

The Problem with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Public Relations

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Abstract

This project emphasizes uprising issues often perpetuated by public relations professionals on behalf of corporations called “woke-washing.” “Woke-washing” describes the hypocrisy of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies established by corporations and the true impact of these policies on Black employees and social justice. These discrepancies are detected by analyzing how messaging created by public relations professionals about corporate social initiatives that are made to address social justice issues, differ from the internal treatment of Black employees. They can also be detected by comparing the history, roots, and present functions of DEI and diversity management. To emphasize the issues between companies and their messages about social justice, one must discuss the impact of woke-washing issues within corporations like Alphabet (Google), CrossFit, and Amazon. Ultimately, this study seeks to identify the issue of woke-washing, define key concepts related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and analyze present case studies of corporations holding and creating hypocritical policies or statements. Then will present personal takeaways from the findings in this study.

Keywords: public relations, diversity, equity, inclusion, woke, woke-washing, hypocrisy

In the past decade there have been many changes to how society prioritizes topics of anti-racism and equality. The most notable shift that we have started to see in the last five years are corporations becoming more involved in the topic of anti-racism inside and outside of the workplace. This new aspect of organizations, on the surface, addresses diversity issues like never before, but can be used to improve the reputation of corporations to present themselves as more competitive. Racial equality has become a topic that creates a lot of conversation and garners typically positive reactions. Many corporations have strategically included social justice issues to give them a good reputation but have not made significant progress towards the discriminatory issues that already lie in their corporation. This dilemma with corporations having the face of social equality, yet their practices tell another story is described by Danielle Warren as “Woke-Washing.” In this essay, I would like to further explore criticisms of how corporations use topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Defining Key Concepts

Before I continue further into the issues at hand, I will provide some ground definitions to what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is in a corporation. Diversity describes how the work environment should be filled with people with “real perceived physical or socio-cultural differences” that provide representation (Arsel et al., 2022). Equity “refers to fairness in the treatment of people in terms of both opportunity and outcome” (Arsel et al., 2022). Lastly, Inclusion “creat[es] a culture that fosters belonging and incorporation of diverse groups (Arsel et al., 2022). All these factors work together to ensure that fair processes occur in the work environment (procedural justice) and that there is equal distribution of burdens and benefits in society (distributive justice) (Distributive Justice, 1996; Procedural Justice, n.d.).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion takes an axiological approach (Arsel et al., 2022). It applies to the following axes of difference: gender, age, body, race, ethnicity, social class, social status, religion, and cultural identity. These axes are “distinct but connected” and can overlap which is referred to intersectionality. Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups” (Intersectionality, n.d.). These factors are important to acknowledge since they impact the experiences of employees in unique ways.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion comes with a group of other important terms like social justice, oppression, and privilege. Social justice is defined as the “elimination of oppression” (Brazzel, 2003). Oppression shows how multiple forms of oppression exist and are often institutionalized in our culture. Lastly, privilege as a result of oppression gifts certain unearned advantages and disadvantages to individuals inside and outside of the dominant group. For more clarification, there is an often misconception that occurs between the definition of social justice and diversity. The book describes them like “two sides of the same coin” (Brazzel, 2003). Social justice seeks to solve issues of oppression and diversity seeks to bring people of different backgrounds to the workplace. Another way to differentiate the terms is also in the ease of how diversity can be implemented versus how social justice issues tend to be more avoided and complicated. In other words, “social justice issues must be addressed in order to achieve the potential of diversity” (Brazzel, 2003).

Along with understanding these concepts, it is important to highlight how corporations can interpret these same concepts in different ways. For example, the concept of inclusion can be interpreted in the following ways: the first being compliance and the second being support

(Brazzel, 2003). When diversity management was first being introduced, it was also a byproduct of equal opportunity employment laws. Therefore, many companies understood inclusion to be compliance with Equal Opportunity Employment and Affirmative action laws and regulations. In other words, for companies that took this compliant point of view, certain characteristics they associate with inclusion range from toleration to appreciation, valuing, seeking, or leveraging differences (Brazzel, 2003). The second interpretation is support, “an organizational stance in support of assimilation, of differentiation, or of integration of differences” (Brazzel, 2003). Unlike compliance it takes a more genuine approach, and the organization sees the opportunity in incorporating diverse groups in a work environment.

