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Unraveling My Sweater: Reflections of White Student Affairs Practitioners Committed to Social Justice

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Unraveling My Sweater: Reflections of White Student Affairs Practitioners Committed to Social

Justice

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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“I am no longer the same! All white people who choose to be anti-racist proclaim this truth. Challenging, white supremacy, they are transformed. Free of the will to dominate on the basis of race, they can bond with people of color in beloved community living the truth of our essential humanness.”

-bell hooks

DEDICATION

To my family and friends who stood by and cheered me on along the way. Thank you to my committee, your patience and kindness gave me the energy to never give up. Also, to the six brave women who spoke openly with me about a difficult topic: I learned so much and am forever in awe of you. Finally, to Bumpa: I stayed in school. This is for you!

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To Joe, I could not ask for a better spouse. You have been with me for all the important milestones in my professional and academic life. Throughout it all you have always seen me as stronger, and smarter, and worth more than I ever saw myself. You make me feel smart, valued, and important. I could never ever have imagined doing this without you by my side.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Opening Reflection

I cannot tell you the moment I realized I am White¹. I cannot look at the calendar of my life and point to a specific day or time and say, “There, that is it, that is when I knew I had a racial identity.” I can navigate everyday life completely ignoring what I know to be true: I am White, I have a racial identity, and I have skin privilege. I may work hard for what I have, I may struggle from time to time, but I have privilege and power in this world. Enhancing this White privilege are my sexual orientation, my religion, my age, my education, the temporary ability of my body and mind, the fact that I am cis-gendered.

The social identities we hold are carried with us each and every day, influencing everything we do, whether we realize it or not. This is because who we are and our social identities “are derived from common histories, cultures, and traditions” and our understanding of who we are is cultivated within us as unassumingly as the air we breathe (Adams, 2000 p. 6). As someone with many privileged identities it would be easy to move through the spaces I occupy and never really think about my positionality and how it shapes my practice. I must work to remain conscious of them. Remaining conscious of one's social identities is a vital commitment every student affairs professional must make to support an inclusive and diverse campus environment.

¹ Whether to capitalize the word “White” has become a question many authors struggle with. Some choose not to capitalize it as a way to denote power structures. I capitalize “White” when using my voice in accordance with APA guidelines. However, in some author quotes the word is lowercase based on the author's use of “White” in their writing.

In the book *Community*, Peter Block (2009) describes the need for communities to create a sense of belonging focusing on hospitality and generosity. With more than fifteen years of experience working in student affairs and new student success, I have come to understand that, at its core, the work of student affairs professionals requires that we think beyond introducing and acclimating new students to our campus community. It is essential that we, as practitioners, think critically about our student population and how our work affects the success and sense of belonging for all students on our campuses. To do this I believe practitioners must make a conscious effort to address our positionalities' influence on our work, creating belonging-centered communities as it pertains to programs, policies, and procedures.

One reason I see this as an important topic is that all too often, students of color are expected to be the educators of their peers and the White faculty and staff on their campus. For instance, at a campus event that turned into a student demonstration, a White student addressed the Black student demonstrators and asked, "How can I, as a White person, support you?" and a student of color at the front of the room said, "It is called Google, educate your own damn self 'cause we are tired." Another example is the time a junior student of color at the institution I was working at sat on a panel about their experience on campus. While reflecting on their time in class the student spoke pointedly about how often they were looked to as an educational tool. This language of being a "tool" was profound to me because it brought to mind connotations of being used by others for their personal needs.

I believe that a core function of higher education is the mutual learning that occurs between students, faculty, and staff. I value the life lessons I have gained from

student interactions and genuine relationships. However, for students to feel they are being used as a tool leads me to ask: why are students of color the laborers in the education of White folks? Is shifting the burden of “educator” something we as White professionals can (or should) help alleviate? Can we (White folks) find ways to think critically about race in the work we do, and how we do it? I believe the answers to these questions are “yes”, and we must, and that this work has to be woven into the very fabric of our daily work.

Purpose

This dissertation examines how White student affairs practitioners think about their capacity to build inclusive campus environments. In a monograph titled *Whiteness in Higher Education: The Invisible Missing Link in Diversity and Racial Analyses*, Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson (2018) note that student affairs professionals have taken pride in our consciousness of student perspectives and White racial identity development. They also note that "whiteness scholars need to look beyond undergraduate student populations and include an examination of administrators, faculty, and graduate students" (p. 10). Shifting the lens is necessary because “where issues of race emerge in Higher Education, the focus remains on students of color, and whites are systematically ignored (Finders & Kwame-Ross, 2020, p. 1).

My research question asks, "In what ways do White student affairs professionals articulate the effects of whiteness on their campus interactions with racially diverse students and colleagues?" I aimed for my dissertation to shape my approach to inclusive student support practices. I also anticipate it will influence the practice of White colleagues in the field. Specifically, this dissertation (1) provides an understanding of

sources of social justice commitment among White student affairs professionals and (2) creates a call to action for inclusive student affairs practices and for professional development to build and sustain our social justice commitment.

Significance of Addressing Whiteness

Personal anecdotes aside, there are several reasons for research regarding White practitioners' establishment of inclusive practices in their work. Shifting student demographics are creating institutions with more racially diverse student bodies. However, institutions' employee demographics are remaining racially homogenous. In turn, this is cultivating racially diverse communities without the infrastructure to support the members of these communities. Simply put, the issue is that as our institutional membership changes, so must our practices, if we are going to properly support the success of our students.

Changing Student Demographics

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2018 *Condition of Education Report*, in 2017, 8.8 million of the 16.8 million undergraduate students in the US were White. While White students still make up the majority of college enrollment, White enrollment has decreased by 19%. This decrease comes at the same time as an increase in students identifying as Hispanic. Additionally, though relatively low, the rate for Black, Asian and Pacific Islander students, and those identifying as two or more races have also increased, contributing to more racially diverse student populations. Adding to this change is an almost doubled enrollment of international students attending U.S. universities since the year 2000 (NCES, 2018).

It is important to note that these figures are not just random fluctuations adjusting current annual enrollment, but long term changes that universities must address to remain viable. Grawe (2018) asserts that the trend in decreased enrollment of White students and increased enrollment of Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC) will continue due to fertility rates, immigration trends, and high school graduation rates. Grawe (2018) says that “the national total fertility rate has plummeted by more than 12% since 2007” and “beginning in 2026 the number of native-born children reaching college age will be on a rapid decline” (p. 6). Not only will there be a decline in traditional college-age people, but the racial identity of the United States population will have shifted dramatically. Grawe (2018) adds that women of color, specifically Hispanic and Black women, are showing an increased birth rate, while White women are showing a decreased birth rate across the United States. This means that even as the U.S. birth rate declines overall, it is declining within the White community at a higher rate than across Hispanic and Black populations. Over time, this will shift the U.S. population toward a more racially diverse population and thus an increasingly racially diverse student population.

Birth rates are not the only place we are seeing differences between White communities and communities of color. High school graduation rates between racial groups are also changing. Grawe (2018) presents several data points that show that rates of high school graduation for White students and BIPOC students differ. Specifically, we are seeing a decrease in White high school graduates at the same time that graduation rates for BIPOC students are increasing. The 2015 Association of American Colleges & Universities’ self-study on *Committing to Equity and Inclusion* states that, “by 2027, 49%

of high school students will be students of color” (p. 3). College and university enrollments depend on the available pool of high school graduates, so tracking demographic shifts is crucial.

The decreased fertility rate of White women in comparison to increased immigration trends are also contributing to the demographic shift within higher education. According to Grawe (2018), increased immigration from Asia and Central and South America will continue to “shift the US population toward greater shares among Hispanic, Asian, and Southwest subgroups” in ways that will “demand for higher education to shift even further in these directions” (Grawe, 2018, p. 9). While many international students may identify as White racially, this is another way we need to think critically about our current work and shift from a White/American approach to more open and inclusive practices.

All of the changes outlined above are “reshaping the population of the United States in ways that raise challenges for higher education” (Grawe, 2018, p. 6). The market for higher education will follow the general demographic trends, meaning that “a near nationwide collapse of the non-Hispanic White population paired with increase in Hispanic and Asian populations all but ensures a racial and ethnic shift among students pursuing a college education in the broadest sense” (Grawe, 2018, p. 55-56). With these shifts comes a level of uncertainty for colleges and universities because “status quo strategies are unlikely to succeed” and “institutions will need to look elsewhere for opportunities to increase matriculation rates in the future” (Grawe, 2018, p. 103). Understanding the nuances of these shifts and the impact that birth rate, immigration trends, and high school graduation rates have on our college populations is important

because demographic changes in the pool of potential college students require colleges and universities to modify campus environments to be more inclusive, or risk dying out.

Homogeneity of Practitioners

It could be celebrated that the number of college and university presidents who identify as a person of color has more than doubled since 1986. But even with this increase, more than 80% of presidents are White, and close to 70% of those presidents are White men (American Council on Education [ACE] Race and Ethnicity report, 2019). Knowing that college administrators are often practitioners who were once faculty and staff on campus, these statistics make sense. The ACE report (2019) confirms the changing student demographics outlined above and adds the important nuance that the majority of faculty and staff employed by higher education institutions are still White.

According to the ACE Race and Ethnicity report (2019), in 2016 73.2% of full-time faculty were White. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2018) confirms a lack of racial representation in faculty, showing that in fall 2017 White faculty made up 76% of the total population nationally, with White males constituting 41% of that number. NCES (2018) also notes a rapid decrease in representation showing that only 11% of full-time faculty identified as Asian Pacific Islander, 3% each were Black and Hispanic, and those who were American Indian/Alaska Native, and those of two or more races each made up 1% or less.

Staff employed within higher education are also overwhelmingly White. The 2019 ACE report shows that BIPOC folks make up 30% of staff categorized as “professional positions,” which are only “1% of all professional positions in higher education” (p. 264). Staff within the student affairs category makeup 19.2% of overall

campus staffing and only 26.5% of staff within this category are members of the BIPOC community. The same holds true within academic affairs, who make up 16.2% of higher education staff, but less than a third of whom identified as BIPOC. The highest percentage of BIPOC staff, coming close to 50%, can be found within the category of services and maintenance staff. This means BIPOC students, faculty, and staff are seeing themselves in the faces of the university cafeteria workers more often than in the faces of campus leadership.

Importance of Representation

The statistics outlined above show that the faculty and staff with direct contact to students are overwhelmingly White. Creating an environment that is representative of the student population is important to the success of students of color (Benitez et. al. 2017) because having faculty and staff of color lessens the burden on BIPOC students. It signals “to students that they need not represent their race in the classroom.” A professor can provide representation for them as well as serve as a “counterexample to negative stereotypes about their [students] racial group” (www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2017/spring/benitez).

Representation also impacts students' sense of belonging because the climate on campus is different based on the lived experiences of our students (Kim, Espinoza-Para, Rennick, Franco, Dam, & Rensberger, 2018; Ncube, Jacobson, Whitefield, & McNamara, 2018; Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Patton et. al. (2007) noted that “race is an issue in institutions where students of color are significantly underrepresented because they often experience isolation” and that “race is a reality when students of color do not feel safe, welcome or comfortable in an institutional

environment.” Parallel research by Kim et. al. (2018) showed that “white students experienced a greater sense of belonging and a more positive campus climate than their peers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 244).

“Sense of belonging on campus has a strong positive correlation with [students’]...perceptions of the climate of diversity and inclusion on campus,” according to Ncube et. al. (2018, p. 204). A notable finding in that same research was that “academic experiences do not appear to be as strongly related to student perceptions of climate” (p. 204). Therefore, while classroom settings are a key part of campus climate, students' broader campus life seems to have a higher impact on their overall student experience. Therefore, higher education practitioners, specifically student affairs professionals, need to create inclusive programming that includes dialogue of race (Patton et. al, 2007).

One way Benitez et. al. (2017) recommend addressing this is by hiring, supporting, and retaining faculty of color. However, many student affairs practitioners do not have control over the hiring and promotion of faculty and staff of color in their daily work. That is why White practitioners must ask ourselves: “How can I, in my work, address the growing needs of an increasingly diverse student population,” and “What shifts in my practice would create a community where all students have access to a sense of belonging and meaningful support?”

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Racial disparities in students' perception of belonging on campus and their academic success are a problem exacerbated by a pattern of overwhelmingly White faculty and staff in much of higher education. Practitioners, particularly White

practitioners, must adjust their practice in response to changing student populations.

Focusing on practitioners, especially those working with students new to campus² who describe themselves as committed to social justice, I ask: "In what ways do White student affairs professionals articulate the effects of whiteness on their campus interactions with racially diverse students and colleagues?" More specifically, I examine the following research sub questions (RSQ):

- RSQ1: What motivates White student affairs professionals' commitment to social justice and inclusion?
- RSQ2: In what ways do White student affairs practitioners address whiteness within themselves, their colleagues, and White students on campus?
- RSQ 3: In what ways does whiteness influence their approach when working with BIPOC colleagues, and students on campus?
- RSQ 4: What do White practitioners suggest graduate programs and campus administrators provide to facilitate intentional campus inclusion?
- RSQ 5: In what ways do practitioners view their work as part of larger social justice and inclusion efforts in higher education?

Culturally Responsive Practices as Pedagogical Framework

One approach to answering these questions is through the use of culturally responsive practices (CRP). A framework used widely in K-12 settings, CRP fosters active inclusion and social justice education. Simply put, culturally responsive practices are a practitioner's "purposefulness regarding what students see, hear, feel, and

² At the start of my research the focus was on professionals working with students new to campus so this will be reflected in chapters two and three. However, in my interviews, participants spoke to a much broader range of students. This broader range will be visible in the findings and analysis.

experience” (Kafele, 2021, p. 52). While these ideas may seem simple, they are complicated because “even if [students] are of the same racial/ethnic group, they are still not the same” (Kafele, 2001, p. 69). CRP creates safer spaces for learning “where all students can feel a sense of purpose and belonging,” impacting students' educational experience and creating “long-term attitudinal change” (Lucey T.A., White, E.S., 2017, p. 11). McNair et. al. (2016) argue that the goal of higher education should be to “prepare students for the kind of challenges they will confront in work, in life, and as citizens...and to help them integrate and apply their knowledge,” asserting that “student success is then more than the institution's mission statement” (p. 89) but rather a purposeful approach to systemic practices. Balancing CRP as a theory as well as an applied practice, I use it as a framework to examine student affairs professionals' inclusion strategies for student success.

Definitions and Terminology

To ensure major concepts used throughout my research are clearly outlined, I set out basic definitions here. Further discussion of some terms appears in the literature review.

- **Authentic relationships:** When I speak of authentic relationships I am speaking to an intentional approach to relationship-building cultivated over time and built on trust and honesty. This is particularly important to my research with regard to the trust and authenticity needed to create and sustain cross-racial relationships. Authentic cross-racial relationships are ones that allow space for feedback, challenging our way of thinking and engage in the world, and working together for systemic change. Additionally, authentic relationships such as these are

required between White people in order to support White racial identity development and accountability for our unearned racial privilege as a necessary stage in the change-making cycle.

- **Culturally Responsive Practices:** Student-focused teaching practices that honor the social identities and cultures of students in order to actively create space for multiple ways of being, providing inclusive and equitable access to learning communities (Bolitzer et. al. 2016; Garmon, 2004, 2005; Gay, 2010; Kafele, 2021; Koshino, 2016; Lucey et. al., 2017; McNair et. al., 2016; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016; Schroder, 2015).
- **Historically White Colleges and Universities:** I use this term intentionally over Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) in order to highlight that, due to the demographic changes outlined earlier, some institutions designated as PWIs are no longer primarily White numerically as a campus. However, as campuses they still function as “institution[s] of higher education whose histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and process were all designed by whites, for whites, to reproduce whiteness” (Brunsma, Brown, & Placier, 2012, p. 2).
- **Intersectionality:** A way of articulating the complexity of an individual’s multiple social identities which can only be understood in relation to each other (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), as well as an acknowledgment that, “when it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power [and oppression] in a given society are better understood...by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Hill& Bilge, 2016).

- **Racially Diverse:** An acknowledgement of racial differences between members of the institutions, where White is not the standard that BIPOC students are “different from.”
- **Social Justice:** A personal and professional practice of actively “addressing issues of equity, power relations, and institutionalized oppression” (Goodman, 2001, p. 4).
- **Student Affairs Professional:** Higher education professional whose primary role is not classroom teaching but who contributes to a holistic approach to student learning through a focused approach to the personal and professional development of students (adapted from the *1937 Student Personnel Point of View* as discussed in Evans, Forney; DiBrito, 1998).
- **Student Success:** Encompasses a student's academic and co-curricular sense of belonging, personal growth, and application of learning in a multicultural world. It requires a “paradigm shift that reframes the conversations about student success on students’ assets, institutional responsibility, and personal accountability” (McNair et. al. 2016, p. 75).
- **Whiteness:** Will be used to address both the personal socialization of racial identity of White people built on a false sense of superiority, as well as a cultural and systemic prevalence for White normativity within individuals, institutions, and society as a whole (Cabera et. al., 2017; DeAngelo, 2018; Feagin, 2013; Goodman, 2001; Hardiman, 2001; Hardiman & Keehn, 2011; Helms, 1993, 2020; Kendall, 2013; Kendi, 2016; Kratz, 1978; Leonardo, 2002; Okun, 2021; Philips & Bender, 2013).

Naming My Positionality and Audience

I am conscious of my social position as a White person. Among the questions I ask myself as a student affairs professional is this: "Who am I to say what BIPOC students need, and how do I keep from being/becoming another well-intentioned White person falling into the White Savior zone of superiority?" The truth of the matter is I do not know, and I am conducting this inquiry with caution, trepidation and a large amount of Imposter Syndrome that tells me I should turn away and write something *easy*. The thing is, easy just is not my style, and asking hard questions of myself and the world around me is the best way I know to keep myself from following the status quo. At the end of the day I do not expect my research to answer "what do BIPOC students need," but perhaps it will highlight where our system is failing our current (and future) student populations, and offer insight into what we (White people) can do about it.

Anthony Conwright (2022) cautions White people's "need to center themselves in public discussion of race." I echo this same concern. However, I also think it is important to find a balance, as a White person, between being afraid to ask the question because I am afraid of offending members of BIPOC communities and being afraid to ask the questions because I am afraid of what I will unearth in myself. It is not my intention to continue to center whiteness at the heart of racial conversation. For that reason, I am not writing to BIPOC readers as their educator, but as a humble learner eager to work collaboratively toward change.

Instead of writing to the BIPOC community as an educator, I write as a co-conspirator encouraging White professionals' self-reflection. In that light, this

dissertation is for White people. In beginning my dissertation journey, I came across the following quote:

“[I]n my heart I feel it is my charge to use my privileged racial standpoint to educate those whose prejudices were also entrenched over the course of their childhood, as well as advocate—through research, teaching, and community involvement—for those who do not share the same questions and often invisible privileges that my race grants me” (Orbe, 2007, p. 30).

When discussing change as an interrupt to the cycle of socialization, Bobbi Harro (2000) said, “[I]f our motivation is guilt, we are doomed to fail.” Harro goes on to say that “When we work together with those across social identities, and we focus our work through a strong moral base and vision, “we create hope” (p. 20). It is this hope that drives me to ask the questions I am afraid to ask of myself and of the system of higher education I work within.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

In order to ground my research in a practical based approach I begin my literature review by providing a basic overview of the field of student affairs with a direct focus on new student programming. This will include a brief foundational understanding of the purpose of student affairs and the functional area of Orientation, Transition, and Retention (OTR). I will call attention to their impact as a conduit to inclusive communities with direct implications to student success and sense of belonging on campus. I will also highlight the core competencies national organizations expect of practitioners in order to ground the work of student affairs and orientation on a set standard of best practices.

As stated earlier my research used Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP) as a lens for investigating the work of student affairs practitioners. Understanding CRP as both a method of applied practices as well as a framework for understanding professionals will be important for the readers of this work. In order to best utilize CRP as a framework for inquiry I will provide a broad overview of CRP. This will include how, as an applied practice, CRP supports student success, as well as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by practitioners in order to implement CRP into their daily work. It is the latter understanding of CRP which was used as a framework for understanding practitioners that guided my inquiry as a researcher. More about this framing will be included in chapter three.

Lastly, I will address the need to name and acknowledge whiteness within oneself and one's work. To do this I provide a brief review of Feagin's (2013) White Racial Frame as well as Helms (1993) and Hardiman's (2001) White identity development models. From there I focus my attention of these concepts towards practical approaches to the work in relationship to sense of belonging and CRP.

