NEGOTIATING RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES:
Student Leaders of Color in a Predominately White Organization

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Dedicated to all students of color at The University of Michigan

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ABSTRACT

Students of color in predominately white organizations must continuously negotiate their racial and ethnic identity when interacting with others. This negotiation may come in the form of assimilating and adapting or actively challenging mainstream norms, either of which may make it difficult to stay both successful and culturally grounded. Thirteen student leaders of color were interviewed on their experience of navigating a predominately white student organization. This research explores five different behavioral strategies used by the students of color to negotiate their racial and ethnic identity (as well as intersecting identities). The results suggest that students of color espouse various behaviors in order to operate successfully in a predominately white organization. While immersed in the white mainstream, students of color also attempt to stay culturally grounded and connected with their own communities. This study suggests practical applications for these students as well as for white student leaders in order to create more inclusive and welcoming organizations for students of color.

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INTRODUCTION

The social reality is that racial and ethnic identity influences the way we perceive ourselves, the way others perceive us, and the way we choose to behave. For this reason, from a young age people of color are socialized based on mainstream standards to learn the behaviors and manners they should display in order to be successful. To better understand these behaviors, I draw from Bourdieu (1984) and Omi and Winant (1994) and look at their works side-by-side. I analyze Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Omi and Winant's racial formation ideology to understand how people of color adopt certain behavioral strategies to negotiate their identity in white spaces.

Cultural capital, which is usually transmitted by parents, refers to the knowledge and attitudes that are essential to succeeding in our society and to attain high status; these are those behaviors and manners one must display to be accepted and gain privileges (Bourdieu, 1984). By adding a racial dimension to cultural capital, we can then make the connection that cultural capital is influenced by racial formations, the idea that race is socially constructed and shaped by social, economic, and political forces (Omi and Winant, 1994). For instance, a person of color develops their racial identity based on the relationships they have developed, whether it is at a "micro-level" (i.e. family and individual relationships) or "macro-level" (i.e. social structures and institutions) (Bourdieu, 1984; Omi and Winant 1994). While all individuals must learn cultural capital to gain high status in our society, people of color must also learn this cultural capital through a racial lens, or gain multicultural capital. Hagel (1998) explored this perspective of cultural capital as it relates to whiteness. He argues that whites have the most cultural capital and the non-whites must compete to be acknowledged, obtain a sense of belonging, and gain

power. Whiteness controls cultural capital and therefore people of color must continuously adapt to mainstream social practices (Dolby, 2000).

People of color who grow up in predominately white communities face this phenomenon at an early age; they must learn to negotiate their racial and ethnic identity in white spaces early on (Eggleston and Miranda, 2009; Oliver et al., 1985). However, others may come from homogenous communities of color and have not been prepared to interact with white people; thus they may face a cultural shock when enrolling in predominately white universities (Feagin and Melvin, 1995). To best support the transition, some universities have developed "bridge programs" to prepare such students for this social challenge before they start college. While these programs are developed for all underrepresented students (including first-generation college students and lower class white students) to equip them with college cultural capital, the program is often helpful to those students who come from homogenous communities of color. Such programs help them learn to blend their prior attitudes and behaviors with acceptable ones when in white academic settings (Laden, 1999). However, these programs do not always guide students to retain their old identity and traditions while gaining these new behaviors.

Regardless of their background and prior experiences, students of color are still developing their identity throughout college, but they are also expected to learn to or continue to learn to negotiate their racial identity in predominately white spaces (Steward, 2008; Oliver et al., 1985). More interestingly, students of color still find the need to negotiate their identity even in the most diverse universities because these institutions are still geared toward serving white students (Feagin and Melvin, 1995; Oliver et al., 1985; Walter, 1992). At times, negotiating their racial and ethnic identity may become a habit, a routine that is unconsciously practiced, especially for those students who grew up in predominately white communities. However, more

often students of color must navigate white spaces more strategically, meaning they carefully think about their behaviors and manners prior to entering a space and interacting with white students.

My research uncovers something differently than some of the beliefs in this country that racial categories and hostility are being eliminated through intermarriage (D'Souza, 1995), that in this century there are no more racial problems, or that "the social virus of race will have gone the way of smallpox" (Patterson, 2000). I argue that because racial problems have not been eliminated, even today students of color who join white spaces have to learn to negotiate their racial and ethnic identity, either as a habit or more commonly through strategic behaviors. To further explore this phenomenon, I pose this question: how do student leaders of color negotiate their racial and ethnic identity in predominately white organizations and work towards staying culturally grounded? Exploring the nature of how students of color navigate white spaces is particularly important, not only to learn more about their lived experiences, but also to highlight the process in which they must strategically negotiate their position within an organization. My research is significant in bringing to light to the continuous negotiation that people of color must still undergo in historically white, discriminatory organizations. Understanding this process is critical to working towards creating more inclusive spaces for students of color.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To successfully navigate white spaces, people of color must adopt appropriate behaviors or strategies (Alfred, 2001). Throughout my literature review, I adopt and will refer to Rockquemore and Laszloffy's five "habits of survival" from their book, *The Black Academic Guide to Winning Tenure Without Losing Your Soul* (2008). While these habits were examined

through the experiences of black faculty at predominately white universities, I believe they are

still applicable to my study when analyzing the ways in which student leaders of color negotiate

their racial and ethnic identities. Rockquemore and Laszloffy introduce these habits based on a

type of person, meaning that a person completely embodies a habit of survival. However, I will

only refer to these habits as behavioral strategies that students use throughout their experiences

in white spaces. These strategies capture a variety of negotiating behaviors and they are by no

means mutually exclusive or exhaustive. The five behavioral strategies that students of color may

use to navigate white spaces are 1) Subservience 2) The Warrior 3) Feigned Subservience 4) The

Oppressed Oppressor and 5) Culturally Splitting. These are some strategies that minority group

members adopt to cope in majority group oppressive environments.

Rockquemore and Laszloffy: Five Habits of Survival
A model adapted for understanding behavioral strategies that people of color use to navigate white spaces.

Habits Of Survival (Behavioral Strategies)	Description (types of behaviors and actions)
Subservience	Is aware of the oppression, but rationalizes injustices and accept oppressive behavior while blaming themselves and others. As a result, they may receive benefits due to their submission to those in power.
The Warrior	Aware of oppressors and their unjust behaviors – making it difficult to create close connections. Continuously fighting for justice but may forget to "smell the roses"
Feigned Subservience	Appear to accept the oppressive systems but within, they resist the injustice. This negotiation leads to mistrust and difficulty in creating close relationships.
The Oppressed Oppressor	Does not appear to be aware of the oppression, identifies with the oppressor, and accepts the oppression. Actively blames others for their oppression – which leads to them gaining some status with the oppressors.
Cultural Splitting	Lives in the institutional and indigenous world – learns the patters, gestures, mannerisms, language, and behavior for both spaces. Genuinely are connected in both, but never feel the freedom to combine their two words.

1. Subservience

People of color who adopt the subservience behavior accept the way things are and are reluctant to challenge the authority and power of white people. Some typical characteristics of this behavior include rationalizing injustices and in turn blaming themselves. Hall (1986) defines this internalized racism as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them." It is noteworthy that this type of research is minimal in academia, for it has been seen as a taboo topic (hooks, 1995). Discussing internalized racism is difficult because it requires admitting ones submission to oppression. As Robinson and Ward observed, African-American women may choose to survive in a predominately white environment through "self-denigration due to the internalization of negative self images" (1991, p. 89). These negative self-images come from the societal pressures and stereotypes that create tensions for people of color as they try to overcome stereotypes. Steele (2010) further described this concept by analyzing the behaviors of stereotyped individuals. For instance, a person of color who is affected by a negative racial or ethnic stereotype will become anxious about their abilities, leading them to a lack of confidence and therefore underperformance. Students who accept and are impacted by oppressive discrimination will also be silent and accept the discrimination from white students (Jones et al., 2002). Those with this mentality want to be accepted by and please people in power; as a result, they may receive some benefits, such as praises for their accomplishments. Whites will sometimes even "overemphasize their admiration, as if [people of color] are a strange bird among their own people" (Feagin and Melvin, 1995, p. 93).

Furthermore, in an academic setting, women, including women of color, face the challenge of negotiating self-image. For example, some women faculty may want to adopt a sensitive and friendly teaching style; however, this style may look like weakness to students who are anticipating a more authoritarian approach. Therefore, instead of adopting their own friendly teaching style, some faculties choose to please students and present themselves in an acceptable manner through suitable dress and authoritative demeanor. Women in academia adopt these strategies to gain respect and credibility from students and male colleagues. By following this strategy, some women are asserting their power, while at the same time potentially suppressing their preferred teaching style and reinforcing hegemony, or the dominate male style of teaching (Ford, 2011; Ong, 2005; Fiske, 2002). However, because they are submissive, the oppressor may take advantage of them and disrespect them, leading the person of color to doubt themselves and undermine their capabilities.

2. The Warrior

People who take on the characteristics of "the warrior" behavior are very aware of who the oppressor is. These individuals continuously challenge and fight against injustice and do not accept any oppressive behavior. They want to challenge stereotypes and dominant narratives and disrupt hegemonic structures (Ford, 2011). For example, faculty of color may choose to be active in diversity issues because of their own commitment to represent their communities' concerns and to teach topics of race and ethnicity (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2013; Lesage, 2002; Thompson and Sekaquaptewa, 2002). Because they are constantly working towards ending oppression, people who adopt warrior behaviors don't always take the time to "smell the roses" and may lead themselves to battle fatigue. Smith and Witt (1993) compared the stress levels between African

American and white faculty members at predominately white institutions. Their results indicated "that African American faculty report generally higher levels of occupational stress than their white counterparts" (p. 229). In addition to the workload of people of color, the work around diversity in academia does not necessarily correlate to rewards and recognition. Instead, white colleagues and students resist this work, which makes it difficult to develop important connections and be respected by members of the white power structure (Aguirre, 2000; Ford, 2011). Thus, faculty may have to continuously remind people of their credentials to gain authority and status (Chesler and Young, 2007).

Students also face a similar experience. Jones, Catellanos, and Cole (2002) conducted focus groups to collect the experiences of students of color. They found that because of the lack of diversity at predominately white universities, students of color felt an obligation to represent their communities and educate other students: "students saw themselves as part of a society instrumental in changing stereotypes and racist minds" (p. 29). These students are aware of the oppressive environment and empower themselves to liberate themselves and create change (Robinson and Ward, 1991). When students talked about their involvement in predominately white organizations, some expressed the importance of being influential by "representing the underrepresented."

However, being involved in mainstream organizations led some students of color to feel like outsiders, leading them to a decrease in their engagement and participation (Jones, et al., 2002). Therefore, as a way of survival, support groups have been helpful to create a safe heaven. Multicultural centers have played a role in becoming the "home away from home" at colleges (Jones, et al., 2002). At predominately white universities, students of color will organize mentoring and support groups for their communities and many times use this space for a greater

purpose (i.e. to continue fighting and protest for a better campus climate) (Feagin and Melvin, 1995; Guiffrida, 2003). Students who utilize the warrior behavior as a strategy carry "armor gear" to protect themselves from injustices. As result they may become disconnected from their peers, making it difficult to create close relationships and trust. This behavior also leads to less leadership opportunities within the organization because people of color don't want to perpetuate the status quo or unjust behavior within the structure. These students are instead usually focused on fighting for their "cause" and are connected to their communities outside of the organization.

3. Feigned Subservience

Those who embrace the "feigned subservience" behavioral strategy act as if they accept oppressive behavior. However, when not within the particular white setting, they will aggressively resist injustice. This strategy is a combination of the subservience and warrior behaviors. Someone adopting this behavior has the skill to negotiate the power of the oppressor while later resisting the injustice. This negotiation may lead the person of color to fulfill their agenda and be successful. However, appearing to support oppressive behavior leads to having mistrust towards the oppressor and others; this then translates into not being able to create close intimate relationships with white students.

Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008) state that this type of strategy is usually adopted by people who have grown up in predominately white communities because from a young age they have observed their surroundings and learned to comply with what is expected. For example, they described Marissa, a junior faculty woman of color working towards tenure. Having honed her ability to adapt and conform to diverse settings, Marissa learned to not complain and to hide her thoughts. Instead, if something bothered her, Marissa would try to join committees and take

on projects that she could do on her own, such as writing policy documents to make them more inclusive. However, because Marissa rarely shared her thoughts, her colleagues weren't challenged around racial issues. As a result of keeping her thoughts to herself, Marissa was skeptical of her colleagues and had a difficult time creating close relationships, even though she had successfully created a positive image of herself in the department. This type of behavioral strategy is a bit more complex because it includes subservience and warrior behaviors, and thus there is little literature that captures it.

4. The Oppressed Oppressor

The "oppressed oppressor" strategy includes identifying with the oppressor and accepting the oppression. The frustration of injustice will be directed towards "other oppressed people" – believing it is "their" fault for being oppressed. This strategy is particularly distinct from the subservience strategy because this includes actively blaming others as opposed to only blaming themselves. By blaming other oppressed people, these individuals will try to gain status from the oppressor and will create relationships that will lead them to have leadership positions within the organization or institution. This behavior can be seen in some men of color faculty who have tried to blend their gender privilege with their racial identity to gain status in predominately white universities. These men of color may dismiss or minimize any conflict related to race (Young, 2013).

In a similar way, Banks (1984) highlights that Black children who grow up in predominately white neighborhoods are more likely to assimilate, leading them to have more positive attitudes towards whites and less positive attitudes towards Blacks. Due to this assimilation, Banks' study suggests that these Black children also thrived in their academics.

Someone with this behavioral strategy will criticize other people of color for not working hard enough.

5. Cultural Splitting

Adopting the "cultural splitting" behaviors leads to living in two worlds – the institutional and the indigenous. When in the institutional situation, individuals assimilate to how they "should behave" with the oppressor. When in the indigenous situation, people of color will feel more comfortable and thus be themselves. This behavior is also known as "biculturalism" or "chameleon-like" behavior. This strategy reflects the idea that people of color learn behavior that is acceptable by white people and develop a sense of racial identity that is suitable in white spaces. However, their professional life is disconnected from their personal life and their communities of color (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Stanley, 2007; Ford, 2001). In both worlds, this individual will learn the patterns, gestures, mannerisms, language, and behavior that are appropriate based on the space.

In some cases, students of color maintain their Black identity, while also establishing relationships with their white peers. However, those relationships are distinct. This was demonstrate in a study by Harper and Quaye (2007) where they interviewed African American men student leaders. When these students referred to their relationships with other students of color, they chose the phrase "interact with them." But when they talked about their exchanges with white students, the phrase that was generally used was "deal with." This detail indicates that their relationships with students of color were different than their relationships with white students. Despite the varying relationships, these African American student leaders joined mainstream organizations and fostered relationships to forward their agendas and improve the

conditions of other students of color. It is important to note that these two selves are sincere. They are not faking one or the other; they are portraying two selves that have been developed throughout the years in efforts to adapt. Although the individual is being "real" in both worlds, they never feel the freedom to combine their two behaviors; they will stay separate identities.

