

Black Consciousness and Multicultural Diversity in a Brazilian Public Relations Agency

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Abstract

This study focused on whether and how the corporate public relations industry in Brazil is incorporating multicultural diversity, through in-depth interviews with Afro-Brazilian practitioners and White Brazilian senior executives in an agency. It is contextualized within Brazilian Black consciousness and governmental policy changes on affirmative action. While this study found evidence of discrimination, there was also evidence of the notion and practice of inclusion of all practitioners, regardless of race and ethnicity, which parallels the general practices of inclusion within the social class structure of Brazilian culture. The findings also indicate that agencies and their clients could benefit from hiring and promoting multicultural practitioners, because they bring with them cultural insight, through their cultural background, experiences, knowledge, identity, and opinions. The importance of recognizing and practicing multiculturalism is becoming increasingly important as markets and target audiences are becoming increasingly global.

Keywords: international public relations, Brazilian public relations, diversity and inclusion, multiculturalism, Afro-Brazilian

1. Introduction

Brazil is a multicultural nation that has been experiencing an ongoing social movement, a Black consciousness movement, which has induced government implemented social changes that are restructuring the country's race relations. Scholars, like Chinyere Osuji (2013) and Jan Hoffman French (2009), have documented this increase in Black consciousness and activism in urban and rural regions of the country. Social mobilization around the consciousness and government initiatives has been impacted by the global community, largely stemming from the nation's participation in the 2001 World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa (Htun, 2004). The effort to address racial inequality through both antiracism activism and governmental policies changes still continues today (da Silva, 2015). One of the many sectors in which one can distinctly observe these developments is the public relations industry.

Brazil serves as home to a rapidly and largely expanding corporate public relations industry that is constantly striving to target and build relationships between the agencies, the clients, and the vast multicultural publics. Brazilian public relations agencies and industry, as a whole, have been slow in responding to the social changes regarding racial inequality and injustice in their society; and therefore, they still do not include a representative number of multicultural practitioners to reflect the demographics of their society. Certain terms are used, in this study, when describing these factors to establish consistency and clarity.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the term multicultural refers to the race and ethnicity of people or groups other than the dominant or White race. Multiculturalism refers to not only diversity, but especially to the inclusion, acceptance and equal treatment of, as well as the respect for different cultures, ethnicities, races, languages, and classes. Diversity, in this study, focuses specifically on the presence of differing races and ethnicities in the workplace. The term race is used to define a biological and genetic characteristic, marking skin color and genotype. The ethnicity of a group is defined by distinct characteristics established through its culture, religion, education as well as by biological inheritance and kinship. Afro-Brazilian refers to people identified as “Negro/a” (Black) or “Pardo/a” (mixed with Black), which are terms used to identify Brazilians of African descent.

2. Social Change in Brazil

It is over the past two decades that many Brazilians have come to admit racism does exist and it is an issue within the country. A major shift took effect when the Brazilian government finally admitted racism exists in the country in 1995. Since that time, there have been legislative and political changes that gradually seeped into the nation’s public opinion altering the perspectives on race and anti-blackness.

In da Silva’s exploration of black consciousness and present-day antiracist activism, he states that in recent times, “the Brazilian government has taken its sharpest turn yet toward positive actions against racial exclusion and racial discrimination, including the controversial implementation of racial quotas at all public universities, an ambitious slavery reparation program granting titles to occupied ancestral lands, and a federal law that requires schools throughout the country to teach African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture.” (da Silva, 2015: p. 50). For example, in order to foster cultural awareness and sensitivity, Brazilian Federal Laws 10.639/2009 and 11.645/2008 were created to make it mandatory to teach Afro-Brazilian and indigenous history and culture in schools (Guimarães, 2015). The government has been addressing such issues of racial discrimination against Blacks in society for some time now. Former President Luiz Inácio “Lula” Da Silva worked to build programs and initiatives enforcing affirmative action policies and quotas in federal agencies, as well as to encourage public universities and organizations in varied sectors of the society to adopt these policies. This social change, along with an antiracism discourse, has emerged in Brazilian society out of a new consciousness and recognition of racial injustice against Afro-Brazilians. The new level of consciousness at which the government has arrived is still in its developmental stages and has not been adopted by all Brazilians. Although the government is not able to influence individual thought on racial matters, it is able to influence the institutions which are extensions of the society it governs. Government agencies have begun to hold organizations accountable for their advancement toward racial diversity and equality. As a result, Brazilian organizations and their public relations agencies are now faced with the challenge of adapting their operations to the demands brought on by both a shift in the social order and an increasingly race-conscious multicultural society.

