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). I wanted to do this research to incorporate their stories as they can provide a different perspective on how DEI impact SOC experiences in PWI and can shed light on things that we overlook as a result. Building off literature around ritual and DEI in this chapter, I will highlight the valuable

information that emerged through the stories of students and staff in PWI. In this chapter I will describe 1) the implications of the research findings; 2) the theoretical contributions; 3) the limitations of this study; and 4) how those limitations inform future research on the work we do in diversity equity and inclusion.

Implications of Research

The purpose of this study was to examine DEI onboarding programming or what I call Race Rituals that are often one of the first experiences that welcome and help with student transition into the university. I wanted to examine how these first experiences may help or hinder SOC assimilation into a predominantly white institution and to gain a more wholistic picture of RR and its impact on SOC experiences. With the RR targeting specifically SOC, these events are carefully curated to reflect diversity, community, and much more as they transition from highschooler to college freshmen. To better understand how RR impact SOC experiences I use Critical Race Theory as it utilizes experience from POC as a form of knowledge to how we make understanding of what we are studying such as DEI and RR and autoethnography and counter story telling as methodology help to show how RR impact SOC experiences. The data collection was qualitative in approach where I conducted interviews over zoom with current students and staff at the University of Minnesota to examine the three onboarding RR: The Golden Evenings, MCAE Kick-off, and Gopher Equity Project. All participants had attended or participated in one or more of these events. The questions that guided my study were (1) How is race ritualized in higher education? (2) How does the ritualization of race in higher education support or complicate the efforts around diversity

work? And (3) If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them?

Through data analysis I was able to identify three main themes 1) Racial Identities as symbol, 2) (Mis)Representation, and 3) Navigating Difference & Educating White People. Data analysis showed that RR functioned to reinscribe racial identities while at the same time also serving as symbols in RR that often represent something other than it's literal meaning. Symbols communicate messages of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are spoken, written, and performed and in the case of RR such as GE and MKO, the intentional invitation of staff and students of color display a powerful message for the campus and its dedication to DEI. On the other hand, these specific RR I examined were also noted by the students and staff to have short term impact on SOC experiences, and although as a first experience at the university RR reflect a robust community of POC on campus, once dispersed across PWI also contradicts itself as RR also misrepresent POC on campus. The onboarding events examined in my study are intentional about who are invited to RR and to reflect a specific racial identity for incoming students, however the likelihood of students interacting with the staff present at RR may vary greatly depending on their roles, location, and departments.

On the other hand, RR also support SOC experiences as there is importance and value in having representation on campus and awareness of different resources to support SOC as echoed by many of the students and staff interviewed. Lastly RR can provide tools and support for students short-term on how to navigate PWI, such as language from the GEP, and the different success stories that student leaders share at RR like GE and MKO, but a lot remains on student motivation to seek out long-term support on campus. RR like the GEP

were mentioned by students and staff as mostly helpful for educating white people on how to interact with POC to create a more inclusive campus climate and was also reflected in the data that was collected and presented on the GEP outcomes collected through the university. Of the three RR that I examined, the GEP was the newest RR and was the only one that is a requirement for all incoming students to take with follow up conversations for first year experience courses (Gopher Equity Project, nd.). Although the GEP like the other two RR are received from a mostly positive perspective, aspects of RR need to be further explored such as involvement from those people who are in positions of leadership and power at the University, including faculty and staff members who are not directly involved in DEI programming. Much of the focus is on staff of color, SOC, and students creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus culture but some very important components are not included in this very important conversation which include those who hold positions of power.

Theoretical Contributions

As students of color in a predominantly white institution many of the students' members shared their stories of experiencing racism, racial microaggressions, and feelings of isolation or not fitting in despite having participated in one or more of the three RR that I examined in this study. What I contribute to the field of organizational communication can also be extended to higher education research, and student affairs. In recognizing the different layers of RR within higher education organization, the student and staff counter stories allow us to gain another perspective on how RR can serve to support as it often appears in the forefront yet behind the scenes communication of racialized identities are continually being reinscribed, reinforced, and maintained.

Organizational Communication

This study makes valuable contributions to the field of organizational communication in two ways. The first is expanding how we conceptualize DEI in higher education organizations. Currently much of organizational communication scholarship on diversity equity and inclusion in higher education often focus on inclusion/exclusion, the barriers that occur in organizations like stereotypes, and navigating difference (Buzzanell, 2020; Galliard et al., 2020; Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022; Van Gilder et al., 2024). Few studies examine DEI and student experience within organizations. For example, Alvaraz and Genao-Homes (2023) explore DEI in higher education, but they target faculty stake holders accountable for deep institutional change around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Although their research is important in creating change within an organization, much of the research focuses on faculty and does not include narratives from students or staff about what kinds of change would be most beneficial to SOC.

Secondly, I add to the work on organizational rituals where much of the research have focused on symbolism in organizational behavior (Trice & Beyer; 1993). Other work on organizational rituals is best described by Koschmann & McDonald (2015) who state that:

Research demonstrates that rituals are used to stimulate innovation (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2002), shape identities (Coyne & Mathers, 2011), influence responses to environmental changes (Boyer & Lienard, 2006), convey rationality (Carter & Mueller, 2002), challenge dominant values (Islam, Zyphur, & Boje, 2008), and reduce uncertainty (Knuf, 1993). Furthermore, Smith and Stewart's (2011) review of the

ritual literature also shows that organizational rituals are employed for many more social and individual purpose. (p. 232)

What my research adds to how we understand ritual in organizations is through the incorporation of the lived experiences of SOC and staff of color to RR. My dissertation offers an aspect of ritual that is often left out of understanding DEI work within organizational cultural practices such as onboarding and communicating DEI: the experiences and voices of POC as knowledge that can contribute to how we approach the work we do in organizations around DEI. The counter stories shed light on important aspects of DEI that are often overlooked such as the underlying implications of who benefits from DEI, what the work is or isn't doing, and much more. This dissertation challenges us to reexamine ritualized onboarding practices such as RR, because whether intentional or unintentional, they communicate different meanings, values, and impact for people and organization alike and we must look at all the layers to see what we are simply checking off and what can grow towards systemic change.