Relevance of Student Affairs for Student Learning

Before I begin this section of my literature review it is important to note that while I started my research focused specifically on new student programming through an orientation, transition, and retention (OTR) lens, participant narratives shifted to a broader lens of student affairs. Therefore, this section will examine both a general understanding of student affairs as a field, as well as a more focused look at OTR. In future chapters, readers will see this shift as I speak less to new student success but to a wider campus population. It was important for me to keep this portion of my literature review in order to highlight this shift intentionally. For instance, part of the discussion in chapter five will specifically call attention to the absence of new students in participants' narratives because, oftentimes, what is not said is as significant as what is said.

As individual learners, students could enter the mental and physical space of a college and simply receive a degree. However, when learning is seen as knowledge created through transformational experiences (Kolb, 1981, 1984, 1985 in Evans et. al. 1998), it becomes about more than subject matter expertise. That being said, "life is not experienced the same for all members of any given cultural group" (Orbe, et. al., 2007, p. 28). Therefore, learning must be understood as a process where individuals come together around the factors of "shared decision making, a shared sense of purpose, and

collaborative work toward that purpose, and collective responsibility” (Collay, Dunlap, Enloe, Gagnon Jr., 1998, p. x). Learning, through this perspective, involves students fully connecting to learning experiences and open to multiple perspectives so that they can cultivate critical thinking skills using several viewpoints (Evans et. al. 1998, p. 209). It is this idea of sharing within a collective that is so important to higher education, because it puts inclusive learning at the center of every student experience both inside and outside of the classroom.

Within the community of student affairs professionals, the 1937 Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) established a core understanding of this larger purpose for higher education. Information from this report can probably be found in every student development theory book out there. In one such book, Evans, Forney, and DiBrito (1998) explain that, while the SPPV statement has evolved and adapted over the last 85 years, it still reflects the ideas of citizenship, professionalism, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships as cornerstone principles of education within student affairs communities. Higher education should focus on the development of the “whole student” in order for students to reach their fullest potential and societal contribution. They state, “The SPPV was a reminder to the higher education community that in addition to the contributions of research and scholarship, the personal and professional development of students was (and remains) a worthy and noble goal” (p. 6), and that student affairs is a vital contributor to that process.

Supporting the notion of learning outside of the curricular experiences is George Kuh’s research (1995), which found that students “view their life outside of the classroom as the ‘real world’ laboratory” that contributes greatly to their learning and

development (p. 145). Through these experiences, students are exposed to people such as faculty, staff, and other students from different backgrounds. Kuh's research confirmed that "out-of-class experiences presented students with personal and social challenges" in a way that encouraged deeper development of both complicated personal and academic viewpoints. This holistic approach provides students with "opportunities for synthesizing and integrating material presented in their formal academic program (p. 146).

Furthermore, Kuh's (1995) research points out that a major contribution to co-curricular learning is the relationship between students and the institution as an entity. This includes noting the relationship regarding institutions' stated and implied expectations on students, campus policies and practice, as well as "its ethos and other cultural properties" (p. 174). Simply put, who an institution says it is, and how it carries that out in its programs and policies, creates a dynamic relationship between curricular and co-curricular impact on student learning. Understanding the effect of our institutions from a curricular and co-curricular viewpoint is important because this understanding centers student learning in everything we do, highlighting the importance of holistic student development and the impact of student affairs on the student experience.

Orientation and Belonging-Centered Practices

One way to ensure all students receive the full impact of their college education is to start them off immediately with the resources, social connections, and confidence to engage fully in the campus community. This is where orientation has an important role within the field of higher education and student affairs. Understanding that learning takes place outside of the classroom is a key factor in understanding the impact orientation has on students and why students should clearly see an active attempt to create inclusive

communities focused on belonging. Mayhew et. al. (2010) underscore this importance when they note that, “the people new students come into contact with early on during their college careers often have an impact on learning” (p. 340). They assert that it is for this reason that orientation needs to equip students “with the tools needed to successfully navigate their educational environments” (p. 321).

From this perspective, orientation becomes about more than welcoming new students to campus. Orientation, at its core, should “provide a clear and cogent introduction to the intellectual, cultural, and social facets of the institution” (CAS Standards for Orientation Programs). In his book *Community* Peter Block (2009) states that, “to feel a sense of belonging is important” (p. 3), and that its importance stems from the need for community to allow for safety and inclusion. Block goes on to say that, “By thinking in terms of a structure of belonging we begin to build the capacity to transform our communities into ones that work for all” (p. 4).

When speaking about belonging in connection with social justice and inclusion it is important to note that “to feel a sense of belonging...leads us from conversation about safety and comfort to other conversations, such as our relatedness and willingness to provide hospitality and generosity” (Block 2009, p. 3). Within the context of higher education, communities built on hospitality and generosity are essential to creating, strengthening, and restoring community on our campuses. Bolitzer, Castillo-Montonya, and Williams, L.A. (2006) echo this idea of hospitality, applying it to the classroom, by noting that when hospitality is applied to education it underscores the idea that students are hosted “not only in the physical space of the classroom but also the intellectual realm of subject matter” (p. 28). In other words, for orientation to be successful it must be seen

as an educational process establishing a sustainable and inclusive community of learners in terms of the academic and social success of students.

With these ideas of community and hospitality in mind, student success efforts must start with Block's (2009) ideas of belonging with regard to communities that work for all. However, as noted in chapter one, not all students feel a similar sense of belonging. For that reason, it is vital to remember that "access is about ensuring not only that all people have the means and opportunities to go to college, but also that all students have opportunities to learn within it" (Bolitzer, L.A., Castillo-Montoya, M., Williams, L.A., 2016, p.28). Understanding the impact student affairs practices such as orientation can have on belonging is important. This includes shifting our perspective of orientation as more than an introduction to campus life. Orientation should enhance students' access to not only the brick and mortar of higher education, but to collaborative scholarly conversations and deep learning. More about belonging in relation to race will be outlined further in the section about whiteness.

Nationally Recognized Core Competencies for Practitioners

In order to hold practitioners accountable to this significant work, national organizations have created core competencies they believe every student affairs practitioner should strive towards mastering. These include organizations that take an all-encompassing look at the field, providing insight to all functional areas. Additionally, there are organizations that focus their attention on specific functional areas to provide specialized professional development.

ACPA/NASPA Core Competencies

Established in 2009, the most foundational set of core competencies for student affairs practitioners are the “Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators.” These professional competencies were created in collaboration between the two largest professional organizations in higher education: ACPA-College Student Educators International, and NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators. ACPA and NASPA worked together to establish 10 competency areas: professional and ethical foundations, values philosophy and history, assessment evaluation and research, law policy and governance, organizational and human resources, leadership, social justice and inclusion, student learning and development, technology, and advising and supporting. In 2014, the organizations reviewed the competencies with “specific consideration of the application of the competencies to practice, professional development, and the preparation of new professionals through graduate study” (p. 4). This is particularly important in the context of this research due to the special attention given to the, then titled, competency of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Today, under the title “Social Justice and Inclusion,” the core competency of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion has shifted from awareness of diversity to a more active approach. The current “Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators” (2015) states that in changing the name their aim was “to align this competency with research, practice, and a commonly utilized definition of social justice” (p. 4). This definition is rooted in the writings of bell hooks (2013), where social justice is understood to have the goal of “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (p. 21). In the text *Promoting Diversity and*

Social Justice, Dianne Goodman (2001) shared a similar understanding of the term “social justice” when she highlighted a difference between diversity training, which allows for productive and peaceful cohabitation, and social justice. Goodman (2001) states that diversity training “tends to focus on individual and interpersonal dynamics”; stopping there. Whereas “social justice also involves addressing issues of equity, power relations, and institutionalized oppression” (p. 4). Defining the work of social justice through an active lens provides practitioners with a call to action that must go beyond recognizing differences to actively engaging in work that breaks down barriers set up within the system of higher education.

Another notable shift in this core competency as it relates to my research is the intentional effort made to “frame inclusiveness in a manner that does not norm dominant cultures” (p. 4). The ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies explicitly call out that “student affairs educators need to understand oppression, privilege, and power so they can understand social justice” (p. 14). This is an important distinction because it is essential in creating “learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power” (Goodman, 2001, p. 14).

Orientation Standards and Competencies

Looking more narrowly at the standards and competencies focused on Orientation, Retention, and Transitions (OTR) for new students are the Council for Advancement of Standards in higher education (CAS) and the NODA-Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention in higher education Core Competencies. Together these two prominent documents provide insight and guidance into the work of OTR

professionals. Each document calls for practitioners to incorporate social justice and inclusive practices into the foundation of our daily work.

CAS Standards. At its core the CAS standards call for OTR professionals to uphold a focused attempt to “provide a clear and cogent introduction to the intellectual, cultural, and social facets of the institution...based on the needs and expectations of the institution and student population” (p. 2). As noted in chapter one the demographic makeup of students entering U.S. institutions of higher education is changing and creating a more racially diverse student population. The CAS standards note this directly while also calling attention to how demographic changes require a need for a new approach to the work, stating that OTR programs must “foster environments responsive to the individual needs of students and families” (p. 3).

NODA Core Competencies. While the CAS standard provides an overarching model for orientation programs, they fall short in providing “specific competencies for OTR professionals” (NODA Core Competencies, p. 4). Keeping the CAS standards in mind, in 2016, NODA focused on creating their own set of core competencies in order to “offer direction for guiding individual personal and professional development” (p. 4). Ultimately, NODA landed on 12 competencies or “thematic tenets” designed as a “guide to develop one’s professional growth” (p. 8). The NODA core competencies are meant to be a “holistic approach to OTR practice” whereas the ACPA/NASPA competencies are meant for a broader audience, and CAS standards as “programmatic guidelines” (p.9). The NODA core competencies consider broader approaches to student affairs, program specific ideas, and personal and professional development, and are about infusing these tenants into the very fabric of the work.

While it could be argued that all 12 tenets relate to my research, the tenets of theoretical and institutional knowledge, diversity inclusion and access, program delivery and management, communication, and enrollment management have distinct elements to them that relate to my research. They have direct implication to conversations around inclusive communities, student support services, and sense of belonging.

- **Theoretical and institutional knowledge** suggests that practitioners need to understand the nuances of student development theory as well as an understanding of their institutional functions including student demographics.
- **Diversity inclusion and access** requires “practitioners value the intersectionality of students’ identities and serve as allies through inclusive transition practices.”
- **Program delivery and management** focuses on the delivery of effective transition programming including things like “facilitating multiple types of programs” and “articulating current societal trends” as they apply to program delivery.
- **Communication, and enrollment management** looks directly at the issue of student demographics as it pertains to partnerships and active participation in the “enrollment process with the end goal of student success and retention.”

Critique of Core Competencies

These are not the only organizations with strong articulation of standards. For instance, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) also have a

similar set of standards called *Making Excellence Inclusive*, designed to help colleges and universities integrate diversity, equity, and educational quality efforts into their missions and institutional operations. While it is admirable that all of these professional organizations worked hard to create a more purposeful approach to social justice and inclusion, simply stating something as a standard may not go far enough to support systemic change.

These core competencies do provide a road map for professionals. However, professionals must see them as more than a check and balance set of standards. Sarah Ahmed (2012) describes an audit culture in higher education, and pushes for diversity work to be about more than “generating the right image,” because this can lead to whiteness being described “not as an institutional problem but as a problem with those who are not included by it [the institution]” (p. 34-35). This continued cycle of placing the problem of whiteness outside of our work thus continues to other BIPOC members of our communities. Additionally, she points out that a common expression that comes up in diversity conversations is acknowledging the “heart and mind.” Ahmed (2012) notes that “just because we might see diversity work being done on the surface it does not necessarily mean it has been incorporated as a value by individuals” (p. 113). This is important because “if hearts and minds can stand for a sense of commitment...then commitment offers us a way we can get beyond the tick box approach to diversity work” (p. 113).

Ahmed’s (2012) audit culture spotlights how easy it is to fall into performative diversity work. This tick box approach also lends to a compartmentalized idea of professional standard. Poon (2018) points out that notions of “social justice, equity, and

inclusion remain segregated and marginalized in higher education” (p. 13). This segregated approach, coupled with “resistance among student affairs and higher education professionals to systemically analyze and transform higher education” (p. 13-14), creates a roadblock to enacting the change essential to support our shifting student populations. This is why as professionals we must consistently examine our practice and the greater purpose of our work within the field. Many practitioners have good intentions when it comes to providing inclusive communities which are socially just and free of discrimination. However, “good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the changes needed...good will must be accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and skills (Gay, 2010, p. 13).

Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP)

Pedagogical knowledge and skills require a directed approach to the work of learning and teaching. As noted in chapter one, Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP) is an educational pedagogical approach to classroom teaching with direct connection to K-12 learning environments. While CRP is typically applied to more traditional classroom teaching it is important to consider, as do McNair et. al. (2016), that “everybody who works on the campus [is] an educator” (p. 30). This gives further credence to the impact student affairs professionals have on student learning, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Having a clear understanding of student affairs' impact on learning, our practice can also benefit from applying CRP to our work. Therefore, this section will provide a grounding for understanding CRP as a multifaceted approach to equity-minded professional practice.

In order to be truly effective in addressing race and equity in higher education our approach must be intersectional, which is a key aspect to culturally responsive practices (Bolitzer, Castillo-Montonya, Williams, 2016; Gay, 2010; Lucey, White, 2017; Santamaria, Sanamaria, 2010). CRP is the notation of “using cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Gay (2010) also asserts that there is a regular attempt to provide students with a more accurate understanding of different cultures through facilitation techniques approachable to various learning styles. This type of education requires facilitators to create spaces that are caring and supportive for all members of the learning community (Lucey, T.A & White, E.S., 2017). Gay (2010) explains that CRP must be seen as a comprehensive multidimensional approach to teaching which empowers and transforms learners. This multidimensional approach pushes conversations of multicultural programs beyond that of supplemental materials and allows them to be purposefully woven into every educational experience. Santamaria L.J. & Santamaria A.P. (2016) point out that CRP embeds the idea of education for social justice and equity as necessary for student access to learning by establishing a need for an equity agenda in creating access for student learning and equal outcomes for all students.

Establishing CRP

Providing such an environment takes an intentional effort by the practitioner. This is also important because “by thinking deeply about their students, [practitioners] may be called to deepen their understanding of the broader social context in which they and their students are situated” (Bolitzer et. al., 2016, p 29). Koshino (2016) points that we “must

understand the context within which the students are educated and socialized” (p. 99) because this context influences not only how facilitators present information, but the different ways students evaluate and take in what is being taught. It allows for students to see the value we place on the diverse student populations we serve, validating students within every aspect of educational practices.

In order to create a learning environment that validates all learners, practitioners must commit to ongoing personal growth and development. Part of this is because we “need to acknowledge the different experiences and ways of knowing in the room,” as well as own our limitations and “yielding to the cultural and lived experience of our students” (Schroder-Arce, 2015 p. 217). In other words, practitioners must invest time in learning about the students we serve, and understand that we are not the experts in their students' lived experience. This directly ties to the student-ready approach McNair et. al. (2016) describe when they call for practitioners to do the hard work of facing the assumptions and biases rooted in themselves. Through this lens the work becomes just as much about our own education as it does that of our students.

Doing this kind of self-work requires an intentional effort on the part of the practitioner. Looking at pre-service teacher education programs, Garmon (2004, 2005) outlines six key factors in developing culturally responsive practices. These are categorized into two focus areas: practitioner disposition and influential experiences. Practitioner dispositions include an openness to new information, self-awareness and reflection, and a commitment to social justice. Adding to these dispositions are practitioners' access to influential experiences that are intercultural, educational, and supportive. Individually each of these things is important, but when they are interwoven

they create a dynamic fabric of practitioner development. Remove one thread and the garment may be passable, but there will also be a hole that will need to be patched.

Dispositions. Looking more closely at these key factors will help better understand how they impact a practitioner's ability to enact change in their work both in their daily practice and on a systemic level. According to Peter Senge (2006), we fail to put into practice new methods, or adapt policies because we all have “deeply held internal images of how the world works” or mental models (p. 163). He urges us to find ways to manage and shift our mental models by being open to new ways of thinking. In other words—when we are open to new information, including diverse people, ideas, perspectives, and insights other than our own—we are able to expand our own knowledge and skills (Garmon, 2004, Garmon 2005, Senge, 2006). “Inverting our thinking...creates conditions where the shift in the world [or work] is possible” (Block, 2009, p 66).

Building on the disposition of openness to new information is the factor of self-awareness and reflection, which also connect to Senge's (2006) concept of shifting mental models. Active reflection allows us to “slow down our own thinking processes,” making us more aware of our mental models and their influence on how we engage with the world around us (Senge, 2006, p. 175). By spending reflective time on ourselves we can become aware of our own beliefs and attitudes, as well as open ourselves up to think critically about ourselves (Garmon 2004, Garmon 2005, Lucey et. al., 2017). This critical self-examination is important because, as we function within campus communities with diverse student bodies, the reality is that “it is human nature to have preconceived notions about others who are not similar to ourselves” (McNair et. al., 2019, p. 83). Thus, we must “spend time recognizing and addressing our biases and the stereotypes that may

negatively influence the students we serve" (p. 83). Patton et. al. (2007) call for student affairs practitioners to be "knowledgeable about and aware [of] how their racial identities influence their decisions and interactions with others" because "[practitioners'] attitudes towards diversity and multiple identities can empower or thwart the developmental experiences of the students they encounter" (p. 47).

Understanding the greater impact of our own self-reflection on the students we engage with connects a professional's self-work to their commitment to social justice (Patton et. al., 2007; McNair et. al, 2018). However, this commitment must be grounded in equity and equality for all people in society (Garmon, 2005). Leonard (2002) pushes this idea further by calling out the need for practitioners to work alongside students in order to name, reflect on, and dismantle whiteness as part of creating socially just education communities. This commitment must be a consistent part of the work that we do. Boltizer et. al. (2016) explains that culturally responsive practices do not work when diversity and social justice separates individuals or aspects of individual identities from the collective. Additionally, they note that we must come together as individuals to create a collective effort that centers diversity in everything we do, embedding our commitment throughout our work instead of highlighting social justice as a separate issue.

Experiences. Practitioner dispositions, as noted earlier, are only half of the needed components for practitioners to embody culturally responsive work. Garmon (2005) points out that our experiences and exposure with regard to diverse interpersonal relationships, education, and support groups within one's social identity groups are also essential. It is important to note that when looking at the key factor of intercultural experiences Garmon (2005) indicates they must include "direct interactions with

individuals from racial/cultural groups different than one's own" (p. 279) because they create practitioners that are "more likely to develop positive attitudes and beliefs about diversity than those with little to no experiences" (p. 280). Connecting these experiences to the disposition of openness it is easy to understand that being exposed to new ideas can often lead one to be more open to the learning and development that comes with intercultural experiences and relationships.

As noted earlier, culturally responsive practitioners need to not only understand our campus cultures, we also need to name and educate ourselves on the cultures of our students. This includes grounding our work in a knowledge base of knowing who our students are and in understanding the larger context of our campus communities (Gay, 2010). White practitioners must engage in educational pursuits that expand our understanding of the world beyond our own cultural and racialized experiences, in order to increase a knowledge of people different than ourselves (Gay, 2010). This "lack of knowledge of people different than ourselves often breeds fear and negativity, so if [practitioners] take an ethnocentric approach to practice they reinforce biases and prejudice...being open to seeing outside your perspective is key" (Gay, 2010 p. 24). Therefore, educational experiences "must tap a wide range of knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives (p. 34) in order "for educators to be able to understand the perspectives of students and seek ways to support and maximize students' potential and affirm their identities" (Koshino, 2016, p. 108). Garmon (2005) notes that education and professional development opportunities need to go beyond one course in a graduate preparation program, to include long-term comprehensive training and development. In

order to bring about change in the attitudes and beliefs of practitioners, we as practitioners need access to ongoing professional development.

Just as “it is important that students receive appropriate mentoring and supervision” when engaging in intercultural and educational experiences, so too must professionals (Garmon, 2005, p 281). Establishing supportive relationships creates spaces for practitioners to simultaneously have their beliefs (or mental models) challenged and to feel personally accepted and cared for. In these environments practitioners “are less likely to become defensive and resistant and more likely to be willing to verbalize and reflect on their beliefs and experiences” (Garmon, 2005, p. 281). These support group experiences then “create feelings of safety and acceptance while also encouraging that person’s growth” (p. 282).