The final concepts that will help us understand how corporations interpreted applying these frameworks is Corporate Social Initiatives (CSIs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Corporate Social Responsibility is “a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders” (What is CSR?, n.d.). CSR provides competitive advantages such as increased sales and profits, improved brand image and reputation, and enhanced customer loyalty (What is CSR?, n.d.). Last, there is corporate social initiatives which puts the goals of corporate social responsibility into action. An example is IKEA’s People and Planet initiative which calls for its entire supply chain to be 100% sustainable by 2020 (Warren, 2022).

Defining Diversity Management and the Historical Roots

Diversity, equity, inclusion, oppression, and social justice are all topics that have been widely discussed in diversity management. Diversity management has become an increasingly important aspect of human resource practices since the 1990s. This new field of human resource management came as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Liberation

Movement of the 1960s (Brazzel, 2003). It also resulted from legislation and initiatives that followed such as the Equal Opportunity Program and Affirmative Action Legislation. There are a variety of social justice movements that diversity management is rooted in including Brown v. Board of Education, United Farm Workers Protest, Anti-Vietnam Protests, and many other demonstrations that occurred during that period (Brazzel, 2003).

From the 1960s to the 1980s organizations addressed diversity issues for three main reasons: fear, law, and values and ethics. Organizations that addressed diversity issues as a result of fear were often concerned that if they did not make any changes to their workplace diversity “that social and community unrest would move into the workplace” (Brazzel, 2003). There are also organizations that addressed diversity issues because of the law which ties very closely to the compliance concept mentioned earlier; changes are made to comply with equal opportunity and affirmative action laws (Brazzel, 2003). Lastly there are organizations that addressed diversity issues to align with morals, ethical standards, and values (i.e., to do the right thing) (Brazzel, 2003). From the 1980s to the 90s, the demographic and economic changes made more companies focus more on using diversity management for improved profit, innovation, and effectiveness (Brazzel, 2003). Diversity programs became a better way for companies to generate higher greater effectiveness and competitiveness than to really solve overarching issues of inequality and discrimination.

Furthermore, upon completing the background of diversity management, a definition is necessary. Diversity management can be defined as a field that:

“uses applied behavioral science methodology, research and theory to manage organizational change and stability processes, that support diversity in organizations and eliminate oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation and other human

differences, *in order to improve the health and effectiveness of organizations...*"

(Brazzel, 2003).

It is important to highlight that diversity management focuses on organizations which can be problematic when taking the approach of solving social justice issues. Specifically, in the definition it states that diversity management is needed "in order to improve the health and effectiveness of organizations" (Brazzel, 2003). Additionally, diversity management is a cross-disciplinary field and although it is mainly used by Human Resources in a corporation. It has been shaped and defined by the following behavioral sciences: anthropology, economics, education, human resource management, organization behavior, organization development, political science, psychology, social work, and sociology" (Brazzel, 2003).

The Stigmatization Of "Woke" And "Woke-Washing"

From the terminology, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is concept and field that seeks out methods for solving discrimination and oppression of minority groups. However, what happens when corporations start to use DEI to solely make their corporation more appealing and competitive? What happens when corporations' internal practices do not align with the standards they claim to agree to? As mentioned, while concepts like social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion all have definitions that seek to eliminate oppression, corporations can interpret them in their own ways. While a lot of positive outcomes can result from the use of DEI, there are a lot of capitalistic and hypocritical outcomes of how corporations use diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As many workplaces shift towards including DEI in their organizational values, there are many issues that arise when trying to incorporate social justice into a business environment. Primarily, it is the natural inconsistency between the intended purposes of social justice and the purposes of corporations in a capitalistic environment. The problem is that a real and genuine

approach to eliminating oppression can completely clash with the practices of corporations. Corporations will always seek out anything that is in their best interest for the survival of the company and as a result that can ruin the integrity of social justice.

This phenomenon of corporations being hypocritical and inconsistent in their values in relation to their practices is a term called “Woke-Washing” created by business scholar Danielle Warren. “Woke-Washing” is a stigmatizing phrase used to “label firms for inconsistencies between their corporate social initiatives (CSIs) and firm purpose, values, or practices” (Warren, 2022). Notably there is the use of the word “woke” which used to represent awareness to racial discrimination and injustice but is now stigmatized to be a word that describes “a lack of consistency” between the firm’s corporate social initiatives (CSIs) and their values (Warren, 2022). Warren discusses the stigmatization of the word woke in the journal and mentions how journalists have changed the way that they have used to word in headlines to something to mock corporations:

“We need only look back a couple years to see journalists using *woke* to praise companies such as ‘How DOW Chemical Got Woke’ (Green, 2019) and ‘Costco Is The Most Woke Company Out There’ (Sears, 2019). Yet in the last year, we see a shift in usage, where *woke* conveys a false sense of commitment to social ideals or undesirable social values... ‘Brands Gone Woke: 5 Risks of Performative Pride Allyship’ (Martel 2021)” (Warren, 2022).