People of color can adopt the cultural splitting behaviors, but the effects of balancing two distinct spaces can lead to psychological and physical illness (Garcia, 2000). Being a "chameleon," or living in two words can be stressful; however, once people of color find a way to stay true to themselves and "not lose their souls" they may begin to navigate white spaces more strategically and with less pressure (Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2008; Stanley, 2007). For the same reason, to successfully manage these different worlds, Rendon suggests people of color should "take time for self-reflection and self-renewal" (p151). Staying rooted to their ethnic community is a great way for people of color to build relationships and support systems that will empower them to face the challenges of being in white spaces (Garcia, 2000). To gain further understanding of their identity, people of color can search for mentorship programs or find white allies to dialogue with about racial issues (Rodriguez, 1985; Stanley, 2007). Another way to maintain a strong racial identity, despite being in predominately white spaces, is to display subtle markers of one's ethnicity. For example, displaying cultural art or decorations and wearing culturally distinct clothing are ways for people of color to stay rooted in their culture (Bell and Nkomo, 2001).

The "five habits of survival" model is a framework for understanding how students of color negotiate their racial and ethnic identities in predominately white organizations. Again, my objective is not to impose these behaviors onto particular people. Instead, I examine how these

behaviors are fluid throughout one's experience – meaning that students may adopt these behaviors as strategies depending on the setting, time of the year, developmental stage, etc. Furthermore, I introduce an additional dimension to examine how students negotiate their identity in white spaces: intersectionality. Intersectionality, a term that Crenshaw (1991) highlights, looks at how various identities come into play and intertwine to shape one's experiences. This concept leads us to more critically think about how all of our identities collectively impact our interactions. For example, while it is important to learn how racial and ethnic identities impact our interactions, we cannot ignore the fact that our gender, class, religion, and other social identities may simultaneously affect our experiences. Thus, I will focus on exploring the negotiation of racial and ethnic identity, but also explore socio economic status, gender, and religion.

Whether the advice comes from parents at a young age, from school programs, or early college experiences, students of color learn ways to navigate white spaces (Garcia, 2000; Lesage, 2002; Thorne, 1997; Turner, 2000;). At the same time, students also learn how to best stay culturally grounded. The term, "culturally grounded," may seem ambiguous and does in fact have a variety of definitions. For this research, I define staying culturally grounded as being able to accept and feel a sense of belonging with one's racial and ethnic identity by adopting behaviors, manners, traditions, and artifacts (Bell and Nkomo, 2001). While staying culturally grounded may mean having close friendships and relationships with people of one's racial and ethnic identity (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Oliver, et. al., 1985; Stanley, 2007), I don't only use this connection as a definite definition. I also consider staying culturally grounded as a way of navigating white spaces and staying true to one's beliefs and values despite being emerged in white mainstream culture (Garcia, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Overview

I pose the following question: how do student leaders of color negotiate their racial and ethnic identity in predominantly white organizations and how do they work towards staying culturally grounded? While this is a phenomenon I have reflected upon as an enrolled student at the University of Michigan and after participating in many student programs and organizations, my interest in this topic was fueled after joining a predominately white student organization, the Order of Angell Senior Honor Society.

In the spring of 2012 I was invited to join the Order of Angell (OOA). OOA, formerly known as Michigamua, was founded in 1902 by a group of University of Michigan students with the support of its then current University president, James Burrill Angell. Since then the organization has been "dedicated to advance exceptional leadership through a lifelong loyalty to and engagement with The University of Michigan." Each year, up to twenty-five diverse students are selected and invited, or "tapped," to join OOA based on their loyalty to the university and involvement on campus. Members of the organization hope to invite a diverse group and include student leaders from every corner of the University. Throughout the year, with the leadership of these students and their well-rounded network, this group develops initiatives, such as leadership programs and pep rallies, to unify the student body and leave Michigan a better place. Prominent figures such as Gerald Ford, U.S. President, and Fielding H. Yost, University of Michigan Football Coach, have been selected to join this honorary organization.

Throughout the years, this organization has undergone significant changes. When founded, early members of this organization adopted the theme of Native Americans and referred

to themselves as a tribe. Up until the 1970s the selected students would undergo initiation week,

or "Rope Day" (Royce, 2006). All members were assigned Native American nicknames to

reflect a characteristic of a "brave". The active "braves" would meet in their Wigwam, which

was located in the tower of The Michigan Union. To continue the Native American theme,

alumni from the organization were referred to as old braves. In addition, prominent faculty or

administrators were also invited to join as honorary members, or Honorary Sachems, which

refers to Native American chiefs or leaders (Michigamua Publications, 1908).

In 1977, OOA was accused of violating the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,

which prohibits the discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs

and activities that receive federal financial assistance (Michigamua Publications, 1908). By this

time, members began considering changing their Native American theme. Finally in early 1990,

student activists won the battle and the organization changed their theme from Native Americans

to Michigan Pride. However, the Students of Color Coalition continued to target this

organization and in 2000 occupied the Michigan Union tower, where members of the OOA held

their meetings. The controversy continued as these student activists announced their findings of

Native American artifacts in the "wigwam." As a result, Michigamua was asked to move from

the tower and since then has not recovered the tower (Gold and Maggard, 2002). The accusations

continued as Michigamua was once again challenged for having a Native American derived

name (Royce, 2006). So eventually in 2007, the organization changed their name to the Order of

Angell, in honor of James Burrill Angell, the former University of Michigan president.

As a result of this history, the OOA has been a controversial student organization at

Michigan, especially in communities of color. Organizations such as the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People at Michigan and the Black Student Union have in their

constitution that no member of their executive board can join the OOA. Many other organizations on campus also stand in solidarity with the Native American community and are against collaborating with organizations or members affiliated with the OOA.

Even today, students of color who are 'tapped' face the decision of whether to join this predominately white student honorary organization that has a controversial racist history but that provides opportunities and valuable network, or to stand in solidarity with the Native American community by not joining OOA. Many students of color still decide to join this organization regardless of the history but cannot escape the negative consequences from their communities of color. For example, students of color have been removed from their own organization's executive board positions and/or have lost funding or awards for their student organizations (Prusak, 2011). While other students of color in OOA do not face these harsh consequences, they may still have to negotiate relationships within their communities of color.

When joining OOA, I quickly became aware of this history and the organization's relationships with communities of color. Members of OOA and alumni provided great support to all new members, but specifically to students of color, on how to navigate those tensions and manage relationships outside of the OOA. However, soon after, I also noticed the importance of learning how to negotiate our relationships *within* the organization, especially with our white peers. From my initial experiences with OOA, I became more interested in exploring the experiences of student leaders of color when entering predominately white spaces and how students of color stayed culturally grounded despite their membership in this mainstream organization.

Sample

I chose to focus on OOA not only because of their history around racial issues, but also because this organization continues to face sensitive racial and ethnic group dynamics. As a result of its foundational structure and despite its attempts to become a more progressive organization, OOA is still a space were students of color must negotiate their racial and ethnic identity. Therefore, OOA became a suitable organization for my study. My sample consisted of thirteen student leaders who identify as people of color (from diverse racial and ethnic identities) and who were tapped to be in OOA. Four of those students are current members, six are alumni, and three are students who accepted the invitation but then left the organization for various reasons. Seven of these students are men and six are women. In regards to socio- economic status, students identified as follows: 2 lower, 4 middle, 4 upper-middle, and 3 upper-class. Their religious affiliations varied and most were between 20-24 years of age when interviewed. I chose this sample because they have all experienced the structure and culture of the organization in one way or another. Also, all of the participants were part of the organization after 2007, when the organization officially changed their name from Michigamua to OOA. By interviewing more current members I hoped to be able to focus more on the participant's experiences rather than the heated controversies prior to 2007. All participants have interacted with members and alumni of the organization and have managed relationships within and outside of the organization.

Recruitment

Prior to deciding on my research study I surveyed students of color who are or have been affiliated with the organization via email to gauge their interest in participating. Once I sensed an interest in participating, I began to recruit through a formal email invitation. Because I was part of the organization, I knew all of the students of color and was able to easily obtain their contact

information. I contacted all of the members of color from three different years and followed up

via emails, phone calls, or texts. Since most of them were already interested in the topic, all of

the people I contacted agreed to participate. However, because all of the participants were or are

busy student leaders, it was difficult to schedule the interviews, and it took me over two months

to interview everyone. I was unable to schedule meetings with three other interested students

because either our schedules did not align or it became too late in my research process for me to

interview them.

Interview and Questionnaire

Before or after each interview, participants filled out a questionnaire that included

general demographics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and socio economic status. The

interviews were between 40-80 minutes and were divided into three parts. Part one consisted of

questions around their experiences prior to joining the organization – for example, perceptions,

expectations, and reactions to the invitation. The second part of the interview guide prompted

participants to reflect on their racial and ethnic culture and experiences. During this time

participants were able to share experiences about their upbringing and cultural values. Finally,

the interview ended with questions about their experience within and outside the organization,

specifically around their interactions and relationships with their white peers and with members

of their racial and ethnic communities. For participants who left the organization, I also asked

questions around their decision to leave.

Data Collection

All interviews were one-on-one for an average of one-hour and were conducted face-to-

face, by phone, or Skype. They were all scheduled over email or text and were conducted during the weekends, evenings, or late nights. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in private settings at campus study rooms, office spaces, or lounges. For the interviews that were conducted over the phone or Skype, I was in a private room at my home. Since I already had relationships with the participants, it was easy to warm up and begin each interview. After most of the interviews I also took notes on non-verbal information such as body language and the setting. In addition to the thirteen interviews, as a member of the organization, I also reflected and recorded my own experiences based on my interactions within the organization.

Once all interviews were completed, they were transcribed and transferred to NVivo. Through the NVivo software I was able to capture common themes around the behaviors students used to negotiate their racial and ethnic identity and to stay culturally grounded. Once I collected common themes, I created an outline to organize the most relevant content as it relates to my research and developed seven themes for strategies of negotiating racial and ethnic identities: 1) Prior Experiences 2) Adapting/Fitting In 3) Responsibility to Represent 4) Responsibility to Teach 5) Us vs. Them 6) Gaining Status in White Spaces 7) External Stressors. In addition, I noted general strategies on how to stay culturally grounded, such as nurturing relationships. Although this was a great start to begin collecting my data, I later found a model that best guided my results and analysis. Using Rockquemore and Laszloffy's model of the "habits of survival" I then revised my themes to be 1) Subservience 2) The Warrior 3) Feigned Subservience 4) The Oppressed Oppressor and 5) Culturally Splitting. I found that these behavioral strategies captured the students' interactions within the organization. I assigned numbers to the participants when writing my results and analysis and used the gender-neutral pronoun of "cis" instead of he/she, him/her, his/hers; I did this in order to maintain the students'

gender confidentiality in this small and potentially recognizable sample. However, when gender was critical to my report, I assigned students a letter, rather than a number, to again conceal the participant's gender identity. Once I assigned letters to the students, I used gender pronouns (he/she, him/her, his/hers) to best analyze the gender dynamics.

Reflexivity

I began my data collection while I was still part of the organization. Because of my relationship with the participants, I believe I was able to create a safe space for them, leading them to open up. However, about halfway through my data collection, I left the organization due to other time commitments and external stressors. Since I didn't publicly disclosed details about my decision to leave the organization, I later reflected on how the space within the organization was not safe to reveal my personal challenges and that OOA members were not the support system I needed as a woman of color from a low-income background. Leaving the organization made me a little nervous because I did not want my departure to influence the responses of the participants and their agreement to participate. Regardless, I decided to continue my data collection but was transparent about my status in the organization and I still worked toward creating a safe space for participants. At the beginning of each interview I made sure participants knew I had left the group and provided a space for them to ask questions. After comparing the responses from interviews prior to me leaving the organization and interviews after I left, I did not notice a difference in the responses, suggesting that my status in the organization did not affect their answers.

I believe that I was in a unique position. Having built relationships with members of the organization gave me the credibility to relate to them in their experiences. But having left the

organization gave me a different perspective and created a safe space for conversations with those who left the organization.

Limitations

Interviewing members of only one organization limits the diverse experiences from other student leaders of color. In addition, while I interviewed students from three different years, those who are current members can only attest to their exposure and interactions of about five months. Finally, I also encountered the challenge of intersectionality within my methodology and analysis. For example, although my research focused on studying the negotiating of racial and ethnic identity in white spaces, other identities such as gender, socio economic status, and religion influenced the way that students of color negotiated this white space. I am aware of these limitations. As McCall (2005) identifies, the intersectionality perspective brings a complexity to research. I believe that the experiences of these students are not a lone voice of students of color in predominately white organizations.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
Following Rockquemore and Laszloffy's (2008) model of the "habits of survival," I divide my results and analysis into five sections 1) Subservience 2) The Warrior 3) Feigned Subservience 4) The Oppressed Oppressor and 5) Cultural Splitting. While they used this model as a way to connect a particular person with a "habit," I use these categories as descriptive behavioral strategies that students of color used while in the Order of Angel (OOA) when negotiating their racial and ethnic identity with other students, white or students of color. I refer to each section as a behavioral strategy and not as an attempt to categorize individuals. Each behavioral strategy is not necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive. For each section, I

briefly introduce the type of behavioral strategy and provide examples from the students' experiences. These five types of behaviors were expressed at various times and were fluid from student to student – i.e. they do not describe any individual students.

Nevertheless, some behavioral strategies seemed to be more popular than others. The warrior strategy was by far the most expressed, followed by the culturally splitting and subservience behavioral strategies, and the feigned subservience and the oppressed oppressor strategies as the least common. I anticipated this to be the case because I believe that some students of color want to demonstrate their commitment to their communities of color, thus making the warrior behavioral strategy the most common one. In contrast, the subservience, feigned subservience, and the oppressed oppressor behavioral strategies were the least popular since I expect students don't want to openly accept oppression or consent to the oppression of others.

1. Subservience

The subservience behavioral strategy includes rationalizing injustices and accepting oppressive behaviors from the white mainstream. Someone adopting this strategy has difficulty recognizing the oppressor and finds it tough to resist oppressive forces. Furthermore, this often includes blaming the self for one's struggles or challenges, leading to becoming vulnerable to dominance from white people. At the same time, someone who adopts some of the subservience behaviors may gain benefits for being submissive.

Throughout the interviews some students revealed subservience characteristics. For example, some students rationalized injustices and blamed cis selves for it. Student 3

continuously blamed cis self for not putting forth all of cis efforts and frequently thought about

their image within the organization.

> I'm just really critical of myself so I always think that I could be doing something better or it's not right or I didn't phrase this correctly or I'm just always worried about looking dumb. And so, I notice sometimes I mess up with how I say things or just not—I don't ever want people to think that I'm not going to put in enough work or give my all for something. So if I feel like I could be—if I feel in the slightest bit like I could be doing something better then I'm really down on myself and I feel like I haven't done anything. – Student 3

"Looking dumb" and "I mess up" are examples of self-blame. Blaming cis self was a way to

rationalize the intentions of white students whom created an unwelcoming environment. Student

3 continued to be self-critical and reflected on cis experience as it related to speaking during

meetings.