Even with these developments, many Brazilians, of all races, do not want to address or deal with the issues of racial discrimination in their society. In addition, many people do not want to be identified as Black because of the stigma long associated with the term. According to Guimarães (2007), the concept of race consciousness in Brazil faces strong resistance because many people of mixed race do not identify as Black by self-definition, but instead by discriminatory treatment from Whites. In an effort to combat these social issues, the government has worked to develop affirmative action policies in society, beginning with institutions of higher education. Also, issues of racial discrimination are being discussed in the different media, even though, in many cases, the perspectives of the messages are one-sided.

3. Diversity in Public Relations

It is imperative that the diversity in a society is reflected in the multiculturalism of that society's public relations industry, because, as described by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2001), public relations is the management function of establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on which its success and failure depends. Observations by various scholars and findings from different studies over the decades have been used to build a case for diversity and inclusion that includes multicultural representation.

According to Weick's (1979) requisite variety perspective, diversity inside of the organization should mirror that of the population on the outside for the organization to effectively reach and build relationships with critical stakeholders and members of the targeted publics. This is necessary because diversity in public relations enhances the effectiveness of the organization and its operations (Weick, 1979). Grunig (1992: p. 4) states that "Public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its public." Based on this understanding of public relations, it is necessary for public relations agencies and practitioners to assist its client organizations in building successful relationships with their publics in order to effectively operate. Building such relationships in diverse societies would mean some of the key publics that organizations must dedicate efforts toward include their multicultural publics. In order to sustain successful relationships with multicultural publics, it is critical for people of those publics to be integrated and active in the organizations, including the public relations agencies that serve to build relationships between the two. As found in a study on public relations diversity issues by Hon and Brunner (2000, p. 335), participants reveal that "diversity plays a key role in communicating with multicultural audiences, enhancing the organization's image, serving customers, and recruiting the best employees and talent."

A 2015 study provides the recommendation that race and ethnicity should be viewed as valuable aspects to be recognized in a young public relations professional of an under-represented group. Furthermore, the research suggests that public relations industry leaders should pair equal opportunity for professionals with cultural appreciation and awareness (Appelbaum, Walton and Southerland, 2015). It is evident that diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism can propel an organization into the type of optimal performance that benefits the organization and its various stakeholders. In a recent study on diversity and inclusion in public relations, participating organizations that are members of the Arthur W. Page Society expressed that diversity in recruitment and retention of under-represented groups is closely tied to their business success (Jiang, Ford, Long and Ballard, 2016). Herein exists an opportunity for all parties to find success when diversity and inclusivity are practiced, because it benefits not only the organizations and their publics, but also the organizations' employees.

The consideration of these major factors unearthed foundational questions upon which this research was developed and sought to answer in effort to contribute to the discourse on multicultural diversity and inclusion in the field of public relations.

4. Research Questions

As a result of the aforementioned climate within the Brazilian society and practices of the Brazilian public relations industry, the research questions explored in the study are as follows:

- RQ1: A. To what extent do Afro-Brazilian public relations practitioners identify with the Black consciousness movement?
B. How do they apply this consciousness in their work?
- RQ2: In what ways does perceived discrimination affect the role that Afro-Brazilian practitioners play in the public relations agency?