Critical Race Theory & Higher Education

CRT research focuses on challenging white dominant narratives while centering race and racism, placing value in experiential knowledge, and emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches, with the intention of social justice (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In my dissertation I touch on each of these aspects as RR draws attention to how we are doing DEI in onboarding practices in higher education. Secondly, race is at the center of my research as it applies to RR and SOC experiences in connection to RR in PWI and challenges how we

approach these rituals in practice, who does it really serve, and how we can move from check box approaches to social justice and action in PWI by holding ourselves accountable and challenging who DEI and RR actually benefit. Through my research I contribute to the current knowledge in two ways. First, I add an additional perspective regarding how we conceptualize race in higher education through RR and secondly, I broaden CRT research by examining RR for SOC that are onboarding processes within higher education.

Current CRT literature in higher education focus on community building or collective efforts in decolonization of structures that continue to center whiteness that maintain systems of oppression, white power, and privilege in institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Deitch et al., 2003; Essed, 1991; Feagin, 2013; Hill, 2009; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014; Dar et al., 2021). Other studies focus on the racialized experiences of students of color (Hubain et al., 2016), protecting whiteness (Bondi, 2012), devaluing knowledge and experiences of POC (Dar et al., 2021), among many others. My study provides to CRT research another perspective on how we conceptualize DEI in higher education through race rituals. As I previously stated, by conceptualizing race as a ritual it challenges us to critically examine how race is performed, maintained, structured, and communicated, as well as how it shows up in our daily lives. Additionally, by conceptualizing race as ritual we can start to identify how race is used to both reveal and conceal larger systemic issues that can stymie progress in organizations. There is a visible and an invisible aspect to RR that impacts all of us. As Chwe (2001) states “Ritual language is often patterned and repetitive. In terms of simply conveying meaning, this can be understood as providing redundancy, making it more likely that a message gets through” (p.4). By including diversity into power symbols such as institutional documentations, mission statements, and marketing materials; colored bodies on campus further reestablish a certain

commitment, meanings, behaviors, and attitudes about what diversity is and how diversity is being done. The repetitive uses of diversity and colored bodies reinforce and maintains current structures, policies, practices, and power; and to accept it as the norm. These subtle exposures of diversity and race rituals have long term implications for those who do not identify as well as to those who do identify with their meanings. Systemically, the term defines identities and makes explicit who are a part of its members and exposes those who are the other.

Secondly, I push CRT to examine specific processes within organizational structures that serve to conceal structures centered around whiteness and maintaining privilege and power in plain sight in higher education; but can be expanded to broader organizations. By examining RR or onboarding practices that are often intended to welcome SOC to campus life we can gain a better understanding of how well-intended practices can be a double-edged sword. On one hand RR appear to support SOC and welcome them into a community of diversity, equity, and inclusion, while on the other hand racial identities are being reinscribed and the discrepancy in diversity work on campus still relies heavily on the labor of faculty and staff of color with minimal expectations from white staff members to participate in things like RR. Additionally, RR serve political implications for the university such as doing diversity well or the university's dedication to DEI which can complicate change in the institution as it can draw attention away from larger systemic issues that are revealed through the stories of the staff and SOC in PWI.

As a person of color who has taken on the role of student, staff, and instructor my position offered me the opportunity to share how RR can both support and complicate DEI efforts for SOC in PWI. I focused on incorporating experiential knowledge through

autoethnography and counter stories as they offer a wealth of knowledge that can be used as tools in how we approach DEI work in organization, pedagogy, and practice. Counter stories reveal aspects of RR that are often overlooked since they are often considered as positive investment of the university's dedication to DEI while concealing who really benefits from RR, who is and is not involved in systemic change, and the actual impact that RR may have on SOC experiences.

Limitations

There are several limitations to my dissertation as I have only begun to scratch the surface on race rituals in higher educational institutions. The limitations of my research are as follows. Firstly, I limited my participants to "current" students and staff which provided me with limited information on RR; given that many were part of the cohort when COVID 19 happened and that shifted the dynamic on how RR took place. For example, the GE were cancelled and the MKO was switched to online and that in itself shifted and changed the kinds of messages, interactions, and meanings from students who were able to attend in person. Additionally, there were many alumni and past employees who were highly involved in these events when they were held in-person who showed interest but were unable to participate since they had already left the institution. The GE have restarted in person since last year along with MKO but I was not able to participate or interview many students who were a part of the new cohort.

The second limitation is that I only focused on onboarding RR at one PWI institution. I think this research could be expanded to include other PWI or BIPOC serving institutions and the impact that may have on SOC experiences. This is especially important since not all PWI

have specific onboarding programming for SOC and each RR is different from one to the next. Accessibility to diverse student populations should also be factored in. For example, the UofM is located in the heart of Minneapolis and St. Paul where the surrounding community is highly diverse, making it more accessible and likely that students from those communities would attend. The UofM also hosts many DEI events for students and faculty and staff that may not be as common at other PWI's that may be in more rural settings. This can change as well depending on whether it is a private or public college, a four year vs. two-year college, and so on.

Lastly, in this study I only focused on onboarding RR in higher education which is a very small piece within organizations and DEI. I think that other RR in higher education should be examined in addition to RR in other types of organization to gain a better understanding of RR and their impact on POC, policy, practice, maintenance, and change. Higher education organizations may differ in attention to RR since they serve students vs. organizations that are commercial and serve a broader audience. How do those RR impact their employees? And what kinds of messages and meanings are created and generated from performer to participant? My dissertation is only the beginning and although it examines the early stages of entering an organization, we can learn a wealth of information from the stories of students and staff who have participated in RR.