> ... it is kind of hard because sometimes it's like, "Do I want to say something right now?" so that thought always goes through my mind. It's not because of the organization; it's something that always goes on in my mind. – Student 3

Student 3 blamed cis self without acknowledging the organizational structure and power

dynamics that silenced cis or helped make cis feel inadequate. This student emphasized that cis

insecurity of speaking at meetings was a result of cis struggle to articulate well and "not because

of the organization." Student 3's struggle to speak cis mind was one that was expressed by

various students.

Those who adopt the behavior of blaming themselves become vulnerable to the oppressor

and thus rationalize with the injustices. Once students rationalized the oppression, some students

excused white students for discriminatory racial behaviors and then felt the responsibility to

educate them.

> …people just don't know. [White student's name] comes from a community--like his grandmother, if I were to walk through the door, she would probably have a heart attack. "Why are you with this [person of color]?" And that's what he knows. One of his favorite

> songs is from the Song of the South or something like that. That racist Disney
> movie...That's what he knows! It's not bad. – Student 4

Justifying white students' intentions or behaviors was an initial way to begin to conform to a white space. Student 4 justified the problematic musical taste by explaining the white student's background and accepting it. This student recognized the oppressor but seemed to believe that the oppressive behaviors are innate to white students. As a result of the belief that white students are inherently prejudice and unaware, some students felt the responsibility to educate.

> I have to educate. I can't look at someone as being bad or [be like] "Why don't you know about my race or my ethnicity?" I can't do that. I couldn't do that at all. – Student 4

> Similarly, Student 3 also shared an experience when cis patiently explained to white

students diversity campus issues because white students had not experienced diversity prior to college.

> So just talking to them and getting them to understand 'cause they didn't really understand at first. They were like, "Oh Michigan it seems like a really great place. There's so much diversity! I walk around and there's so many types of different people!" But he's coming from a school where all he saw was white people so it's like of course when you walk through the diag you're going to see so many cultures out there. But then when you sit down and look at how they interact with one another then it's not so diverse. And so that would be a good experience in just seeing that people do want to learn and do care and want to change their ways 'cause it made him think about it in a different way. – Student 3

Understanding the root of white students' behaviors towards students of color is one thing. Justifying it and taking the sole responsibility to educate those white students is different. Both students, 3 and 4, justified the white students' comments and behavior by explaining that most white students came from predominately white backgrounds. This type of subservience behavioral strategy was common across several students of color.

Furthermore, students of color learned to strategize and behave in a manner that they felt

was acceptable to white students. Adopting such behaviors was important for students of color as

they attempted to create a positive image for themselves within the organization to be accepted.

Student 3, for example, shared an experience when cis had to nominate campus student leaders

to participate in one of the staple OOA leadership events. This student expressed cis strategy of

nominating students.

> I guess it was awkward when I had to nominate people because I'm more into [my community of color] so of course I can recognize leaders in that community easier than I can in other communities. Then it's like I don't want people like, "Oh, [cis] only lists [people of color]." So, to an extent it's like, "Let me show that I'm diverse!" – Student 3

Although Student 3 recognized and identified with cis racial identity, cis distanced cis self by

deliberately not nominating students of color in an effort to show white students that cis was also

connected with student leaders from various racial backgrounds.

Other students shared their strategy when negotiating their communication style. Student

6 expressed how cis felt comfortable and safe in the OOA; however, first, this student had to

navigate the system and gain credibility and respect.

> Yeah I would say I feel safe but I would say I was strategic about it like when I do share I tend to just be myself right up front and whether that's kinda cursing or saying something that's kinda off the wall. But I immediately follow that up with something intelligent to say…So if you have an audience you want to tailor your speech to the audience… after I gained a reasonable amount of respect using certain strategies I will feel more comfortable to be myself and that way I can present my identity as charismatically as possible and once I present my identity as charismatically as possible, people will know [what I] say, this which "I think is cute, funny, whatever, but still has something to say so I'll listen." And that's almost something I can do for myself and after that it's just pretty cool in a white setting.... So I would say I tend to be myself and then I'll kinda do what's expected or what's the norm – Student 6

Student 6 also recognized cis racial identity and was aware of the influence it had in the space.

For this reason, this student seemed to frequently think about cis interactions and how to

strategically communicate with white students. Cis felt the pressure to say "something

intelligent" or seem charismatic to balance cis identity and natural behaviors. By being cis self,

yet charismatic, and at times doing what was expected, this student seemed to successfully gain

status in the group and feel safe.

Similarly, other students were strategic about their communication. Some students

carefully negotiated discussion topics, such as when it was or was not acceptable to talk about

racial issues. Student 3 acknowledged that as a person of color cis would have to talk about race

at times and speak about issues within communities of color, but cis was mindful of when these

conversations were most appropriate.

> …don't forget about those issues and yes you have to go the table. It would just be giving
> them perspective and making sure that's heard. You don't have to be the person where
> everything has to be about race. If we're talking about simple food, it's like what? Not for
> everything, but if it's like an extreme. It would really affect the community or that
> community isn't really being considered, then just so bringing that up. Doing that to not
> where you're just like, "Okay we already know what you're going to say something
> about [people of color]." So just having a balance…just remembering the main goals of
> the organization [OOA] and making sure that that's done as well. – Student 3

Student 3 again seems to be aware of the prevalent issues in their community; however, cis

learned to speak tactfully about race.

Similarly, Student 9 also spoke about cis communication strategies.

> I think that my strategy was eliminating words, phrases, and things people say that create
> and perpetuate stereotypes of different identities. So I wouldn't use certain words or
> topics that are closely related to stereotypes. So for example, I would say "I am
> [racial/ethnic identity]", but I wouldn't say "I love [my racial/ethnic identity] culture." I
> wouldn't be that vague. Like you shouldn't use words like, "I love being Black," or "I
> love Chinese food," some of these things are really close to stereotypes, so I try to be
> very specific so people don't misunderstand what I am trying to say. The one exception
> to that rule is when people are really trying to learn about your culture. So I had a
> conversation with people about what it is like going to [my country]. People were
> genuinely interested so I opened up and made myself vulnerable. – Student 9

"eliminating words, phrases" was the first step this student took to assure that no stereotypes

were ascribed to cis. However, the exception was when white students wanted to learn about cis

background. Student 9 was mindful of these racial issues and strategically used cis racially

sensitive language in spaces.

Furthermore, Student 3 expressed being aware of the lack of diversity on campus, yet

rationalized the unawareness and valued the interest white students had in learning.

> I feel like I've been fine within this organization. The people really wanted to know and
> understand what we were going through and really wanted to work with us. Sometimes I
> worked in an org where they look down on the person of color—it may not be
> intentional—but their voice isn't that important. So far it's been a good experience.
> People care. It may be because of the fact of what happened in the past so they really
> want to raise awareness about diversity but so far it's been good. – Student 3

This student reflected on previous group experiences and compared them to experiences within

the OOA: cis concludes that the environment within the OOA is positive. Student 3 felt

somewhat valued and pleased with the white students' desire to want to learn about diversity

issues. Interestingly, this student referenced the OOA's history and used it as a potential

explanation of why white students seemed interested in learning about diversity. A student of

color who embodies subservience behavior may benefit from the organization and white students

may see them as "good members." The ability to act in a way that is acceptable to white students

leads to building a stronger relationship, which is a benefit of adopting this behavioral strategy.

Student 6 also had a similar experience when connecting with white students within the

organization. While in the organization, this student valued relationships and felt accepted by cis

white peers.

> Yeah I think I feel accepted. Because I feel as though I can say whatever I want to say. I
> don't know if that's my personality or not but I don't feel ashamed of sharing anything.
> And being able to talk with individuals. Most of the time I feel like they are genuinely
> interested which is pretty cool. So I feel accepted. – Student 6

Positive experiences around relationship building and feeling accepted were prevalent within

those students of color whom showed subservience characteristics.

Nonetheless, not all students entered the organization with the mentality of only gaining

relationships and benefits. Initially, Student 11 joined the OOA with hopes to create change;

however, cis came to the realization that becoming a change agent was quite challenging, and

thus adopted the subservience behavioral strategy to gain the most benefits and build

relationships.

> I felt that I was very accepted. I mean I will not lie to you, the people who were in my
> pride, are the most important people in my life. I care about them and I know they care
> about me. Um, but I also think that came from a mentality shift that I had to have around
> this time last year. My mentality shift became this idea that this organization was no
> longer an organization in which I could attempt to create significant change. That was not
> my purpose for being a member of this organization. I began to see the organization as a
> support group where the members of the organization where there for each other through
> thick and thin and once I had that approach, I felt that I was very accepted by the
> organization and I was accepted both personality wise and culturally. And that is when I
> made that shift that this organization was now a support and people we were going to be
> best friends, I took that and I ran with it. And I really made the effort to make
> relationships. – Student 11

This student's experience clearly shows that to be accepted and gain the benefits of strong

relationships, students of color must adapt to the mainstream organization. Students who are able

to submit to mainstream norms and adopt and operate within the power structure are able to

receive benefits.

The benefits that students receive are not always only personal, but they may also receive

benefits for their organizations or own communities. For example, Student 11 expressed not only

gaining personal benefits, but also creating networks that were beneficial for cis organization.

> I did not expect what I gained from this organization at all. I'm not sure what I expected
> – I think it was more like you know it was an opportunity for my organization, for me.
> Yeah, I guess it was more like a network opportunity for me and my organization, but in
> the end it became one of the most life changing experiences I ever had and it became an
> experience because of the relationships I created. – Student 11

> Similarly, Student 8 also expressed how the OOA was beneficial for their organization.

> It helped me to connect my organization to a lot of resources and that was really nice. –

Student 8

Throughout their experiences within the OOA, less than half of the students of color that I interviewed adopted subservience behaviors to navigate the predominately white space. Various students seemed to have embodied subservience behaviors at different times and in different ways. For example, some students had difficulty recognizing power and privilege and others seemed to have stronger characteristics of blaming themselves. Overall, most students who had subservience characteristics seemed to rationalize injustices, accept oppressive behavior, and as a result, gained benefits from the organization.

2. The Warrior

Unlike the subservience behavioral strategy, the warrior strategy includes openly and actively resisting oppression. Someone who adopts warrior behaviors continuously fights for cis cause and is constantly in "battle mode." Those who exemplify this behavior will most likely be leaders in their communities but might have a difficult time developing intimate relationships with people of the predominately white organization, leading them to feel alienated and devalued. Their commitment to social justice also may prevent them from "smelling the roses" at times and taking care of themselves.

Almost all students interviewed demonstrated some aspect of the warrior strategic behavior. First, students who embraced warrior behaviors acknowledged the white power and privilege existing within the OOA. Student 4 and Student 8 provided overarching examples of how they identified group dynamics.

> There are people who, in terms of privilege, don't really see the other communities on campus—and sees and acknowledges it. – Student 4

> That's the problem that brings 25 individuals, its like OK, we are creating this diverse

> environment and its just all going to work out, because what that does, it denudes those people and their background, I'm not walking in there as just this individual. I am walking in there as [an ethnic] leader. I am walking in there as a person of color. I am walking in there as a person that has faced oppression, who faces it every day. Who sees it in various interactions and who cares about it, and other people are walking in there as privileged. – Student 8

Both students were very aware of the privilege exercised by whites within the organization. In addition, both of them also noticed the lack of awareness white students had in regards to diversity. Specifically Student 8 pointed out the importance of acknowledging white privilege and the "social baggage," as cis later describes it, that students of color have. The lack of awareness by white students around racial issues created a space where students of color did not feel understood.

Furthermore, there were other students that more explicitly shared their observations and experience within the OOA in regards to power dynamics. When asked if cis thought about their racial identity, Student 1 spoke about the white privilege within the group.

> More so I think about their race more so than my own. Being white men, and even white women, the history there, the history of white supremacy: power and control…I definitely look at the invisible hierarchy in the group and think about which students feel the most comfortable to speak up, who are the proxy and the vice proxy; they're two white males coming back with pretty privileged backgrounds with the best intentions, but may not recognize just how they may look to someone as myself… It's crazy because so much has changed in the context of the 18th century, 19th, 20th, the one thing that hasn't changed is white males in the elitist class and their grade in power and control. And that's a very general blanket statement and I don't think the students in the group would be able to say that's what I experienced but that invisible construction, I think they don't even recognize. – Student 1

Student 1 not only acknowledged the privilege of white students but also reflected on the historical implications of why this privilege exists. Moreover, this student highlighted the particular position of white men within the organization and analyzed the "invisible hierarchy" of power with regard to airtime and leadership roles. Student 1 continued to reflect on these dynamics and the need to challenge differences among one another because "white males in the

elitist class and their grade in power and control" has not changed and continues to influence

group dynamics.

> Because these dynamics such as racial discrimination or socioeconomic status or identities; all these things are very prevalent in 2012. And so, I feel like this is a time where we should definitely be challenging each other to be more enlightened and conscious of everyone's experiences. – Student 1

This student, along with others, was aware of the impact of identities and the privilege that

comes with white racial identity. Being aware of privilege and oppression is the beginning to

becoming an active resistor of injustice – a key to the warrior behavioral strategy.

> Another warrior behavior is being able to identify and respond when someone is being

problematic or discriminatory. For example, Student 8 shared cis experience when cis recognized

prejudice from white students.

> Like every, the little comments that people would make. The little jokes. Just because we were friends and you knew all these things about my life that it was suddenly ok for you to make jokes about [my ethnicity and our stereotypes]? NO you are a white male, back the fuck off! You think you can make that joke to me because we are friends? No, that is ignoring the entire structure and realities of our lives. You are all this privilege. – Student 8

Student 8 emotionally expressed cis frustration after reflecting on the discriminatory comments

from white students and the disregard of cis lived realities. This student too was very aware of

the privilege within the organization, specifically the privilege coming from white men.

> Some students of color were aware of the group and power dynamics from the time they

joined the organization and actively worked towards their cause (i.e. an issue that affected cis

community).

> One of the biggest reasons why I joined the organization was because I was uncomfortable with individuals representing [against my cause] in that space and not have a counterbalance – Student 13

Student 13 continues:

> I was uncomfortable with the organization's elitist nature and attitude, but that wasn't going to preclude me from, again I was very interested in making sure that individuals in the organization did not have the kind of unfettered access to other student leaders to be able to potentially sway them and talk [against my cause] without there being another presence in the room, another voice in the room to counteract that. – Student 13

This student was very specific about cis reason for joining and worked towards bringing awareness of the issues that affected cis community. Furthermore, this student was also conscious of the power dynamics within the organization and openly referred to the organization as being elitist.

Other students did not have one specific cause, but worked towards ending oppression within the organization. Student 4, for example, shared cis meeting experiences and how cis actively tried to address problematic comments. After some white students criticized cis organization and cis as a campus leader this student felt disrespected. Once Student 4 learned about the accusations, cis immediately addressed it during one of the meetings.