Warren goes further to explain this difference through comparing a similar concept, “green-washing.” Unlike woke-washing, being labeled “too green” in itself is not necessarily as detrimental as being as the labeled “too woke” (Warren, 2022).

Recently, “wokeness” has shifted into “woke capital” which defines “those corporations that have adopted progressive rhetoric on social issues and used their platforms to support voting rights or back [*sic*] movements like Black Lives Matter” (Bouie, 2021). Wokeness is now being weaponized against corporations with progressive polices by Republicans like Ron DeSantis to expel them from conservative states (Bouie, 2021). Nowadays, being “too woke” is not a label that signifies a “false sense of commitment but can signify being too progressive which is unfavorable to those who hold conservative beliefs (Warren, 2020).

Woke-washing is also a phrase synonymous with hypocrisy. Woke washing is used “in a manner that ‘convey[s] that the firms’ [corporate social initiatives] conflict with the rest of the firm” (Warren, 2022). There are many corporations out there that present themselves to be progressive in the area of social justice but have shown no real effort in their internal practices and instead pretend to be “woke.” This discrepancy between the company’s social corporate initiatives and their internal practices are not limited to race based social initiatives but can also intersect with other areas of a workplace, including health and safety.

For example, on the topic of health, Alphabet (Google) announced a series of social initiatives that would institute more COVID-19 vaccines globally, promote vaccinations, and provide free vaccinations to 250,000 people from lower- and middle-class countries (Warren, 2022). Yet, another Alphabet owned platform, YouTube, has been home to conspiracy theories and misinformation that deny the existence of COVID-19 and Google has taken very little action to reduce them (Warren, 2022). Another example, Amazon, announced during the pandemic that they would invest \$4 billion globally to improving COVID-19 related initiatives on getting products that would protect employees and customers, but CBS reported that the state of New York sued Amazon “claiming the company failed to provide workers with a safe environment at

two warehouses in the state as COVID-19 infections surged nationwide (*CBS News*, 2021)” (Warren, 2022). This is only the “tip of the iceberg” in Amazon’s many issues with woke-washing in their messaging.

In 2020, Amazon made a very public statement supporting anti-racism on the front page of their website. They posted a banner with a bolded “Black Lives Matter” along with a statement of their support: “Amazon stands in solidarity with the Black community” (Kari, P., 2020). They were notoriously one of the many companies that went public about their standing on supporting Black Lives Matter. Especially the C.E.O. and founder, Jeff Bezos, showed publicly how he was in solidarity with the Black community. On May 30th of 2020, he posted a screenshot of an article titled “Maintaining Professionalism In the Age of Black Death Is... A Lot” with a small statement about recognizing “the pain and emotional trauma [to the Black community] caused by the racism and violence...” of abusive policemen (Bezos, 2020).

Bezos also followed up with two other posts that exposed how customers reacted to Amazon’s public statement. One post stated, “it is quite disturbing to get on the AMAZON website and see ‘BLACK LIVES MATTER’...for your company to blast this on your website is very offensive to me...ALL LIVES MATTER” (Bezos, 2020). Bezos posted a message in which he disagreed with the customer and stated, “Black lives matter speaks to the racism and disproportionate risk that Black people face in our law enforcement and justice system” (Bezos, 2020). He ended his message saying, “I want you to know that I support this movement that we see happening all around us, and my stance won’t change” (Bezos, 2020). Another post included a derogatory message from another customer in which Bezos responded, “And Dave, you’re the kind of customer I’m happy to lose” (Bezos, 2020).

While Amazon and the founder have showed consistent support for Black Lives Matter, Jeff Bezos tweets can come off as a performative activism. According to A. Freya Thimsen from the Penn State University Press, “performative activism is a critical label that is applied to instances of shallow or self-serving support for social justice causes” (Thimsen, 2022). Performative activism is term typically applied to individuals, particularly public figures that are hypocrites of the messages they spread. Jeff Bezos seems to use his sympathy towards these issues as a morality boost. The caption on one of his Instagram posts display how he wanted to share his “correct” response: “I got this email from a customer and wanted to share my response” (Bezos, 2020).