- RQ3: What structural changes do the Afro-Brazilian practitioners perceive would enhance diversity in the agency's practices?
- RQ4: To what extent does the public relations agency meet the standards for corporate social responsibility in relation to multicultural public relations?

The questions were used to guide the research and fulfill the purpose of the study, which is to examine the experiences of multicultural practitioners of African descent (both Negro/a and Pardo/a) in an effort to discover (1) how they identify with the new consciousness due to recent societal shifts, such as the racial discrimination law and affirmative action policies, and (2) what their perceptions are of how these changes are being applied within their agency, as well as how they affect these practitioners.

5. Theoretical Framework

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility theory posits that a company has an obligation to its community or stakeholders (van Leeuwen, 2005). The responsibilities include delivering social, economic, and environmental benefits. Corporate social responsibility theory was applied to this research because the fourth research question of this study investigated the selected agency's standards of corporate social responsibility as they relate to the social and economic aspects of multicultural public relations. The Brazilian government has initiated social change addressing racial injustice that has called for different social institutions to adopt affirmative action and quota policies. Due to the government's actions, different sectors of society, including the corporate sector, are gradually being held to a new standard of social responsibility in terms of racial equality. With the government holding the organizations accountable, corporate social responsibility is a significant issue at this point in Brazilian history.

Social Interpretive Theory for Multicultural Public Relations

The social interpretive theory for multicultural public relations asserts the social interpretive view that interaction through communication is how people construct social reality (Banks, 2000). The social-interpretive theory for multicultural public relations has been used to explain how and why multicultural public relations should be practiced, based on elements of human voluntarism, social construction of reality and knowledge, the centrality of symbolic codes and culture, the subjective nature of research and practice, and the importance of identity (Kim, 1988).

In this study, there is a strong focus on the case for multicultural practitioners to help agencies engage in communication within a cultural context that includes their multicultural publics. Therefore, the theory and its assumptions provide a solid basis for examining the practitioners' views on their experiences with regard to multicultural public relations or the lack of it.

6. Methodology

The qualitative methodology chosen for this research is informed by ethnographic methods. Ethnography is the study of people or events *in situ*, that is, within their naturally occurring context, through a process of participant observation, background research, and face-to-face interviews with informants. As an interpretive method, ethnography is used to provide an understanding of human experience in particular settings (e.g., community or organizational) through a set of inter-subjective processes, such as those aforementioned, which are designed to elicit the meanings that participants associate with the practices and culture of the community or organization (Prus, 1995). Through an

interpretive inquiry, this modified ethnographic method was used to examine the practitioners' and managers' experiences within the public relations agency selected for examination. The researcher's observations regarding the physical and organizational environment add contextual description to information gathered from participants. Data from participants and the researcher's observations were then considered within the overall climate of social change taking place in Brazil with regard to race relations shaped by the Black consciousness movement.

Background research, in-depth interviews and participant observation are the three ethnographic methods that were employed with the goal of discovering the existing dynamic as it pertains to race. To prepare, the researcher studied in Brazil one year in advance, gathering background information on Brazilian culture and race relations. In addition, background information on the agency was collected through the examination of key agency documents on the mission of the organization, personnel data, and organizational structure (among other things) from different informants. Participant observation was conducted by the researcher over a period of three weeks at the agency in order to observe and gain a sense of the overall work environment, layout, and daily routines of employees. The third method was conducted through both formal and informal face-to-face interviews with informants. Personal, in-depth structured interviews took place with a total of 14 individuals: nine practitioners and five top level executives.