> We had our meeting and I walked in and I had a speech that I was going to say. I told them, "If you want to learn more about my organization, we can have that conversation, but if I'm going to be at this table you will not disrespect me." I told them I'm nobody's slave and that this whole idea of whose organization is superior over whose organization has got to stop. I felt highly disrespected. – Student 4

This student was outspoken and actively addressed the issue. After this incident, Student 4 felt less judged by white students and noticed that white students seemed more willing to learn more about cis organization and culture.

Another student of color also acknowledged the mainstream perspectives that dominated discussions within the OOA. Students 5 and 6 spoke about white students taking up airtime during meetings and continuously challenged them to address this dynamic.

> How are we being conscious of what's actually happening and how are we making sure that it's not just this one white perspective that is completely taking over the conversation? And I think that a lot of the times I had to really work that one person would be like "AND YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND" and I'd be like let me interpret

that so you can actually hear what's happening and how important it is. I definitely felt an obligation. – Student 5

I think about it [my race] when other people are talking so if I feel like a certain group isn't being heard then I will just stop the conversation and put a certain group of people who are talking a lot, and so have to say, "I know you're trying to get into the discussion" or "this side of the table, that side of the table." So I will notice other people and then often times I don't necessarily have much to say but if I do, I just be speaking for me I don't really contribute it to speaking for my race or anything but if I see people inside the group certain groups are dominating the conversation then I'm quick to jump in. – Student 6

Students 5 and 6 were very conscious of the power structure and how white students dominated the space and the discussions. Student 5 expressed cis frustration at having to bring awareness to white students about the importance of social issues, because white students seem to be unaware. Student 6 shared a technique cis used when white students were dominating discussions: cis would ask white students to step back and try to open up space for those who were not being heard. Being sensitive to and active in challenging patterns such as dominance of space is a clear characteristic of the warrior behavioral strategy.

However, the balance of space and sharing of diverse perspectives was not always accomplished. Students of color within the organization seemed to continuously be victims of not fitting in and being silenced by white voices. Student 8 briefly shared cis experience of adapting when joining the organization and as the year went on, cis found cis-self being silenced.

No I didn't adapt to it [OOA], it got worse as the year went on and in fact like, I think I adopted different strategies of resistance, throughout my year, but it was a downhill slope because I think Order it kind of works, its social structure is so much different than other organizations, other organization you sort of start out slow, with the ideals and the symbols and all of that area sort of presented at the beginning and then you transition into adapting, you know what I mean? Order its sort of because you have this very intensive process that with the people in the organization you start out the honeymoon face, with the face of being "oh my God, these people are so cool, I can't wait to get to know them!" And there are always warning signs and red flags and then as the year goes on, and the honeymoon period has physically sort of around this time in the year, you know, around like, fall semester, you know, and the middle of fall semester towards the end of fall semester you are just like, "oh, this group is actually really problematic." But I feel

then you don't realize how much the group silences you. – Student 8

This student described the structure of the organization and how cis believed the initiation

process was misleading. At the start, students experienced what this student called "the

honeymoon period," where every member seemed to be connected. However, once this

"honeymoon period" ended, Student 8 realized that this organization was not what cis expected.

This organization no longer provided a safe and inclusive space and cis was never able to adapt.

Student 8 continued to share:

> One day you wake up and realize that I don't have any common ground with these people. Like, we are not even on step A together. The way that your voice is monopolized, you come out as this person of color who defends this group, who is used as a token to represent this group, who is used by this group to justify this group's success and existence and power and privilege on this campus, and yet, the group silences you because of its structure and how little they actually care about social justice – but you realize that it's not one person doing it, its just the social structure of the group. You can't just point to one person and say "it's your fault." But it's when every time you bring something up, people roll their eyes or "there [cis] goes again" and its just disintegrated, it just gets worse and worse – Student 8

Student 8 critically reflected on cis experience and connected it to the oppressive systems that

have created a tense racial environment within the organization. "It's not one person doing it, its

just the social structure of the group," this student says as cis brings light to the organizational

structure that silenced them.

Student 8 was not the only one that experienced being silenced. Similarly, Students 4 and

6 shared similar experiences.

> I felt that sometimes my voice wasn't heard physically. I would say something and it wouldn't be acknowledged until I turned into, okay, that angry [person of color], essentially. That happened a lot of times. I would repeat myself just to be annoying before someone would hear me. That shouldn't happen. That's happening in my student groups now. The white people will look at the other white people in the conversation and not the person that's [of color]. Why is that the case? I've definitely experienced that within Order of Angell. – Student 4

> Um, there were times when yeah I did feel valued. That what I had to say meant something, but there were many many times when I felt that what I said people viewed it as, "oh [cis] is talking again" which it absolutely didn't matter. I felt absolutely valued by certain people, who I feel incredible close to, because there were people in that group who made me feel what I had to say really mattered, and I think that is how they felt about most people. The most vocal people, I think felt the least valued. – Student 6

Students 4 and Student 6 also expressed being silenced. Both also felt they had to turn into "that" person of color, which in turn made them feel devalued for their experiences as people of color. However, Student 6 expressed identifying members who valued cis, but goes on to conclude that those who spoke the most, or had the most warrior-like behaviors, were least valued by other OOA members. From identifying discriminatory comments to actively speaking their discomfort, students of color demonstrated their commitment to their communities of color and to fighting against oppression.

In addition to challenging problematic issues at the meetings, students noted how they constantly thought about their communities of color and what they could do for their own organizations.

> I'm in this organization to not only mobilize myself. I just see myself as a pawn of…my duty here on earth is to help others and to mobilize others' lives to give to others and give to myself. I think that all intertwines with why I'm in this group. How can I learn, network more, make more connections with people—genuine connections and genuine networks—to help other people. – Student 1

> I didn't come here for the purpose of looking to be accepted. Again, I wasn't doing this for these other 22 people nor is it to say I was doing it for me, for my own advancement. No, I was doing it because I felt I had a responsibility, a purpose bigger than me. – Student 2

> So yeah, like everything with Order is so multi faceted, you know, it is not this simple yes or no answer, yes I'm going to do this because I like it. For me at least, it was a very throughout process that required a great deal of assessment in what I could do, not only for myself but for other people and other organizations. – Student 11

These students expressed their unselfish commitment to the OOA. Most of them seemed to not

have a clear idea of the OOA membership benefits, but they felt confident that their membership

would not only benefit themselves but also their broader community.

Other students of color had a clearer idea about how the membership benefits had or

would directly shape and benefit their communities. Specifically, some students of color

observed and learned from the success of other white student leaders and worked towards

emulating those effective technics in their own organizations and communities.

> I would say resources in terms of knowledge of other communities and seeing—because I felt like we're not as progressed as a lot of white organizations. We struggle with funding when you have white organizations on the back of their t-shirts have sponsors. How the heck do they have sponsors and we're over here struggling because we're going to hall councils and BSU asking for money and we still are underfunded. How do we mock what they're doing? So that was a lot of what I was doing. Why are we such a struggling organization? …I'm like, "Why don't we have this money that's falling in like white fraternities?" It's like kind of seeing what they're doing to how we can put a spin to our own way of doing things. – Student 4

> I was really interested in learning how different groups kind of nurture and cultivate all the talent they have. So for instance whether it's coming here as a Jewish student I feel like you will feel very comfortable coming to campus. For example you have cultured meals available to you, Hillel, so places where you can go and really really stay in touch with what you grew up with. Or even looking at other communities whether it's the Asian community how they are able to come to campus from across the world and feel really comfortable. Go do great things. And I was thinking why isn't that necessarily like that in [my community] there are resources available but you still feel some type of way coming to campus. Well at least I didn't [feel comfortable] I was trying to find more [people of color], where they at? – Student 6

Both students spoke about the strategies they had learned to improve their organizations and/or

communities of color. Student 4 more specifically spoke about how organizations of students of

color could learn from white student organizations, "how do we mock what they're doing?"

Student 6 explored the way that other communities are successful at creating welcoming spaces

for students and cis hoped to imitate those communities and create a more comfortable transition

and support for students of color. Constantly thinking about their communities of color and how

to best serve them is a characteristic of the warrior behavioral strategy.

Students who displayed characteristics of the warrior behavioral strategy constantly thought about their organizations, their communities, and how they could best use their role in the OOA to improve communities of color. More so than any other time, students seemed to think about their communities when selecting new members for the OOA. During this time of the year students of color wanted to make sure that the numbers of diverse students did not decrease within the organization.

> …what direction that we want to do when we pick out other people, making sure that we do have a balance that numbers don't decrease. I understand that you want to get good leaders, but let's still make sure that we have a balance to have leaders in all communities. – Student 3

Student 3 felt the responsibility to advocate and make sure that other students of color were invited to be part of the OOA. However, this student also shared a challenge for selecting student leaders of color: white students didn't always take the time to get to know other student leaders of color to then later select them. Other times, Student 3 felt the need to advocate for student leaders of color who were not always seen as strong leaders, according to the white students' standards.

Student 4 also advocated for student leaders of color.

> It's not an old man's club at all. We don't deal with legacies that's one thing that I definitely instilled and I fought to have so many people of color…they're at this table. And I made strong arguments for all of the people that are in it currently that were of color because I just felt like that voice needed to be stronger. I knew how I was and that if there was more of me saying it, it would be better, someone would keep the conversation rolling and like more conversation centered around race and identity or our communities—you know, the conversation would always be happening. – Student 4

"Fighting" for more diversity within the organization was a common challenge for students whom adopted the warrior behavioral strategy. Student 4 specifically addressed legacy traditions because people felt pressured to continue to invite leaders from mainstream organizations. This

student challenged this idea and also worked towards advocating for student leaders of color

from smaller, and not so well known, organizations. In addition to creating a more diverse group,

Student 4 also hoped to increase the variety of perspectives, those who would carry on

conversations around issues that affect communities of color.

Other students, such as Student 13, took a slightly different strategy.

> So I made a conscious decision not to push for anybody from my community to join the organization. I was more committed to making sure that certain communities and groups weren't represented. – Student 13

Instead of working toward increasing the representation from cis racial and ethnic community,

Student 13 focused on eliminating the presence of students who seemed to dominate and

reinforce mainstream values and beliefs.

Adopting the warrior behaviors, including being aware of privilege and oppression and

actively fighting towards a cause, was draining for some students. As a result, students of color

who had the most warrior-like behavior struggled to create strong healthy relationships with the

OOA members.

> A considerable amount of time that was spent was devoted to allowing people to say what's on their mind. The table talks idea kind of allowed people to sit up and stand and speak their mind freely to the group. Which is something I participated in, but I always felt that my contributions were very superficial…I didn't really trust them to not use things against me. For example, if I were to have shared something that was troubling me or something that I was conflicted about, I didn't really trust certain people in the group, maybe the group as a whole to keep that to themselves. – Student 13

Throughout the year, the OOA had a structure were students were provided the space to get to

know one another. As Student 13 mentioned, having that time was a great opportunity to share

and understand each other's diverse backgrounds. However, several students of color struggled

to open up and gain trust because they did not feel understood by white students.

Finally, both inside and outside stressors emotionally affected some students of color. As

upper classmen, student leaders must transition a new executive board into their organizations while also balancing their academics and beginning to create plans for after graduation. Student 5 speaks from a student of color's perspective where regardless of these stressors, they felt the pressure still to be strong leaders and not to seem weak.

> I was busy like my senior year was a bunch of meetings. And I didn't take time for myself. To be able to have time for me and to be able to center myself. So essentially what I was doing was just walking around with my head cut off… And I also think that comes from being a minority I think it's this thing of I don't want to be this weak [person of color] who can't deal with [cis] problems. I don't want to be the weak person of any group. – Student 5

"Waking around with my head cut off" is an example of how students felt overwhelmed by the stressors in life; however, students of color felt the pressure to not seem "weak."

More specifically, other students spoke about particular struggles within the OOA that led them to be psychologically stressed at times. Student 8 reflected on having to choose their "battles" or when to speak up against oppression.

> It was really hard for me, emotionally and psychologically because I am not used to picking my battles, I am used to fighting them, and it sucks! I am getting all emotional thinking about it. It sucked, it just sucked. Because it was just like I really care about this. You are psychologically tormenting people and like, and I never really got over that and I think a lot of my accreditation with the group over the year, I still had this, that from the outside it made me do something or conform to something that I didn't really ideologically agree with. – Student 8

Student 12 also shared cis experience when joining the organization. The emotional and psychological battles exhausted this student and led cis to conform.

> Psychologically it takes a toll on you. I felt physically safe. I know no one was going to touch us, no one was going to be mean, make us do something, but I knew there was going to be a lot of peer pressure. A lot of peer pressure to conform and act like the leaders we were being tapped into and to do the things they needed us to do, whether it was little games or full on projects. I think that was unsettling. – Student 12

While initiation week was supposed to be an intensive time for these students, Student 12 spoke about the psychological stress, the challenge to resist peer pressure, and to do things that went

against cis own values. The various stressors that students of color had to face took a toll on their psychological and emotional well being.

The warrior behavioral strategy was the most common within the OOA students of color with more than half of the participants sometimes describing warrior behaviors. Students acknowledged the privilege and oppression within the OOA and were aware of the group dynamics. This awareness allowed students to then identify discriminatory comments, oppressive systems, and dynamics within the group and to actively fight against those injustices. However, some students who adopted warrior behavioral strategies experienced psychological stress, mental health challenges, and some students eventually got burnt out.

3. Feigned Subservience

The feigned subservience behavioral strategy is a combination of the subservience and the warrior behaviors. Similar to the warrior strategy, feigned subservience includes being aware of privilege and oppression. But people who adopt the feigned subservice behaviors do not actively fight against injustices; instead they appear to accept injustices when in white spaces. This strategy also includes having the ability to negotiate racial and ethnic identities in a way that is pleasing to white students while later resisting discrimination. Appearing to support oppressive behavior leads to having mistrust towards the oppressor and others, which translates into struggling to create close intimate relationships.

Most students were aware of discriminatory behaviors and injustices, but at times, many stayed quiet. Those who exemplified feigned subservience behavior learned when to stay quiet and to conform to the organization's norms and styles. Student 8 and 1 shared their awareness of

racist comments and of privilege within the organization, but did not speak up or advocate creating change.

> It's like, these tiny little things that would happen, and I would be like, wait, wait, I want to say something – "like that's not OK, you can't say that" Like someone making a joke, a super racialized joke or super gendered joke – and you're like, do I bring this up now? Do I not bring it up? Even the interests of the group, like, let's put on a rally – I mean it's fun, but it's going to occupy all of our time and there are real issues on this campus! When we would bring up issues, they would be like, "no they are too political" – but "wait, you think that this is just something I do on campus not a lived reality, I mean as a person of color, you think that this is just some thing?" – Student 8

"But wait," this student hesitated to speak up, despite having identified the racialized comments. While the rest of the group planned events such as the pep rally, Student 8 had an internal struggle as cis reflected on the "real issues" and "lived reality" that cis thought needed to be addressed.

Student 1 also had a similar feeling about the pep rally and believed it did not necessarily align with issues that cis considered to be the most critical to campus climate.