CRP in Student Affairs

Because CRP is grounded in work within K-12 education settings there is a limited, almost nonexistent, amount of literature regarding how to apply CRP in higher education (Han, H.S., Vomvoridi-Ivanovic, E., Jacobs, J., Karankha, Z., Lypka, A., Topdemir, C., & Feldman, A., 2014). I also found it difficult to find literature about CRP in higher education that was not examining teacher preparation programs. My research sets out to try to fill this gap, because I believe there is a strong connection between CRP and the work of student affairs’ impact on student success.

For instance, outlined earlier in this chapter is an understanding that learning happens outside of the classroom, and that the work of student affairs plays a large role in the learning and development of college students. Echoing this idea, Gay (2010) claims that when thinking about CRP student achievement must be measured on more than

academic indicators, because a major goal is “developing socio-civic skills for effective membership in multicultural communities” (p. 21). Gay (2010) doubles down on CRPs connection to student affairs claiming that, at a minimum, education should provide students the knowledge and skills needed to function effectively in a diverse world, and college is often the time when these communities come together for our students. This connects directly to the SVVP’s assertion that centers the educational efforts of student affairs around ideas like citizenship, professionalism, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships. This connection provides a concrete use for CRP in student affairs, specifically in regard to that of orientation and student success.

“Central to this framework are cooperation, community, and connectedness” (Gay, 2010, p. 27). When thinking about community as it relates to orientation and student success this is important because “as we seek to build community, we need to be a part of that community and share our authentic thoughts and feelings” (Schroder-Arce, 2015, p. 217). When practitioners take the time to see the broader impact of orientation on student success, it creates inlets for us to think more deeply about how to change cultural norms within our communities (Santamaria et. al. 2016). CRP is an important framework for approaching our work including the nationally recognized competencies and standards outlined earlier in this chapter.

Furthering the connection of CRP to orientation is the research Lucey et. al. (2017) wrote regarding mentorship in higher education as it relates to CRP. In their research on pre-teacher education Lucey et. al. (2017) noted that they interviewed a young woman who said her work as an orientation leader was an important part of her growth and development as an educator. This was because her orientation leader

experience was “her first substantial and sustained contact with individuals from a variety of different backgrounds” (p. 208). It was through her work as an orientation leader that “she learned firsthand about how dealing with diversity can be challenging” (p. 208). This confirms that orientation practitioners must also think critically about what we mean when we talk about multicultural competencies and diversity programming.

Limitations

It is also important to note that, while CRP provides practical ways to apply the knowledge and skills practitioners possess in relation to national standards such as CAS, the ACPA/NASPA core competencies, or NODA core competencies, it is not a perfect solution. Gay (2010) notes that “culturally responsive practice alone cannot solve the problems of improving the education of marginalized students of color,” because real reform must also include institutional changes around things such as funding, administration, and policies (p.1). However, from a practitioner standpoint, understanding CRP through a critical lens can help those working to establish inclusive and socially just campus communities in order to use it as a model for daily and systemic change.

Addressing Whiteness

Katz (1978) points that because “race has been such a contentious and difficult subject for many, we talk around it rather than address it head on” (p. 3). By not naming race and whiteness we have the ability to “provide plausible deniability” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 44) in the work that we do. However, Katz (1978) also explains that in order to promote a society that is equal and inclusive we must start with self-examination, and that self-examination must include confronting our assumptions and understandings about our racial identity and the effect of whiteness on work.

In chapter one I described whiteness as the personal socialization of White people's racial identity built on a false sense of superiority, as well as a cultural and systemic prevalence for White normativity within individuals, institutions, and society as whole (Cabrera et. al, 2017; DeAngelo, 2018; Feagin, 2013; Goodman, 2001; Hardiman, 2001; Hardiman & Keehn, 2011; Helms, 1993, 2020; Kendall, 2013; Kendi, 2016; Kratz, 1978; Leonardo, 2002; Okun, 2021; Philips & Bender, 2013). For me it is very important to address both the personal and social dynamic of whiteness. In this final section of my literature review, I will offer a survey of current research on White culture, White identity development and whiteness in relationship to belonging-centered practices and CRP.

White Identity Development

I chose two White racial identity models to ground my research. First I read Janet Helms, *Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life* (2020). I also read Rita Hardiman's 2001 "Reflections on White Identity Development" and Rita Hardiman's and Molly Keehn's 2011 "White Identity Development Revisited: Listening to White Students." While Helm's and Hardiman's theories are independent from each other, together they establish a foundational understanding of White racial identity required for practitioners to engage in the important self-work needed to influence practice. I found these two models complement each other in a way that establishes a firm understanding of how White racial identity plays out in an individual's development process. Understanding White identity development through their models provides a way to examine the duality of White practitioners' own racial development and the important role we play in helping form the racial identity of White students.

Helms' (2020) White Racial Identity Development model is broken down into two phases: internalization of racism and evolution of a nonracist White identity. Within each phase are three distinct "schemas" of identity development. Helms describes her model as "a pair of eyeglasses...through which the person perceives or reacts to racial aspects of oneself." This is an important element to Helms' model because "just as one person can wear more than one pair of eyeglasses at a time, so too may the person use more than one schema at a time to react to racial issues" (p. 25-26).

These six schemas interweave with Hardiman's five stages of White Identity Development, creating a broad understanding of White identity development and active anti-racism. The first schema Helms (2020) describes is *contact*, where "the person is not consciously white and assumes that other people are raceless". Helms (2020) describes individuals engaged with this at this point of development as having a "naive curiosity or timidity about race" (p. 27). Similarly, Hardiman's (2001) model begins with "naivete" which is "marked with a lack of awareness of visible difference" (p. 111). In either case, this is prevalent when White people have limited interaction with people of color.

As it becomes harder for one to ignore racial differences, one shifts to a stage Hardiman (2001) calls *acceptance*. This is where a White person accepts racism in general and "internalizes [consciously or subconsciously] their superiority over people of color" (p. 111). Helms (2020) describes this level of understanding whiteness through the lens of *disintegration*. Through disintegration a person "consciously acknowledge[s] that [they are] white and that certain benefits accrue from belonging to the white membership group" (p. 27).

The third schema within Helms' (2020) phase one is *reintegration*. This takes place when a White person acknowledges ones White identity, but is stuck in a cycle of "othering" because of a belief that Whites and White normativity to be superior. At this stage a White person confirms stereotypes and focuses on a "self-protective strategy" including scapegoating, stereotyping, and excluding others in order to protect their White privilege.

At this stage of the two White identity models there is an important distinction. Where Helms (2020) asserts a stage where White people circle back to a deeper commitment to their White identity, Hardiman's (2001) model distinguishes a third stage of *resistance*. According to Hardiman and Keehn (2011), White people establish "feelings such as guilt and shame" and, unlike Helms' (2020) model where a person may protect their whiteness, "people want to distance themselves from their whiteness" (p. 123). In this stage "whites become antiracist or active in efforts to reduce, eliminate, or challenge racism" (Hardiman, 2001, p. 111).

The second phase of Helms' (2020) model addresses a similar active engagement in addressing racism through the evolution of a nonracist White identity. The first schema in this evolution is *pseudo-independence*. Through this lens, a White person actively questions their assumption of inferiority and acknowledges the responsibility White people play with regard to racism. While the White person is "no longer invested in maintaining the belief that white people are superior...[they do] not yet have a new belief system to replace previous socialization" (p. 28). This shift correlates with Hardiman's (2001) fourth stage of *redefinition* in which a White person "begins to accept and take responsibility for his whiteness" (p. 111). This is an important distinction in Hardiman's

model because “rather than estrangement from whiteness and their peers...they take ownership of their whiteness rather than trying to deny it” (p. 111-112).

Moving forward within Helms’ model is the fifth schema of *immersion-emersion*, which “involves an active exploration of racism, white culture, and assimilation and acculturation of white people” (p. 29). As with Hardiman’s *redefinition*, this schema includes “personal responsibility for racism” as well as the “awareness of the assets and deficits of being White” (p. 29).

Rounding out a Helm’s nonracist White identity phase is the schema of *autonomy* where a “person feels safe and secure within oneself” and looks for experiences with those within their race and cross-racially that “develop an egalitarian or humanitarian attitude toward people regardless of their race” (p.29). This schema requires a White person to internalize, nurture, and apply a new definition of White identity. At this stage of identity development White people “choose to be anti-racist [and] proclaim” that they are “no longer the same” (hooks, 2003). When White people do this, we are able to challenge racism and White supremacy and “can bond with people of color in beloved community living in the truth of our essential humanness” (p. 66). This internalization is also seen in the fifth and final stage of Hardiman’s (2001) model—*internalization*—which “involves integrating or internalizing this increased consciousness regarding race and racism and one’s new white identity into all aspects of one’s life” (p. 112), including their professional practice.

White Normativity

Understanding whiteness beyond our personal identity development is important because it expands our ability to see how whiteness and White normativity are embedded

in the systems within which we live, work, and move. Sociologist Joe Feagin (2013) refers to systemically embedded whiteness as a "white racial frame," asserting that this frame defines White Americans' "way of being" and "...provides the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of society" (p.11).

It is often hard to name the White racial frame due to what Bobbi Harro (2000) describes as the cycle of socialization. Harro (2000) explains this a process, noting that we are born into the world with little-to-no information with regard to the social identities we [and others] hold. Throughout our lives, we are socialized through family, social interactions, and media in ways that shape and reinforce our values and understanding of what is "normal." Similarly, the White racial frame is created through a daily socialization process that is taught, sometimes unknowingly, through our family and social interactions, which continue to reinforce the normalizing of whiteness within the world around us and which pushes out different ways of being (Feagin, 2013; Harro, 2000, Okun, 2021). The net effect of this is the creation of a culture built on notions of White normativity.

One notable problem with White normativity is that "aspects of white culture assume superiority over others" (Leonard, 2002, p. 32). Normalizing the world through a White racial frame creates a false sense of superiority, which leads to discriminatory practices (Feagin, 2013; Leonard, 2002; Okun 2021). By widening our racial awareness, we move beyond seeing White supremacy as bed sheets and burning crosses to an unconscious conditioning of White superiority. This awareness is vital for unpacking how White supremacist culture is embedded in ourselves and in our institutions.

Tema Okun (2021) outlined 14 specific characteristics of White supremacy culture, which “trains us all to internalize attitudes and behaviors that do not serve any of us.” These 14 characteristics create “White supremacy thinking which...targets BIPOC people with the intent to destroy them... and White people with a persistent invitation to collude that will inevitably destroy their [White peoples’] humanity.” These 14 characteristics are: perfectionism, either/or thinking, worship of the written word, objectivity, individualism, quantity over quality, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, sense of urgency, defensiveness, paternalism, progress is bigger-more, only one right way, and right to comfort. Okun’s (2021) articulation is another example of the subconscious socialization of the White racial frame and the prevalence of White normativity in ourselves, our work, and our institutions. The subtle way these “characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us” (Okun, 2021) is another example of why it is so important for practitioners to reflect on and learn about the influences whiteness has on their work.

For instance, due to our ingrained thinking that there is “one right way,” we might find ourselves unwilling to be open to new ways of doing things. This can impede our openness to new information, which is vital to the CRP approach outlined earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, characteristics such as perfectionism, right to comfort, fear of open conflict, and defensiveness can all impact one's ability to take risks, move forward from mistakes, or create trusting interracial relationships.

Whiteness and Belonging-Centered Practices

To create a consistent campus climate and sense of belonging it is important to examine how whiteness plays out in our work. White people's experiences of belonging

are oftentimes taken for granted in a way that BIPOC community members of HWCU's are not (Ahmed, 2012; DiAngelo, 2018). Cabrera et. al. (2018) point out that within predominantly White institutions (PWI) "there is a troubling trend of white students existing within highly segregated white environments" (p. 40). By turning the lens on ourselves and naming our whiteness we are situated to understand where adjustments are needed in ourselves, our work, and our institutions (Kendall, 2013).

A key element to CRP, as well as the professional core competencies outlined earlier, calls for practitioners to be self-aware. ACPA/NASPA explicitly call upon student affairs educators to "have a sense of their own agency and social responsibility" (p. 14). Taking the time to reflect in such a way allows us to see that "the way we function is powerfully impacted by our worldview, or the way...the world shows up for us" (Block 2009, p. 15). Phillips and Bender (2013) encourage White professionals to recognize their racialization and decentralize the White perspective; doing so will demonstrate that whiteness is not neutral.

According to Gay (2010) self-work is important as it applies to CRP because CRP practice should first confront existing perceptions and practices before real change or reform to work can take place. This, Gay (2010) notes, is because "if teachers do not know how their own cultural blinders can obstruct educational opportunities for students of color they cannot locate feasible places, directions, and strategies for changing them" (p. 70). We must take the time to understand our racialization as White people in order to remove our blinders, unlearn our early socialization, and participate in more inclusive and equitable ways. This includes understanding that racism in our society has not been the product of hate and ignorance, but instead has been brought about by "powerful and

brilliant men and women [who] have produced racist ideas in order to justify the racist policies of their era” (Kendi, 2016, p. 9). This production and reproduction of racist ideas continues because we are “socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 2), leading to the ongoing oppression of BIPOC communities. Kendi (2016) notes that continued oppression reinforces the notion within the White community that Black people are inferior, arguing instead that it is the opportunities for the Black community which are insufficient.

It can be painful, as White people, to see ourselves as part of the problem, but once we understand how whiteness is connected to racism it becomes clear that “our individual and collective roles in maintaining a system of white superiority” (Kendall, 2013, p. 1) is our responsibility. When we fail to do so, we “fail to create a just world in which everyone has an equitable opportunity to contribute and thrive” (Kendall, 2013, p. 1).

White educators' self-reflection is important because our social identities impact our worldview. Our worldview is a contextual set of beliefs, often unconscious, that frames how we think and see the world; our worldview also affects behavior (Block, 2009). According to Harro (2000), it is when we are confronted with something that contradicts what we have come to know as “the truth” that we are able to unlearn and relearn about the world around us and ourselves. Both Block's concept of worldview and Harro's cycle of socialization (2000) underscore the likelihood that White people remain unaware of their racial privilege. As long as White educators do not address our whiteness, we will be unable to enact change.

Final Thoughts on the Literature

All of this comes together in my research because when we only talk about whiteness and White supremacist groups as "fringe" groups, we continue to ignore the whiteness embedded in ourselves and in our programs (Leonardo, 2002). When we do this, we perpetuate the idea that White supremacists are "those people" in the minds of our students and ourselves. If we do not refocus our practices to include a critical look at whiteness, our culturally responsive practices will continue to keep BIPOC students at the margins; we will not create the radical anti-racist change we needed to build programs and campuses that are responsive to our full student body.

Student affairs practitioners are called upon by our national organizations to embed social justice practices into our work. We also have an obligation to our students, who benefit from witnessing us navigate tricky terrain such as whiteness, social justice, and anti-racism in order to see their place in the process of change (Schroder-Arce, 2015). When thinking about our work as conduits for students to immerse themselves in the campus community, understanding how social justice and inclusion are tied to a student's sense of belonging is vitally important. I ask: how exactly do we address whiteness in the work, and how do we keep ourselves, our colleagues, and our institutions accountable to create needed change? My research draws on culturally responsive practices as a framework to uncover ways in which White student affairs professionals articulate the effects of whiteness on their campus interactions with racially diverse students and colleagues.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methodology

Through critical reflection on practitioner interviews at various career stages, I examined White student affairs professionals' self-reported ideas and experiences with White racial identity and social justice work on campus. In this chapter, I provide justification for the use of Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP) as a framework for critical narrative analysis of the experiences of White student affairs professionals. I also outline my research process including selection of participants, research protocol, and analysis of interview transcripts.

Research Question

As a reminder, my research asks in what ways White student affairs professionals articulate the effects of whiteness on their campus interactions with racially diverse students and colleagues. More specifically, I examine:

- RSQ1: What motivates White student affairs professionals' commitment to social justice and inclusion?
- RSQ2: In what ways do White student affairs practitioners address whiteness within themselves, their colleagues, and White students on campus?
- RSQ 3: In what ways does whiteness influence their approach when working with BIPOC colleagues, and students on campus?
- RSQ 4: What do White practitioners suggest graduate programs and campus administrators provide in order to facilitate intentional campus inclusion?
- RSQ 5: In what ways do practitioners view their work as part of larger social justice and inclusion efforts in higher education?

Research Framework and Rationale

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) describe conceptual frameworks as “the current and evolving version of the researchers map of qualitative territory being investigated,” asserting their importance in focusing a researcher. Specifically, a framework allows a researcher to “decide which things are most important; which relationships are likely to be most meaningful and... what information should be collected and analyzed” (p. 15). I used Garmon's (2005) six key factors (outlined in Chapter Two) to analyze CRP in participant narratives.

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain that critical research is a broad approach, which aims to move our work forward in creating a more just society. Norman Denzin (2016) points out that research needs to go beyond interpreting the world, to changing it “in ways that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full, inclusive, participatory democracy” (p. 9). The use of critical research to look at structures of power with an intent to change the systems which we live and work within (Denzin 2016; Merriam & Tisdell 2016) aligns directly with CRP’s call for practitioners to critically examine ourselves, our institutions, and our work in order to create communities inclusive of the diverse social identities found on our campuses.

There are several examples of this type of critical approach to research within the context of education giving credence to CRP as a framework. For instance, Santamaria et. al. (2016) asserted that applied critical leadership, a strength-focused model, provides insight into the leadership practices of educators as we work in relationship to the social context of their educational communities and their own social identities. They point out that CRP as a framework is deeply connected to the critical leadership lens that leads to

White practitioners actively working together with BIPOC professionals to change educational systems. Similarly, bell hooks (2003) used life-transforming dialogues within a context of community-building to call for conscious, cooperative partnership across racial barriers in order to create learning communities that are mutually liberating for both students and teachers.

Another example of critical research within education is found in Sleeter's (2017) use of critical race theory (CRT) to examine the whiteness of teacher education programs. Offering "conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been institutionalized" (p. 157), Sleeter (2017) used CRT as a lens to analyze whiteness in teacher education and conceptualize responses. Similar to CRP, critical race theorists such as Sleeter have used narrative to build "on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoints, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado & Stefancic 2017, p. 45). As with CRP, self-awareness and awareness of power dynamics are at the core of all of these frameworks. Therefore, I used CRP as a critical framework to make sense of the experiences of White student affairs practitioners.

Research Method and Rationale

Brinkman & Kvale (2015) describe interviews as research through conversation, noting that "conversation is a basic mode of human interaction" (p. 1). Interviews help bring stories out of people by asking them to share their narratives and to "unfold the meaning of their experiences" (p. 3). Understanding conversation as a way to use narrative to "encompass both the modes of thought and texts of discourse that give shape to the realities they convey" (Gay, 2010, p. 3) was important to my research. Firstly,

because personal stories of practice move us from understanding concepts and principles to applying this understanding to the work (Gay, 2010). Secondly, because sharing one's narrative demands a level of vulnerability from both the participant and the researcher. These elements came together to create research designed to use reflective interviews to better understand the connection of self in relation to others (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). This level of self-reflection, or reflexivity, can be uncomfortable because it requires a deep level of vulnerability from the researcher due to its insistence on examining the topic in relationship to oneself, to others, and within the systems we live and work within (Denzin 2016; Adams et. al., 2015; McMillan & Schumacher 2010). While this level of reflexivity can open the researcher up to personal criticism, it was vitally important to my research because “reflexivity also asks us to explicitly acknowledge our research in relation to power” (Adams et, al. p. 29).

I used a semi-structured approach to interviewing to allow participants' stories to drive our conversations and my findings. The value of narrative in my research lies in "seeing personal experience and narratives as important tools for learning and using them to connect the dots between individual and group experience of (dis)empowerment to institutional and systemic analyses of racism” (Bolitzer L.A., Castillo-Montonya, M., Williams, L.A., 2016, p. 73). This is significant because the literature confirms that when talking about student support it becomes vitally important to understand how power and privilege play out in the work as White professionals supporting racially diverse student populations. Santamaria & Santamaria (2016) note that “understanding our own biographies along the lines of social class, ethnicity, gender, and ability can help us to begin to name and expose the norms of cultural practice we live, and which formed our

dispositions" (p.48). Gay (2010) expands on the impact of story by stating that "a story perspective allows the integration of more types of information and styles of presentation than are customary in more conventional styles of scholarly writing and research" (p. 2). Expanding on this, Gay (2010) also points out that the use of story asks individuals to think about how they project and present themselves. Story is one way we declare what is important and valuable. It has direct connection to how we make "general facts more meaningful to specific personal lives, connect the self with others, proclaim the self as a cultural being [something missing from the White narrative], develop a healthy sense of self, and forge new meanings and relationships, or build community" (p. 3).