Table 1: Demographics of Study Respondents

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Race	Age Group	Years at Agency
Practitioner 1	F	Mixed	40-49	10-15
Practitioner 2	F	Black	Under 21	Less than 1
Practitioner 3	M	African descent	25-29	1-3
Practitioner 4	F	Mixed; All races	30-39	4-5
Practitioner 5	F	Black	30-39	10-15
Practitioner 6	F	Black	25-29	1-3
Practitioner 7	F	Black	40-49	1-3
Practitioner 8	M	Black	30-39	6-9
Practitioner 9	M	Mixed	25-29	1-3
Executive A	F	White	50+	More than 15
Executive B	F	White	40-49	10-15
Executive C	F	White	40-49	6-9
Executive D	F	White	40-49	10-15
Executive E	F	White	30-39	10-15

Selection Process

The participants in the study were selected from among a group of self-identified Afro-Brazilian (Negro/a and Pardo/a) practitioners, their directors and vice president, who were all employed by the public relations agency in São Paulo, Brazil. The participants were selected through a non-probability sampling method, in which only professionals who were willing to participate and volunteered to respond were included. This sampling method was chosen to minimize risks that might affect the participants' jobs or careers. The public relations agency was selected based on its location inside a large metropolitan and multicultural city, which is recognized as the financial capital or centre of the country. The agency is substantive in size, with an estimate of 225 employees at the time that the research was conducted. The agency is an affiliate of a major public relations agency in the United States and serves many clients on a local, national and international scale. Considering these factors, it is evident that the agency operates in an urban, multicultural setting and, in many cases, targets multicultural publics.

Analytical Procedure

The respondents' answers were categorized according to the coding scheme developed by the researcher. The researcher aggregated the responses of all participants and examined them for commonalities and contrasts. The unit of analysis used for the interview responses in this study is the dominant theme contained in each respondent's overall response to an interview question. The dominant themes were defined based on the emergence of two or more of the practitioners' responses that were in agreement. The units of analysis used for the participant observation notes were a) observed activities occurring two or more times, and b) information that emerged two or more times. The information used as units of analysis came from informal interviews and the agency literature collected while conducting participant observations.

The participants' responses were separated into two data sets in order to address the two-pronged problem of the *practitioners' experiences* and the *agency's commitment to corporate social responsibility*. The first data set consisted of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners' responses to Research Questions One to Three. The second data set consisted of the information garnered from agency documents together with the responses to Research Question Four given by the top level management.

The responses were discussed to explain the findings and then the researcher associated each of the interview questions from Parts II and III with a research question. Table 2 shows the correlation between each research question its respective interview question(s).

Table 2: Research Questions and Interview Questions Correlation

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ 1A: To what extent do Afro-Brazilian public relations practitioners identify with the black consciousness movement? RQB: How do they apply it in their work?	15. How have you responded to the black consciousness movement? And how have you expressed this perspective at work?
RQ 2: Does discrimination affect the way in which Afro-Brazilian practitioners participate in the public relations agency?	16. Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your race or ethnicity while working at this agency? If so, in what way(s)? 16a. (Probe) Why do you think you are not in a director position or higher?
RQ3: What structural changes do the Afro-Brazilian practitioners perceive would enhance diversity in the agency's practices?	13. What are the top three barriers to your agency's efforts to attract diverse practitioners?
RQ4: To what extent does the public relations agency meet the standards for corporate social responsibility in relation to multicultural public relations?	11. How would you describe the agency's efforts and policies for creating and maintaining a more culturally and racially diverse work environment? 12. How would you say the agency has responded to the introduction of quotas and affirmative action policies in society? 14. Do you feel comfortable in your work environment? Why or why not?

Findings

Black Consciousness and Identity

Research Question One was addressed by asking whether participants responded to the Black consciousness movement and how they expressed this perspective at work. Three of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners do not acknowledge the Black consciousness movement or that it even exists. The Afro-Brazilian practitioners who identify with the Black consciousness movement, identify in different ways, ranging from racial identity to choices in physical appearance, to perspectives on improvement of Blacks in society. However, none of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners respond to the movement or identify with the movement as active, official activists or members of the movement. It is noteworthy that only one of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners at this agency applies her response to the movement at work, initiating discussions related to the movement and attempting to make others conscious.