> The theme of the pep rally is sportsmanship and Michigan pride, which is great. But those are both things that are highly, highly funded…how do we really tackle issues such as diversity, immigration and actually create sustainable changes across communities for people to understand that there's a spectrum of students that go here. I did speak up about, kind of bringing light to how much money it was [being spent on the pep rally], but I didn't really speak about why I said that because I'm very proud of their work and their talent. However, I feel like I'm constantly looking back at the big picture and sometimes feel that the resources we have are not being—is this what we should be focusing our time and energy on right now? – Student 1

Both students did not believe the pep rally event was the best way to use the resources, time, and energy. However neither of them spoke up nor advocated, at this time, for issues cis believed in, such as diversity, unequal access and distribution of resources, lack of support for underrepresented students, etc. More specifically, Student 8 learned to not always speak up on these issues because white students considered them to be "too political."

Student 10 also tried to adapt to the OOA despite having different values or beliefs at times.

> I think everyone had to adapt to the organization, but people of color definitely had to be the most accommodating in order to "fit in" with everyone else. I think I was accepted in the group, but there were instances where I held different values or beliefs than everyone else, and didn't bring them up or speak to those ideas because I realized only the other people of color would understand/value what I was saying. Not to say the people who were white wouldn't get it, but that it would be hard for them to understand since they've always been in the in-group. – Student 10

Student 11 shared a similar experience, of adapting to and following the norm to create a more comfortable environment between cis-self and other students. This student specifies that cis mentally adapted to the organization, however, was still aware of and resisted the injustices when in a space outside of the meetings.

> I think my adaptation came out of frustration with the inability to, I guess, not force, but getting people to see different perspectives. Almost because I was so willing to see others perspectives, I just though that you know what, rather than creating a situation where people are frustrated and feeling animosity towards each other, it is better that I just go with the flow, inside the room and this table. So, I would argue that essentially I adapted a mentality that you know, that at the table, with these people, I would adopt the norm and go with the flow there, but outside of this room I would advocate for whatever I advocate for. – Student 11

Student 11 exemplified the feigned subservience behavioral strategy when "out of frustration" decided to "adopt the norm and go with the flow,"; however, when with others outside the organization, cis challenged the norm.

This same student continued:

> So, at the table, I might have been more complaisant at the table. I kind of gave up to you know having like, saying the things at the table… So if something frustrated me at a meeting, I wouldn't bring it up at the meeting, because I felt like I couldn't because I felt I wouldn't be heard. But outside of the meeting, I absolutely brought it up. And I would bring it up with that person and with others. And I knew that I would be, and I knew that I would be respected and valued. – Student 11

This student learned to navigate the white space by staying silent, not by choice but as a result of cis not feeling heard. However, outside of meetings cis tried to express cis sentiments about the injustices with members individually.

Other students learned to pick their battles, not only to "fit in" but because of exhaustion. Being tired and stressed was a common reason why students adopted feigned subservient behaviors. As senior student leaders, they had to balance their course work, organizational work, employment, and/or family commitments. Student 5 shared how at times this lifestyle could be draining and led them to not speak up at meetings.

> …and then sometimes it was one of those things where sometimes you're just exhausted. It's late at night you've had a long day. I remember my Mondays were essentially like 11-8 to staff meetings then I would eat something. I would really want to sit in my room and watch Real Housewives but I would have to go all the way up to north campus. And you're just tired at that point. And there were sometimes when you look at each other like it's just not a fight worth fighting. – Student 5

After having a long day, students more easily adopted the feigned subservient behaviors, deciding that some fights were just "not a fight worth fighting" and learned when it was most comfortable or effective to challenge white students, or adopt warrior-like behaviors.

Appearing to accept oppressive behaviors sometimes brought benefits to students. For example, Student 8 noticed the power dynamics, but reached a point where cis instead focused on gaining the benefits from having a community.

> I reached a point when I said, "I am getting the community benefit, but it is a very emotional space for me, it reinforces the hierarchy and the issues with racism" and it was like, how do I make the most out of this. And in some way, the way to get the most out of it is to conform to its principles. – Student 8

Despite identifying the oppressive structure of the OOA, this student wanted to make the most out of cis experience. Student 8 navigated this dilemma by choosing to "conform to its principles" as a way to gain the "community benefit."

4. The Oppressed Oppressor

The oppressed oppressor behavioral strategy consists of having a connection with the oppressor, and at times, accepting the oppression. This strategy includes blaming other oppressed people and believing it is the victim's fault for the struggles and challenges they face. Blaming the victim is a way to try to gain status and to create relationships with members of the dominant group, with hopes that it will lead to leadership positions within the organization. The difference between the subservience and the oppressed oppressor strategy is that the oppressed oppressor strategy focuses on blaming others, whereas the subservience behavior is to blame the self for the cause of the oppression.

Student 3 begins to explain how cis believed that other students of color only focused on oppression and didn't see the good things the University had to offer.

> I feel like sometimes students of color may just come here and get so caught up in that community that they're just like, "Oh this is what's wrong with it, we don't like this and we don't like that." Instead of focusing on the negative, just go out and see what the positives are and understand that there are people that are there and they do want to see you be successful. – Student 3

This student spoke about other students of color as people who complained and were unable to appreciate the benefits the campus had to offer. Student 3 did not reflect on the fact that some students of color have had very negative experiences across campus, which have led them to feel disempowered, frustrated, or burnt out.

Similarly, Student 9 also speaks about cis community.

> I feel more normal and more myself when with white people because growing up my closes friends were white and one of the things when I hang out with the [my racial and ethnic] community is that everyone really prides themselves on being [a person of color]. One of the things I always tell people of [my racial and ethnic] background is that by being proud they are perpetuating their own stereotypes. I want to forget about or eliminate backgrounds and different ethnicities in my day-to-day. They see themselves as

different and I don't know if I identify because I am trying to do the complete opposite, I am trying to forget about racial identity or pretend like it is not important, because I truly don't think it is. I don't judge people based on their racial characteristics. – Student 9

Roquemore and Laszloffy (2008) say that the oppressed oppressor behavioral strategy is one adopted the most by people who grew up in predominately white neighborhoods. For example, Student 9 exemplified the characteristics of the oppressed oppressor by relating to white students and being color blind to the impact that racial and ethnic identities have on the lived realities of people of color. Also, this student actively blamed people from cis community and attempted to discourage them from openly priding on their racial and ethnic identity to prevent stereotyping.

Furthermore, while the OOA prides itself in being diverse, year after year, this organization still stays a predominately white organization. This happens either because not enough students of color are invited to join, because students may not accept the invitation, or because students leave the organization after joining. The demographics within the organization still seem to remain a hot topic on campus and some of the OOA students of color blame other students of color for the lack of diversity within the OOA. Student 5 expressed cis frustration with other students of color who have criticized the OOA and the resultant overwhelming responsibility to represent people of color.

I felt a certain duty to be there. I felt like I needed to be here because I think it was one of the reasons. That's why I get frustrated with people of color who say it's just a white organization. Well if you don't join it hell yeah it's goin be. I felt a certain duty to be like you know I need to be that voice in that room and really challenge people on these different notions on what it means to be a leader and what it means to be diverse. – Student 5

While this student expressed a "warrior-like" behavior (i.e. wanting to challenge the organization) cis still blamed others of cis own group. Student 5 did not consider that other students of color might not want to join the organization because their values do not align or they

don't feel welcomed within the organization. Rather, Student 5 blamed other students of color

for the lack of diversity within the OOA, which in turn, might have confirmed the views of many

OOA white members and thus given this student status within the organization. This student also

emphasizes cis responsibility to do what other students of color are not doing, to be a person of

color representative within the OOA.

Moreover, Student 9 also emphasized a behavior that cis believes students of color should

work on.

> Some people just didn't have control; they are like, "no matter what, I am still going to say what I think." I kept my mouth shut. But if I wanted to say something, I definitely felt safe to say it. – Student 9

This student referred to students within the organization who "didn't have control" over their

own verbal communication. As opposed to those students, Student 9 thought to demonstrate an

acceptable manner of communication – staying quiet and only speaking at times.

Another student also expressed their disappointment towards other students of color.

Student 7 wished cis friends could understand the life of a student leader. Student 7 seemed to

look down at cis friends for not being able to understand the struggles of a student leader.

However, cis seemed pleased with the OOA space which provided a space for cis to connect

with other student leaders.

> I guess just people going through the same experiences and I can't talk about that with the rest of my friends because they aren't as involved or as active and that's what's hard for my friends to relate to me sometimes in that regard. Like, "why are you always stressed?" "why are you…" like yeah this is why and other people felt the same way and at least enduring the same things I was going through. It really helped me a lot and gave me a lot of comfort. – Student 7

While Student 7 does not directly blame others, cis compares cis friends with the OOA members

and criticizes other students of color who are unable to understand cis stress. By doing so,

Student 7 is creating a hierarchy across students of color, between those leaders of the OOA and

those students of color.

To stay at the top of the hierarchy and gain status, those who adopted the oppressed oppressor habit behaviors navigated white spaces to disassociate themselves from negative stereotypes. Student 4 reflected on times when people of color from their organization used language and actions which cis considered being unacceptable.

> I guess I do what the majority do sometimes. But in terms of my appearance, I try to stay out of what I believe is negative stereotypes of [people of color]… It's like the way people talk. Some people, like in my [organization], will say or call a girl a B every two seconds. You know, like "Yeah, I just hit that blah blah blah." And it's just like, "Why are we talking like that?" Speaking in that type of language makes you look incompetent. That's my personal belief and I don't do that. I'm very respectable. And so, it's the negative things people do and I try not to associate myself with that in the way that I dress. I've never sagged before in my life. I never will sag. – Student 4

This student identified the negative stereotypes of people of cis racial and ethnic identity and worked towards disconnecting cis self from those negative characteristics. By doing so, this student reinforced the dominant narratives or the mainstream perceptions of the negative characteristics of people of color. This phenomenon resonated with Student 3. Cis felt the need to present cis self in a "positive" manner for white students and hoped to provide a representation of a "good student of color" with adequate behavior.

> I'm always worried like I feel like since there aren't so many; the one person they interact with is how they're going to judge the entire culture. So I never want to give my culture a bad impression because of something that I did. So I always want to do so well. – Student 3

By presenting themselves in a proper (i.e. white) manner, some students of color seemed to have gained status within the organization.

Gaining status or acceptance within the organization was a reason why some students demonstrated oppressed oppressor behaviors. For example, Student 8 adopted particular kinds of behaviors in the initiation of new members.

…and the next year I was screaming too. You heard me screaming too, I gave them some hard time, but I must say it, the white kids really had it from me. I don't want to be that [person] on this issue, and so alright, I'll yell at people and you sort of get caught up in the power of it. – Student 8

Student 8 was involved during initiation week and conformed to the traditional activities such as screaming at students. By conforming, cis was no longer seen as the other and felt accepted.

The oppressed oppressor behavioral strategy includes blaming other oppressed people in order to gain status and stand apart from other people of color. As a result of behaving this way, people of color can gain benefits such as acceptance and relationships. Within the OOA, some students of color practiced certain oppressed oppressor behaviors when they deliberately disconnected themselves from their communities of color or when they looked down at other people of color.

5. Culturally Splitting

Adopting the cultural splitting behavioral strategy is like living in two worlds – the institutional and the indigenous. When in the institutional position, the individual will assimilate and learn the patterns, gestures, mannerisms, language, and behavior that are acceptable when in white spaces. In contrast, they will also learn those behaviors that are suitable within their communities of color. While someone is genuinely connected to both spaces, they struggle to freely combine the two worlds.

The different communication styles across communities were a common topic among students of color. While some students felt most comfortable in their own communities, others also learned to navigate and feel comfortable in the white spaces. For example, Student 13 felt more comfortable to be cis-self and open up when with people of color, whereas cis did not feel the same way when with white students in the OOA.

The folks who were in [my organization], the folks that were a part of the broader [racial/ethnic] campus, those were my people so I felt very comfortable with them and I would have no problem sharing with them openly a wide variety of things about me and who I am, and what I do, and why I believe in things I do, and when I'm feeling angry and when I'm feeling sad, and how I express those kinds of emotions. With Order I was certainly a lot more guarded. – Student 13

This student was aware of the two different spaces both when with their community members and when in the OOA. With cis community, cis "felt very comfortable," but then learned to be "a lot more guarded" when in white spaces. Student 13 learned to naturally navigate white spaces by being more cautious.

Other students found this experience more prevalent when in social settings. The times when white students invited Student 3 to their white social events were the times when this student felt the most disconnected and the pressure to act different.

I guess the only time would be if we go to social events and if it's in a more so predominantly white party so I don't really listen to all of that music or whatever so sometimes I can't be into it as everyone else because yeah I like to have fun but after a while it's like "Alright. I want something else to come on." So to that extent it might get awkward if we're in public then I'll feel like, "Well you need to act in a certain way sometimes."… But I think you always have to be open and I never want people to think that I'm having a bad time or think that I'm this little evil B-I-T-C-H – Student 3

When at white parties, Student 13 heard a distinct type of music selection and consciously adapted to the white space. Adapting to the space was an attempt to fit in and not seem like the other.

Another student shared a similar experience. Student 8 reflected on the times when cis experienced living in two different worlds and behaved in different ways.

…its like, when you are a person of color you are forced to delineate that identity versus like, this is me being [a person of color], this is me being an American, you are supposed to put on different hats and I think the bottom line of being in Order is having to negotiate how much to wear my [person of color] hat and just see it as a hat. Being in college in general or in my community gives me that opportunity to be like, "no, I'm not wearing that hat, like, this is who I am, I am all of these things, and that's ok." But to be in that space [in OOA], you are forced to say "I am being [a person of color] right now," "or I

am being this..” "this is me being racialized," "this is me taking off the hat" and I think that is the beginning and end, big picture. There were moments where I had to embody my race so fully that it underserved what I wanted to do and I didn't want to lose friends, I didn't want to piss people off that I liked. But I had to embody it so much and there were moments where I had to dis-learn it so much that I would do something that was uncomfortable. So in essence I was always living a double life. It was always a choice of like doing something that I wouldn't otherwise do. And I think that's the problem, that minorities in that, at least for me, that is my experience, for me it felt that as a minority in that group you could never just be, you could never just do what you wanted to do you were always calculated from the basis of your minority status. – Student 8

Student 8 reflected on this phenomenon of living in two worlds, or "always living a double life," and constantly dealt with the process of negotiating and managing cis racial identity when in white spaces and when in cis own community. This was a common struggle for many students of color. Some students openly expressed their challenges and acknowledged that they are still working through this process.

Student 1 learned from a young age about these two worlds and how to "look the part or act the part." However, cis now struggles with negotiating cis racial and ethnic identity while also attempting to not change cis-self. But still, this student felt that cis must adapt to white spaces because white students did not understand cis background.