It is very important to note how people in executive positions, like Jeff Bezos do not deal with customers directly. Therefore, his effort to directly respond to these emails is a direct example of performative activism. Performative activism also rests on “a distinction between what is said by supposed supporters and what they actually do” (Thimsen, 2022). In this context, it is important to ask the following questions: Have Jeff Bezos or Amazon made any efforts to solve issues of anti-Blackness in their workplace? Do their acclaimed values match with the internal practices of the company? How do Black employees specifically describe their workplace experience?

In 2020, twelve former and current employees came out directly Amazon, ten of which were Black employees (Del Rey, 2021). They individually brought up discriminatory accusations against Amazon including accusations of “indirect and insidious bias[es]” that were harmful to an employee’s professional life, of down-leveling (a term to describe how Black employees were often hired to positions they were overqualified for), and of receiving “least effective marks” more often than their counterparts which made it harder for Black employees to get into higher

positions (Del Rey, 2021). Among the ten Black employees, three employees came out publicly about their issues with Amazon: Christian Smalls, Chanin Kelly-Rae, and Charlotte Newman (Del Rey, 2021).

Christian Smalls was a former Amazon warehouse employee that worked at JFK 8 in Staten Island, NY. He was fired from Amazon in 2020 for organizing a walk out against the unsanitary health and safety conditions that warehouse workers faced in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Del Rey, 2021). Smalls was later described by Jeff Zapolsky, Amazon's top lawyer, as "not smart, or articulate" during a meeting with other company leaders, including Jeff Bezos (Del Rey, 2021). Smalls later started became the president of Amazon's first labor union at one of Amazon's biggest warehouses, JFK 8, with the help of his friend Derrick Palmer (Kantor & Weise, 2022). Both Smalls and Palmer held many community events and raised money outside of JFK 8 that eventually resulted in Smalls raising \$120,000 towards establishing a new labor union (Kantor & Weise, 2022). Smalls sits as the president of the first newly founded and successful labor union at any Amazon warehouse.

Chanin Kelly-Rae is a former Diversity and Inclusion director at Amazon. The issues she highlighted with Amazon included the struggle for Black employees to get promoted, the lack of diversity in higher management positions, and the ignorance in how Amazon executives handled diversity issues. Regarding Black employees struggle to get promoted, Kelly-Rae described a workplace standard called "Earns-Trust," a list of values that was used as a tool to discriminate against Black employees (Del Rey, 2021). It can typically be used in manner that would describe how certain employees did not meet the standards of the company. Kelly-Rae describes some examples of how this is weaponized against employees:

“Someone can say it if they don’t think you are a team player. They can say it if they don’t believe you’ll fall in line. They can say it if they believe you’re someone who pushes back too much. And they can say it if you are someone who doesn’t push back enough. They don’t have to quantify it or qualify it” (Del Rey, 2021)

This standard led to Black employees experiencing a higher amount of “least effective” remarks than their counterparts and resulting in the overall fewer promotions for Black employees (Del Rey, 2021). These issues were one of the many flaws that she seen within the hiring and employee procedures within Amazon.

Kelly-Rae also experienced a disrespectful encounter with Amazon’s Head of Human Resources, Beth Galetti, which revealed the ignorance of individuals in executive positions (Del Rey, 2021). In January of 2020, Kelly-Rae attended a first-annual internal diversity summit with other diversity and equity leaders in Seattle to share feedback and set goals for the future of Amazon (Del Rey, 2021). Most attendees raised issues against Galetti about the lack of commitment to the diversity and inclusion goals set by executives, and the lack of resources for diversity and inclusion. Attendees, like Kelly-Rae, pressed for more detailed data about diversity in Amazon in which Galetti responded “you don’t need the data to do your job” (Del Rey, 2021). This response left attendees shocked, but Kelly-Rae took the opportunity to emphasize the importance of such statistics. She went further to request that she meet with Galetti to discuss more about this issue later. According to Kelly-Rae, “[Galetti] told me when I was at Amazon longer, then I could talk to her” and walked away (Del Rey, 2021).

What is the importance of having appropriate statistics? Kelly-Rae states that “data analysis is crucial in identifying problems” and emphasized the importance of getting those statistics at the summit (Del Rey, 2021). How does the lack of diversity statistics impact

Amazon? An example is that in 2019, Amazon reported that they are more diverse than other tech companies (Del Rey, 2021). According to the statistic, 26.5% of employees in Amazon identify as Black (Del Rey, 2021). That statistic alone shows that they have a diverse staff, but what percentage of those statistics were reported by Amazon Warehouse employees? What is the specific percentage of Black employees in corporate? This factor is why detailed statistics are important. Without detailed statistics, there is an inaccurate overview of the percentage of Black employees in corporate. This leads to these underlying discriminatory issues remaining hidden from the public and being ignored by Amazon. During the time Kelly-Rae's story was told, Amazon still had no statistics differentiating the warehouse versus the corporate diversity (Del Rey, 2021).