These results become more interesting when viewed within the larger context in which the contemporary Black consciousness movement has been growing across Brazil and causing social change for more than 20 years. During this time the movement has gained national and international attention, charging the government to action, to create laws to improve the education of Blacks and policies to enforce affirmative action throughout different sectors of society. Growing out of the movement in São Paulo, Black activists and leaders have formed NGOs such as Geledés – The Institute for Black Brazilian Women, established in 1990, and later the Center for the Study of Racial Inequality in the Workplace (CEERT) formed (Telles, 2004). Also as a result of Black activism, the University of Zumbi dos Palmarões Citizenship, the nation's first predominantly Afro-Brazilian university was founded in São Paulo, in 2004. It is a step in the direction of providing more opportunities and access to higher education for Blacks, similar to the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States. This is notable, because once more Afro-Brazilians can matriculate at universities, there will be more opportunities for them to enroll in public relations programs and other programs for fields that have traditionally been out of reach due to lack of training.

In comparing the findings of this study and the literature on the Black consciousness movement, the Afro-Brazilian public relations practitioners have distanced themselves from the movement occurring in their own backyard. For those who acknowledge, support or identify with the movement to some extent, the agency central to this research does not provide room for such expression at the workplace. It is probable that the divide between the Black public relations practitioners and the Black consciousness movement exists, not only because of the culture of their work environment, but also because some of the rhetoric and principles of the movement are considered controversial and problematic. Sansone (2004) points out that the problematic language and tenets of the movement, and the government's willingness to accept them, does not encourage alignment with the movement or build a large force against racism. This claim, along with the findings, suggests a display of involvement with Black activism will conflict with the beliefs of the majority of the population and the employers. These factors considered, the Afro-Brazilian practitioners may not find it beneficial to associate themselves with the Black consciousness movement or convey their support of it at the agency.

Roles and Barriers of the Afro-Brazilian Practitioner

To address Research Question Two, practitioners were asked if they have ever experienced discrimination due to their race or ethnicity at the agency, and if so, in what ways. The interviewer probed further with the question of why participants think they are not in an upper level management position. These questions were asked to find out whether the respondents participate in the agency

as professional practitioners, if they participate in the same activities as other practitioners, and if racial/ethnic discrimination prevents them from participating as practitioners. Three themes emerged from the responses to these questions: 1) the agency is to be credited for the racial equality and lack of discrimination, 2) the individual is to be credited, and 3) neither the agency nor the individual is to be credited. Notably, regarding this question, all of the practitioners conveyed that the responsibility or reason they do not hold the positions of director, vice president, partner or president is in some way their own doing.

To determine the answer to Research Question Three, participants were asked: What are the top three barriers to your agency's efforts to attract diverse practitioners? Based on the responses, the three themes that emerged here were: 1) the pool of potential multicultural PR practitioners is limited; 2) there is a lack of opportunity and access in the field for multicultural PR practitioners; and 3) there are no barriers.

Although all of the practitioners claimed discrimination in this agency is nonexistent, four of the participants pointed out there is a need for structural change, due to issues such as discrimination in hiring processes towards Blacks with higher education throughout Brazil, a lack of equal opportunity employment and advancement, and lack of paid internships at the agency which most Blacks cannot afford to accept.

Emerging from the researcher's observations was a stark contrast between the participants' responses and the observations regarding racial discrimination. Only two individuals saw themselves as playing a significant role in impeding discrimination within the agency. Four participants diverted the problem and responsibility of racial discrimination from the agency and focused them on the government, emphasizing that Brazil is in need of affirmative action policy and the government needs to improve the educational system for Blacks. Four participants addressed the lack of access and opportunity for Blacks to attain higher education. Research supports the participants' claims concerning education, revealing that Blacks still face problems in completing primary education and moving on to secondary schooling. Also, there has been a significant gap between the 25.1% of Whites who have completed secondary education and the 18.3% of Blacks who attained the same educational level (Osório, 2008). In this study, it was found that even after Blacks were able to acquire secondary education, the degrees tended to not benefit them to the same extent as their White counterparts who received higher income pay-off for the same level of education (Osório, 2008).