I learned at a young age what it means to fit in and adapt and look the part or act the part. But when it comes down to now, growing into myself and accepting who I am and my identities and ethnicity and all of that, I'm not willing to compromise any part of my identities anymore. So I guess I'm still struggling to truly adapt in the sense that, knowing that other people see me the way I see myself because they may see me fitting in but they might not know really who I am or they can't relate exactly to my experiences or understand certain aspects of me. I think I'm still working on that. I guess in my MOMs, in the monthly updates. I may tend to condense or say something about what's going on in my life. In reality, my actual experience - sometimes it's hard to say what I'm going through now without having people understand the background or the context of what I've experienced and what's happening. – Student 1

Student 1 did not completely share cis experiences during the personal monthly updates because cis did not feel understood by the white students. Other students also learned to hide their

experiences when in white spaces. This was a strategy to prevent them from seeming weak in

front of others.

> In reality I'd like to say I'm an optimistic person and that's why despite what I've gone through and what I'm going through I can still hold my head up high but I think people might even take your kindness for weakness in that respect that because I'm smiling they don't really know of the pain that I've suffered. – Student 1

> …you have to look after those around you and you have to—it's okay to worry but at the same time don't worry. Put a brave face on. – Student 2

These students put on a smile or a "brave face" and hid "the pain that I've suffered" to best fit in.

Other students also shared their struggle of managing their two worlds. Student 4 shared

cis experience when interacting with white students and alumni. While this student is still

learning how to behave in white spaces, cis reflects on this process.

> There are times where I felt like because my background is not so intertwined with white privilege or the white community, I don't know how to adjust and how to talk. It's like uhh malfunctioning in my head. How do you interact with these people? Like when alumni come through, it's like, "Okay, how do I connect and talk with you because I really don't know how to do it?" That's honestly still a struggle now at the university: connecting with white people. That's hard for people of color. Even when I shook people's hands. I don't know if you've seen the video of Obama, he is shaking hands with a white person but with a black person he daps them up. That's happened to me! I don't know who should I dap up? Who should I shake hands with? It's so weird! And it happens all the time! I've tried to—for any white guy I meet, I try to dap them up because I just don't know but they always shake my hand. It's that underlying language once again that people of color have. -- Student 4

Student 4 unpacked the process of understanding white spaces and learning how to interact in

both worlds. Cis shared the challenge of learning how to act in white spaces, how to

communicate, or even how to greet white people. For example, cis was able to "dap" another

person of color, but learned that "dapping" another white person was not appropriate. This

student continued to share how they learned to address this challenge.

> What I've done, honestly, is I overhear what they talk about, how white people are interacting with each other. If I'm on the bus, I'll hear what questions they're asking and honestly I won't ask any person those questions. I just wouldn't. I wouldn't work those sentences in that same nature. And it's hard. I'm thinking like, "Okay, clearly everyone

just starting off now is going to talk about how their summer went." But it's like my summer's going to be way different from yours. And all their summers are very similar. I just let them talk, essentially. You start the conversation and go from there and keep asking—I personally felt like questions I already knew the answers to. I could sit here talking and be able to answer the questions because it's like they kind of said it in their story. But it's like choosing the time where you have that person go further in terms of what they're saying. – Student 4

This student learned by observing white students' interactions and listening to cis conversation.

In addition, Student 4 also learned to ask questions and carry on conversations with white

students, even when cis could not relate.

Just as Student 4, Student 6 also shared cis experience when communicating in white

spaces. Learning to be articulate was an important skill for these student. Once cis gained respect

from white people, cis were able to navigate the space better. However, it never became a

comfortable space to communicate, as it is when in their community of color.

In a predominantly white organization I just try to make if it's in a meeting setting and or interacting to try to make what's considered intelligent comments. Whether they have a lot of depth in them, or not, I'll say it like it's the deepest thing in the world or the most intelligent thing in the world just to earn that respect. That you're going to listen to me when I talk. I'll establish that early. When I'm with say my community I don't feel like I have to do that. I tend to be quiet I'll be more quite than anything. I'll be more of a jokester per se. But if I'm in a predominantly white group, once I'm comfortable I'll joke. I think you have more to prove in other groups and it's very important that you establish that. If I'm in [my community] I could care less how people see me because I feel like shit we damn near the same. – Student 6

Student 6 also learned to observe group dynamics and learn from white students.

See who's the most influential in the group and either argue with them if I have a great point or reinforce what they said and expand on it. So first articulate what they said to show that I understand it and then if I agree then expand and maybe bring up a new point and pose that point to them or to the group. If they feel like it's a good point then I won if they feel like it's a bad point then I probably have to argue a little bit more but I'll have to lose gracefully. I won't turn it into a war but it will be like a small battle just to push back and it would be, did you consider this? did you consider that? I will be strategic if I'm on the losing end cause you can't lose if you loose you're losing more respect if you crash and burn. – Student 6

It was clear that cis had reflected on cis interactions and the behavior seemed to be strategic when in white spaces, compared to when cis was in cis community. To this student in particular, gaining respect was essential to navigating white spaces, but when with cis community, cis cared less.

Some students of color more clearly displayed tactful behaviors when in white spaces than when with other people of color. Student 5 shared an experience when cis peers pointed out a shift in behavior when interacting with a white student.

> …and I was with I think it was all [people of color] and we were in the lounge just chatting and you know being our silly selves and one person who was white from my study group who walked by and I was like hey [name of white student] how you doing? And they [the people of color] were like "oh yeah he's white I thought he was," And I was like "excuse me?" I didn't know I talked differently to people but maybe I do. I really don't know and I think that is something that in terms of Order maybe I did with Order but I think that if it happened in Order it probably happened in all different passages in my life. – Student 5

This student completely shifted the way cis interacted with the white student, compared to when cis was with the people of color chatting and being silly. As this student mentioned, this is a phenomenon that is common in various spaces, including in the OOA. Even though shifting behaviors may be common, if this shift is noticed by other people of color, students of color may be questioned; as Student 5's peer pointed out, "oh yeah he's white."

Other students learned to navigate the white space by displaying their leadership qualities. Student 12 reflected on the initiation week when cis felt the need to stand out as a strong leader and be accepted by the alumni and the new members of the OOA.

> …it also reminds you that you're there because you're a leader. So all the time, I think you try to like display these very leader qualities, like speak up. And I think it's not so much as being part of a team, because those first initial days, it's not about being a team. It's about proving yourself and proving why you've been chosen here. That initial moment of being like "okay I have to prove myself to these people because the old ones, I guess, approve. But now these people don't know who I am" and I think you always have that face mask on, where you have to be that leader…It's like trying to give yourself

away, I feel like sometimes you don't have to, but that's just a case of the game of minority in any type of leadership position. -- Student 12

Focusing on being a strong leader and practicing the best leadership qualities seemed to be a strategy for avoiding being racialized by white students, even if it meant having to put a "face mask on," or to "give yourself away."

In comparison to their relationships and interactions with white students, when in their communities most students of color felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Student 2 began by expressing cis comfort level when with cis community. In contrast, cis did not feel entirely valued within the OOA and thus, did not feel as comfortable as cis would when with people from cis's racial identity.

> Yeah. I'm more comfortable [with those of my own race and ethnicity] because it all goes back to the question of "Are you valued?" It's so interesting that it takes all this circumlocution. It takes all these things to come to the conclusion. I do act differently in this group because one is not valued entirely. You might be valued for your intellect, physical ability…For those two identities, in particular, one is not valued. And so, you don't feel comfortable to just be who you are. – Student 2

Student 2 attributed the different behaviors in different settings to not feeling valued within the OOA.

> Student 3 also managed the various interactions and faced challenges when trying to gain and maintain credibility within communities of color.

> In some ways, I feel like you always have to act different because if you act the same then you're never going...but just with [my racial/ethnic community] letting me know that you care. I still go to events and I tell myself this year that I have to go to more 'cause people [of color] are coming up to me like, "Oh you haven't been around" but I've been sick and tired so it really wasn't like that. So now I'm just like "Let me just go out" because I don't want people to think that "Oh she joined that organization [OOA] and just forgot about where she came from" so just making sure that you're still involved in that organization. – Student 3

Students of color continue to feel the dual responsibility to stay connected to their communities and to balance their relationships with whites.

Student 4 concluded that negotiation of these spaces became a burden. But at the end,

when they connected with their communities of color, students relaxed and acted more like their

true selves.

> I feel like it's a day job for us. I feel like we do work and then we have to go back to our
> community where we feel like we can let our guards down and just be who we are. It's
> hard out here sometimes. – Student 4

Students of color who adopted culturally splitting behavioral strategies learned to

navigate two spaces – white spaces and spaces within their communities of color. One of the

most common behaviors that students managed was communication across these spaces. In

addition, students of color also worked at gaining credibility in both spaces. But it was evident

that students of color were the most comfortable when with people from their own communities

of color.

DISCUSSION

These five behavioral strategies (1) Subservience 2) The Warrior 3) Feigned

Subservience 4) The Oppressed Oppressor and 5) Culturally Splitting) were, I believe, an

appropriate framework for exploring how student leaders of color within the OOA negotiated

their racial and ethnic identity.

First, students who adopted subservience behaviors justified and ignored discriminatory

comments and actions from white students. These students usually rationalized the injustices

they encountered from white students by trying to excuse or explain why white students were

unintentionally being discriminatory. Other times, students simply blamed themselves for being

oppressed. This behavior was usually adopted when students of color did not feel confident

about their capabilities, for example, when trying to articulate and communicate during

meetings. By adopting some of the subservience behaviors, some students became tolerant of white students' dominant ideas and plans, and as a result may have gained status and benefits from the white members in the OOA.

The warrior strategy, in contrast, included behaviors where students acknowledged and identified privilege, oppression, and power dynamics. In addition, some students who embodied warrior behaviors then actively worked towards ending the oppression and challenging the power dynamics within OOA. Students in this "battle mode" seemed to feel strongly about advancing their communities of color and were particularly passionate about social justice issues. Nonetheless, this constant battle led some students to be frustrated, burnt out, and to face psychological and emotional challenges. In addition, students who adopted the most warrior behaviors also struggled to develop strong relationships with white students and sometimes with other students of color within the organization.

Those students of color whom exemplified the most feigned subservience behaviors were fully aware of the group dynamics and the privilege and oppression that came into play. However, once in white spaces, these students seemed to tolerate the discriminatory comments and behaviors from white students, appearing to fit in. But deep within, these students resisted the injustice and would sometimes speak their mind when not in the space. The negotiation of these two mentalities led some students to struggle in developing relationships within the OOA.

The oppressed oppressor behavioral strategy included prioritizing relationships with whites within OOA, to the extent that those who adopted the behavior associated with the oppressor. This strategy included behaving in a way where students of color oppressed other students of color – in word or in deed. Students who espoused this oppressive behavior blamed other students of color for their struggles and also attempted to detach themselves from the

negative stereotypes of their communities. Students who mastered this behavior sometimes benefited from creating strong relationships with white students and gained status within the organization.

Finally, the culturally splitting behavioral strategy was based on two distinct behaviors – behaviors that are acceptable in white spaces and behaviors preferred within communities of color. Students of color who practiced these behaviors faced the challenges of negotiating two different worlds and maintaining their status within the two spaces. For example, students of color learned to communicate across group boundaries in white spaces and were very aware of what they were doing as they reflected on their position within the OOA. This negotiation of two words can be stressful, but when in spaces with people of color, these students seemed to let their guard down and feel more comfortable.

In summary, these five strategies are diverse behaviors that students of color practiced while in OOA. Throughout their experiences within the OOA, these behaviors were adopted and abandoned depending on the time of the year, the conversation or issue being discussed, the students' well being, the challenges or struggles, and so on. These behaviors were fluid all throughout and did not describe one specific student. However, it was evident that some students adopted specific behaviors more than others and some students seemed more comfortable to be in the predominately white space. I believe that comfort could have been based on students' past experiences in white spaces and/or commitment to the OOA. While these five strategies were beneficial to analyzing the behaviors of students of color, I do not claim that there is a right or wrong way for students of color to navigate white spaces. Rather there are varying behaviors students of color adopt to navigate white spaces.

Staying culturally grounded

As students adopted behaviors to navigate white spaces, many also managed to stay culturally grounded. During each interview I asked students the open-ended question of "how do you stay culturally grounded?" Based on the participants' answers and their comments throughout the interview, I define "staying culturally grounded" as a way that a person of color continuously stays connected with their racial and ethnic culture (culture defined as values, beliefs, and practices) despite being submerged in a white mainstream organization.

Consulting with Community

First, because of the prejudice in the history of the OOA, some people of color on campus still question the membership of this organization. As a result, it is sometimes challenging for students of color who joined the OOA to stay connected and keep their status within communities of color. Several students felt it was necessary to consult with alumni of color and/or their community leaders before joining the OOA. For example:

> I contacted probably every alumni that I knew that was associated with Order and social justice community and person of color community, I talked to everyone I could talked to. I talked to alumni that had been tapped and not followed forward with it, I talked to people of color that were in my community, I talked to everyone under the sun, and I was just so worried that this was the choice that I was making for myself or a choice I was making for my organization. – Student 11

Connecting with people from cis community and listening to what they had to say was very important for Student 11's decision making. Cis felt as if joining OOA was not only a personal decision, but a choice that would impact cis entire community. Consulting with cis organization leaders was a technique to stay connected and maintain status within communities of color. In the same way, Student 5 also connected with an alumnus of color before joining OOA.

He had also gone through that process so that was one of the reasons and also he was a person of color so we would be able to connect. He also still had relationships with people in the [community of color]. So he definitely had to go through it, had to sort of navigate those relationships through his decision to be in Order. – Student 5

By connecting with another person of color, Student 5 hoped to gain insight into how to navigate relationships with other people of color and stay connected to cis community.

Student 8 consulted with and tried to persuade cis own organization's executive board to support cis membership in the OOA.

Everything happened so fast and everything was so fussy and to a certain degree I knew that I was confident in my ability to persuade my board. I was pretty much sure that I would win them over and that I would be fine. The accusations that I got, mostly to the end of the year. People said that I made the decision already, and I said yes, I made my decision but I brought my decision to you. Of course I had my opinion about my decision, its fine, its different. – Student 8

Despite cis effort to consult, Student 8 was still accused for not genuinely coming to cis group because cis had already made a decision about joining prior to consulting. This student continued to share cis experience once people found out cis had joined the OOA.

Some people thought I would be a sellout, but I don't care about Order more than I care about this. But there were people in the social justice community that couldn't believe I joined. So in that end, I was able to create some allies, but then there were some that I just lost. I did feel like I was alienated on campus, in the social justice world, because many of those people didn't trust me anymore because I had decided to join this organization. But I was able to navigate some of it and establish my own legitimacy in my own way. – Student 8

Student 1 also shared cis experience of communicating with and negotiating relationships with people of color. This student was encouraged by some people not to join the organization, but others supported cis in the decision.

He would always rant about the organization and told me the horrific history and talked about all the bad. And said, "Don't join this org." Just a lot of people said, "you don't need to join it. You already have like built yourself up in a different, autonomous way. Why become a part of a secret society?" I wouldn't necessarily say I lost them as friends, I think the relationship just kind of changed which is really odd, but I have to respect their decision. I just think that they thought that once you go into that kind of org, that's

how you're constructed to work through those systems in a secret way for the rest of your life. But on the other end, there are people also who were skeptical, but heard me when I explained what it really was and all of that and just believed in the core of who I am and realized that an org is not going to change who I am as a person 'cause they felt that I'm pretty rooted in my core values. – Student 1

At the end, Student 1 maintained some community relationships because of cis ability to demonstrate how cis stayed grounded to their values. Student 8 experienced the challenge of staying associated with people from their community after joining the OOA. This was a common challenge for some students.