Executives like Galetti are a part of what is described as the "S-team," a term that describes high-level executives closer to Jeff Bezos (Del Rey, 2021). Within their values, they have a value referred to as the "Are Right, A Lot" principle, which defines leaders as always being right (Del Rey, 2021). However, this principle is antithetical to another principle in which leaders supposedly "seek diverse perspectives and work to disconfirm their beliefs" (Del Rey, 2021).

It is important to note that even in Kelly-Rae experiencing first-hand an Amazon executive refusing to acknowledge her feedback, she gave another chance for Galetti to practice an S-team value of being open to "seek diverse perspectives," but she completely dismissed Kelly-Rae (Del Rey, 2021). Therefore, when analyzing these values, we must ask which of these values are more important; always being right or being able to listen to different perspectives? Galetti clearly displayed the former which could be an indication of how executives in these

positions listen and handle social justice and diversity issues. Another example of the hypocrisies within Amazon's workplace values.

Lastly, there is Charlotte Newman, an Amazon Web Services Manager. Newman came out against Amazon about her experiences with down-leveling and sexual harassment, both factors that impacted her personal and professional life drastically (Del Rey, 2021). In 2017 she started as a lower-level manager, which in comparison to her accomplishments did not match her experience level. Newman attended Harvard Business Graduate School and worked for political figures like Sen. Cory Booker along with three other congress members (Del Rey, 2021). The intentional hiring of overqualified employees to lower-level positions is called down-leveling, an experience that many Black employees experienced at Amazon (Del Rey, 2021).

Additionally, Newman was denied a promotion for two years and was eventually promoted to a senior position in 2019. Her first boss she accused of discrimination since he would often describe her as "too direct," "too scary," and "can intimidate people" (Del Rey, 2021). These stereotypes are commonly associated with the "strong Black woman" stereotype, a stereotype in which "many black women in America report feeling pressured to act like superwomen, projecting themselves as strong, self-sacrificing, and free of emotion to cope with the stress of race- and gender-based discrimination in their daily lives" (Manke, 2019). She then was a victim of sexual harassment by a former Amazon Web Services Director, in which she accused them of inappropriate touching (Del Rey, 2021). As a result, this had a permanent impact on her personal life since she felt unheard. Coming out about these issues was her way of taking her life back and starting the process of healing from this workplace trauma.

From the experiences of Christian Smalls, Chanin Kelly-Rae, and Charlotte Newman, there is evidence of Amazon treated Black employees poorly. So, does this really reflect their

stance of supporting social justice and solidarity with Black individuals? This is what makes the concept of social justice different from diversity. Amazon hired Black employees (diversity) but did not create a place of belonging (inclusion) and did not treat their qualifications equally compared to their counterparts (equity). Diversity is an easier concept to approach, but social justice seeks to eliminate oppression, which can contradict with the capitalistic goals of the company and individualistic goals of executives that already benefit from the existing power structure.

“Woke-Washing” and the Connection to Public Relations.

So how does the concept of “Woke-Washing” correlate with the field of public relations? Corporations generally rely on public relations professionals to create and release messages about corporate social initiatives. Warren also addresses the role of public relations and advertising: “in practice, ‘woke capital’ does little more than pay tribute to progressive causes through marketing and posturing” (Warren, 2022). While corporate social initiatives are seen as ways to approach and solve oppression, they also bolster a company’s reputation which gives greater reason for professionals to highlight these initiatives.

In a broader sense, promoting a hypocritical image of the company can have a problematic view to the public, however, an experienced public relations professional would never release information that would ruin the image of the company. According to the PRSA Code of Ethics a professional’s loyalty is to “those we represent” which is typically corporations and includes an obligation to “serve the public interest” (PRSA Code of Ethics, n.d.). On the other hand, public relations professionals are also supposed to be advocates that “serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent” (PRSA Code, n.d.). Therefore,

having a definitive view of whether this dilemma is ethical can be hard, however there are many examples of how the public relations profession can be diminished by “woke-washing” claims.