Research Design and Analysis

In this section I outline my research design. To do this I will present an overview of my participant selection and research protocols. My research protocol was organized into three major parts. First, I describe the prep work for conducting my interviews including the developing and testing of interview questions using a pilot interview. Second, I present a detailed description of my interview process, specifically including the use of a post-interview reflective journal. Closing out this section I present the three-tiered narrative analysis used to review the data.

Participant Selection Protocol

I set out to interview White student affairs professionals in various stages of their careers whose primary responsibility was working with new student programming or overseeing departments with direct responsibility for the success of new students. In order to represent a range of experiences these five participants were to include:

- one master's level graduate student in their first year of their program

- one master's level graduate student in their final year of their program
- one new professional (one-to-three years post-master's)
- one mid-level professional
- one senior-level professional

Due to the nature of my research, and in order to narrow my participant pool down further, I also set a criterion that all participants must be practitioners working at historically White colleges and universities within the greater Twin Cities area of Minnesota. Therefore, all participants worked at institutions within a 75-mile radius of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota.

I drew upon my professional network as an initial strategy for recruiting participants. This included directly reaching out to professionals within 75 miles from me to invite them to participate or to provide referrals for other potential participants. I reached out to professionals within my network who met my criteria, as well as those who did not meet all of the criteria, but may have known of someone who did. Using Google Forms, my contacts submitted either their own names or the names of people whom they thought would be potential participants.

From those professional referrals I reviewed potential participants based on their institution type, role on campus, and career stage. This allowed me to conduct focused outreach to ensure a cross section of participants from different campus types, including size, public versus private, and two-year versus four-year. Having narrowed my potential participants through that process I then emailed several people from the various career stages outlined earlier. I made all initial contact through an introductory email explaining the purpose of my research, a description of the process, and an invitation to participate

in my study. Once confirmed, interview participants received a copy of the informed consent as well as my interview questions, and interviews were scheduled.

In order to provide as much confidentiality as possible I invited participants to choose pseudonyms for themselves. When participants did not choose one, I provided one. My findings are therefore reported without identifying participant titles, positions, or their institutions. In order to maintain participants' ownership of their narrative throughout the process, interviewees were given the ability to remove themselves from my data pool at any time as part of my consent for release.

Because I used professional networking to find participants, I must note that student affairs is a small community. This means there was the potential for me to know the participants, at least to a small degree, or that their supervisor/instructor would be part of the recruiting process. In order to mitigate any uneasiness for my participants due to these connections, I made it clear to both those making referrals and to my final participants that I would not disclose to anyone whether or not someone they referred to me was contacted to be a participant or not. Those who provided referrals were simply a conduit to names and nothing more.

In soliciting participants, I received ample participant options in each of the five career stages. While reaching out to possible participants I ended up with two senior level practitioners with interest in participating. Because they had different levels of experiences and worked at different institutional types, I expanded my participants from five to six. Another notable change in my participants, as will be seen throughout chapters four and five was that their focus on students new to campus became less of a focus area. Therefore, while it was a part of my initial criteria, and all participants had

some level of exposure to new student programming, the scope of their work and narratives went beyond their work with new students and focused on their broader student affairs practice. Finally, I want to note that all six participants did identify as female. While this was not a criterion at the beginning of my research, in order to ensure different institution types and maintain the career stages I set forth to focus on, this happened organically.

Research Protocol

The first step in my process was applying for IRB approval after the conclusion of a successful proposal meeting. Based on my participant criteria and line of inquiry I followed the exempt IRB protocol through my institution. Because there were no strict deadlines for an exempt IRB application and approval, I was able to gain full approval for my research in early February of 2021. I will now detail the process of my research including preparing for interviewing, the interview process, and the reflective journal conducted after each interview.

Preparing for Interviews. One could say my approach to data analysis started as early as creating my questions. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) list this as one of the important steps of preparing for interview analysis, noting that understanding the method of analysis during the creation of your questions allows the interviewer to prepare their interview and thus help guide the transcript of the interview (p. 216). They state that preparing in this way allows the interviewer to ask, “How shall I conduct my interviews so that their meaning can be analyzed in a coherent and creative way?” (p. 216).

Using Garmon’s (2005) six key factors I used CRP as a framework for creating my interview questions in order to investigate White student affairs professionals'

dispositions and experiences regarding social justice and inclusion. These questions included inquiry regarding their professional development, as well as current practices and how they establish inclusive campus communities through their work. The full set of interview questions can be seen in Appendix A.

Balancing my questions in this way allowed for asking personal questions about the values and experiences of all participants in relation to my research question and sub questions. This provided a deeper understanding of how White student affairs professionals address their racial positionality in their work and actively engage in professional practices that enhance student success and the sense of belonging of racially diverse student populations through their role.

An important part of preparing for my interviews was conducting a pilot interview. The process of a pilot allowed me to assess myself as a researcher with regard to my interview style and rapport with a subject. It also provided me with valuable feedback on my questions and research design. Because this pilot interview was used to provide such important insight into my research method, it was vital that I find a participant who fit three major categories. First, they needed to connect to the larger context of my research, meaning that they needed to be a White student affairs practitioner with direct experience or oversight to new student success. Secondly, I sought out someone who I knew would give critical feedback on me as an interviewer. Their answers were important, but not incorporated into the data analysis. The pilot interview was used as a tool to examine my role as the interviewer, including an investigation of my formatted questions as well as feedback on my ability to authentically ask follow-up questions. The third requirement was that they be someone who would be

willing to introduce me to people within their professional network. The third requirement was important because, as noted, I used professional networking to obtain possible participants. I capitalized on my pilot subjects' connections to target recommendations for possible participants. This technique is called snowball sampling and is a process where one asks well-situated people with whom else to talk (Patton, 1990, p. 176). Using feedback from my pilot interview, I made slight adjustments to my interview questions including calling attention to my interviewee's choice of pseudonym, and the arrangement and timing of questions to best establish rapport with participants.

A key part of my process was creating a templated journal page, which I completed after each interview. These are the journal prompt and interview summary templates in Appendices B and C. Also known as analytical memoing, this process "documents the research reflection and thinking processes about the data" and serves as a "first draft self-report, of sorts...a rapid way of capturing thoughts" directly after each interview (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 88). This journal was important because the "lengthy, uncondensed text in the form of interview transcripts...is cumbersome...and is not easy to see as whole." Furthermore, "comparing several extended texts carefully is very difficult...and can make [the researcher] feel monumentally overloaded" (p. 103).

Conducting the Interviews. Each interview was set up as a 90-minute semi-structured interview. Most interviews took the full 90 minutes. However, the graduate student in her final year of study took just over 60 minutes and the senior level professional at a four-year institution took closer to two hours. While I had a set of questions to refer to, I allowed participants to lead the conversation. Based on their experiences and insights I focused on the narrative of their work in the field connected to

social justice, and culturally responsive practices. Their detailed explanations provided a richer understanding of their individual perspectives.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place virtually via the video meeting software Google Meet. I conducted all interviews from my home office and asked participants to select a location they felt most comfortable in as long as it was private, quiet, and free from distractions for the duration of the interview. While the use of Google Meet provided benefits such as saving a recorded transcript, the technology has some limits. Face-to-face interviews with participants provide opportunities to read body language and nonverbal cues as well as build rapport through direct eye contact. With technology, such as virtual interviews, rapport was more challenging to establish (Chase, 2008). It is also important to note that for the protection of interviewees' confidentiality, my use of Google Meet required me to transfer transcripts out of Google Drive to my own password-secured external hard drive immediately after each interview.

Reflecting on the Interviews. Thinking critically about how I entered into the research was a vital part of my process. In order to do this, I engaged in reflexivity using a reflective journal, which traced my ideas and personal reactions through my fieldwork (McMillan & Schumacher 2010; Luttrell 2010; Adams et. al. 2015). Specifically, at the conclusion of each interview I used the journal prompts provided in Appendix B to record my reflections. Luttrell (2010) notes that reflective writing exercises such as this are “meant to capture your thinking process while you are engaged in it” (p. 469). I applied a similar approach to question design in the critical reflection journal used to confront my assumptions as a researcher. More about the reflective journal process will be detailed in the following subsection.

Approaches to Analysis

Narrative inquiry is rooted in social change (Chase 2008, 2011, 2018) and has specifically been used to “bring to light marginalized people’s experiences, changing our perceptions of them” (Chase 2018, p. 553). It is not my intention to co-opt or appropriate a form of research which allows for unheard voices to be showcased. I believe that narrative inquiry is also a strong tool to bring White practitioners into conversation with each other about whiteness in order to shift our perceptions of how privilege impacts our practice. In this way, the social change often called for through narrative inquiry was used to hold myself and my White colleagues accountable by listening to personal narratives of culturally responsive practice. To do this I used a narrative inquiry analysis model outlined by Susan Chase (2018) which focuses “on content, form, and context in the storylines of interviewees’ narrative and then compare[s] those storylines across interviews” (p. 551).

My narrative analysis consisted of three ways of meaning making. First, I used my reflexivity journal to create a one-page summary debriefing each interview after they took place as well as responding to the personalized reflective prompts. These questions were broken down into two categories. First, I reflected on the interview itself by examining my role as the interviewer, the limitations to my questions, and my reactions to the participants. Secondly, my reflections focused on my connection(s) (or lack of connection) with the participants. I used this two-tier approach to reflection to help connect the dots between the literature and the narratives of my participants, as well as address my own positionality as a White student affairs practitioner in my research.

My second approach was to read each transcript through the lens of Garmon's (2005) six key factors. I read each individual transcript using Garmon's (2005) six key factors as a framework for analysis before doing a comparative analysis of the interviews in relation to each other. Chase (2011) states that "Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them" (p. 412). Spending a considerable amount of time thinking critically about my questions and designing them around these six key factors allowed me to focus my interviews less on fact-finding and more on meaning-making using narrative inquiry.

A third layer of meaning-making involved cross-narrative analysis. This process allowed for "individuals' stories [to] become a collective story" (Chase 2018, p.555) with the ultimate goal of my research being to "improve the quality of everyday experiences" (Chase 2011, p. 421-422), or to "change [the] professional practice" (Chase 2018, p. 554) of student affairs practitioners. Reviewing the transcripts in this way shed light on important patterns within their narratives. These patterns allowed for deeper understanding and helped support the vital implications for professional practice outlined in chapter five.

Final Thoughts on Method

The form of collective conversation I used is quite powerful. However, being so closely connected to the research (I could have easily been a participant based on the criteria, had another researcher been conducting the interviews) created an additional need for caution regarding confronting my assumptions. This is why using the reflective journal was so important in re-grounding me as a researcher and in keeping the focus on my participants. When describing her own research from 2010 Chase (2018) notes that

“speaking and listening across differences are skills that must be learned” (p. 557). Chase (2018) says one reason for this is that researchers need to confront their own limitations in understanding another's experience. Yes, stories can bring us together, but “researchers should not assume that narratives always connect people” (p. 557). This was key for me to remember as a researcher in order to stay conscious of my own experiences and assumptions. I could have easily fallen into a pattern of *White like me* when speaking with other White practitioners, without acknowledging that beyond commonalities in racial socialization in this country are individual lived experiences in a variety of social contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, I will do my best to honor the narratives of the brave women who agreed to share their experiences with me. Each participant was open, generous, and vulnerable with what they shared. Their stories provide important insights for other White professionals who are committed to social justice and equity in their daily work.

In Table 1, I have created a brief overview of each participant including their institutional context, and a researcher-provided tag line about what stood out in their narrative.

Table 1

Participant Overview

Variable	Participant Pseudonym					
	Erica	Sarah	Mary	Jessica	Josuelynn	Heather
Institution Type	4-year Public	4-year Private	4-year Private	4-year Private	4-year Private	2-year Public
Functional Area	Advising	Advising	Admissions	Activities	Residential Life	Student Affairs
Career Stage	Beginning Graduate Student	Advanced Graduate Student	New Professional	Mid-Level Professional	Senior Professional	Senior Professional
Tag Line	Student is Expert	Future Change	Institutional Transparency	Balancing Space	Common Language	Feedback Loops

Several institutional types were represented including public and private institutions, two-year and four-year, and religiously-affiliated, or not. Institutional size also varied widely, from campuses as small as 1,500 students to as large as 15,000. In terms of functional area, while all participants had some aspect of their work influencing students new to campus, they all also worked with the larger student population through advising, campus activities, admissions, residence life, and student affairs leadership.

In order to organize my findings, I will begin by introducing each participant's narrative, paying close attention to their professional context and personal definitions of social justice and inclusion. Understanding each participant in this way is important for understanding how each works, and helps navigate the complexities of diversity, social justice and equity in their life and professional practice.

After establishing a foundational introduction to each participant, I will focus on key aspects of my participants' practices as gleaned through narrative analysis using Garmon's (2005) six key factors. From there I will zero in on whiteness. Specifically, I will highlight the difference in how participants think about their whiteness in relation to working with BIPOC students and colleagues versus with their White students and colleagues. My final point of analysis will be in reviewing participants' desires for ongoing professional development, and their perceived impact to institutional change.

Introduction to Participants

Erica's Summary—First Year Graduate Student

As a first-year graduate student, Erica had limited time on campus and thus her knowledge of the campus was fairly general. She described the campus as a four-year regional state institution. While the campus does have residential students, her

understanding was that there is a large commuter population from the surrounding area, contributing to their student population being largely White (69%), Minnesota residents. She was open that her statistics were from 2018 and indicated that they may not be accurate for current student numbers. As far as her work on the campus, at the time of interview she currently had two roles with direct student contact. One was advising within a particular educational program. The second was within a new campus initiative of wellness counseling for students in their first or second term at the school. She spoke about both experiences within her interview. She also spent a fair amount of time talking about her own experience within her graduate program at the school. Her graduate program was where many of her social justice and inclusion beliefs and insights were currently being supported.

Her definitions of social justice and inclusion were centered around her responsibility with regard to learning and making space for others. For instance, she defined social justice as a commitment to lifelong learning including learning about oneself, one's role within the world, and “the myriad of diversities in the world.” Also centered on learning, her definition of inclusion has recently shifted as she has become more aware of the several dominant identities she holds. When asked to define inclusion she spoke fondly of a campus leader at a previous school who influenced her understanding. This leader spoke about inclusion needing to not only focus on “including someone in the circle, but moving over to make space for them too.” Erica said that she no longer thinks about “how I’m including you [i.e. the student] in my world,” but instead has shifted to seeing inclusion “as including others, but also shifting the way that I view the world in order to make space for other ways of being.”

Erica stood out in the way that she spoke of not being the expert. This idea of not being an expert had less to do with her limited experience in the field, and more to do with giving voice and ownership of the work she does one-on-one with students, to the students. Throughout her interview, she spoke of students being the experts of their own lives. An example of this was seen when discussing working with a male student of color regarding academic support. He had missed classes and assignments, and her colleagues were unsure how to support him. Erica noted to her colleagues the compounding impact of work issues, financial issues and COVID-19. However, for her, it was also important to note that, while White students experience those issues too, there was a different level of inequity to consider due to race. After doing so, she was assigned the student to her caseload. When meeting with the student, and others she spoke about, she said her work came down to “just really trying to support students in terms of talking through what they needed, one-on-one. Giving some resources if they were interested in that as well. And just really trying to come from a supportive place rather than a punitive place.”

Sarah’s Summary—2nd Year Graduate Student

At the time of our interview, Sarah was in the final semester of her master’s program. Her context was influenced both by her graduate program institution, as well as the context of her two assistantships. However, for the purpose of this interview she spoke most directly to her educational and professional context at a four-year private institution. From that perspective, she viewed the campus from that of a student and a professional staff member working with student support and transition programs. Throughout the interview, she spoke of her directness with students, particularly with regard to student staff supervision.

Being near the end of graduate work, she was upfront that her definitions of social justice and inclusion were on her mind, as she expected to be asked similar questions in her job search process. When it came to social justice, Sarah was very clear that to her a definition of social justice must include diversity (who do we say we serve), equity (who are we not reaching), and inclusion (creating a welcoming environment). To Sarah social justice came down to “valuing the whole student, all that they bring.” Though Sarah was quick to incorporate inclusion within her definition of social justice, she also articulated inclusion as an action-driven approach to the work. She said that, to her, inclusion combines the language we use and the approach we use when welcoming students and their families to campus. Specifically, she stated that, “we need to actually be doing things rather than just saying things.” Therefore, her work was influenced by an action-oriented, comprehensive idea of inclusion in both word and action in order to “think about who we are and are not serving on our college campuses.”

One significant item to note with regard to Sarah is that, while she was a more advanced student in her program, she had limited experience with professional practice. She attributed this to having gone directly into her master’s program after obtaining her undergraduate degree. This was particularly significant to her narrative compared to other participants, and contributed to her tagline centered on future change. Sarah’s contributions to the conversation about institutional change were future-focused compared to the other participants, who may have perceived more positional power when it came to direct change and influence in their daily work at the time of interview.

Mary's Summary—New Professional, 1-3 Years Post-Master's

Mary was in her second job since obtaining her master's degree four years ago, and was the only interviewee who worked directly within the functional area of admissions. Her context of bridge-building between prospective students and the institution will be an important lens in understanding my analysis of her narrative through the framework I have used. Mary spoke often about balancing the duality of how the campus environment influences the experiences of students, as well as how students impact the campus environment. Also contributing to Mary's unique lens was the fact that the four-year private liberal art campus Mary worked at was the furthest away from the Twin Cities metro area, and had the smallest domestic student population of all six participants' institutions. While her campus was the least racially diverse, she was acutely aware of the 2026 enrollment cliff highlighted in chapter one. Understanding that the US will have lower amounts of college-aged students by 2026 influenced her framing of social justice and inclusion as she worked to recruit a robust class each year.

Mary's definition of social justice was about moving past personal comfort to advocate for everyone around you, and striving for the best: In her words, "...working more toward justice for everyone and equity more than inclusion." Her call to move past a singular definition of inclusion went beyond physical presence and incorporated items like her thoughts and ideas around how to make conversations and opportunities for everyone's voice to have a platform to be heard. Thus, for Mary, inclusion was less about providing entry to a college or university, and more about an equitable understanding of access to higher education and the support systems needed to allow for students to thrive while enrolled. She said, "Just because someone is present doesn't necessarily mean they

have been included.” Inclusion must incorporate thoughts, ideas, and “true listening to those thoughts and ideas,” so that students feel a sense of belonging on campus.

Mary’s tag line is due to her consistent call for transparency. This included stories that discussed being open with students about when she was unavailable because she was prioritizing DEI professional development opportunities, as well as working to provide a more transparent and truthful depiction of student life for prospective students who attended campus visit dates. Beyond students, her call for transparency and open communication also discussed ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic had opened up lines of communication inter-departmentally and with the wider campus community. This “clear transparency...provide[s] faculty and staff opportunity to ask questions of the Admissions office as to why things are trending a certain way.” She had worked hard to ensure that sharing student trends included sharing what social justice issues were important to the students coming into the school.

Jessica’s Summary—Mid-Level Professional,

Jessica had worked at the same small four-year liberal arts campus since she was a graduate student seven years ago. During her time there, she had had different responsibilities, all centered around community and student engagement. Because she worked at a smaller campus, she noted several personal touch points with students, including fall orientation programming, first-year seminar courses, and campus-wide events and leadership programming.

Jessica centered her definition of social justice around the idea of breaking down barriers through education for a more equitable system. She said, “I think a lot of social justice work is unlearning and then creating action from what you’ve learned.” The

education piece was key to Jessica's experience because, as she stated, "There have been many times where I'm like yeah, I know it all...I know social justice...I know privilege and then I'm like, oh I definitely absolutely do not." Therefore, for Jessica a definition of social justice must come with an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning.

Because Jessica tried "to take as equitable an approach as possible to inclusion," her definition of inclusion was centered around the belief that inclusion must go beyond welcoming students, to a more equitable approach to making space (both physical or metaphorical) for students. When she thought about social justice and inclusion in her work she considered both event logistics (i.e. asking questions like, "is a program provided at a time when students can attend?") and fostering the interpersonal development of her student staff (for example, providing bystander intervention training), so they could engage with their peers in productive and positive ways.

Jessica's narrative focused heavily on space and reflective practice. She spoke of her need to think critically about balancing space. She mentioned needing to understand when to "step in, step up, or step aside" in various spaces depending on her role, or positionality as a White person, and how she could best support her community and push for change. For example, she talked about, as a White woman, her experience in showing up to community conversations of race as an active participant. She chose to take on roles such as "question collector" in order to be in the space in ways that showed she was in support of the conversation, without taking away space from the BIPOC narrative and re-centering the conversation on White fragility.