One of the important observations throughout these interviews is the difference between how the respondents discuss the role of discrimination in general – as in when speaking about government programs and affirmative action – versus how they describe their own experiences. While the respondents spoke from both personal and vicarious experience about discrimination issues in the larger society, as discussed above, none admitted experiencing any form of discrimination or racial issues within their current work experience. At this juncture, exists the contradiction between the participants' claims that discrimination is not present in the agency and the fact that professional development and upward mobility for Blacks is non-existent up to this point.

The obstacles Blacks face in the agency were not discussed by the participants. The hurdles they face surpass Brazil's educational system and begin to approach the systematic discrimination of the agency. The Afro-Brazilians in this agency holding positions ranging from account assistant to account manager or coordinator have all attained a secondary education, with one who earned a graduate degree. So, for them, lack of opportunity or access to secondary education is no longer the main issue. Yet, observations revealed that none of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners hold top executive positions and none of them are near entering positions of that level. Most of the practitioners blame this on their lack of skill. However, the agency is not currently providing the professional training and development that is necessary for the practitioners to reach that stage. For

instance, the agency's outsourced English language tutorial services are not being provided for any of the Negro/a or Pardo/a practitioners. The lack of professional development will surely impede the upward mobility of Afro-Brazilian practitioners in this agency.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Multicultural Public Relations

Although the practitioners' responses were examined to answer Research Question Four, the main focus was on the responses of the five top level managers and their official pronouncement on their philosophies behind the agency initiative of corporate social responsibility and racial diversity. The focus was placed on those in management positions, because they are the decision makers who address issues of corporate social responsibility within the agency and several of these persons initially raised the topic of corporate social responsibility during informal discussions.

Five of the practitioners expressed that there was low representation of Blacks in the agency. Four of the respondents directed the need for quotas and affirmative action away from the agency, relieving the agency of the responsibility to create structural changes to enhance multicultural diversity, by holding others responsible. This group also expressed that the agency does not need such policies. It was found that all nine of the practitioners reported that they feel comfortable carrying out their responsibilities or duties at the agency. Of the nine, seven believed the agency is egalitarian in its practice. Of this group, several expressed that they regularly interact with their coworkers as well as the agency's executives.

The researcher found all of the Afro-Brazilian practitioners, as well as the directors of the agency strongly express that the agency provides and encourages a culturally diverse environment. The Afro-Brazilian practitioners' claims that they are comfortable around coworkers are also supported by other observations made around the office. There is a comfort and affection between employees that reflects Brazilian culture.

The department dedicated to studies and research at the agency launched a quality measurement product, which was to include measures for social responsibility. The researcher was present for the office-wide launch meeting and observed that although upper level management said they were in the process of writing diversity into agency literature, the topic of multicultural diversity was not discussed as part of the presentation. The researcher also reviewed all of the promotional literature on the other tools and services provided by this department and found that the topic of multicultural diversity was not addressed. This finding is significant because of the low percentage of multicultural practitioners reported in the agency's human resources statistics, as portrayed in the following tables.

Table 3: Color/Race of Employees - Year 1

Total Employees	N = 215
Color/Race	
White	80.93%
Black	4.65%
Mixed (with Black)	5.12%
"Yellow" or Asian	2.33%
Indigenous	0.47%
No Information	6.50%

Source: The agency's human resources internal report

Table 4: Color/Race of Employees - Year 2

Race	Quantity	Percentage
White	189	85.52%
Black	8	3.62%
Mixed (with Black)	11	4.98%
“Yellow” or Asian	6	2.71%
Indigenous	1	0.45%
No Information	12	5.43%
Total	227	102.71%

Source: The agency’s human resources internal report

Based on the data in Table 4, in year two, Afro-Brazilians (including both Negro/a and Pardo/a) made up the largest group of multicultural employees with a mere 16 out of 227 employees. That is, in year two Blacks accounted for 8.4% of the agency’s employees, yet Blacks accounted for 49% of the country’s population. Also, Table 3 and Table 4 depict that the amount of Blacks employed by the agency dropped from 9.77% in year one, even though the amount of employees increased in year two. By year two, the multicultural groups made up only 11.45% of all employees.