Future Research

My dissertation only touches on a small aspect of RR and can be expanded to other areas such as the processes of “diversity” and ritualizing race in higher education, or perhaps including more universities who do and do not have race specific onboarding rituals for

incoming students. Other themes that emerged from my study that I was not able to address are exploring SOC who attend predominantly white high schools/SOC who are from predominantly diverse areas or student from Black serving institutions. What are the differences if any? How are they approaching RR? These are areas that can contribute to how RR shapes, complicates, and add to their experiences in a predominantly white institution? These are all areas that can be further examined to help gain a better perspective on race rituals in higher educational institutions that I did not have enough time to explore.

Other areas that can help to shine a light on RR are to examine them outside of higher education. RR are a systemic issue that work to both support and conceal deeper issues that remain unphased due to the distraction that RR sometimes provide. Higher education also has these systems in place, but have some form of commitment to its students so how RR communicate, and unfold may vary greatly from one organization to the next. The counter stories from employees, students, and other marginalized members can provide important information that we need to move towards challenging and creating systemic change.

Conclusion

CRT works towards eliminating racial oppression with a broader goal of ending all forms of oppression by challenging these types of surface level approaches. Too often are conversations on race viewed as complaints. As Ahmed (2022) puts it

A complaint can be how we learn how the house is built. Complaint as diversity work: the work we have to do because we are not accommodated; the work we have to do in order to be accommodated. It might seem that the work of dismantling described by

Lorde and the work of accommodation are quite different kinds of political and institutional work: if the former is about bringing the house down, the latter seems to be about enabling more people to enter the house. Things are not always as they seem. Complaint teaches us that for some to be accommodated requires dismantling an existing structure or modifying an existing set of arrangements. (pp. 139-140)

By writing this dissertation I wanted to present the good work around DEI and draw attention to the concealed aspects of RR that continue to support current structures that keep these very issues alive and well. As CRT centers on race as endemic, we need to acknowledge and undo some things to end systemic racism. By repeating these rituals, we conceal an important conversation; one that is rooted in coloniality and systems of oppression. So, I end with my third question: If there are complications that do emerge from this process, what are some ways that we can address them? How do we move beyond conversations and performance to actual action towards social justice and inclusion? As someone who was in a role of complicity, I understand the double bind that well-intended individuals may experience when doing diversity work. But are these good intentions enough or do they continue to do a disfavor as roadblocks towards change, social justice, and equity?

Rituals are dynamic and fluid and, as Kertzer (1988) states “is the fact that power must be expressed through symbolic guises. Symbolism is necessary to prop up the governing political order, but also essential in overthrowing it and replacing it with a different political system” (p. 174). Perhaps the answers lie within rituals of race, where we can take the already normed and powerful symbols that include diversity and use it for change. Unrooting inequitable and racist policy and practice start with undoing foundations of power and

maintenance. Although I do not have a definite answer, what I know is that we can only truly celebrate diversity when our higher educational institutions are equitable for all its students.

There are also questions that we need to continually ask. Although there are a number of different DEI efforts designed to help students help students, what about faculty and staff? How do we get faculty and staff to buy in on things like the Gopher equity project or participate in diversity work outside of faculty, staff, and students of color? How can we get those in power to legitimize these issues that persist? A large issue with DEI that needs to be addressed is as mentioned before that this area of work is often POC's and white women's work. Without white males legitimizing these discrepancies much of this work will remain the same or slow to progress. As Bell (190) put it

White people will seek racial justice only to the extent that there is something in it for them. In other words, interest convergence is about alignment, not altruism. We cannot expect those who control the society to make altruistic or benevolent moves toward racial justice. Instead, civil rights activists must look for ways to align the interests of the dominant group with those of racially oppressed and marginalized groups (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

When we take part in RR what role are we taking and are we questioning who really benefits from them? Other things that we do need to consider are as Bell states how can we align the interest of the dominant group to the racially oppressed, and are RR a way to achieve that?

There are many strides that have been made in terms of creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces such as higher education, yet many continue to conceal deeper systemic issues that are rooted in racism or to keep processes in place that oppress marginalized others. RR are one of the many ways in which serve to support and conceal, and the challenge

is how can we start to peel away the layers so that change can start to happen. How can we get those in power to legitimize the need for change and be a part of the movement in breaking down these deeply rooted systems of oppression? RR offers opportunities for seeds of change to be planted, through each individual that participates in them, but more importantly we also need our white counterparts to participate in RR in unity to solidify the efforts.

CRT offered me an opportunity to include the valuable information from the stories that all of the students and staff shared with me. Through the counter stories many known but unspoken themes emerged and are now in the open. Figuring out how to apply what we know, how to continue this conversation, and transitioning conversation into action is the next step. My dissertation is only the beginning, and much work still needs to be done. In higher education research on SOC is still being produced from a deficit perspective and white students as the norm, faculty and staff of color on college campuses need to improve, and most importantly DEI is work that we all need to take part in for change to happen. Attending a DEI workshop or performing RR and checking off a box is not enough. As educators we need to hold ourselves accountable and utilize the privilege that we have to be intentional about the change we want to see. It is through our interaction, pedagogy, and action with our students in these organizations that we can plant seeds of change for future generations.

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Appendix

Forms, Protocols, Interview Questions

Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer



RACE RITUALS

In Higher Education

What?

You are invited to be in a research study of Race Rituals in Higher Education. The purpose of this study is to examine race rituals in higher education, looking specifically at Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) onboarding events such as the Gopher equity project which was required for all freshmen to take when entering the UofM starting from 2019, MCAE Kick-off, Golden Evenings/Gatherings at the University of Minnesota and its impact on students of colors experience.