Josuelynn's Summary—Senior Level Professional, Four-Year Campus

Josuelynn had 10 years of experience in higher education with a specific focus in housing and residential life. While most of her experience was at larger state schools, she recently took on a senior level position with the housing department of a smaller four-year liberal arts campus in the Twin Cities. Though her focus was specifically on students who live on campus, she did have a wide range of exposure to students as she often worked with them from as early as the recruitment phase of their connection to her campus. Now, as a senior level professional, she has had more exposure to staff development and policy changes, which connected to much of what she talked about with regard to my research.

For Josuelynn social justice “means each person who shows up in front of us has an opportunity to feel heard and valued and not judged...whether I agree with that voice or not.” Due to her definition including multiple perspectives, Josuelynn pointed to the need for discourse and “dialogue around what that voice might be.” In terms of inclusion, she was the first and only interviewee, to push against this language; she said that, to her, the word “inclusion” was associated with assimilation, so she did not use that word. Instead, Josuelynn centered her language around belonging. In her leadership role, she used this shift in terminology to focus on creating policies and structures that “support who students are while also valuing human connections.” She believed a key part of belonging was being really transparent in conversations with students about the assimilation piece.

Josuelynn provided an example of where she had seen students being required to assimilate to meet policies that did not necessarily align with their social identities. She

spoke about how the documentation required by her school in order to allow partners to live with students if they were married was a marriage certificate. Josuelynn noted that, "if you are identifying as Muslim you might not necessarily enter into the same type of marriage," explaining that the documentation might look different. She said it was important to sit with students to understand the system and say, "I don't have control over that," but also say, "how do we help you get what it is that you need to be able to make this happen? Because at the end of the day this needs to happen." According to Josuelynn it was important in her work to address assimilation because "it comes back to helping students...find resources they need," but also to ask "how do we help you?" "Belonging" to her, then, became about helping students navigate a system that may not have been built for them, while also looking to change the system so that it was more accessible. It was important to Josuelynn to help students understand that policies are important, but that policies can change if they are no longer serving their purpose and are creating barriers for students.

Whether it was about making space for dialogue in relation to her definition of social justice, or a shift in terminology from "inclusion" to "belonging," having a common language was a key part of Josuelynn's narrative. For instance, she noted that an essential part of allowing space for multiple voices was about finding a common language with her staff, which she believed allowed for more people to engage in tough conversations. In her work, this included establishing lines of communication within her staff, as well as how they used language with students regarding roommate conflict and general conduct issues. Having the tough conversations centered on a common language

shed light on where policies and practices were flawed, in order to work toward active change and advancement with regard to student success and belonging on campus.

Heather Summary—Senior Level Professional, Two-Year Campus

Heather was the senior-most interview participant, with over 20 years of experience, most of which had taken place at two-year schools. Part of her commitment to social justice was directly related to her intentional choice to work at two-year campuses. Early in her career, she had not really thought about community colleges in relation to her professional career goals. However, once she started at a two-year college, she stayed because “the mission of access and inclusion...that's what centers community colleges,” and that is what centered her work, too. In her current role, she sits within cabinet-level leadership, supervising the division of student affairs at the community college where she works.

Connecting greatly to the mission of access and inclusion that centers community colleges certainly impacted the way in which Heather defined social justice. She framed social justice in a way that moved beyond access to equity. Moreover, social justice is about “disrupting systems that are inequitable” and creating new systems that ensure access included entry into college as well as “opportunity, equal rights, and fairness...which doesn’t always look the same for everybody.”

Coupled with her personal definition of social justice were Heather’s ideas around inclusion. Working at an open access institution, she defined inclusion from the vantage point of “everybody being invited to the table,” because “you can fill out an application and you can come to college here, and so you're welcome here. You're included here. I think, to me, that's inclusion.” However, she was aware that being welcomed to campus

was more than just getting accepted. From an early age, she said she was “aware of people having different starting places.” She grew up in a low-income single-family home and was the first in her family to go to college, so she “was uniquely aware that resources weren’t distributed evenly and that...hard work does not always equate to wealth.” Because of this experience, she believed that for many “success is defined differently,” so when welcoming students to campus, and thinking of belonging it was important to Heather to remember that.

Heather had more than 20 years of experience working at institutions of higher learning, and it was refreshing to speak with a leader so willing to talk about the ongoing need for feedback and assessment both personally and institutionally. Heather spoke at length about the need for open communication, specifically as it related to creating space for feedback and closing the loop. This included “using data to drill down and say, ‘Where do we see gaps?’” institutionally. However, Heather took this work further by adding that there was a need to work to “understand why there are gaps,” and then make an action plan or “strategy to reduce that gap.” Beyond institutional assessment Heather was also open about her personal need for growth and development, stating that, “It’s okay to maybe say something wrong...because then we’re going to learn from it.” However, similar to the gaps in the data she spoke about, even personally, follow-through is vital: “People need to be accountable to actually learning from it [mistakes] instead of continuing to make the same mistake over and over.”

Individual Insights from Garmon’s Framework

Now that each participant has been introduced I will present important findings gathered through the use of Garmon’s (2005) six key factors as a framework. In this

section, participants' narratives will be presented individually before being cross-analyzed, to highlight findings as they relate to Garmon's (2005) two major categories of practitioner dispositions and influential experiences. To begin each section, a brief reminder of each category will be provided. From there I will look at the key factors within each category in relation to participant narratives in order to highlight the impact of practitioner dispositions and experiences as they relate to my research.

Dispositions

Garmon (2005) outlines three components of practitioner dispositions: commitment to social justice, openness to new information, and self-awareness. For the purpose of streamlining analysis, these factors will be broken down individually. However, it should be noted that all three intersect in dynamic ways. For instance, a practitioner's commitment to social justice oftentimes is seen in the time, energy, and resources they put toward professional development and feedback. Furthermore, a practitioner's self-awareness is deeply influenced by their openness to new information as it pertains to their understanding of themselves. Together, these practitioner dispositions underscore the importance of racial identity development among White student affairs professions.

Commitment to Social Justice

Erica. In her work with students, Erica puts her social justice commitment to work by intentionally honoring the expertise students have in their own lives. This was highlighted when she spoke of her work as a wellness coach. In this role she said she is, "not coming from a place where like, I'm the expert and I know what they should do in order to be successful. They know what they need." Specifically, she said that "stepping

back from that expert role and getting a little bit better about considering other ways of being” was important to her because “maybe the way that I would do things is not the way that other people would do things, and that's okay.” Since Erica does have a level of understanding of campus resources, she focuses on “help[ing] them figure out what they need to be successful...being there to facilitate whatever is best for them.” To Erica her work is less about telling students what they need and more about working with them to develop their voice for self-advocacy as it pertains to navigating campus resources.

Sarah. Action-orientated social justice is a key element in Sarah’s commitment. Sarah said, of her work, “We need to actually be doing things rather than just saying things.” A big part of the action Sarah currently takes is in asking direct questions in order to ensure she is framing her work in “valuing the whole student, all that they bring.” Her commitment focuses on understanding “who we are serving” but must also include asking, “Who are we not reaching?” Sarah expanded on that idea, expressing the need to “not take a one-size-fits-all approach.” This approach is one in which Sarah believes you can create spaces “where students really feel like they are valued for who they are and can be their authentic selves.”

Mary. Having grown up in a small, rural, racially homogenous town, Mary’s purposeful choice to attend a diverse undergraduate campus in an urban area is a keen example of how, even before she could articulate a commitment to social justice, she was open to broadening her worldview. This commitment has only flourished since her years as an undergraduate student. Mary spoke about the space she creates with students as being heavily influenced by her undergraduate experiences. She values student-centered spaces where it is “ok to like, to have a breakdown and try to work through that.” She

said her own undergraduate experience was "instrumental in making [students] feel comfortable."

Jessica. Since her college years, Jessica has shown her commitment to social justice through her self-motivated approach to embracing learning opportunities when they present themselves. I will go into further details about this in the following subsection as it pertains to "openness to new information." However, for Jessica it is so interspersed with her commitment that I felt it important to highlight here as well. For Jessica, participating in these programs is not only important because it aids in her growth and learning, but it situates her as an active member in her campus community when issues arise. She sees herself as "a partner and supporter of initiatives that are happening on campus." Often taking a "behind the scenes [role], especially if it's a community conversation on race," Jessica works to ensure students see her colleagues of color as leaders in those spaces, while also seeing her active involvement as a supportive ally. One example of how she does this is by volunteering "to be a moderator and help grab questions and give them to the people who are hosting and provide support...that's another way for people to see that I care but that I'm not putting myself as a center point of that conversation." Another way Jessica works to decenter herself, yet show her commitment to social justice, is seen in how she thinks about her work facilitating student leadership training:

I always find it challenging about the space I'm taking up when training our students as an ally, but also, making sure that I'm putting a diverse group of professionals in the room with those students as well to educate them and find that balance.

Here Jessica is shows her commitment to social justice by ensuring that student training is addressing multiple narratives and by allowing others with more professional or lived experiences to hold expertise in spaces where she may not have it.

Josuelynn. Noted in her personal definitions, a key part of Joseulynn’s commitment to social justice centers on language and how we communicate with each other. For instance, Joseulynn recognizes that language plays a part in creating barriers within policies, such as it did in the example with the Muslim student and the marriage documentation. However, language can also open new ways of engaging in dialogue. Having a shared language is key to Joseulynn’s commitment to social justice, especially as it pertains to supervising staff. One concrete example of this is her focused energy in addressing White supremacy in supervision including using contextual framing such as Tema Okun’s (2021) *White Supremacy Culture* to create common language for her staff “where it is ok to make mistakes and perfectionism isn't expected.” By approaching her work in this way, “there’s no blame, there’s no shame, there’s no guilt needed because as an organization, we have decided as a team, that this is where we’re going to go.” Language is also important to Josuelynn’s commitment to social justice because, in her own words, “arming staff... with language to be able to talk with students not to talk over [them]” creates inlets for practitioners to foster a leadership style that says, “Okay, this can explain what we're talking about and now we can tap into our hearts because we are able to understand one another.” This approach to supervision demonstrates Josuelynn’s commitment to social justice because it pushes her staff to move beyond the White normative approach to leadership and respond to the changing cultural dynamics of the students they are serving.

Heather. As the senior-most practitioner and the only interviewee working at a two-year institution, part of Heather's commitment to social justice can be seen in her passion for working within the community college system. Highlighted within her opening summary, Heather made a shift to two-year campuses early in her career and stayed because she connected personally and professionally with their missions of access and inclusion. In Heather's words:

If I'm not doing something to advance [social justice] in my work every day, then I mean, honestly, I shouldn't be in my role...there's a responsibility that all educators should feel, but I think especially college leaders should feel. Like if you aren't...working to advance these [social justice] efforts then you shouldn't be in your role.

Within her role, Heather does illustrate her commitment to social justice through a student-centered approach to addressing the nuances of an open access campus. Heather's current work is focused on the idea that if "you complete the application you are accepted, we will meet you where you are at, we will provide opportunities." In order to provide these opportunities Heather works to intentionally take time to be with students, something that can be hard to do for senior-level leadership. However, Heather said, "I love being with our students." Her commitment is more than just making sure she is visible to students in the lunchroom. Furthering her student-centered approach, she noted that, "If it's a decision that's going to impact students...we're finding a way to include them in the feedback...or I try to connect with staff in student affairs that are working directly with the student[s] every day."

Openness to New Information.

Erica. Erica spoke of embracing the idea that her way of doing things was not the only way. Erica was upfront in understanding that in order to do this she must expose herself to different points of view and be committed to lifelong learning. She subscribes to the idea that she is “not going to stop learning.” This openness to lifelong learning played a direct role in her definition of inclusion, which had recently shifted. As noted earlier, Erica spoke of a previous mentor who opened her mind up to a new way of thinking about inclusion. It is through being open to this new definition that she has now been able to expand her definition in order to “also shift the way that I do things and the way that I view the world in order to make space for other ways of being.” This is a key example of informal ways to be open to new information.

Sarah. Sarah spoke about her upbringing influencing her desire to actively step outside her comfort zone in order to learn new information. Having grown up in a White upper middle-class area, she had a very racially homogenous upbringing. However, even at a young age, something drew her to a desire to expand her lens. Due to this desire, she was intentional about going to college in the Twin Cities. It was there where she really leaned into embracing new information specifically around social justice. She said, “Coming to college...I guess, just started opening [me] to thinking more about this [social justice]”. It was also in college where she encountered a mentor who nurtured her inclination towards new information by providing her with readings and other resources. These were resources she was not required to engage with, but she was self-motivated:

I love learning, especially when it's new for me at that moment...so the learning and growth piece, I think those were probably the two biggest things that come to mind as to why I engaged with them [i.e. readings provided by a supervisor].

Her choice to find a more diverse community and commitment to ongoing education are key examples of Garmon's framework in action.

Mary. In Mary's narrative, I heard substantial overlap between openness to new information and self-awareness. I will give more attention to this in the self-awareness section. However, one example to note was a self-selected book club she spoke of. She chose to read Layla Saad's *Me and White Supremacy*. Mary credits having chosen this particular book as important in bringing to light "a lot of things I take as how they are." Engaging with this text allowed her to think critically about White supremacy which is something she said she previously "hadn't thought much about." She said it is important to "know what my role is in this," observing that her connection to White supremacy subconsciously or consciously plays out in her life. By self-selecting to engage with this book, and unpack her whiteness, she shows an openness to learn more about herself and the world around her. This book club was a personal choice to examine "how the actions [she] takes..are tied to White supremacy." It was her own convictions and openness to new information that pushed her to want to "delve deeper into that" in order to make change.

Jessica. Included in her commitment to social justice was a call to Jessica's deep commitment to learning and development. A fundamental component to this is her intentional effort to engage with multiple voices in order to have a wide range of input to learn from. For example, when she engages in learning opportunities it is important to her to engage with multiple perspectives. To highlight this Jessica spoke about a reading circle centered on Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. For Jessica it was important to read a book by a White author. However, she worked with her book club to ensure they were

also reading books written by BIPOC authors. Her openness to new information through multiple voices is not only illustrated in the authors of the books she reads. Jessica also works to make deep and meaningful connections on campus and cultivate authentic relationships with colleagues. For example, when engaging in book clubs across campus she intentionally joins groups with colleagues she does not directly work with in order to thoughtfully expand her campus network.

Deepening this commitment is the investment she has made in cultivating authentic interracial relationships. She stated, “I have been thoughtful about investing in relationships so I can expand my worldview.” By being thoughtful in her relationship-building she says “that my friend group diversifies for the right reasons” because she does not “want it to be tokenism.” These intentional interracial relationships have been essential to her engagement with new information. They allow her to have hard conversations across racial identities. Specifically, she “tries to go to those conversations with the education and then ask for dialogue,” instead of just assuming that her colleagues of color will work to educate her.

Josuelynn. Josuelynn provided a great example of the arc of openness to new information among practitioners. She spoke of a time early in her career where she received feedback from a supervisor and was “defensive and reluctant” to take it in at the time. However, she noted that this supervisor (also White) “saw me as his people” and encouraged her openness to new ideas. She said she now works to align “the head with the heart” so that her work is grounded in meaningful relationships as well as contextual understanding of the systemic issues she is confronting. Josuelynn believes that “if we are going to change the world” we need to “understand what someone is saying” and “feel

engaged to change.” In order to find that balance it is important to her to be open to new information and continue to learn and grow as a person and a professional.

Heather. A common theme for Heather, as noted in her tagline, was her openness to feedback as a leader in the field. This feedback could be personal (as will be highlighted in the self-awareness section) as well as programmatic or institutional feedback. Heather is open to looking at data to understand where the gaps are in order to proactively work towards closing them. When it comes to personal feedback she believes being open to this information is important because “we only grow if people are willing to give honest feedback.” She commented on how feedback can be hard to take in, but “none of this work is gonna get done unless we’re ready to be in those kinds of spaces of being uncomfortable.”

For Heather, being a strong leader who supports a racially diverse student body requires consistent professional development. To do this she works to “educate [herself] around racial literacy” by “plugging into different opportunities for learning and dialogue.” For example, she started “following social media feeds of prominent leaders within the black community.” Additionally, she started “working on [her] own professional development plan.” More about this professional development plan will be highlighted in the following section, as it pertains directly to her pursuit for better self-awareness in connection to her racial literacy.

Self-Awareness

Erica. Erica’s self-awareness, as it pertains to her racial identity, has been a central focus in seeking out purposeful professional development. She noted “a couple of book groups that I participated in...that I chose.” The books she chose to engage with

included *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving and *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. She said it was important for her to read these texts because they opened up “another way of looking at [and] learning about myself.” This commitment to learning is also seen directly within her definition of social justice. There she described her definition, including “learning about myself [and] learning about my role within the world.” She also talked about the self-awareness needed in order to “learn about her own triggers” and “where those might be coming from.” She mentioned one such trigger being her tendencies to want to “fix things” or the perfectionism that she notes as being “rooted in White supremacy.” Furthermore, she described her tendency to judge students if they say something inappropriate versus working to meet them where they are at, to contribute to their growth and development. Taking the time to become aware of these triggers has allowed Erica more opportunity to step back and re-center herself in her work if she feels she is losing sight of the bigger picture.

Sarah. A pattern heard in Sarah’s narratives was her ongoing reflective practices around her self-awareness of her White racial identity in relationship to the spaces she occupied. At one point, she talked about an experience at an art gallery where she entered a caucus space meant for those identifying as both Trans and BIPOC. She is a White cis-gendered person. This experience caused her to start a more intentional examining of when and where she shows up. Sarah's intentionality about inclusion and belonging is enriching her grasp of how various students she works with define welcoming space:

I do hold many privileged identities in so many spaces I enter. I'm automatically going to feel welcomed, because everyone around me is going to ...be similar to

me or have similar experiences to me, which makes me think, especially with new student programs or incoming students.

Sarah also made specific mention of how important it has been for her to have White people in her life to work with on her White identity. Sarah said, “When I’m around other White folks...that I’m close to...I often have a lot of these conversations with them and in those conversations, I have no fear of making mistakes.” She said when in a safe space, specifically with people who share similar identities with her, she can “recognize a mistake and move forward.” However, she also noted that she is more aware of her racial identity within racially diverse spaces. This juxtaposition of her racial self-awareness will be further highlighted in the section devoted to examining whiteness later in this chapter.

Mary. Noting a few formal professional development experiences, Mary has engaged in ongoing work to increase her self-awareness. For instance, I spoke earlier about the book club where Mary purposefully engaged with readings in order to better understand her White racial identity as it relates to White Supremacist Culture. She said, “I want to know what my role is in this, maybe subconsciously or consciously, and try to delve deeper into that.”

An important aspect to Mary’s work with self-awareness was her ability to take seemingly separate professional development experiences and connect them for deeper learning. For example, prior to our interview we had participated in the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Mary found a powerful take-away in connecting her IDI profile to her Gallup Strengths assessment. While working with her IDI coach, they spoke about her Includer strength influencing her thoughts of inclusion because she is

“trying to draw too much on the similarity” found within groups versus accepting members as they are.

This self-awareness has provided a new level of confidence regarding the importance of her work. Mary said, “I don't want to sound conceited, but it's instrumental for me to have a good understanding of social justice and to be an advocate for the community at large.” She uses the data and information she gathers from student application information and shares it out so that her campus can more intentionally create programs and services for the students they are serving. By coupling her understanding of the larger community with more self-awareness, Mary believes she “can definitely help bring to light some conversation that maybe haven't happened before.”

Jessica. In terms of self-awareness, Jessica's narrative was filled with terms and statements such as: "I need to reflect on that," "How am I showing up," "being mindful," and "thinking about the process" of growth and development. As noted in chapter three, reflective practices are a major part of self-awareness. Jessica values the feedback she has gotten and uses it to motivate herself to educate herself. This openness to learn is an important part of her self-awareness and understanding of how whiteness impacts her work. There is, however, a battle for her in "being self-aware and not trying to present myself as like this White savior complex." She works to find a balance by "trying to be vulnerable and sharing my personal experience or just trying to develop relationships of trust." Another struggle she has with herself is a willingness to make mistakes. She said "I'm just a highly anxious person...like oh did I say [or do] something wrong." I asked her how she moves past this anxiety in order to stay engaged and she said she has worked hard to get to a place where she can "apologize and move on." It has become increasingly

important for her to not “just...continue to just apologize about it because that doesn't help.” Leaning yet again on education and reflection, she works to “unlearn, recognize, and move on.” Simply put she said “it's not gonna help anyone if I just like to sit and turn my wheels about something that I've already addressed.”