According to Utting (2005), corporate social responsibility theory dictates that private enterprise can regulate itself through corporate self-regulation and voluntary initiatives, with regards to social, labor, and environmental standards. The executives at the agency under study suggest that it has the ability to regulate its multicultural diversity, drawing from the Brazilian social standards of affirmative action policy and the establishment of quotas. Based on the researcher’s findings, the agency has not taken any specified or documented steps, thus far, to commit to corporate self-regulation or voluntary initiatives, in terms of multicultural diversity.

The company’s data on employees is not indicative of an organization that is advanced in racial/ethnic diversity of which is reflective of the diversity within its society or among all of its stakeholders. On this issue, the agency falls short of the recent recommendations to demonstrate cultural awareness and to value the races and ethnicities of underrepresented groups as an attribute (Appelbaum et al., 2015). This shortcoming is of significance because the agency has an affiliation with a United States public relations agency and operates within major metropolitan cities with largely diverse communities, all of which contain substantial Black and multicultural populations that include stakeholders of the agency and its clients. During the directors’ meetings, top level executives and upper level management discussed their culturally and racially diverse clients, such as the domestic Chinese and Japanese populations, as well as the different countries where their client accounts exist, including Canada, the United States, Germany, Chile, Mexico and other Latin American countries, and St. Martin in the Caribbean. Some of these clients have operations in several different countries, increasing the breadth of diverse stakeholders for the agency and its clients. Yet, no discussions about multicultural diversity within the agency occurred in any of the directors’ meetings.

On the other hand, as examined through social interpretive theory for multicultural public relation, despite the lack of documented self-regulation of multicultural diversity, the agency has created an environment in which its multicultural practitioners are comfortable and feel they are treated equally in comparison to their White counterparts. In accordance with statements made by the practitioners, no overt racism or discrimination was directed at the Afro-Brazilian practitioners. The Black practitioners interacted with their coworkers, the directors, and at times the executive staff with ease and in the same manner as the White practitioners.

The answers to the research questions addressed in this study could be used by the agency to improve its cultural diversity, the status and contribution of its Afro-Brazilian practitioners to the agency and its clients, and the overall practice of the agency. The Afro-Brazilian practitioners portray a high level of consciousness of their Black identity. Certain practitioners are also aware of the goals of the Black consciousness movement. These practitioners understand the need for affirmative action policies in Brazilian society as a whole and they are in tune with the many difficulties that Black Brazilians face in education and other institutions of society. They are educated, skilled and competent. The agency would benefit from having these practitioners in decision making positions when it comes to addressing the needs of clients, such as the international corporation that required diversity research and training or the national organization that held a sizeable conference on the state of education. An Afro-Brazilian director, promoted from among the pool of practitioners who were interviewed, would have great insight into such issues and could successfully cater to the clients. With the rate of Afro-Brazilians graduating from universities increasing over the past three decades, from 2.6% to 18.3%, the agency would also benefit from hiring more Afro-Brazilian employees who could offer a broader variety of perceptions on social issues that the agency and its clients are facing. Based on the findings of the recent study by Jiang et al. (2016), such an increase in the hiring of Afro-Brazilian practitioners would contribute to the success of the agency's operations in multicultural environments.

7. Conclusion and Implications

Data from this study suggests it is evident the agency, like many others throughout the world, is competing on an international level in multicultural societies. An increase in cultural diversity would benefit the agency's status in the global market. As demonstrated with this agency, globalization is challenging the organizations to meet the demands of operating within cultural diversity of great magnitudes. The need for organizations to successfully function in the international market or within their own multicultural societies depends heavily on the ability of the corporate public relations industry to assist them in building relationships and reaching stakeholders. It is necessary for the public relations agencies to interlace multicultural public relations into their own structure and practice.