Family and Friends

Another way that students of color stayed culturally grounded was to nurture close relationships with their family and friends. Students 3 and 4 both shared their experiences of how they stayed connected with friends.

But now we're all in different organizations but we still come together like go out or just talk about daily issues. There have been events where like a semi racist incident occurred or just talking about how you feel in class. Like one of my friends, "I'm tired of all these white people saying negro." (Laughs) I mean in those ways. – Student 3

… just being around [people of color] and being able to talk about our different issues that we feel that we have in common talk about music, fashion, celebrities, political issues, stuff like that go hoop go play basketball, go to events around campus that involve the [community of color], that's how I stay culturally grounded. – Student 6

Specifically, Student 3 highlighted the type of conversations cis friends and cis-self have – discussions around interacting with white people. Student 6 also spoke about taking part in conversations and activities that were relevant to cis community. Similarly, Student 4 also emphasized communicating with people of color and relating to one another.

I'm a personal believer in—there's a certain culture like no matter what or who you are or where you grew up, I feel like your people in your community, there's an underlining language that you can communicate with one another. Whether that be maybe "We've been oppressed" and we both connect on that or even if you were upper, lower class or

middle [person of color], I feel like there's something there that we all connect on and we can understand each other whenever one of us is in need and help or what have you. I don't know how to describe it but it's that connection that you have. – Student 4

Staying connected and feeling supported was important for Student 4. This student pointed out that regardless of differences in socio economic statuses, cis felt a connection with people of color.

Student 6 additionally shared the significance of staying connected by supporting each other at various campus events, not only attending but also helping with the execution. When supporting each other, this student then described the atmosphere that was created within the community, an atmosphere that made one feel included and welcomed.

Text you about different events. Like say I need help with this. One of my friends he's doing involvement with black homecoming and he had needed some help with something. So he said, "hey, help me with this." That makes you feel included. So overall just getting invitations to different things, outings. And then when you get to those outings being greeted and talked to. And I don't always necessarily have to go up to people and talk to them they will come to me. – Student 6

By attending and supporting each other at various events, this student was successful at staying grounded within cis community.

Furthermore, having friends that challenged them was also a way to stay grounded. For example, Student 6 and Student 11 both had friends from their racial and ethnic identity who reminded them of where they came from and kept them grounded, both when deciding to join the OOA and then throughout the year when in the OOA.

…they would never think I would just be joining something that at the end of the day it would hurt me. If I can learn about it and tell them they can be confident that I'm trying to give them as much of an unfiltered answer as possible. Like this is what it is. And so when I told one of my homeboys he was just like alright man I trust you dawg, but this is what we heard though. It was good because they challenged my thinking not to just eat the soup I would say. So I was always pushing back with what the group was telling me and then what outside was telling me. – Student 6

…we're all [ethnic] and on top of that my group of friends my close group of friends, we were always together. So that absolutely kept me grounded. Because they were still very in touch with their backgrounds and their ethnicity and that to me that was a part of my life, and about my friends who had been my friends before Order happened they would say "listen, this is not you, what is going on?" and you know when you come to realize that people who care about you that something has change, then you are really far more conscious of that person of who you are and who you are becoming. – Student 11

Student 6 reflected on cis experience before joining the organization and gave credit to cis friends for these challenges. Also, by being transparent about the organization and the process, this student maintained relationships and positions within cis community. In a similar way, Student 11 was also challenged by friends and felt valued when in cis home community.

Staying connected with family was another way that students felt supported and connected to their roots.

I grew up very close-knit with them [i.e. family]. I try my hardest to still keep in touch. So that's the first thing I think about…But what I carry with myself today is the value of this deep, embedded understanding of happiness and life and happiness isn't rooted in materials or what you have, it's rooted in the love that you share and the relationships that you have and you nurture. – Student 1

Student 1 considered cis family to be an important aspect of staying grounded. Although the life of a student leader may make it challenging to stay connected to family, this student made it a priority to maintain and nurture relationships with cis family members.

Similarly, Student 7 also stayed in touch with cis family and took advice from them on how to stay culturally grounded while in college. Student 7 shared the advice from a relative:

He met a lot of kids [in college] that were well off that were also [his racial identity] so he kinda got jealous of them. He told me, "I was really jealous of guys like you when I got to college" so he told me when I got to college he was like, "make sure you stay humble." – Student 7

Receiving advice from alumni or family members and friends who had experience being in white spaces was the most influential.

Cultural Practices

Staying culturally grounded and rooted to their values was something that many students thought about and worked towards. For example, students practiced their own language or linguistic style, listened to their cultural music, appreciated ethnic art, and stayed up to date with politics that affected their communities.

> …language for sure. I mean my [language] isn't as good as it should be, whatever that means. But it's not, I can converse. I was very, I was hyper aware of my political, of how my identity colored my political beliefs. – Student 13

> So I embody culturally that I am very [ethnic], like I listen to [ethnic] music, almost, probably more than American music, if not more, then definitely equal. I eat [ethnic] food, I am a fluent [name of language] speaker, that is something that puts a huge poll in my life and that is mainly to me that I can read and speak…I am very engaged in the politics of the region with the politics of foreign policy and all of that. [name of language] fluently. – Student 8

> Definitely the music, the dancing the way we express ourselves and they way we enhance our community I think that is through self expression through art, making jewelry, creating different crafts out of things we find, honestly. – Student 1

These students developed deliberate strategies to stay culturally grounded, making them feel connected and accepted in their communities.

Students also stayed in touch with their cultural traditions. By doing so, they felt connected and grounded to their values and beliefs.

> Just celebrating holidays and coming home and you know spending a lot of time at home and maintaining that. That was inherent. – Student 11

By celebrating cis cultural holidays, Student 11 stayed grounded. By practicing their cultural traditions, students were able to stay rooted.

Self-Reflection

Although most students worked towards staying connected to their culture, many students had to still critically reflect on their own racial and ethnic identity before feeling culturally grounded. Student 3 struggled with understanding what it meant to stay culturally grounded because cis was still exploring cis identity and the culture.

> …it's hard though because to a certain extent [my racial group] don't have like a legit culture. There isn't like something that you have to do specifically to be [my racial identity] so in a way that question is hard to answer. – Student 3

Furthermore, Student 5 reflected on how cis stayed culturally grounded and felt that cis faced a unique experience. Since cis did not fully feel accepted within the community of color because cis possessed "white" mannerisms, this student had to work towards centering cis-self.

> I do feel an obligation to stay connected and I do feel the need to make sure I still have relationships with people in the [my] community. But I think that the way that I sort of, what's the word? How I manifest my [racial/ethnic] culture is very different than a lot of other people. A lot of people would say I'm white wash. I'm uppity I'm a uppity boy [of color] who thinks he's white, whose just trying to make it in the world. Whose cutthroat, who doesn't care about his people. That used to hurt me. I can't tell you how many times I was called an oreo growing up. Then coming to this campus I thought it was going to be different and then, no, people still called me an oreo, [people] who came from all white backgrounds. I got to the point in my life where I was like I can only live my life for me. I can express myself the way I can express myself so if people say I'm not living into my race I think it's more so a personal problem. – Student 5

Student 5 experienced a process that many students of color go through. However, this student was able to reflect on and be comfortable with who cis is and still feel grounded and connected to their racial identity.

To Student 1, staying true to cis-self when making the decision to join the organization and to participate throughout the year was the key to staying grounded.

> But I think the hardest thing not to lose is trust in myself. Trusting, am I making a good decision that's true to myself? I think even currently, I'm still being challenged in that decision but I think I've gained a lot so far but also lost a lot. But I'm still figuring it out. – Student 1

While Student 1 was still reflective about the decision to join the organization, as an individual cis still felt true to cis-self and trusted the decision to join the OOA. Student 1 also reminded cis-self of cis background as a way to stay grounded.

> I guess the simple thing is that I have to remind myself where I come from 'cause it's easy to get wrapped up in the "glim glam" of America. – Student 1

In the same way, Student 2 also reflected to make sure to not lose themselves while in OOA.

> Through a lot of deep reflection. That's the only way. Otherwise you will get lost in your group, in the institution, in the constitution. Through a lot of deep reflection, that's how I have been able—staying grounded to who I am, to what I abide by and what I relate to and also being present. Deep reflection so as not to get lost in yourself as well to just ground yourself yet still stay present in the moment. – Student 2

Student 1 and Student 2 both used self-reflection as a way to meditate on their experiences and remind themselves of their backgrounds.

Staying culturally grounded when having been submerged in a predominately white organization may be challenging for some people. Most students of color considered themselves having stayed culturally grounded despite being in this predominately white organization and shared their strategies for how they managed to do so. First, several students expressed the importance of consulting with alumni of color and current community leaders before joining the OOA. By genuinely searching for guidance and for support from their communities, many students of color were able to maintain their status within their communities of color.

Second, students focused on nurturing relationships with their friends and family. These relationships were usually with people who would challenge them or advise them on how to best stay grounded. Furthermore, students also shared simple strategies for staying culturally grounded. For example, practicing their language, listening to their cultural music, appreciating cultural art, and staying aware of issues and events that their communities were involved in.

Finally, several students also expressed the importance of self-reflection and staying true to themselves. Self-reflection was also beneficial for students, who still were working towards understanding their racial and ethnic identity and staying centered despite what other people said.

Intersectionality

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that other social identities (other than race and ethnicity) influenced the experiences of students of color in a predominately white organization. I briefly explore socio economic status, gender, and religion/faith and the impact these identities had on students of color's experiences and interactions within OOA.

Socio economic status

Sometimes socio economic status (SES) was used by students of color as a means to navigate the predominately white space. For example, being able to afford outings and activities gave students of color the opportunity to bond with white members and create meaningful relationships. Student 7, as an upper-middle class member, felt as if cis did not have to worry about money when going out. However, cis was aware of cis SES privilege and tried to be inclusive of those who came from lower SES by attending free events and supporting one another through inexpensive ways.

> I think my social economical status I guess in a sense. I guess I identity with upper middle class background so therefore some of the stuff we might do might cost money where going to social events whether it's bar or traveling or whatever something that does cost money I do realize that could come into play with what resource I can contribute or how much I could participate and that might not be the case for everybody. So I always try to keep that in mind and just try to interact with people not just on going out and drinking but going to peoples events because most people's events are mostly free anyways so why not support that and enjoy. Because I know not everyone in the organization comes from upper middle class background that's why we're diverse in that sense. – Student 7

While Student 7 acknowledged the SES privilege, cis seemed to have a skewed view of SES

diversity among students of color in OOA. The following is the breakdown of the SES of the

students of color, based on how they identified: Lower (2), Middle (4), Upper Middle (4), Upper

(3). Within the students of color in the OOA, there was an overwhelmingly middle and upper

SES representation. These demographics definitely came into play as students adapted.

Student 3 reflected on cis experience within the organization and cis ability to feel

comfortable and not awkward due to SES status.

> From my socioeconomic status I feel like it's in the middle because I didn't have it really
> hard, but it wasn't that everything was given to me either. It's like yeah, I have to work
> for things, but I don't feel—it doesn't make it that hard. I guess it would be hard if I was
> on opposite ends of the spectrum. Like if I really just couldn't do this. I feel like that's
> awkward when you're in a situation and you can't pay for anything, I haven't really been
> put in that situation. Like, "Yeah I'm not going to go on this extravagant trip." (Laughs) I
> feel like most people are in that situation. I feel like that hasn't really affected me and that
> people that I hang around were all pretty much on the same level so we've had pretty
> much similar experiences. – Student 3

Student 3 recognized that cis SES was beneficial because cis was able to better relate to most of

the other students and participate in most of the activities.

However, not all students came from affluent homes and students seemed to recognize

students from lower SES.

> There were people that were socio economically underprivileged and they were forced to
> let that go. They don't want to be those poor people who are always like, "why are we
> spending so much money in social outings?" "Why are we assuming that everyone can
> afford this?" – Student 8

Student 8 suggested that lower SES members might choose not to speak up because they didn't

want to be labeled as the other. Instead, those students might either not attend the social outings

and events or could only afford to attend some.

Most students of color seemed aware of SES and how it played out within OOA. Student

6 argued that students from upper SES carry themselves with confidence, as opposed to students

from lower SES, who may not feel as confident.

> I can recognize the people that got money though… Yeah cause those are the people that tend to maybe go out more, buy people rounds, and you're building that relationship in that way. That's probably my, I guess bias. And then maybe if you do come from and this isn't me though, if you were to not come from let's say money you don't feel that sense of entitlement. I know with just some of my friends that I grew up with they could be the most intimidating person like amongst our group but if they get in a setting that they don't really know how to navigate they just revert to that stuff which is usually physical and can get you in a lot of trouble. You can go to jail over that. They will just freeze up and they can't discuss or use their words. So if you come from something like that where if you do get in a disagreement or where you have something to say and somebody's not listening to you and you don't know how to negotiate that or navigate that and feel this sense of entitlement like I have something to say and you will listen. I think that tends to be a problem more with people that come from less money and if you come from more money you talk very rarely that you are important and that you matter. If you have that confidence it'll show up in a group setting. Like you can tell who is more confident in what they have to say and they don't have any problem with just speaking up. I've noticed that kinda early when I was younger. When me obviously coming from money I'm not as hesitant but I do think it plays a role. In the group I think it does somewhat. Yeah I think it do. – Student 6

Student 6 reflected on cis experiences outside of the organization and used cis friends whom

come from lower SES as a way to compare them with upper SES people. Cis claimed that some

people from lower SES might not be as confident when speaking in white spaces. However, if

these lower SES people do not feel as if they are being heard, they might act aggressively to

obtain respect. On the other hand, those students that come from more affluent families will tend

to be more confident and not feel as if they have to make themselves heard. In the end, Student 6

concludes that SES does play a role within the OOA.

Student 6 briefly touched upon the cultural capital aspect of SES, when cis described

upper class students having the confidence to communicate. Student 8 brought more light upon

this aspect of SES, expressing how a lack of cultural capital affected the way that cis could relate to white students.

> Part of it was like not being able to, not being into stuff like gulf. Not being into like football. Or like just a lot of cultural things that I realized that I didn't know that well. I grew up poor, for a long time until high school we were really poor. I couldn't relate to that sort of culture consumption that came from being a middle/upper middle class white. Talking about having a cabin on the lake. And they talked about it so normal. Or they would talk about their favorite book or literature, and it was like, I don't know 90% of the authors that you are talking about. The things that you don't know. I think that played a role on it. – Student 8

This student noticed the cultural capital that affluent white students had such as knowing how to play golf and being able to talk about literature. By having the lack of cultural capital, this student struggled to connect and interact with white affluent students within the OOA.

Student 10 also emphasizes cultural capital and the unawareness that most white students had around SES.