Josuelynn. Throughout the section on dispositions it has been noted that Josuelynn has a deep commitment to social justice as it pertains to her whiteness. When asked what motivates her to directly address White supremacy in her work she said, “That is my number one passion area.” She said she is passionate about it “because of the identity that I hold...so the passion...comes from a curiosity.” For Josuelynn there is also “a values-driven piece” to her work. Additionally, she noted that within her top five strengths (according to Gallup inventory) is Significance. For her, the strength of Significance is less about her needing to feel important and more about her work needing to “be important, it [her work] needs to be meaningful.”

Another big part of Josuelynn’s self-awareness is grounded in her commitment to accountability. In the past, she has focused on personal accountability by presenting “a lot about accountability in White supremacy within supervision.” She believes that “one big piece within the work is learning about self-compassion and forgiveness.” She went on to ask that, “Specifically with White folks...where do you find self-forgiveness and peace to continue the labor?” Now that she is in a more senior role, she is excited to use her experience with self-awareness and accountability and “go a little bit above that [personal accountability] and say ‘ok from a systems perspective...how are we keeping people out from belonging?’” Josuelynn sees that understanding oneself within the system is essential for holding both the system and the individual accountable in tandem.

Heather. Heather works to unpack what it means to lead others while learning herself. She said, “I live in two spaces,” and asked herself, “How do I lead an institution or division in this work while I’m still learning to do the work myself in an effective way?” One way she has started to do this is by participating in formal training and development programs such as the IDI. This process has been significant in her self-awareness because it has helped her acknowledge some important things about herself:

I'm very Minnesotan, very up north Minnesota...I still have a lot of friends from college and some friends from high school...and my group is still predominantly White...professionally, a little bit more diverse, but still, and so I see why....some of my actions haven't...seen as many outcomes, because...I have some work to do.

She struggled at this point of the conversation a bit to fully articulate what she was thinking, stating, “I’m just in a little bit of a stuck phase.” Taking the IDI has reinvigorated her commitment to self-reflection. Heather wants to “engage in some coaching one-on-one,” going as far as to commit to investing the funds for coaching herself if she has to. She aims to focus this coaching on increasing her racial literacy with particular emphasis on figuring out how “as a privileged White woman in administration [I] carry power in the spaces that I’m in...and how do I make sure that I’m distributing that power and then turning my words into action.”

Heather understands how her self-awareness impacts her work. She talked about how knowing her Gallup Strengths types contributes to how she thinks about social justice and inclusion within her work. She said, “My strengths finder might give a little insight...at least four fit into the relationship quadrant and so that really is kind of how I approach my work.” She said her leadership style is to “build that foundation” because

“relationships are important.” She also talked about her belief strength resonating with her equity work at two-year schools, because it grounds her work in a set of core values. She said, “I think that the belief strength that I have, I mean that ties my personal values...grounds me into community college and what I believe our work is.” Having a strong awareness of her belief strength allows her to better understand the importance she places on needing to believe in the work that she is doing. She understands more deeply why it is crucial that her work connects to a set of personal and professional values, particularly as it applies to social justice and inclusion on her campus.

Influential Experiences

Garmon (2005) breaks down influential experiences by educational, intercultural, and supportive relationships. What I found in listening to my participants is that many of these experiences are interwoven, which made using a rigid approach to the framework difficult. However, within each of their narratives distinctions in the ways in which participants spoke about their experiences stood out. Therefore, I used Garmon’s framework as a guide to see the interconnectedness of all three influential experience categories as they relate to participants’ personal experiences, experiences with students, and experiences with colleagues or mentors they work with.

Personal Experiences

Erica. As a young child Erica’s mindset shifted early regarding recognizing the importance of intercultural relationships. A major personal experience for Erica was her parents’ intentionality in raising her in a racially diverse community for the first 10 years of her life. After moving to a predominantly White area she remembers having a conversation with her mom about this shift and asking, “Where are all the people with

dark skin?” Erica said she was proud to be from a family where she was allowed to ask that question, because even if her mom's response “might not have been perfect, it was...something that I was allowed to talk about, which I think can be rare in White families.” Having had this experience influences her current comfort level in leaning into learning experience. One such experience was when she participated in a Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) program. SEED is a local and participant-driven professional development program that builds community and invites challenging conversation on diversity and equity. Similar to her childhood, she valued this experience because it normalized having hard conversations. These personal experiences were significant to her because they set her up for being more equipped than senior teachers when she took another job. While this left her feeling confident in her work, she also struggled with it: “[It was] hard for me because I'm like, ‘I'm just starting this journey. I shouldn't know more than [other teachers].’” Erica acknowledged the importance of these experiences and “wish[ed] that there was more of this work being done.”

Sarah. When discussing Sarah’s dispositions, I briefly mentioned an experience at a conference that influenced how she thinks about the space she takes up. This was such a significant experience that I will turn to it again later in this discussion as an example of the impact personal experiences have on our practice. Sarah and the friends she had attended this conference with (one White, one BIPOC) sat in a breakout session created “for BIPOC trans folks to come together and talk.” However, because “they [i.e. the organization in charge of the conference] couldn’t limit who was in the room, anyone could go.” Right away the conversation turned to “calling out White folks in the room,”

questioning why they were in that space. Sarah said it was one of the most uncomfortable experiences she had ever lived through, but that it was also her “biggest point of growth.”

She attributed her ability to learn from this event to two things: “One, I feel like this is something that we talk about a lot in classes—that in order to grow we need to not be afraid of making mistakes...and need to feel uncomfortable.” The other thing was the supportive relationships of her peers. Sarah noted that “there also were two other people that were there with me, one who is White, and one who is a person of color, and so reflecting with them on it too, I think those two were helpful in processing it.” She noted that it was especially important to have another White person to reflect with. She spoke of how it is still something she thinks about today, and that the experience allowed her to think about how and when she shows up in spaces, as well as how she uses her position as a White person in various spaces.

Mary. Mary highlighted her undergraduate experiences as especially important because she “grew up in a very homogenous community. So, when I first went to college I felt a bit of culture shock.” It was at college where she first engaged with conversation about White privilege, which she said was “a completely new topic to me.” According to Mary, her time at college was important to her growth because she met BIPOC peers and mentors and it was “a time for me to educate myself and to learn.” She credits the support she received from faculty and staff on campus to being influential in how she works with students today. For instance, Mary highlighted the intentional space she creates with students as heavily influenced by her UG experiences. She notes that the space she creates “stems from having that space in my time at [college].” Specifically, she named

three mentors who created space for her to come in and “just share what was happening,” and it was “ok to like, to have a breakdown.”

Jessica. She described having been color blind (socialized to not see color/race) entering college and that the “move to college and being exposed and introduced and challenged definitely opened up my world view.” She said, “It just kind of accelerated at a fast pace” from there. She noted being thankful to have attended a graduate program that really “expanded my understanding of social justice and equity work.” Her specific program did not include a DEI certificate program. However, they did accept credits from other academic institutions and when she found a DEI certificate offered by an out-of-state institution, she jumped at the chance.

While Jessica valued her graduate program, the DEI certificate opened her lens even further and she noted that, “I don't know if I agree with all the in class or out of the classroom activities we participated in.” One particular assignment she struggled with involved attending activities at two different spaces designed for identities she did not hold (i.e. a Christian student attending a Muslim religious service). She said, “I felt discomfort, you know, because I was a White person going to these spaces...for a grade.” She brought this up in class in order to have a dialogue around what the assignment was intended to teach them. The lesson she learned revolved around “being authentic in the spaces that weren't created for me,” especially if she is using these spaces (and the people within them) “as a way to educate myself on inequities.” She reflected on how to appreciate and authentically engage outside your own identity versus engaging in a voyeuristic, self-serving way.

Josuelynn. Early in the interview, Josuelynn spoke of an experience at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with a woman of color who was watching the Dereck Chauvin trial on her phone. Josuelynn spoke of feeling compelled to show her support as a White person. As she left the conversation, she remembered telling the woman of color to “have a great trial.” She immediately recognized having regretted her words. She said “It’s just, it’s bullshit White stuff...I can, you know, quote for you all of these published authors...tell you how amazing I am...and then go to the freakin’ DMV and totally assault someone with my language.” For Josuelynn this experience was influential because she had two choices: sit with the mistake she made, dwell on it, and seek forgiveness from the woman at the DMV, or sit with the mistake, seek self-forgiveness, and reflect on alternate choices. She spoke of needing to work on “self-compassion and forgiveness” in order to not place the labor on the woman of color she harmed. Josuelynn said, “She [the woman of color] might have already moved on and I’m still sitting with it.” Josuelynn attributes her increased understanding of whiteness to the DMV experience.

Heather. While the interview was focused on her work in student affairs, much of what Heather spoke about had to do with her personal life and how her personal life impacts her professional work. For instance, her upbringing in a low-income single-family home had a major influence on how she thinks about inclusion within her work. As an adolescent, she had experiences that pointed out the limitations of her socioeconomic status while also casting a spotlight on her racial privilege. Currently her personal life also impacts her work, in that she is a White parent to an interracial adoptee. She said that as parents, she and her partner have “made conscious decisions...in terms of

our environment,” stating, “Representation--that’s important.” While she noted that even parents of White kids should be actively thinking about representation and ensuring their kids are engaged in diverse communities, for her this “was a huge evolution in my learning.” Specifically, she noted that it has made her “more attuned in my professional life to the importance of representation of voices at different tables and different spaces on campus.” While she is grateful for this evolution, she also noted that it lack of representation was “a misstep for me for a long time.”

Experiences with Students

Erica. Due to her experience level, Erica did not have as much experience with students to draw on. However, she talked specifically about working with a female student of color in an advising capacity. This student is in a White-male-dominated field. In order to best support that student, she starts by “affirming her experiences,” and listening. As noted in Erica’s tagline, a major theme throughout her interview was her acknowledgement that she is not the expert in the lived experiences of her students. What this looks like when Erica is with students involves her intentionally “stepping back,” not assuming she knows best, and instead, “letting them have the floor.”

Sarah. Sarah stated that she works in a student-facing role with both of her assistantships. Whether advising or training student leaders, “it’s important to think about my identities and how they might show up.” She said this is particularly important when working with BIPOC students “because of those privileged identities... [I]f I’m interacting one-on-one with the student, or even with a group of students, understanding how my power might be perceived in that situation.” Understanding how her position of racial privilege may be perceived by students is one significant part of working with

BIPOC students. She also noted that it was important for framing her work in order to address “what assumptions or biases I'm coming in with.”

Mary. Mary’s work is focused on creating supportive cross-racial relationships between students, herself, and her department. This includes creating what she called “brave space” for her student staff. She reflected on the recent resignation of faculty of color who reported campus climate as their reason for leaving. Having established the Admissions office as a place where students could speak up allowed for students in their department to take a direct approach in voicing their concerns afterwards. The students stated they would not work until the issues were addressed within the department. Mary and her department then met with the students about their concerns, specifically their feelings of “falsifying what it’s like to be a student of color on campus.” The students said they felt that they were asked to “sugar coat” what it was like for BIPOC students.

While Mary noted that this was disappointing to hear, she felt hopeful for change. The students acknowledged that “they submitted their concerns with Admissions because they knew we cared about them and they knew that we would do something about it.” She noted a key reason for their comfort in coming forward was because the students see the staff actively working to address issues like this in themselves. Not only are staff open about what they are doing, they made it clear they are prioritizing it, going as far as telling students that when they are in their “DEI workgroup, I’m not available.” She said she let them know she was “happy to step away if they really needed something, but really wanted to focus on this work.”

Mary was glad her student staff felt comfortable speaking. She also noted the need to go further. “They were the only students that were seeing us do this,” so the

student staff “felt like they needed to shoulder the weight on behalf of the entire student body.” She said opening the floor to students reminded her that she has a lot to learn from dialogue in order to provide “the right landscape to have those conversations with students and to continue to push the envelope...and hold [her institution] accountable.”

Jessica. Due to the student-facing nature of her work, many of the experiences Jessica talked about included working with students. Being in a position to work with students from matriculation to graduation, she has thought carefully about the scaffolding of how she works with students toward social justice and inclusion. “When I’m working with first year students I’m very mindful of that [White privilege] and how I interact with them or the assumptions I make about their adjustments to college.” Therefore, in orientation she takes one approach with students, and then while teaching in the first-year seminar program she is more intentional about “bringing up these conversations of power and privilege. For many students, these are new conversations and Jessica strives for a balance of challenge and support, by “opening up a conversation in a space that it’s ok to not know what is going on.” To do this she said, “I share that through a lot of personal stories,” making sure to “tell my students not to struggle in silence... and we can walk through that together.”

It is not only in the classroom where she works to establish a relational approach creating educational opportunities with students. Whether it is within her leadership programming, in supervising a campus programming staff, or working with her orientation leaders, Jessica said, “I do the work to educate my students,” and to ensure “that my students know that I’m a safe space to come to come to talk to...I try to make that very known.” A prime example of this can be seen in her experience with a student

involved with her leadership program. She said, "My leadership program has remained very diverse and had high engagement numbers from students of color, commuter students, et cetera." However, she noted that the timing of the meetings overlapped with another highly attended campus program. Because of this, she looked into "adjusting some of the hours...so that more students could attend." Jessica was surprised when a BIPOC student expressed concerns that this idea to shift the hours was about making it more accessible to a privileged student demographic. Jessica said the student perceived the time change "as though I was trying to welcome a more White group of students." What the student heard was, "You [Jessica] don't like the program how it is currently...with the students currently in the program." In this situation, Jessica talked about working with the student to find a common ground. To this day, this experience makes her think critically about what she says. In Jessica's words: "I'm very cautious of the way I phrase things around students so that it doesn't get misunderstood as me wanting to change the makeup of a group or not allow[ing] space for other students."

Josuelynn. Josuelynn's narrative was rich with influential experiences that connect directly to her work with students. For instance, one story from her early professional career occurred when Josuelynn stepped in to supervise a student staff whom she did not hire. Among this staff were two BIPOC students who had good relationships with their last supervisor. She noted that the previous supervisor was also a part of the BIPOC community. Right away in this new position, Josuelynn said there was conflict due to cultural differences. "I was type A, super White, ready to go." She noted having binders and agendas for staff meetings, and the students were used to a different type of supervision. With good intentions, Josuelynn advocated for these students to switch

buildings and serve under a different Hall Director. Josuelynn's supervisor agreed so that the intercultural conflict did not continue to negatively impact the student leader experience. While this resolved some of the immediate conflict, the students-expressed ongoing concern with Joseulynn's supervisor about her hiring a diverse staff and being able to adequately support a racially diverse staff. Joseulynn's initial reaction, as a young White professional, was to get defensive. She had a White supervisor who found a way to balance supporting the BIPOC students and pushing her as a White professional. That experience had a long-term impact on Josuelynn. I will speak more about this supervisor/mentor in a later section with regard to his impact on how she now supervises her staff.

Heather. Being the most senior-level participant I interviewed, Heather's language suggested more distance from students than other interviewees. While she provided fewer direct examples of experiences with students, much of her narrative was still very grounded in a student-centered approach. This was particularly clear when coupled with the growth and learning outlined regarding parenting within an interracial home. Again, noting her growth around representation, this includes her purposeful approach to allowing space for student voice in decision-making. Heather said that when making decisions that will directly impact students, she works to find "ways to include them in feedback." When students themselves cannot be at the table she works to make sure the "student affairs [staff] that are working directly with the students every day" are there. They have "a much better idea of how...a certain policy might impact a student." Heather believes she is successful in her approach because she purposefully establishes open lines of communication both formally and informally. She said it is important "that

from the start, how you communicate and make students feel at ease really kind of sets up the foundation or framework from which they can engage with campus going on." In order to make these connections, she believes informal interactions make a huge impact, "so that I can continue to have that contact [with students]."

Experiences with Colleagues or Mentors

Erica. As a graduate student, Erica seems very pleased with her program's intentional approach to discussing social justice within the curriculum. Erica appreciates the infusion of social justice into the program. This happens at three levels: inclusive class materials, applying social justice principles in practice, and "even the personal experience that their [faculty are] bringing." Erica imagines how this came to be, stating, "I wonder if it's kind of like the subject that we're learning...we're in a helping field and we're going to be helping students at universities and colleges. So there's maybe a little bit more awareness." While she noted a strong commitment to social justice within her curriculum, she did not believe it was as prominent institutionally. She said they have events around major holidays such as Martin Luther King Jr. day, but otherwise she does not really see these conversations happening.

Sarah. As an undergraduate student Sarah had a supervisor "who was very great about pushing me on a lot of my thinking, or challenging me." She said that when it comes to work with social justice and diversity in higher education that, "I feel like my growth really started...with that specific supervisor." What made this mentor so significant to Sarah was that he challenged her thinking and was "also just constantly sharing resources with me and things for me to read and having conversation[s] with

me.” Sarah’s supervisor offered support through encouragement and concrete educational resources.

Mary. One professional experience that has recently had a big impact on Mary was the institution hiring an administrator for multicultural student affairs. This new leadership on campus has set a new tone about what a diverse student body could look like. Mary said he "helps us examine how we are attempting [to recruit multicultural students] as a department.” Beyond working with recruitment, he has been “very instrumental...about building connections across campus, so that we aren't just getting students here and then kind of leaving them high and dry.” This approach to cross-campus initiatives regarding enrollment helps create systems where students “are feeling supported all the way through," from application to graduation. Another part of this shift has been the clear leadership regarding whom they are recruiting: “We're looking for like-minded people to join our community, because if they're not open to growing...then they don't belong in our community.” Mary said this has been a “big mindset shift from like, “We need to enroll ‘a’ class to we need to enroll ‘the proper’ class." Mary has become more intentional about how her office works with prospective students under this new leadership.

Jessica. When engaged with her colleagues Jessica works to foster authentic relationships. First, she said it motivates her to be surrounded by folks who have similar interests [around social justice] as me. This includes having White people to process her privilege with, and her intentional approach to creating cross-racial relationships. She states, "I have been thoughtful about investing in relationships so that I expand my worldview and that my friend group diversifies...but, for the right reasons. I don't want it

to be tokenism." To do this she works to "surround myself with some of the Black professionals on campus...in spaces that aren't just talking about race...but as a friend." It is important to her because to her growth "comes with human interactions and allowing that to kind of influence and shift your work as a professional."

Josuelynn. Earlier I shared a story regarding Josuelynn's first year as a hall director, noting a supervisor who was dedicated to keeping his staff up-to-date on theory and focused on applied practice. While she noted him being dismissive at times, and frustrated, she appreciated that he stuck with her. "He did an amazing job of working really closely with me to make sure that I was doing the work and was doing what I needed to learn." With this particular story, she noted that:

[M]y supervisor continued to not give up on me and I think that's my number one lesson that I've learned...no person is garbage or a throwaway. It's gonna take longer...but at the end of the day my supervisor at the time saw me as 'their people,' and so gave me grace and time to get where I'm still going today.

As a supervisor now, Josuelynn reflects on earlier lessons: "When I think about supervision and what my job is and what I'm responsible for I think back to me that first year...how do I make sure that I get my team ready to go?" Josuelynn intentionally looks for moments where learning can happen, understanding that people can learn in different ways.

Heather. Openness to feedback is a recurring theme throughout Heather's professional experiences. This includes formal feedback loops she has in place for those she leads, as well as a receptiveness to informal feedback, particularly as it relates to her understanding of power and privilege. For instance, Heather spoke of an encounter via

social media which was not directed to her specifically but which she took to heart. She said, "Recently... White folks were asked...what are you doing in your personal and professional spaces to actually advance racial justice and anti-racist work?" Her immediate reaction was to talk about some of the things her campus was doing regarding professional development. The social media influencer said, "'Thank you' and kind of pushed back," encouraging her to work harder at seeking feedback from people of color at her institution.

Garmon's Framework: Cross-Narrative Patterns

As noted earlier, all of my participants self-selected as "committed to social justice" as part of the participant criteria. That in and of itself could be seen as evidence of a disposition to social justice and equity work as practitioners. However, simply saying one is committed to social justice and putting that commitment into practice are two very different things. Garmon's (2005) six factors served as a key way to examine participants' commitment to social justice and inclusion within their practice. Using Garmon's framework to examine participants' narratives I determined five categories which impact a practitioners' approach to equitable student success practices. These categories are: student-centered practices, personal beliefs and values, institutional context, career trajectory, and their personal lives. Here, I will bring the individual narratives into a collective voice as a way to highlight these categories.

Student-Centered Practices

The first significant take away from my analysis is the significant focus on students, student development, and relationship-building displayed by my participants.