It is beneficial for the public relations agencies to achieve the propositions of multicultural public relations. As related to the issues of race discussed in this study, two of the propositions are of particular importance, 1) all public relations communication proposes identities of participants; and 2) social and personal assessment of values in public relations communication is culturally conditioned (Banks, 2000). If the agencies are committed to these propositions, not only would the agencies' clients benefit, but so too would the communities in which they operate.

When the public relations communicators have a better understanding of their roles and influence in society they will become better equipped to lasting, trustworthy, mutually beneficial relationships for their clients and their clients' stakeholders. Of equal importance is the need for agencies to hire multicultural public relations practitioners to foster a culturally diverse approach to the implementation of the above propositions, and effectively operate and compete in the increasingly global and multicultural market. As supported by Parkinson and Ekachai (2006), when dealing with different cultures as target publics or stakeholders, it is important to exhaustively investigate the culture and learn what issues are most important to the group. Multicultural practitioners can contribute immensely to this process.

The results of this study indicate that multicultural practitioners bring with them cultural insight, through their cultural background, experiences, knowledge, identity and opinions, that can benefit agencies and their organizations. This point was demonstrated in the responses of the Afro-Brazilian

practitioners on issues concerning Brazil's Black population. An increase in the number of practitioners in public relations agencies, from the different cultures among the targeted publics, brings about the opportunity for greater cultural knowledge and sensitivity to enter the industry. In addition, the agencies need to set objectives on how to combat racial discrimination internally and externally among their clients in order to attract and maintain diversity in their companies and the industry.

In this case, public relations agencies and their clients would then be placing themselves in positions to self-regulate according to their needs and those of the surrounding community, fulfilling a higher standard of corporate social responsibility. It is likely that such a social obligation to the community could help to strengthen the community, and in possibly propelling a cyclical effect, a strong community is positioned to sustain an environment in which the organizations can thrive.

It is established in this research that Afro-Brazilian public relations practitioners still face the challenges of limited opportunities and access to the field of public relations. However, the inclusive culture found inside each level of the Brazilian social strata, which was also prevalent in the agency used in this study, suggests that once Afro-Brazilians and other multicultural people increasingly graduate with degrees in public relations and/or journalism, they will gain entry into the industry, be welcomed by other practitioners upon entry, and should be able to gradually move up the ladder to obtain executive positions. With the help of federal programs, industry awareness, agency and organization initiatives, and the open-mindedness of professionals, there is a chance that multiculturalism in public relations can grow and thrive to the benefit of all stakeholders.

In an increasingly global world, the importance of recognizing and practicing multiculturalism is progressively becoming more important. The future of multicultural public relations lies in the hands of corporate executives, professional organizations, multicultural practitioners, and legislators, when necessary. It is the actions of all parties involved in the corporate public relations practice and industry that will guide the progression of multicultural public relations and the impact that it can have throughout all facets of society. This study offers insight into the best practices that will support the ultimate success in this endeavor and provides a glimpse of potential barriers which can be dispelled through organized and concerted efforts.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The study was conducted by a researcher from the United States, whose perspective might have influenced the analysis and reporting of the findings. Also, her status as an outside investigator could have caused a lack of trust between the participants and researcher, possibly inhibiting the candor of the participants. In order to address and control the effects of this limitation, the researcher spent a year building relationships with executives and practitioners at the agency, as well as five months immersed in Brazilian culture and scholarship.

There were few participants in this study. This is a result of the small number of Afro-Brazilian public relations practitioners in the industry as well as in the agency under study. To control this limitation, the investigator also held interviews with members of upper level management.

The intention for conducting future research on this topic is to interview multicultural practitioners from various public relations agencies or departments in order to increase and diversify the sample. An additional consideration is to replicate the study in another country, where the practice of multicultural public relations and its impact have not been examined extensively. Exploring diversity, inclusion, and multicultural public relations in various cultural contexts allows for advancements in the effective practice of public relations to benefit both the organization and its stakeholders.

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