Volunteers Needed

- Do you currently attend or work at the University of Minnesota as a student, faculty, or staff of color?
- Have you participated in the Gopher Equity Project training or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff),

If you answered yes to both questions, then I invite you to take part in this research on race rituals in Higher education! All participants will be asked to participate in a 45-90 minute zoom interview.

You are Eligible if:

- Identify as Asian, Black, Indigenous, LatinX, or Person of color
- Are 18 years of age or older
- Are currently a student, staff, or faculty
- Participated in Gopher Equity Project training or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff),
- Read and speak English

Contact Info

If you are interested:

E-mail:

Call:

Text: "Race Rituals" to

Appendix B Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

Race Rituals in Higher Education

You are invited to be in a research study of Race Rituals in Higher Education. The purpose of this study is to examine onboarding race rituals in higher education, looking specifically at the "Gopher Equity Project" race ritual at the University of Minnesota and its impact on students of color's experience. This study can be used to improve diversity efforts during the onboarding process for students of color in predominantly white institutions. You were selected as a possible participant because you identified as a student of color, staff, or faculty member who has taken part or participated in taking the Gopher Equity Project training. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kate Lockwood Harris, Department of Communication Studies

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Email or text Sylvia Vue that you are interested/agree to be a part of this study.
2. You can expect to receive an email or call to set up a date for the 45-90 minute zoom interview and go over any additional questions you may have about participating in this study.
3. During the zoom interview we will start by going over the consent form.
4. Afterwards, we will continue with the zoom interview which will last about 45-90 minutes, depending on availability.
 - a. If you agree to a follow-up interview, you can expect it to be about 45 minutes.
5. Interviews will be recorded and properly disposed of after research is complete. You can say no to being recorded; in which case the researcher will document the interview in writing.
6. There will be no in person contact and all interaction with the researcher will be over zoom during the time and date that is agreed upon by you.

Confidentiality:

During the project, information from this study will be kept private and will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access to information that identifies you. Your identifying information will not be shared with others outside of this research study. However, organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance (such as the Quality Assurance Program of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)).

Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before we publish any report or share the results or data from this study. Since these interviews will be recorded, the only people who will have access to them will be myself and the PI Kate Lockwood Harris. All recordings will be erased after research is complete.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Kate Lockwood Harris and Sylvia Vue. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix C Correspondence

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

*Human Research Protection Program
Office of the Vice President for Research*

*Room 350-2
McNamara Alumni Center
200 Oak Street S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-626-5654
irb@umn.edu
<https://research.umn.edu/units/irb>*

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

January 30, 2023

Kate Lockwood Harris

Dear Kate Lockwood Harris:

On 1/30/2023, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Race Rituals in Higher Education
Investigator:	Kate Lockwood Harris
IRB ID:	STUDY00017722
Sponsored Funding:	None
Grant ID/Con Number:	None
Internal UMN Funding:	None
Fund Management Outside University:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race Rituals Interview Questions, Category: Other; • hrp-587_-Race Rituals Consent Form.docx, Category: Consent Form; • Race Rituals Volunteer Flyer, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Race Rituals In higher education protocol_Vuev4.docx, Category: IRB Protocol

The IRB determined that this study meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To arrive at this determination, the IRB used “WORKSHEET: Exemption (HRP-312).” If you have any

questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed.

This study met the following category(ies) for exemption:

- (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this study is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination. In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) on the IRB website.

For grant certification purposes, you will need these dates and the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003).

Sincerely,

Clinton Dietrich, MA, CIP Senior IRB
Analyst

We strive to provide clear, consistent, and timely service to maintain a culture of respect, beneficence, and justice in research. [Complete a brief survey](#) about your experience.

Appendix D

Protocol

ANCILLARY REVIEWS

DO NOT DELETE. Submit the completed checklist below with your protocol.

Which ancillary reviews do I need and when do I need them? <i>Refer to HRP-309 for more information about these ancillary reviews.</i>			
Select yes or no	Does your study...	If yes...	Impact on IRB Review
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include Gillette resources, staff or locations	<i>Gillette Scientific review and Gillette Research Administration approval is required. Contact:</i> research@gillettechildrens.com	Required prior to IRB submission Approval must be received prior to IRB committee/ designated review. Consider seeking approval prior to IRB submission.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Involve Epic, or Fairview patients, staff, locations, or resources?	<i>The Fairview ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact:</i> ancillaryreview@Fairview.org	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include evaluation of drugs, devices, biologics, tobacco, or dietary supplements or data subject to FDA inspection?	<i>STOP – Complete the Medical Template Protocol (HRP-590)</i> <i>The regulatory ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact: medreg@umn.edu</i> <i>See https://policy.umn.edu/research/indide</i>	
	Require Scientific Review? Not sure? See guidance in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).	ONLY REQUIRED BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH REVIEWED BY FULL COMMITTEE	

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Relate to cancer patients, cancer treatments, cancer screening/prevention, or tobacco?	Complete the CPRC application process . Contact: ccprc@umn.edu	<div style="background-color: red; color: black; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Approval from these committees must be received prior to IRB approval;</div> <div style="background-color: yellow; color: black; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">These groups each have their own application process.</div>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include the use of radiation? (x-ray imaging, radiopharmaceuticals, external beam or brachytherapy)	Complete the AURPC Human Use Application and follow instructions on the form for submission to the AURPC committee. Contact: barmstro@umn.edu	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Use the Center for Magnetic Resonance Research (CMRR) or MR at Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain (MIDB) as a study location?	Complete the CMRR pre-IRB ancillary review Contact: ande2445@umn.edu	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include the use of recombinant or synthetic nucleic acids, toxins, or infectious agents?	STOP – Complete the Medical Template Protocol (HRP-590)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include the use of human fetal tissue, human embryos, or embryonic stem cells?	STOP – Complete the Medical Template Protocol (HRP-590)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Include PHI or are you requesting a HIPAA waiver?	If yes, HIPCO will conduct a review of this protocol. Contact: privacy@umn.edu	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Plan to use CTSI Monitoring services, and/or have an IND, IDE, or designated NSR-IDE by the UMN IRB?	The CTSI monitoring ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff. Please note eligibility criteria here . Contact: fenc1003@umn.edu	