> Even though most of us came from relatively the same SES, I found that the white members were less aware of issues of financial privilege--privilege simply from being able to go to college, pursue careers they wanted to, etc. – Student 10

Overall, students of color in the OOA came from affluent backgrounds, which led them to more easily adapt to the organization when they planned outings and events. However, it was evident that most students of color were aware of their SES privilege and were sensitive to the issue. Several students expressed that because their parents did not come from upper SES they were constantly reminded of the struggles of working class people. In the end, many students of color were able to utilize their SES privilege to adapt and navigate the predominately white organization.

Gender

Despite there being a relatively equal balance between men and women within the OOA, students still pointed out gender dynamics that affected the organization. Of the students of color interviewed, 6 were women and 7 were men. For this section only, I will use him/her/he/she pronouns but will be changing the student numbers to letters, to keep the students' experiences confidential.

Today, the OOA is a coed organization. However, the OOA was initiated in 1902 as an all-men organization, and did not invite women into the organization until 2000. Some women of color reflected on this history before deciding to join. Prior to accepting the invitation to join, Student A consulted with other women of color and thought about her position within the organization.

> …and something that made me angry about the organization that, after my tap I was like, can I be in an organization like this. The fact that they did not accept women until the 2000s. The University of Michigan that prides itself in being such a progressive university and having such a strong social justice community I just couldn't believe that women had not been allowed in the organization until the 2000 and I talked to the alumni who were women and who were people of color and I asked them, "how do I reconcile this" and they kind of like, obviously they were more bias and ultimately what I decided was I could not let an organization like this continue to exist with the off change that it is not going to revert to what it used to be. And I felt, that when I made that choice, when I entered this organization that I had an opportunity where I could feel part of that change from within. – Student A

As a woman, this student was at first skeptical of the history and the fact that women had only been part of the organization for a little over a decade. However, after talking to other women of color who had been part of the OOA, Student A felt more comfortable in accepting the membership and committed to bringing gender awareness. Student B similarly expressed her desire to represent her identity as a woman.

> You know in 2000 they just started letting women in. And so I felt like it was important to represent these identities – student B

Student A and Student B both also exemplified warrior behaviors – where they felt strongly about being the change and advocating for women.

Moreover, due to the fact that women were not part of the organization for decades, the culture of the organization was and is very male-dominant. Several women felt as if they were entering an unwelcoming space. Student C expanded on how some the OOA men made comments about women in a discriminatory and unwelcoming way.

> Gender was probably one of the biggest dividers of the group as well. I say divider and not difference because there were issues during tapping/selection that related specifically to a member's gender. For example, it was originally assumed by the guys that we, as women, wouldn't be able to handle the "rougher" aspects of tapping. In the beginning of the year, the male members would also joke about how "it used to be" (i.e. all men, before women were allowed) was so much easier than it is today, and that we should go back to those original policies. While these comments were made in jest, I believe they were said with a small amount of truth, unfortunately. – Student C

This student identified gender dynamics to be a significant factor when conducting initiation week, specifically, when new members were given various challenges throughout the week. However, the most hurtful comments for this student were the comments around wishing the organization went back to being an all men group. Although men made these comments jokingly, she felt that at some implicit level these men meant it.

Women were not the only ones who noticed gender power dynamics. From the men of color interviewed, some acknowledged their male privilege and were aware of these dynamics. Student D, for example, shared how communication styles among men and women were different as a result of the gender privilege and oppression – men had more confidence to speak their mind and dominate conversations.

> Yeah I think gender comes into play. Me being a male I feel like I have certain agencies to where I can say certain off the wall things and it will be funny and get a laugh out of people. That I don't think women could do or do as easily without you know losing something from what they just said. And then I would say as a male I could probably

more easily dominate a conversation. Which I've tended to see, well I don't speak that much but I will say. Like as a male I enjoy more freedom I would say. – Student D

Interestingly, Student D mentioned that if women were to be funny, women would lose status or respect. This student also pointed out that men are freer to speak their mind.

Student E was also aware of his male privilege and explored his gender identity, but instead, he related his experience to white men. This student intertwined his racial identity and reflected on how his gender interactions were influenced by his racial identity. When in spaces with white men, this student fought for the same status and respect as white men did. However, these thoughts did not cross his mind when thought about engaging with women, whether white or not.

Yes. I think that's particularly why. So beyond just race, there's gender, which is a big issue, one that vexes me. Male privilege, which you also have to work against but be cognizant of. When in engaging with white males in the group, that's when I consciously make that clear. I mean, we're both males, you bark, I can bark too. Why don't we just end it there? That's just one example with white males. With females, it doesn't cross my mind. I don't know why. I can already see right now in dealing with the alumni. We're all males. These are all strong and very powerful white males. And so, there is that element. I think about my racial aspect. – Student E

Evidently, this student had thought about his relations with other men in the group and interestingly, also reflected on the power that white alumni men have. For this student of color, gender and racial identity are almost inherently connected, and he thought about these two identities when interacting within the OOA.

After analyzing the gender dynamics within the OOA, I saw how this identity also impacted the way that students of color, both men and women, interacted with other white students. More specifically, it is noteworthy to say that women also had to learn to navigate interacting with white men.

Religion/Faith

Religion and faith also seemed to be an identity that impacted the way that some students of color navigated the OOA. Students made decisions based on their beliefs and values. First, while drinking became a culture of the organization, some students found these activities to conflict with their religious beliefs. Student 8 reflected on how alcohol influenced their relationships with other members. While this student decided to drink, cis expressed being pressured to do so and feeling as if cis had to hide cis religious background from people – since drinking is not supported in their faith.

> The only ways that I, that I…well I drank with them. Drinking was like the equal, that was the moment when everyone got together, to just drink. We all drank and got trashed. If I was more conservative, that wouldn't have been an option for me. There was so much of that culture, that the group was driven by alcohol. All throughout my life I had been pretty conservative and my senior year I felt the pressure to drink. Not only am I losing these battles and being the angry person of color but also miss out because of social opportunities because I didn't drink. And even when I did drink, it was hard for me because I had to be secretive about it. In that structure, the fact that it is driven by alcohol, for a person who doesn't drink, that's very rough. – Student 8

Attending socials where there was drinking was a strategy that this student used to build on relationships. As a person of color, this student already felt targeted and did not want to once again be labeled as the other by not participating in drinking activities.

Other students, such as Student 13, acknowledged cis religious privilege and felt comfortable drinking and socializing with others. This student of color felt that because of both a common religion and common interest in drinking together, white students were able to connect with cis and build memories together, regardless of racial and ethnic identity.

> For example, my family's religious background is Christian. There are aspects about my identity that made it easier for people to, I think, sort of immediately get along with me or not sort of hold the kinds of prejudices against me that they might hold against other [religious people of color]. So yeah, I also drink and that's a huge aspect of the organization. Drinking and spending time with folks in that kind of capacity is a huge part of the experience, so because I had no problem doing any of that stuff I didn't really

feel like there was any obstacles in my way of getting along or connecting with folks in the way that the organization encouraged people to get to know one another. – Student 13

Having no religious guidelines that prevented drinking, Student 13 felt fortunate not to be judged and to be accepted within the organization.

Other students faced another type of barrier based on their religious practices – i.e. dietary restrictions. Based on their beliefs, Student 2 struggled when going out with members of the OOA because this student had to always be mindful of cis diet.

> Then let's say the socials, in terms of my religious framework. There are things I just don't do. Whenever we go anywhere to eat, I have to always be thinking about that. Should I eat before or how do I navigate? That's something I have to navigate a whole lot: diet restrictions. Wondering, is it perceived an extra thing or embraced as a natural thing? – Student 2

Dietary restrictions set this student apart from the others and made going out in groups sometimes uncomfortable. In addition, this student seemed unsure of how cis dietary restrictions were perceived, if it was seen as a burden or a valuable characteristic.

Other students also felt uneasy about how their religious identity impacted their interactions within the OOA. Student 12 expressed a bit of confusion as cis reflected on how the activities cis was encouraged to do within the OOA did not align with cis religious and personal values.

> …and I was starting to think. Like even in your mind you no longer feel humbled that you served. You're like I'm like this leader now, that has been chosen. It's very a strange feeling. I remember sitting in the car on my way to like these scavengers' hunts and being told to sing this creepy song like we're going to rule Michigan. And I don't know if I feel like this is a conflict between my religion, that I represent its for a university on a public relations scale. – Student 12

Students' religious faith and beliefs seemed to be influential in the way they navigated their interactions within the OOA. While this is a more invisible identity for some students than for others, students of color seemed to still be aware of the privileged religious and faith

identities that allowed some students to enjoy and appreciate some aspects of the organization culture, such as drinking, eating out, and practicing certain traditions, and at the same time excluded or created discomfort for others.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the backgrounds of students of color in OOA, whether they came from predominately white communities or not, students expressed having to learn strategies to negotiate their racial and ethnic identity while in college and in OOA. In addition, most student leaders within the OOA also developed strategies to stay culturally grounded within their communities of color or with their own cultural beliefs and values. It was evident that while many spent time reflecting and learning about their racial and ethnic identity throughout college, as young adults they have begun to question some of the "acceptable" behaviors they were taught as children. For example, some students learned to adapt and assimilate when they were young; however, they expressed warrior behaviors in order to challenge oppressive behaviors and systems in OOA. Others continued to seek and obtain advice from their family members on how to best stay culturally grounded. Staying connected to their family and friends seemed to be the most common coping strategy.

Just as with the transition into predominantly white colleges, student leaders of color face a similar challenge as they enter professional leadership student organizations. However, there is no "bridge program" to guide them as they navigate a predominantly white organization and thus, they must learn to navigate themselves, with the tools they have learned prior to joining. Most students joined the organization hoping to adopt certain behavioral strategies, such as the warrior, but quickly realized they had to change their strategies and adopt more subservient

behaviors in order to be accepted and valued by their peers. Others, anticipating acceptance and justice within the organization, then found themselves having to learn and adopt warrior behaviors. These negotiations of identity led to psychological or emotional challenges for some students.

I conclude not by rating or selecting the most effective types of behaviors for students of color. My goal is not to provide a guide for students of color to navigate white spaces. Instead, I believe my research should lead to efforts of creating inclusive spaces, where students of color are not pressured to renegotiate their racial and ethnic identity within mainstream organizations or be challenged to stay culturally grounded. Students of color should not have to hide their identity or be forced to continuously struggle to be valued. I believe it is critical for white students to understand the students of color's experiences. My research should not only provide interesting stories about these students of color, but also hopefully challenge white students to think about their role within the organization and how their white racial identity impacts others.

Furthermore, I believe that understanding the experiences of students of color may allow for a transformation of OOA's organizational structure and culture so that is more inclusive. For example, some students of color expressed feeling devalued and unsafe during meetings. While diversity in the room is the first step, being aware of how these diverse identities come into play and are influential in the group's dynamics is essential to gain the most out of the diverse group. Conducting trainings and dialogues at the start of the students' membership, where students can understand each other and their backgrounds, is a way that this awareness can be established. It is also critical that this understanding, this dialogue, takes place in a safe space, which can be initiated by developing guidelines and actively listening.

Talking openly about each other's privileged and oppressed identities should also lead to more effective communication. The majority of students of color expressed struggling with speaking up at meetings, feeling devalued when they spoke, and having to change their communication style when speaking with white students. This challenge may come from white students practicing their white privilege (i.e. dominating air time, not actively listening…etc.). Unless this power dynamic is understood by both white students and students of color, there will continue to be misunderstanding and silencing of the voices from students of color. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the privilege that comes from white racial identity in white spaces. For example, during meetings, there should be a balanced airtime and a process of affirmation.

Last, some students felt uncomfortable during initiation week. Since every year the membership changes, I believe there should be a revision of the initiation week activities to best fit new members' values and comfort levels. While this could be a challenge due to the traditions, I believe that new traditions can be created, of making a more inclusive and safe experience. By doing so, all students will, from the start, feel valued and welcomed.

Alongside my research, much more research needs to be done around creating safe spaces for students of color in white-dominated or mainstream professional leadership organizations. Since college is a time when students begin to prepare for their future careers, understanding these interactions will be very beneficial for their future. Further research must be done to fully understand white spaces, specifically white students and how they manage their white racial identity. This research will be a significant advance in the effort to create inclusive spaces in predominately white organizations.

The stories of these thirteen student leaders of color are voices that are typically unheard. I hope that this research will bring light to their lived experiences and challenge readers to critically think about the impact racial and ethnic identities have on the spaces we occupy. Through this research, I hope all students are empowered, as I was, to reflect on their own privilege and oppression and work towards liberation. The stories of these thirteen students are my story.

APPENDIX

Sociology Honors Thesis: Interview Questions

For students of color in Order of Angell:

Part I: Prior to Joining
1. What student organization/activity do you represent? In what other organizations are you involved?
2. When you got tapped for Order of Angell, what did you know about Order? Its reputation?
3. What was going through your mind during your 'tap'? Did you think about your racial/ethnic community?
4. Was your Guiding Wolve a person of color? Why do you think they were a person of color? Did you receive mentorship from a person of color? From a white person?
5. Why did you accept to join this organization? Was it difficult to decide?
6. Did you consult with anyone before you made your decision? Who? Why?
7. Did you expect backlash (or any negative reaction) from your community? If so, why?
8. How did you feel the day the names were published?
9. How did people from your racial/ethnic community react once seeing the names (your name) published?
10. Did you believe you would be valued with your unique racial/ethnic culture in the organization?
11. What was your experience when finding out who was in your Order pride, in regards to the racial/ethnic diversity composition?

Part II: Racial/Ethnic Culture
1. With what racial/ethnicity community do you identify with?
2. Are there cultural aspects you embody from this community? (e.g. behaviors, art/music, history…etc)
3. Do you feel connected to you racial/ethnic community? In what ways?

Part II: Current Experience
1. There are 39% students of color in Order this year, do you think you have adapted to the predominately white organization? Do you feel accepted or fit in the organization? If so, how? If not, why do you think you have not?
2. Do you feel safe, valued, and/or accepted in the organization with your unique racial/ethnic identity?
3. How do you consciously display your cultural aspects of your racial/ethnic identity when interacting with white member in Order?
4. Has your racial/ethnic identity played out in meetings/social events/etc in Order?
5. Do you have a particular experience when you think your racial/ethnic identity has played a role in your interaction with Order members?
6. How often do you think about your race/ethnic identity when in Order meetings/social events/etc?

7. Do you behave differently when you are in Order meetings/social events compared to when you are with people from your racial/ethnic community? If so, why do you think so?
8. How do you manage your racial/ethnic identity in these two different environments (i.e. in Order and in your racial/ethnic community)
9. How do you see your racial/ethnic Identity impact your future interactions in the organizations?
10. Are there any other identities (gender, ses, religion, etc) that you think come into play while interacting with white members?

PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

Age	Gender	Race	Socio Economic Status
20 (1) 21 (5) 22 (5) 23 (1) 24 (1)	M (7) F (6)	Black (6) Arab (3) Asian (3) Multiracial (1)	Lower (2) Middle (4) Upper Middle (4) Upper (3)

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