An example of a woke-washing and public relations issue is the dilemma with CEO Greg Glassman and his company, CrossFit. On Twitter, the Institute of Public Health and Safety tweeted a photo that stated, “Racism is a Public Health Issue” with the caption “racism and discrimination are critical public health issues that demand an urgent response” (McLean & Duffy, 2020). Greg responded, “It’s Floyd-19,” mocking the message and stated: “Your failed model quarantined us and now you’re going to model a solution to racism? George Floyd’s brutal murder sparked riots nationally. Quarantine alone is ‘accompanied in every age and under all political regimes by an undercurrent of suspicion, distrust, and riots.’ Thanks!” (McLean & Duffy, 2020). A response that seems to indicate Glassman’s disapproval of COVID-19 restrictions and his perception of George Floyd’s murder causing national riots. As a result, many partners, and affiliates (gym branches) of CrossFit ended their partnerships (Duffy, 2020).

Greg Glassman issued an apology stating “I, CrossFit HQ, and the CrossFit community will not stand for racism. I made a mistake by the words I chose yesterday. My heart is deeply saddened by the pain it has caused. It was a mistake, not racist but a mistake” (Duffy, 2020). However, soon after, a phone of Glassman talking to his affiliates (gym branch owners) was leaked in which he stated: “We’re not mourning for George Floyd – I don’t think me or any of my staff are” (Duffy, 2020). Furthermore, Glassman also stated his intentions before the controversy:

"I want to build CrossFit gyms that run free of charge in blighted neighborhoods. We've been playing with that for a long time... Now I hate even talking about it, and prior to this, it was all I talked about ... But now I've got to say something special or I'm a

[expletive] racist. And now this gym is going to look like I'm, like it's [expletive] reparations or something” (Duffy, 2020).

An important part of looking at this controversy is imagining: What if these phone calls weren't leaked? What if he did build CrossFit gyms for “blighted neighborhoods” and used this idea as a corporate social initiative that would benefit CrossFit's image? We would never know his true feelings about solving social justice issues.

Soon after, CrossFit released a response or in other words, public relations professionals of CrossFit crafted a response that would not only offer a confusing view of their stance but defend Greg Glassman. They started the statement titled “Why didn't CrossFit just say something?” stating, “it is rare for us to speak on these types of [social justice] issues... because our varied points of view sometimes devolve into dysfunction,” but also state that “this team is anti-racist” (Why didn't CrossFit, n.d.). While acknowledging the varying beliefs that caused a delayed response, it makes it hard for the statement “this team is anti-racist” to be true (Why didn't CrossFit, n.d.).

Lastly, it is important to look at Amazon's response to the ten Black employees that accused Amazon of discriminatory workplace practices. First, Amazon states, “we disagree with this characterization of Amazon's culture and believe that it misrepresents the facts and is based on the views of a small number of individuals” (Del Rey, 2021). A statement that seems to generally dismiss the issues raised by employees like Christian Smalls, Chanin Kelly-Rae, and Charlotte Newman. They continue stating, “we work hard to build an inclusive culture... our retention data and employee surveys illustrate that they have similar attrition rates and greater job satisfaction and feelings of inclusion than their non-Black colleagues” (Del Rey, 2021). They finish their statement on a competitive note: “we encourage anyone to compare our goals and

progress towards achieving those goals with other large employers (Del Rey, 2021). Offering a competitive view of their company, similar to how corporations used Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the 1980s and 90s.

Personal Takeaways and Conclusions.

One of words that stuck out to me when thinking about the experiences of Kelly-Rae, Smalls, and Newman was perseverance. Each of these individuals among the ten employees have decided to go against the grain to create a better workplace for other Black Amazon employees. Making that choice is not easy and draws up harsh criticism from the public. However, Kelly-Rae stated:

“Sometimes you need people willing to be brave to say there’s a lot of stuff that is wrong that needs to be looked at critically in order to be fixed... I am willing to put my neck out and to put skin in the game, because if leaders in the 1940s and ’50s and ’60s didn’t do it, then I wouldn’t be where I am today” (Del Rey, 2021).

This quote resonates with my goals for this thesis, to critically look at the way corporations use Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Within public relations there is a great need to reform corporate perceptions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. As a professional, I aspire to enhance the profession by being another Black professional in the room working to “counsel subordinates in proper ethical decision making” and to “accurately define what public relations activities can accomplish” (PRSA Code of Ethics, n.d.). While public relations, in terms of “woke-washing” has been used to spread hypocritical messages, there is a way to ensure that better ethical decisions will be made; by hiring Black employees and letting them occupy all levels of the workplace from entry level to executive positions. Starting from there can change the ways that public relations campaigns, or messages are created.

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