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Use data from CTSI Best Practices Integrated Informatics Core (BPIC) Formerly the AHC Information Exchange (AHC-IE)?	<i>The Information Exchange ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact: bpic@umn.edu</i>	These groups do not have a separate application process but additional information from the study team may be required.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Use the Biorepository and Laboratory Services to collect tissue for research?	<i>STOP – Complete the Medical Template Protocol (HRP-590)</i> <i>The BLS ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff.</i> <i>Contact: Jenny Pham</i> <i>Pham0435@umn.edu</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Have a PI or study team member with a conflict of interest?	<i>The CoI ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact: becca002@umn.edu</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Need to be registered on clinicaltrials.gov?	<i>If you select “No” in ETHOS, the clinicaltrials.gov ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact: fenc1003@umn.edu</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Require registration in OnCore?	<i>If you select “No” or “I Don’t Know” in ETHOS, the OnCore ancillary review will be assigned to your study by IRB staff</i> <i>Contact: oncore@umn.edu</i>	Does not affect IRB approval.

PROTOCOL COVER PAGE

Protocol Title	Race Rituals in Higher Education

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor	Name: Kate Lockwood Harris
	Affiliation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UMN <input type="checkbox"/> Fairview <input type="checkbox"/> Gillette
	UMN Home Department: Communication Studies
	UMN Home Dept ID: 10958
	Note: New IRB applications from the Medical School must include documentation of resource review and approval. Upload approval documentation in ETHOS. Applications from the Medical school lacking this approval will be withdrawn by the IRB.
	Telephone Number:
	Email Address:
Student Investigator	Name: Sylvia Vue
	Current Academic Status (Student, Fellow, Resident): Graduate Student
	Department: Communication Studies
	Telephone Number:
	Institutional Email Address:
Scientific Assessment	I believe Scientific Assessment is not required.
Version Number/Date:	Version 2 12/8/2022

REVISION HISTORY

Revision #	Version Date	Summary of Changes	Consent Change?
1	12/8/2022		
2	1/3/2023	Deleted instructions in red, updated event, Updated section 22.1, updated section 22.2, updated section 19	
3	1/26/2023	Revised protocol with track changes as per request, revised section 3.2 and made clear that I am not observing any participants to meet the modification request, revised section 5.2 I clarify in this section I will have access to public data to meet the revision request.	

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1.0 Objectives

1.1 Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine onboarding events or what I refer to as race rituals in higher education, looking specifically at the "Gopher Equity Project" at the University of Minnesota and its impact on students of colors experience. Although many universities have their own unique approaches and programming for students of color during the onboarding process there remains limited research on the impact orientation and first contact programs have on students in addition to the lack of in-depth research on effectiveness and outcomes of diversity initiatives. Additionally, most research on first year experience do not include people of color and students of color stories and experiences as knowledge in shaping or reshaping diversity initiatives and programming. What this research aims to do is collect and share the stories and experiences of students, faculty, and staff who have taken part in the Gopher Equity Project as knowledge that can contribute to better understanding first year experience programs such as the Gopher Equity Project in predominantly white institutions. Through these stories we can gain a better understanding of the types of impact or non-impact that events like these have for students' short term, intermediate, and long term in assimilating into college. The benefit of incorporating experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color in this process will help organizations to gain a better idea of its overall impact, value, and effectiveness for the students these programs are intended to serve

2.0 Background

1. Significance of Research Question/Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine onboarding events or what I refer to as race rituals in higher education, looking specifically at the "Gopher Equity Project" at the University of Minnesota and its impact on students of colors experience. Although many universities have their own unique approaches and programming for students of color during the onboarding process, there remains limited research on the impact orientation and first contact programs have on students in addition to the lack of in-depth research on effectiveness and outcomes of diversity initiatives. The benefit of incorporating experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color in this process will help organizations to gain a better idea of its overall impact, value, and effectiveness for the students these programs are intended to serve. My research questions to explore this gap is 1) How is race ritualized into higher education onboarding and assimilation processes? 2)How does the ritualization of race in higher education support or complicate students of color's experiences during onboarding processes? 3)What are the short term and long-term impact of these race rituals in the assimilation process for students of color?

2.1 Preliminary Data: There is no preliminary data

2.2 Existing Literature: Current Critical Race Theory literature in higher education encompass history, access, curriculum, and policies (Patton, 2016), diversity initiatives and discourses in higher education (Iverson, 2007), policy discourse (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006), diversity and race neutrality in admission processes (Morfin et al., 2005), literature that recognizes and challenges racism in the academy (Hughes & Giles, 2010), and intersectionality and achievement gaps

(Lopez et al. 2016). However, there remains limited CRT research on the onboarding processes such as orientation, welcome week, and the Gopher Equity Project. So, although there is some diversity specific programming during onboarding rituals, little is known about its overall impact, and may even function to further exclude students of color from being full participants and members of the campus community.

3.0 Study Endpoints/Events/Outcomes

3.1 Primary Endpoint/Event/Outcome: I will be conducting interviews with current students, faculty, and staff who have attended, participated, or coordinated the Gopher Equity Project training or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff), at the University of Minnesota.

3.2 Secondary Endpoint(s)/Event(s)/Outcome(s): There will be no observation. This is and online training and simply the subject of my research.

4.0 Study Intervention(s)/Interaction(s)

4.1 Description: Since the Gopher Equity Project is an online module, I will only interact with participants online over zoom for the interviews.