This includes a practitioner commitment to honor the whole student and to create space for all students. Some examples include, “Honoring the students' expertise in their own lived experiences” (Erica), “valuing the whole student, all that they bring” (Sarah), and “arming staff...with language to be able to talk with students, not to talk over [them]” (Josuelyn).

This student-centered approach decenters the practitioners in order to uplift students in ways that celebrate who they are. Other ways practitioners depicted decentering themselves included their emphasis on reciprocal relationships between staff and students. Examples of this include Jessica’s use of language like “partner” and “supporter” and Mary’s deliberate attempt to create “brave space” for her students. This concept of partnership was also seen in the ways their narratives depicted a coaching style with their students focused less on a desire to want to fix things—something Erica explicitly noted was rooted in a White supremacist mindset of perfectionism. This idea will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

All six participants highlighted ways they engage in student-centered practices focused on belonging beyond a physical space. They emphasize the need for belonging to also include creating space for students to be themselves and to engage in a community that is authentic to who they are. Decentering the practitioner in this way helps one to realize that as their students are varied, so must be our approach to the work. It is essential for campuses to look for ways to bring students to the table, provide space for feedback, and build language around ongoing systemic change on their campuses.

Career Trajectory

Examining participants' student practices was paramount in providing insight into how career stage influences professional practice. While all participants spoke of student-centered practices, how they engaged with students differed. For instance, both Erica and Sarah had limited direct student experience to draw on when speaking about work with students. Comparing this to professionals at the early or mid-level of their careers highlights how social justice practices are influenced by proximity to students. Erica and Sarah spoke of one-on-one advising and coaching approaches to working with students. Jessica and Mary, who have more programmatic oversight, spoke about comprehensive scaffolding of their approach from direct supervision to larger campus wide initiatives. Additionally, the senior-most participants and Heather spoke of students from a more distant approach yet still very much student-centered. These practitioners focused more on the professional staff they supervise, and how they center students when examining campus policies and procedures. Their narratives shed light on an important arc of direct student interaction to campus wide systemic impact. As practitioners shift in and out of more student-facing roles, their access and approaches shift as well, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of their social justice practices.

Personal Values and Beliefs

The third lesson learned through my analysis using Garmon's (2009) framework is the influence of practitioners' values and beliefs on their work. Josuelynn spoke to this directly when she said there is "a values-driven piece" to her work. Specifically, she said she is driven by her work needing to "be important, [needing] to be meaningful." I saw this most prevalently in the way my participants spoke of their self-motivated reflective

engagement in informal and formal professional development and authentic relationship-building.

Participants' valuing informal professional development and growth can be seen in the ways all six participants embodied a value and belief in lifelong learning. For example, Mary spoke of personal reasons for engaging in reading materials on White supremacy, Sarah spoke of her passion for learning motivating her as an undergraduate student to engage in materials provided to her by her supervisor and mentor, and Jessica discussed her commitment to pursuing multiple narratives in the readings she and her colleagues engage with.

More formal examples include intentional professional development. One way participants showcased this was in the way they all spoke of the educational experience. Participants valued the knowledge and skills they learned in their undergraduate and graduate programs. Their belief systems also lead many of them to approach these experiences with a critical lens. For instance, Jessica and Heather both provided critical feedback on their master's programs, citing things they felt were missing or assignments they felt were inappropriate. Another example is the personal investment they have all made in professional development activities. These included examples from participating in the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), the Gallup's Strengths Assessment, and Erica, who when not working in the field, still directly participated in the SEED program.

Another significant personal value that emerged was participants' value in building authentic relationships. These relationships are dynamic in many ways because they highlighted the power of reciprocal relationships. Aiding the reciprocal nature of these relationships was a commitment from participants to enter into cross-racial

relationships with a contextual understanding of systemic issues. They provided examples of entering into relationships as a learner but not expecting BIPOC students and colleagues to be their sole educators. This included examples of relationship-building with students and colleagues through one-on-one interactions, as well as formal mechanisms like advising, wellness coaching, committee membership and supervision.

Institutional Context

Deepening the connection of personal beliefs and values to their motivations was the way participants spoke about their connection to the institutional context they learn and work within. My participants provided many insights into the importance of “fit” between practitioners and campus. The most specific example of this is Heather. Highlighted within her opening summary, Heather made a shift to two-year campuses early in her career, and stayed because she connects personally and professionally with the mission of access and inclusion that centers community colleges. However, institutional type is not the only way to find these connections. They can also be seen in the way institutional leadership support Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI). This includes examples of the many ways my participants had access to professional development opportunities such as the IDI, book clubs, and active campus-wide conversations around equity and access on campus.

When examining participants' narratives through my framework it was clear that institutional context regarding professional preparation programs was also a vital component to understanding their engagement with social justice. Some found themselves in programs which aligned greatly with their personal beliefs and influenced their growth. For instance, Sarah noted being grateful for being part of a Graduate

program where she was allowed to make mistakes, and identified that program as a reason she learned from her art gallery experience. Jessica noted being thankful to have attended a graduate program that really “expanded [her] understanding of social justice and equity work”—but also noted she had to seek more direct DEI-focused education through elective credits taken through a different institution, an item which other participants also noted as an issue with their graduate preparation programs and professional development organizations.

Personal Experiences

The final key taken away from my analysis is the impact of participants' personal lives on their work. This was particularly intriguing because, at no point were they explicitly asked to go beyond the context of their professional work. However, all six participants brought up significant contributions their personal lives had on their work. For example, all six brought up their own upbringings. Erica spoke in detail about her family's openness to her asking questions at age 10 about the lack of racial diversity when they moved. Sarah, Mary, and Jessica all spoke of purposefully choosing diverse colleges in order to expand their understanding beyond that of their small, racially homogeneous hometowns. Additionally, both and Heather spoke of their first-generation student status.

Beyond upbringing, my participants highlighted several other ways in which their lives outside of work were significant to their practice. Josuelynn's story about the DMV depicted how informal social interactions in her life can fueled her motivation for continued pursuit in addressing whiteness in her professional life. Both Sarah and Heather provided examples of how personal experiences have affirmed their commitment

to representation and belonging within their work. Sarah's art gallery experience had a direct influence on how she thinks about the spaces she creates and takes up.

Additionally, Heather spoke about how being a White parent to a cross-racial adoptee has opened her eyes to the racial homogeneity of her life and the need for her to expand her network in order to sustain an active commitment to social justice within her work.

Beyond Garmon's Framework—Examining Whiteness

The framework applied so far in this chapter was instrumental in understanding the motivations and significant experiences that have influenced my participants throughout their careers. However, the framework was only a starting point. My participants' openness with me (and my rapport with them) resulted in findings that went beyond the Garmon framework. In this section, I present participants' ways of addressing whiteness in their workplaces. Specifically, I will showcase the difference between their approach when engaged with the BIPOC community and other White folks. To do this, I will focus on highlighting their individual insights before establishing patterns and themes gleaned through a cross-narrative reading of their experiences with Whiteness.

Individual Insights into Whiteness with BIPOC Communities

Erica. Early in her K-12 career, Erica had a strong collective of women of color around her, which was instrumental in her growth and learning. Looking back, she stated that, "In terms of regrets like I think that they probably did a little bit of teaching when it came to me...I don't want to cause harm and I'm guessing that was a little bit annoying at some points." Here she is striving to strike a balance between honoring authentic intercultural and cross-racial relationships while understanding the burden she as a White woman often placed on her peers of color for the sake of her growth. One way she has

honored this learning is in her approach to working with students of color, working intentionally to validate their experience. This is similar to the balance she noted above during the section on influential experiences with students.

Sarah. Sarah spoke several times about asking herself when and how she shows up. She noted that “there is a big divide” between how she thinks about race when working with White students vs. BIPOC students. Sarah reflected on being more aware of her racial identity within racially diverse spaces because of her fear of making mistakes. She said, “I don't like making mistakes...so I think a lot of times...I don't lean into them as much as I should because I'm afraid of those mistakes.” While she was able to articulate this fear in the interview, she did acknowledge some confusion about the role of fear in her practice, stating, “I guess I don't know if the [fear of] mistakes is a conscious thing that I'm doing.” Her awareness of potential harm to members of BIPOC communities in discussions of whiteness holds Sarah back from engaging with colleagues and students of color. As she states, “I don't want to look for their sympathy or validation...for lack of better words, causing [them] harm.”

Mary. Mary stated, “I think I probably address it [my White identity] more with my BIPOC students.” She does this by building relationships with students in order to create connections with BIPOC students, and developing a comfortability with her students where she knows she does not need to understand everything. “Some of them are so comfortable to be like ‘oh you silly White girl.’” Mary said they provide her new information on something with their culture or lived experiences on campus. Her depiction of her relationships shows a mutuality with her students where they tease her and they teach her, and Mary accepts both.

Another reason Mary she may default to thinking about her racial identity more with BIPOC students is because of the work she does on campus. Throughout her narrative, she noted that BIPOC students ask about race more directly. She said that prospective students of color often “put on their registration [a request] to speak with a BIPOC student.” Current students of color are also more vocal about race with Mary. In the past, she received several student complaints of falsified depictions of student life for BIPOC students. In order to try to provide a more authentic depiction of the BIPOC student experience she now defaults to saying, “I may not be the best person to speak to about this; would you like me to connect you with a student...with a similar identity to your student?” This is not a response that she has had to give for prospective White students.

Jessica. Jessica's narrative is rich in examples of the actions she takes to cultivate authentic relationships with BIPOC folks. Jessica has worked to balance learning from her peers without depending upon them as a constant source of education or requiring that they carry the emotional labor of her work. Another area where her whiteness comes to mind is in addressing racial microaggressions. She noted this as a growth area because she has “heard students say ‘microaggressions’ and I just... haven’t named it or addressed it.” Jessica was aware of how her White privilege plays into her lack of response: “I don’t need to engage because it’s not gonna hurt [me].” Other reasons for her restraint include avoiding discomfort and fear of mistakes. She spoke of how it can “feel awkward” and how she does not respond “out of fear” of being wrong because she may hear something offhand and not understand it as hurtful. Compounding her avoidance of making a mistake is her fear of being seen as a White savior. She wants to find a balance

between addressing things but not overstepping. To deepen her ability to respond, she continues to lean in to formal and informal learning opportunities, noting that following professionals of color on social media has created a space for her “feel challenged to think about higher ed” and her work differently.

Josuelynn. Josuelynn highlighted the fact that her student affairs work differed among the three academic institutions where she has been employed. One community was much more academic “so everything [was] based on theory,” whereas another institution she worked at was much more “relationship centered.” Josuelynn also noted having been “blessed...to be surrounded by colleagues who identify as folks of color.” She said that it is important to her to make sure she is not “just around White people.” However, when engaging with BIPOC community members in her work and life she said, “I don’t want to burden folks of color to help do my learning for me.” She acknowledges that there is a tension here when she recognizes that “at the same time I need their voice at the table.”

Heather. Earlier I reported on Heather’s engagement with the social media platform of a person of color. As a reminder, Heather commented on a post about what folks were doing to support BIPOC people in their work, and was met with both appreciation and some critical feedback. Heather noted being taken aback when asked, “What would they (BIPOC folks) say about your work?” She said this was eye-opening for her because it pushed her to take her work to the next level. Her “predominant professional and peer group is still a lot of White women,” and she wants this to change. Heather noted the need to find balance when working alongside BIPOC folks: “I think earlier on I relied more on my BIPOC colleagues for resources and guidance.” Now she

works to engage them in “conversations as subject matter experts in their role,” understanding that “as a White professional getting feedback...it's not the job of my African American friends or colleagues to educate me, right. I mean that's my work and then I can engage in dialogue with them.”

Individual Insights into Whiteness with White People

Erica. Even with her childhood experience confronting whiteness and racial homogeneity in her life, Erica admits she still needs to work on confronting whiteness professionally. There is an avoidance from Erica regarding addressing race with her White students. She spoke of her positions on campus in a very prescriptive way which denotes her avoidance. “I don't know if that's some sort of cop-out or like if I should be trying to do more of that...things don't always come up.”

Another reason she believes she has taken a less direct approach with White students is due to her need to step back from a place of judgment. She said, “In terms of working with White students I think, in the past, I've had a bit of like, judgment.” She said she has considered students to be prejudiced and needed to instead recognize that “maybe they just don't have the language and I'm judging them for no reason.” Erica attributes this shift to a class discussion where she was confronted with her own educational privilege around language. Erica spoke of learning that “not everyone...has access to education around this [social justice/inclusion] topic.” She now works at “bringing a little bit more compassion” to her work, stating, “The fact that students haven't started this work is because of the way that they're socialized, it's not their fault necessarily.” This realization has contributed to an ongoing commitment to “just being there to listen” to her students first.

One thing that impressed me about Erica was how, even as a first-year graduate student, she was able to talk about how she has addressed whiteness and privilege with her colleagues. Erica commented on her experience advising a black student and discussing this with her White colleagues:

I kind of brought this lens of like, okay, can we talk about the fact that he's pretty much one of the only students of color...and you know he wasn't showing up for class, there was some work issues...and missing class and things like financial issues...all these inequities...and obviously it's not that White students don't experience those things too, but it was just a little bit of like I just want to bring that [racial] awareness to it so I did bring it up.

While Erica may not speak as directly with students, she was proud that she addressed race so directly with her colleagues in an effort to influence change in herself and her department.

Sarah. When asked how her White identity comes up in her work with White students, Sarah was unable to provide specific examples. She said:

I'm trying to think of when working with White students; I guess I just don't think of it as much maybe as I'm not as in tune, or it's not the forefront of my mind...which then like I feel like I [need to] challenge myself in saying, 'Well, why isn't it at the forefront of your mind?'

Sarah mentioned how important is for her to have White people in her life to work with on her own self-reflection on being White: "When I'm around other White folks...that I'm close to...I often have a lot of these conversations with them and then in those conversations I have no fear of making mistakes." Recognizing the importance of same-

race spaces for her own racial identity work, Sarah expressed a desire to create such opportunities for White students.

Mary. When it comes to talking about whiteness or addressing it with students or colleagues who are also White, Mary had very little experience. She did note that the majority of faculty and staff that she works with are White, and that some of them have been involved in the various book clubs and professional development experiences she has participated in. Her experience addressing whiteness with White students is even more limited. She attributes this to the types of questions prospective students ask when coming in. She said, “BIPOC students...know what to ask for in comparison to their White counterparts.” As noted earlier she said BIPOC students will say, “I would like to speak with a BIPOC student” as part of their event registration. While she understands that there is a need for more White people to be talking about race, she offered no insights into how to bridge that divide.

Jessica. This is an area where Jessica said she wanted to work on being more intentional. She noted that she is more engaged in her positionality as a White practitioner during formal experiences like “workshops or conversation.” A less direct example is when working with her programming board. She did not mention explicitly talking about Whiteness with them. In order to establish inclusive programming goals, she focuses on asking questions that “challenge an idea they might have” in order to dig “a little deeper about what we mean by that event.”

Another way she works to push White students is to encourage their engagement across racial differences. She does this by finding a balance between who is hosting their training programs. For instance, when it comes to training her students (who are

predominantly White) on social justice and equity, she understands that it “doesn’t always have to be my space.” Furthermore, when she is the facilitator she is clear in “acknowledging the privilege I have in that space.” By doing so, she hopes to be an example to White students as a way of mentoring or supporting their racial identity development as well as how they engage with peers of color on their campus.

Josuelynn. I have spoken at length about the many ways in which Josuelynn has addressed Whiteness within herself and the professional staff she supervises in other sections of this text. However, she is also very upfront about whiteness when working with White students as well. She demonstrates the importance of White practitioners working to mitigate the harm of students of color without letting the White student off the hook from learning and growing. When talking about balancing student development with student safety Josuelynn talked about two roommates—one Muslim, one Christian. The Christian student had used shared pans to cook bacon. When confronted about how this was problematic for her Muslim roommate she did not see why it was big deal. Josuelynn’s response was to say "Oh, ok, we're at different places in our development...we're gonna go ahead and move you...and then we're gonna work on that because this isn't gonna happen tomorrow." She said that this experience highlights how important it is that “as practitioners, [we recognize] how far we can actually get and how much harm do we want to do in the learning process of our folks with dominant identities, and on whose backs, and with what labor."

Heather. When asked how her understanding of whiteness affects her work with students, Heather said “listening more” is important. She stated that “being able to actually hear our students and their stories and their experiences and perception from

their lens, because it's different from mine and I know that it's different from mine" has enabled her to reframe her approach to the work. Heather no longer focuses on students' deficiencies but instead asks what students say they need from the college. By listening in this way, the responsibility for change is placed on the institution and the systems at play within it.

While Heather does work hard to create space for student perspectives, she identified working with White students as a gap in her practice. Heather was honest about her limitations when it comes to working with White students and yet acknowledged that White professionals like her have a unique role to play when with White students. This continues to be a sticking point for all my participants as Heather echoed their desire to do more of this work but having not "honed in on" it both personally and institutionally in her work.

Examining Whiteness: Cross-Narrative Patterns

By allowing participants to control their narratives through a reflective and semi-structured interview approach, I was able to widen my engagement with participant narratives. This created a deep understanding of how they address Whiteness in their work. Each participant was asked, "How does your understanding of your own racial identity impact your work with students with different racial identities from you/same racial identity to you?" Similarly, to other aspects of my inquiry, participants broadened their response to more than the students they come in contact with. They included examples of supervising others, relationships with colleagues and mentors, and even more distant contacts such as social media accounts.

In my analysis across participant narratives, I saw distinct differences in approach when White practitioners interacted with predominantly White students and colleagues compared with interactions between White practitioners and BIPOC communities. In this section, I will highlight my interpretations of these differences. This difference in approach is further detailed as I explore how my participants internalize their whiteness and ways they resist normative thinking about race.

White Racial Identity in Racial Contexts. The first theme noticed when analyzing their responses to being asked direct questions about how they think about Whiteness in their work is that the responses differed so drastically depending on their audience. Whether in relationships with students, colleagues, or folks outside of their work, my participants all had rich examples of consciously considering their White racial identity when in space with BIPOC people. Countering that is the way many of them saw an unintentional absence of this when working with White people. Sarah spoke the most directly to this disconnect when she said, “There is a big divide” between how she thinks about race when working with White students vs. BIPOC students. Mary was also clear in saying, “I probably address [my White identity] more with my BIPOC students.”

Having participants so overtly call attention to this difference led me to review their narratives to look for examples of why they might be more aware with BIPOC folks. They shared examples such as being outside of their comfort zone and not wanting to make mistakes which would cause harm to the BIPOC people they were engaging with. Several participants illustrated an effort to create space for counter narratives without expecting BIPOC communities to educate White people. Several participants expressed

concern about seeming like "White saviors" when their intention was to be a supportive ally.

Participants repeatedly named "fear" in our discussions about Whiteness. Sarah and Jessica both spoke of being stopped by fear, specifically fear of making mistakes that would lead to harm when speaking or engaging in conversations around race. Jessica echoed this fear as a reason for not addressing microaggressions in the past. Without a similar lived experience, she worries that she may hear something as an offhand comment or not understand it as hurtful so it can "feel awkward," and she has not addressed it "out of fear."

Jessica, Erica and Heather all focused on relationship-building so that they could find a balance of learning from BIPOC folks while still taking the labor of the work on themselves. Erica showcased this when talking about BIPOC mentors or colleagues as when working in a K-12 system, stating, "I don't want to cause harm and I'm guessing that was a little bit annoying at some points." Heather has been working to shift her approach when engaging with BIPOC colleagues because in the past she felt she "relied more on my BIPOC colleagues for resources and guidance," and now she works to be in conversations with her BIPOC peers as "subject matter experts."

In order to understand these differences further I also took time to dissect examples depicting their lack of awareness when in community with White people. In zeroing in on this, they illustrated the blinders White people often have regarding whiteness. This includes the various ways they do not think about their race in their work on a regular basis—specifically when working with White students. Many of them used language like, "It just doesn't always come up" (Erica), "It's not at the forefront of my

mind” (Sarah), “BIPOC students...know what to ask for” (Mary), and Heather’s comment that working with White students is “a gap area” for her.

Several participants were unable to respond to the question, "Describe how you think about your racial identity when you are working with other White people." Not being able to answer produced discomfort for some participants and deep reflection for others. Sarah said, “I [need to] challenge myself in saying, ‘Well, why isn't it at the forefront of your mind?’” Jessica also was clear in wanting to be more intentional with White students. While she feels she does this well in more formal settings like training and supervising it was not something she felt she did enough of organically. This is an example of that internalization because it highlights how even when we work to address Whiteness in our work formally, it is easy to forget about it during the day-to-day functions of work.