5.0 Procedures Involved

5.1 Study Design: My method for data collection and analysis will be qualitative in approach with purposeful sampling. Counter storytelling will shape my data collection process in three ways, 1.) the population that I want to interview and observe will be students, faculty, and staff of color who have taken part in the Gopher Equity Project, 2.) The questions will be focused on their experiences and knowledge on the impact/outcome of attending the GEP, and 3.) Their stories and narratives will be directly told in my dissertation to provide context, meaning making, and as knowledge of this race ritual.

5.2 Study Procedures: I will have current data that the GEP committee have collected since starting this project that has been made public and accessible on the Gopher Equity Project website <https://gopherequityproject.umn.edu/about>. I will have no direct contact with participants, all interactions will be over zoom.

5.3 For the interview they will all be over zoom and, on a date, and time that is most convenient for the participant. All interviews will be recorded, and participant will be aware of this prior to interview. The participant can choose to not have session recorded, in this case researcher will take notes. All data will be collected and stored on an encrypted drive.

5.4 Follow-Up: There will be no follow-up for this research

5.5 Individually Identifiable Health Information: N/A

6.0 Storing Data for Future Use N/A

7.0 Sharing of Results with Participants

7.1 The results will be shared with participants and others through the research upon completion.

8.0 Study Duration

8.1 Describe:

- The anticipated duration for participant participation is one interview for 45-90 minutes.
- The duration anticipated to enroll all study participants is 2-3 months.
- The duration anticipated to complete all study procedures and data analysis is 6 months to one year.

9.0 Study Population

9.1 Inclusion Criteria: Participants of this study will be students of color, faculty, and staff at the University of Minnesota who have attended, participated, or organized the Gopher Equity Project training or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff).

9.2 Exclusion Criteria: All individuals who have not attended, participated, or organized the Gopher Equity Project training or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff), will be excluded from this study sample.

9.3 Screening: An advertisement for participation will go on campus such as through the multicultural center for academic excellence, cultural centers, Asian Pacific American Resource Center, multiple students of color student groups on campus, and through various academic departments specifying that this study is seeking students, faculty, and staff that have attended, participated, or organized the Gopher Equity Project or related DEI onboarding events (e.g., Golden Evenings, MCAE Kickoff).

10.0 Vulnerable Populations N/A

10.1 Vulnerable Populations:

Population / Group	Identify whether any of the following populations will be primary focus of the research (targeted), included but not the focus of the research or excluded from participation in the study.
Children	Excluded

Pregnant women/fetuses/neonates	included but not the focus
Prisoners	Excluded
Adults lacking capacity to consent and/or adults with diminished capacity to consent, including, but not limited to, those with acute medical conditions, psychiatric disorders, neurologic disorders, developmental disorders, and behavioral disorders	Excluded
Non-English speakers	Excluded
Those unable to read (illiterate)	Excluded
Employees of the researcher	Excluded
Students of the researcher	Excluded
Undervalued or disenfranchised social group	Excluded
Active members of the military (service members), DoD personnel (including civilian employees)	included but not the focus
Individual or group that is approached for participation in research during a stressful situation such as emergency room setting, childbirth (labor), etc.	Excluded
Individual or group that is disadvantaged in the distribution of social goods and services such as income, housing, or healthcare.	included but not the focus

Individual or group with a serious health condition for which there are no satisfactory standard treatments.	Excluded
Individual or group with a fear of negative consequences for not participating in the research (e.g. institutionalization, deportation, disclosure of stigmatizing behavior).	included but not the focus
Any other circumstance/dynamic that could increase vulnerability to coercion or exploitation that might influence consent to research or decision to continue in research.	Excluded

10.2 Additional Safeguards: N/A

10.3 If research includes potential for direct benefit to participant, provide rationale for any exclusions indicated in the table above:

N/A

11.0 Number of Participants

11.1 Number of Participants to be Consented: The number of participants I plan to enroll are 15-25 from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

12.0 Recruitment Methods

12.1 Recruitment Process: Upon approval of IRB to start my study, I will disseminate recruitment advertisement through email and snowball sampling. Recruitment advertisement will be sent to campus partners such as academic departments, student organizations, multicultural center for academic excellence, cultural centers, and Asian Pacific American Resource Center.

12.2 Source of Participants: The source of potential participants will be the University of Minnesota academic departments, student organizations, multicultural center for academic excellence, cultural centers, Asian Pacific American Resource Center, and snowball sampling.

12.3 Identification of Potential Participants: The advertisement that will be sent out to recruit will have a check list to help identify potential participants. The participants will self-identify in response to the emails that will be sent out to the listed sources above. Potential participants will identify as ages 18 or older, identify as Asian,

Black, Indigenous, Latin X, or a person of color, will have participated in taking the Gopher Equity Project module at the University of Minnesota, is a current student, faculty, or staff. The researcher will make initial contact with potential participants. This study will not include any private or protected records.

12.4 Recruitment Materials: Email flyer will be used to recruit participants.

12.5 Payment: N/A

13.0 Withdrawal of Participants

13.1 Withdrawal Circumstances: Participants will be withdrawn from the research without consent if they have not participated, attended, or organized the Gopher Equity Project event.

13.2 Withdrawal Procedures: If there is no data collected from the interview it would be a full withdraw.

13.3 Termination Procedures: Upon withdrawing from research participants will be asked if we can use data that has been collected, if there has been a prior interview.

14.0 Risks to Participants

14.1 Foreseeable Risks: People can experience a number of emotions and reactions when talking about race and students sense of belonging or impacts that race has in students experiences in predominantly white institutions. Before starting the interview, the researcher will ask you what you would like to do if you become uncomfortable during this process. Additionally, participant may chose to not answer or end the interview at any time.

14.2 Reproduction Risks: N/A

14.3 Risks to Others: N/A

15.0 Incomplete Disclosure or Deception

15.1 Incomplete Disclosure or Deception: N/A

16.0 Potential Benefits to Participants

16.1 Potential Benefits: I cannot promise any benefits to participants from taking part in this research. However, by participating in this study participant stories and experiences will help to build knowledge around the types of impact or non-impact that diversity programming has for students of colors. This can also help to improve how predominantly white institutions do programming to better support students of color.

16.2 Statistical Considerations: N/A

16.3 Data Analysis Plan: All data will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for patterns or common themes. There will be no statistical procedures.

16.4 Power Analysis: N/A

16.5 Statistical Analysis: N/A

16.6 Data Integrity: Since the method is counter story telling the data used will be direct quotes of specific examples or stories that participants give. All interviews will be transcribed and analyzed for common themes.

17.0 Health Information and Privacy Compliance

17.1 Select which of the following is applicable to your research:

- My research does not require access to individual health information and therefore assert HIPAA does not apply. If this option is selected, please skip to Section 19.
- I am requesting that all research participants sign a HIPCO approved HIPAA Disclosure Authorization to participate in the research (either the standalone form or the combined consent and HIPAA Authorization).
- I am requesting the IRB to approve a Waiver or an alteration of research participant authorization to participate in the research.

Appropriate Use for Research:

- An external IRB (e.g. Advarra) is reviewing and we are requesting use of the authorization language embedded in the template consent form in lieu of the U of M stand-alone HIPAA Authorization. Note: External IRB must be serving as the privacy board for this option.
- 17.2 Identify the source of Private Health Information you will be using for your research (Check all that apply) N/A
- I will use the Informatics Consulting Services (ICS) available through CTSI (also referred to as the University's Information Exchange (IE) or data shelter) to pull records for me
 - I will collect information directly from research participants.
 - I will use University services to access and retrieve records from the Bone Marrow Transplant (BMPT) database, also known as the HSCT (Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant) database.
 - I will pull records directly from EPIC.
 - I will retrieve record directly from axiUm / MiPACS
 - I will receive data from the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services
 - I will receive a limited data set from another institution

Other. Describe:

17.3 Explain how you will ensure that only records of patients who have agreed to have their information used for research will be reviewed. N/A

17.4 Approximate number of records required for review: N/A

17.5 Please describe how you will communicate with research participants during the course of this research. Check all applicable boxes

N/A

This research involves record review only. There will be no communication with research participants.

Communication with research participants will take place in the course of treatment, through MyChart, or other similar forms of communication used with patients receiving treatment.

Communication with research participants will take place outside of treatment settings. If this box is selected, please describe the type of communication and how it will be received by participants.

17.6 Access to participants

N/A

17.7 Location(s) of storage, sharing and analysis of research data, including any links to research data (check all that apply).

In the data shelter of the [Information Exchange \(IE\)](#)

Store Analyze Share

In the Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT) database, also known as the HSCT (Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant) Database

Store Analyze Share

In REDCap (recap.ahc.umn.edu)

Store Analyze Share

In Qualtrics (qualtrics.umn.edu)

Store Analyze Share

In OnCore (oncore.umn.edu)

Store Analyze Share

In the University's Box Secure Storage (box.umn.edu)

Store Analyze Share

In an AHC-IS supported server. Provide folder path, location of server and IT Support Contact:

Store Analyze Share

In an AHC-IS supported desktop or laptop.

Provide UMN device numbers of all devices:

Store Analyze Share

Other.

Indicate if data will be collected, downloaded, accessed, shared or stored using a server, desktop, laptop, external drive or mobile device (including a tablet computer such as an iPad or a smart form (iPhone or Android devices) that you have not already identified in the preceding questions

I will use a server not previously listed to collect/download research data

I will use a desktop or laptop not previously listed

I will use an external hard drive or USB drive (“flash” or “thumb” drives) not previously listed

I will use a mobile device such as an tablet or smartphone not previously listed

17.8 Consultants. Vendors. Third Parties. N/A

17.9 Sharing of Data with Research Team Members.

I will share through box.umn.edu, the only members who will have access are myself and PI.

17.10 Storage of Documents: box.umn.edu

17.11 Disposal of Documents: Documents will be disposed of 3 months after research is complete. Since it is stored on box.umn.edu I will use the box features to make sure that all data is disposed of through the Box features.

18.0 Confidentiality

18.1 Data Security: All data will be stored on box.umn.edu which is a safe and encrypted site. All consent forms and videos will be stored on box.umn.edu.

18.2 Data Sharing: N/A

19.0 Provisions to Monitor the Data to Ensure the Safety of Participants

This is a minimal-risk research and will have oversight by the myself and my faculty advisor.

19.1 Data Integrity Monitoring. My advisor and I will monitor all data.

19.2 Data Safety Monitoring. This is a minimal-risk research so my advisor and I will oversee all data safety.

20.0 Compensation for Research-Related Injury : N/A

20.1 Compensation for Research-Related Injury:

20.2 Contract Language:

21.0 Consent Process

21.1 Consent Process (when consent will be obtained):

- All participants will be emailed a copy of the consent to go over before initial meeting. The consent process will take place via zoom and participants will say yes or no to their willingness to participate in the research.

21.2 Waiver or Alteration of Consent Process (when consent will not be obtained, required information will not be disclosed, or the research involves deception

- I would like to request a waiver of consent since I will not have any interaction with the participants in person.

21.3 Waiver of Written/Signed Documentation of Consent (when written/signed consent will not be obtained): I would like to request for a waiver of consent since I will ask participants to respond yes or no to an electronic consent form that indicate their consent to participate.

21.4 Non-English Speaking Participants: N/A

21.5 Participants Who Are Not Yet Adults (infants, children, teenagers under 18 years of age): N/A

21.6 Cognitively Impaired Adults, or adults with fluctuating or diminished capacity to consent: N/A

21.7 Adults Unable to Consent: N/A

- Permission:
- Assent:

22.0 Setting

22.1 Research Sites: The site for interviews will be online over zoom.

22.2 International Research: N/A

22.3 Community Based Participatory Research: N/A

23.0 Multi-Site Research

N/A

24.0 Coordinating Center Research N/A

24.1 Role:

24.2 Responsibilities:

24.3 Oversight:

24.4 Collection and Management of Data:

25.0 Resources Available

25.1 Resources Available: This study will be conducted by a graduate student. Faculty advisor will serve to guide student throughout the data collection and research process. The data collection process will take about 3 months to complete and six months to one year to complete the research. Since interviews will be conducted via zoom there will not be a specified location or facility for use.

26.0 References

27.0 References

28.0

29.0 Bauer, T.N. (2010), "Onboarding new employees: maximizing success", The SHRM Foundation's Effective Practice Guideline Series, Alexandria, VA.

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32.0 Graybill, J., Taesil Hudson Carpenter, M., Offord, J., Piorun, M., & Shaffer, G. (2013). Employee onboarding: Identification of best practices in ACRL libraries. *Library Management*, 34(3), 200-218.

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- 35.0 Iverson, S. (2007). Camouflaging Power and Privilege: A Critical Race Analysis of University Diversity Policies. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43(5), 586-611.*
- 36.0 Jackson, A., Colson-Fearon, B., & Versey, H. (2022). Managing Intersectional Invisibility and Hypervisibility during the Transition to College Among First-Generation Women of Color. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 36168432211060.*
- 37.0 Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11(1), 7-24.*
- 38.0 Larmar, S., & Ingamells, A. (2010). Enhancing the first-year university experience: Linking university orientation and engagement strategies to student connectivity and capability. *Research in Comparative and International Education, 5(2), 210-223.*
- 39.0 Mayhew, M., Vanderlinden, K., & Kim, E. (2010). A Multi-Level Assessment of the Impact of Orientation Programs on Student Learning. *Research in Higher Education, 51(4), 320-345.*
- 40.0 Mercer-Mapstone, L., Islam, M., & Reid, T. (2021). Are we just engaging 'the usual suspects'? Challenges in and practical strategies for supporting equity and diversity in student-staff partnership initiatives. *Teaching in Higher Education, 26(2), 227-245.*
- 41.0 Patton, L. (2016). Disrupting Postsecondary Prose. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.), 51(3), 315-342.*

- 42.0 Patton, L., Sánchez, B., Mac, J., & Stewart, D. (2019). An inconvenient truth about “progress”: An analysis of the promises and perils of research on campus diversity initiatives. *Review of Higher Education, 42*(5), 173-198.
- 43.0 Ramos, T. (2013). Critical race ethnography of higher education: Racial risk and counter-storytelling. *Learning and Teaching, 6*(3), 64-78.
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APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

My interview questions were slightly different for students and staff since RR onboarding are often intended for students, whereas staff are often on the planning, coordination, and/or performance end. The interview questions for faculty and staff are as follows:

1. Tell me what you know about Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event?
2. In what ways have you been involved with the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event?
3. Based on your observations, what are some of the DEI issues or challenges that you have observed on this campus that would support the need of the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding events?
4. Based on your observations, what are some of the DEI issues and or challenges that you think the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event is or have addressed?
5. In what ways did the Gopher equity project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event have in providing students with the support and tools to navigate a predominantly white institution, if at all?
6. In what ways do you see the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event support or complicate students of color's experiences?

7. In what ways do you think that the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event impact students of color short term, intermediate, and long term on campus?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event that you would like me to know?

Next, I provide the interview questions for students. They are different from the questions asked of faculty and staff because I was curious about the impact of RR on SOC experiences short term, intermediate, and long term. The questions for students are as follows:

1. What was your experience like taking the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event?
2. What is it like being a person of color in a predominantly white institution (PWI)?
3. Do you think that Gopher Equity Project are needed, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event? Why or why not?
4. Based on your observations, what are some of the DEI issues and or challenges that you think the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event is or have addressed?
5. Did the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event provide you with support and tools for navigating a PWI? If so, what support or tools did it offer you?

6. In what ways do you see the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event support or complicate students of color's experiences?

7. How did the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event impact you the week after taking it? How did GEP impact your experiences as a student in your second year? How does GEP impact your experiences as a student now?"

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the Gopher Equity Project, Golden Evenings/gatherings, MCAE Kickoff or DEI onboarding event that you would like me to know?

Appendix F

List of Definitions

Definitions

Race Rituals: race performances that are both intentional and unintentional behavior/s that are complex, fluid, repetitive and can be symbolic in both the meaning making process and in mediating human behavior, and most often connected to systems of power (Couldry, 2013; Kertzer, 1988; Manning, 2000; Marvin & Ingle, 1999,).

Rites of Passage: rites of passage enable one person to move from one position to another and evoke transformation in ceremonies/rituals (Van Gennep).

Organizational assimilation: refers to the transformation of one's acceptance or membership into an organization. Assimilation is successful when the new employee or students have learned to socially adjust and adopt the organizational norms, values, and expectations and have adjusted their identity to fit in with the culture (Gist-Mackey et. al, 2018; Meiners, 2019, Myers & Oetzel, 2003)

Onboarding: Onboarding serves to produce, reproduce, maintain, and reinforce norms and values of an organization and provide its participants with a transition from an outsider to insider (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer, 2010; Chillakuri, 2020; Watkins, 2016)

Symbols: Symbols are ambiguous, complex, fluid, and hold many different meanings and "rituals change in form, in symbolic meaning, and in social effects; new rituals arise, and old rituals fade away" (Kertzer, 1988, p.12).