While participants noted needing to be more direct with White students, they illustrated more directness with their White colleagues. For instance, several talked about it being easier to address whiteness with peers and colleagues because they were often engaged in similar professional development programs. For example, Mary who highlighted being in book clubs reading about whiteness with her White colleagues. Others, like Erica, spoke of direct ways she has pushed these conversations. As a first year in her graduate program, Erica engaged in a conversation with her colleagues to help them understand that race is a factor in student success that should be considered when advising a specific black male identified student. She noted that his struggles were not ones that “White students don't experience,” but that it was important to also “bring that [racial] awareness to it.” Erica challenged her White colleagues to acknowledge that

BIPOC student experience included barriers that their whiteness had protected them from.

Within all of my observations on whiteness, Josuelynn was the outlier. For this reason, her reflections will be discussed later in this section to showcase the need for mentorship, coaching, and modeling by White people for White people. Josuelynn was an outlier because she repeatedly demonstrated intentionality in addressing Whiteness not only when in community with BIPOC people, but within herself, with White staff, White students. Even with her consistent approach she also noted being very aware of not wanting to “burden folks of color to help do my learning for me.” For her it is important to work with other White people in a way that supports them where they are at while removing the harm they may be causing. She said “as practitioners recognizing how far we can actually get and how much harm we want to do in the learning process” so the development of White students must be done in a way that mitigates harm to BIPOC students within the community.

Addressing White Normativity. Understanding that White professional practices differ within racial context provides a frame for understanding the ways in which White normativity is internalized by practitioners. However, my participants also displayed several ways to actively disengage or resist this normalization of whiteness. Grounded in Tema Okun’s *White Supremacist Culture* (2021), which will be discussed directly in chapter five, I highlight some examples of how they internalize whiteness and ways we can learn from them on how to remain conscious of our socialization so that we can actively resist White supremacy in ourselves and others.

Whiteness Internalized. The differing approach to addressing whiteness within racial context is a direct example of how participants are socialized into an unconscious White superiority. Their more direct approach to Whiteness when working with BIPOC people is grounded in fear, including a fear of mistakes and a fear of causing harm to others. Additionally, their lack of addressing whiteness with White students showcases a resistance to discomfort. Jessica described this well when she spoke of what stops her from addressing microaggressions. She was clear in understanding that it is White privilege that allows for silence in these spaces when she said, “I don’t need to engage because it’s not gonna hurt [me].” These examples are explicit examples of our complicity to White superiority through resistance to discomfort, need for perfectionism, and fear of conflict, all of which are cornerstones to White normativity.

Resistance to White Normativity. While there are many ways my participants demonstrate the internalization of whiteness, there are also compelling illustrations of resistance to racial socialization from which we can learn. They all spoke of the importance of working in community with others and as part of a team. This communal approach pushes against the White tendencies for individualism, and finding a one-size-fits-all approach to student success. For example, Heather uses data purposefully in order to understand where the gaps are and to work proactively towards closing those gaps. Even as a younger professional, Erica shares this same commitment to allow space for other perspectives. This is the predominant focus of her advising style because she focuses on the student’s lived experience in decision-making.

Having a community approach to student success also allows for practitioners to push against our socialized need for perfectionism. A specific example of this is the way

Josuelyn articulated creating a workspace where no one is, “responsible for solving problems alone.” This is also important because by leading her team in this way she hopes to create a culture within her staff of shared responsibility, so that if a mistake happens it is no one person's vault. This structure pushes against our White normative fear of mistakes, so that “perfectionism isn't expected.”

Another example of pushing against our internalized need for perfectionism and resistance to discomfort is Jessica, who has found it to be increasingly important for her to not “just...continue to just apologize about [mistakes] because that doesn't help.” Simply put, she said that “it's not gonna help anyone if I just like to sit and turn my wheels about something that I've already addressed.” In this example, Jessica actively disengages with her need for comfort by leaning into educational and reflective experiences where she can “unlearn, recognize, and move on.”

As the senior-most practitioner, Heather leads through open communication and her openness for feedback as a leader in the field. However, she commented on how feedback can be hard to take in because to open yourself up in that way you are “being fragile.” However, she feels that “none of this work is gonna get done unless we're ready to be in those kinds of spaces of being uncomfortable.” This is yet another example of active resistance of the White normative tendencies to avoid discomfort, as well as resistance to White peoples' need to hoard power.

Importance of Coaching and Modeling from White People. The previous discussion of how participants respond to whiteness in their work contexts identified two approaches: one that ignores or downplays the significance of whiteness, and one that acknowledges and foregrounds the role of whiteness. I began my dissertation with the

assumption that we need more White people talking to White people about the problems with whiteness. The most notable takeaway in seeing the difference in their approaches was that this assumption was valid. White people need White leaders to coach and model ways to engage in whiteness in productive, change-centered ways.

As noted previously, Josuelyn was the great outlier in addressing whiteness in her work, in that she was consistently the most direct about race, regardless of her audience. She attributes the major reason for this being her supervisor in her first professional role. As noted earlier, she had some tough experiences navigating being a White supervisor to BIPOC students. During this time she challenged feedback from her boss. When she first received feedback she was “defensive and reluctant” to take it in at the time. However, she noted that this supervisor, who was also White “saw me as ‘his people’” Having had a White supervisor who never gave up on her and provided her with professional development and mentorship shapes the way she now works with to directly address whiteness in her role as a supervisor.

My participants' direct assertion that they believe this modeling and coaching is important for the ways we work with White students further validates my assumption. Heather feels there is a need to be more direct with White students specifically when it comes to “identity development,” adding that White professionals need to understand “the role we play in that for our White students.” Erica also understood this when spoke of shifting from a lens of judgment when working with White students, recognizing that “the fact that students haven't started this work is because of the way that they're socialized, it's not their fault necessarily.” Others like Mary and Jessica depicted transparent communication with students regarding their ongoing professional

development focused on their racial privilege. They hope their openness provides an example to White students as a way of mentoring or supporting their racial identity development as well as how they engage with peers of color on their campus.

The above examples are more informal coaching and mentorship relationships. Those relational approaches to mentorship are instrumental, but so are more formal coaching experiences. Two of the six participants mentioned formal coaching through their engagement with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). While not solely about race, they spoke to the IDI's impact on their own racial identity development as White people due to the one-on-one coaching provided throughout the process. Heather spoke to this concept most directly when discussing using these coaching sessions—she chose to specifically focus on increasing her racial literacy in order to figure out how “as a privileged White woman in administration [I] carry power in the spaces that I’m in...and how do I make sure that I’m distributing that power and then turning my words into action?”

Beyond Garmon’s Framework- Moving Forward

All six participants provided rich examples from their lives that highlight how hard this work is. Their narratives showcase the important notion that one cannot simply say that they are committed to social justice. Practitioners must engage in ongoing personal and professional development in order to affect change within higher education. To better understand what practitioners need to sustain a continual cycle of development aimed for system change, I explicitly asked my participants about their perceptions of professional development and organizational change. In this section, I will report each participant's comments on professional development and campus change.

Individual Insights on Professional Development

Erica. The professional development that Erica would like to engage with in the future relates to direct application of learning to practice. As a young professional she talked about not having a lot of experience facilitating “group activities where there is self-reflection and dialogue” among participants. While she was nervous about facilitating more group activities, she did note, “It's been really freeing to learn that [being an expert] is not necessary” and “it's ok to just bring yourself whoever you are, wherever you are at.” She expects to find ways of facilitating while also being up to furthering her own learning. This is particularly the case when she reflects on her inaction with regard to addressing White racial identity with White students. Since this is an area she knows she wants to further develop, another point of professional development revolves around “point[ing] things out when other people say things,” both in group settings and individually.

Sarah. Sarah was very practical in many regards when it came to the professional development she wanted to engage with moving forward. She spoke of wanting “just more concrete training or conversations about reflecting on my own identities and thinking about the society as a whole,” because “I also think there's a huge component to thinking about social justice outside of higher ed that really influences higher ed.” She has felt that so far in her graduate work that’s “[not] something that we get a lot of conversation or even opportunity to grow in.”

Beyond a better understanding of societal impact on social justice within higher education, Sarah was eager for more tangible examples regarding how to have conversations with White students. This includes ways to challenge them in their thinking

and “having more conversations on...how to call folks in.” This is one area where she feels she needs to build skills because she feels she has not had enough training. She asks herself, “What does it actually look like when you are actually doing it?” Sarah believes this is an important skill because it would have mutual benefit for all students. White students would have a staff person with whom they could reflect and grow. Additionally, BIPOC students would benefit because she is “not relying on them to call something out.” Finally, she also noted how this skill transcends working with students: “I even think about it in...conversation with other colleagues.” Whether one-on-one or in larger meetings, she knows there are times she could speak up and call attention to an issue but does not.

Moving from specific professional development skill building, Sarah also noted that working with a more diverse student population was important to her in order to continue to expand her lens. An important part of stepping outside her racial comfort zone has to do with continuing to learn how to recognize-when and how she engages in spaces. She believes this will aid in developing her ability to dialogue across differences. She also noted that by engaging outside of her racial identity group, she believes she would “grow in ways that would push me out of this fear of making mistakes.”

Mary. While her campus and department are doing a lot to address DEI on campus, Mary acknowledged that current efforts are direct responses to two faculty resignations that publicly identified "lack of diversity and inclusion on campus being the reason for departure." It was after these faculty resigned that her department spent a lot of time thinking about the experience of BIPOC community members. They wanted to ensure that “those situations don't happen to people that we engage with.” Moreover, it

was important to the department that “we are being very [transparent]” with prospective students.” This was particularly important to Mary when she was going through the application process as a staff person. Her campus was presented “as very inclusive, very DEI-focused” but in her words, “that was never really lived out.” Mary calls attention to her desire for a more proactive commitment to DEI, but is hopeful for this renewed commitment from her campus. She feels that “there is no end point and if you say you are going to educate yourself you need to keep doing so.” She is especially interested in “understanding the systems in the world that we live in” in order to “evolve with the world.”

Jessica. Jessica’s desires for professional development are rooted in a commitment to lifelong learning in everything she does. Seeing learning in the smallest experience, she believes “it doesn't even have to be a very specific professional development opportunity that can like lead to something clicking with you. It’s just that continuous education.” To illustrate this she talked about themed happy hours, webinars, and the previously mentioned book clubs. Jessica is intentional as she curates her learning experiences because there are specific subject matters she is eager to continue to address. For instance, she really wants to dive deeper into what it means to be a White woman and wants to work to directly address her privilege in the work:

There are so many of us—White women—in higher education and we are trying to do the right thing with the best of intentions...it's just not enough to slap a sticker on your door or wear a shirt, like there needs to be more than that.

One way of doing “more than that” is in her pursuit of more education on how to infuse social justice and equity within her leadership program in order to ensure that “social justice is not just a onetime conversation, but that it’s woven throughout” the curriculum.

She also wants more professional development on how to “support the work BIPOC students are doing in a helpful and supportive way...to not overstep.” She said, “I think it's [about] navigating how to support those students and their efforts in a helpful way and not in a way that hits them or frustrates them or contributes to the problem.” She knows she needs to stop asking students to “regurgitate trauma” because “like we know it [racism] exists, they [BIPOC Students] don’t need to keep telling us that it exists.” In order to do this she is seeking professional development “to make sure that when we host events and things like that that we're not just asking students to share their trauma.”

Josuelynn. As noted throughout the previous parts of her narrative, Josuelynn is very educated around social justice, inclusion, and whiteness. She described herself as well read and commented on her experience presenting conference sessions on race-conscious supervision. Specifically aligning her professional development with her shift in terminology from inclusion to belongings, she said that doing the work needs to be about “following a process...because we still have to work within a system, so how do we create a process that...meets the needs [of diverse student populations]?” As a new senior level leader, she said, it's “been a hoot to try and figure out” ways to create a system that “doesn't create more barriers in the process.” To assist with this, she is looking for more training and development that specifically aims to answer the question: “How do we do this [student affairs work] in a way that doesn't put up more barriers?”

Heather. Earlier I addressed Heather's current work establishing a purposeful professional development plan. This includes the IDI, individual coaching, and personal commitment to ongoing education and reading focused on expanding her racial literacy. Heather was candid in her disappointment with access to such training earlier in her career when she said, "Frankly most of our professional development in our jobs, as well as master's and doctoral programs...haven't provided [racial literacy] training." Due to her lack of access to such training in the past, here she echoed her desire to find balance in leading a division while also "learning to do the work myself in an effective way."

An important part of this work focuses on going beyond racial literacy in terms of understanding context and moving towards action. An example of this is when Heather talked about working with colleagues to review campus policies. She noted that in order to truly examine policies through an equity lens, she and her staff needed more training that would "prepare them [staff] to bring that equity lens to our policy development." She understands that it is a "difficult time...especially where we're at as a society...and then adding the pandemic on top of it." This has led her to be committed to professional development now more than ever, noting that it is an "exciting time...maybe we'll actually make a difference."

Professional Development: Cross-Narrative Patterns

Illustrated at length during this chapter was my participants' commitment to ongoing learning and development. While they were grateful for these experiences, they were all open about where they felt their past experiences from graduate studies to professional development workshops had left them looking for more training and development. Heather was the most direct about this when she said, "Frankly most of our

professional development in our jobs, as well as master's and doctoral programs...haven't provided training." This begs the question, what training are they looking for? As I analyzed individual narratives, I gathered the participants' views of what is missing in their professional development. I have grouped their responses into three categories of professional development: action-oriented skill building, systemic change and conversations about whiteness.

My participants depicted a basic understanding of putting theory to practice. They spoke of numerous books clubs, classes, and professional development experiences that provided them knowledge around social justice, inclusion, and other topics. However, they were open about their need for more proactive and direct training regarding building skills to apply that knowledge in actionable ways. They are looking to build a skill set as practitioners in order to answer "how do we do this [student affairs work] in a way that doesn't put up more barriers?" Some examples of the specific skills called out throughout their narratives included working directly with students, such as facilitating group activities, supporting students from other racial backgrounds, and addressing microaggressions or how to "point things out when other people say things" (Erica). Additionally, many of them noted wanting to build their personal and professional networks in order to expand their lens. However, they would like more opportunities to build their interpersonal skills in order to aid them in developing authentic cross-racial relationships.

Beyond practical skill building my participants said they are looking for professional development that looks specifically at impacting systemic change, something many of them noted as having been missing in their graduate programs. Sarah

said she wished her program spent more time “thinking about society as a whole,” because she believes in order to think about social justice in higher education you have to be “thinking about social justice outside of higher ed.” Similarly, Mary highlighted the importance of understanding systems in the world so she can evolve as a practitioner as the world evolves. The senior-most leaders and Heather also embraced a need for more professional development around addressing systemic issues within the field. These included more direct examples like policies, processes, and providing professional development for their staff.

The third type of professional development that my participants explicitly called for was more training on how to directly address whiteness within their work. White professionals first need to establish a theoretical understanding of concepts of power and oppression, equity and inclusion, and race privilege, as well as lean into serious self-scrutiny of their own racial identity. However, this is another area where intellectual knowledge must be coupled with applied action. Jessica spoke to the importance of this when she said, “There are so many of us White women in higher education and we are trying to do the right thing with the best of intentions...it's just not enough to slap a sticker on your door or wear a shirt, like there needs to be more than that.” Connecting back to the call for more skill building, my participants are looking for ways to apply an understanding of whiteness to their work in actionable ways. Sarah noted being left with questions such as, “What does it actually look like when you are actually doing it?” She and the other participants want to refine their ability to talk with White students and colleagues to more effectively challenge them to think about their identities and privileges.

By gaining professional development around addressing in their whiteness, they are also looking to build skills in order to best support the BIPOC students on their campus as well. This includes training and development to ensure that they “make sure that when we host events and things like that that we're not just asking students to share their trauma" (Jessica). Due to the varied approach to how participants address race when working with White students and BIPOC students depicted earlier, it came as no surprise to see participants differentiate their needed professional development for working with BIPOC students.

The women I spoke to give excellent insights into what they would like to see their graduate programs and professional development organizations offer. Additionally, they highlight several ways these forms of professional development would help combat the internalized White normativity outlined in the previous section. First, the skill building around systemic change and addressing whiteness would support White student development and build an active collaborative approach to working with BIPOC folks on their campuses. Additionally, earlier in this chapter I reported on the need for White people to provide modeling and coaching to other White people. The professional development ideas outlined here would create more White professionals who would be able to provide White students and White staff with others with whom they could reflect and grow, and with those who would lead to more inclusive practices among White student affairs professionals.

Individual Insights on Influencing Institutional Change

Erica. Erica was limited in her description of her access to institutional and systemic in higher education. Perhaps this is because, as a first-year graduate student, she

feels limited in her ability to create systemic change. However, I believe her practical approach to future professional development is directly connected to her hopes for the ability to make changes in the future. When asked directly about how her work impacts she spoke of this hope, stating that, “I hope that I can kind of participate in that [social justice] work in terms of shaking things up a bit.” That said, I would argue that real change happens regardless of position, and I believe she is already shaking things up in the way that she has advocated for underrepresented students of color, both in her advising capacity and in how she honors the expertise students have in their own lived experiences in order to be culturally responsive in her approach to the work.

Sarah. Sarah’s tagline, “future impact,” comes directly from how she talked about her impact on change within her work. When asked about how her work influences institutional change, Sarah spoke of limitations due to her role on campus:

I feel like there's just this barrier that I'm like slowly kind of climbing over and getting through...I need one final push to just really engage in a lot of it which, again, might come when I'm in a role that has more perceived power like not being a graduate anymore.

One example of this barrier is seen in the way that she talked about her department's approach to working with the multicultural office on campus while creating diversity programming for new students. She expressed being in “a weird spot” because, “if I wanted to lead these conventions or even this project [but] I can’t really, because I'm not going to be here to actually do it.”

She is eager to have more influence in change and takes some personal responsibility for her lack of engagement as a graduate student. She talked about

understanding that when she has an idea she needs to push herself more because “I think I’m welcome to the conversation. I think a lot of it...falls back on me.” One area she does feel she has been able to have an impact is on the hiring and training of the student leaders within her department. Here she has been able to push more and take on some ownership. An example of this is working to “ensure the language that our leaders are using with our students...is inclusive to all the different experiences and identities that our incoming students are coming with.”

Mary. Mary feels her agency directly lies in “making sure that our breadth of information that we’re providing for people is wide enough to really help.” She identifies the COVID-19 pandemic as a factor in campus change. Specifically, new lines of communication opened within Admissions and from Admissions to the rest of campus. Not only did lines of communication grow stronger, but also the nature of data shared deepened. Recently, Admissions has been better at sharing out raw data in terms of enrollment numbers and demographics, but she has worked hard to make sure that this is also coupled with an understanding of what social justice issues are important to the students coming into the school:

[W]hen we’re seeing in their application, the different things that they’re working on and what social justice issues they’re spending their time working on in high school, like how can we make sure that continues in to their time at [current institution] and doesn’t just stop...I think that is huge and where my role in Admissions plays a large role.

This “clear transparency...provide[s] faculty and staff opportunity to ask questions of the Admissions office as to why things are trending a certain way.” Since the students she

works with are not yet on campus, Mary feels a duty to bring the students' voice to the data so that the institution can understand where their programs and services may be “leaving some others out.” She tries to share “a full perspective” of the students they are enrolling.

Jessica. Commitment to campus partnerships is Jessica's primary source of influence. She is excited about her ability to work across the division to better partner with academic affairs. Students talk with student affairs practitioners to engage in “conversation [about social justice] that might not be happening in the classroom.” Additionally, students bring things “that are happening in their classroom” to their co-curricular spaces. So, if social justice conversations take place in their classes they “are being brought to their clubs or brought to other spaces on campus” because students seek support for continued learning, often from their trusted person in student affairs.

Connected to professional development is Jessica's desire to use technology to gain valuable information about who is involved on her campus, as this can be used to make needed changes within her work and institution as a whole. She feels it is “helpful because it allows my programs to be more thought about in who they are programming for” as well as “who they are missing,” thus allowing them to “create...goals that are tied to equity in a way that didn't exist with my program before.”

Josuelynn. Josuelynn's narrative is full of examples where she connects her work to institutional change. For instance, the way she supervises her staff shows how she is already using her content knowledge to impact that context of her institution and those she works directly with. Her emphasis on language among professional staff, as well as how they work with students, has led to being able to better support student initiatives.

When issues arise in the halls she said it's important to bring students and staff together to say, "Let's figure it out together and then they [her staff] go and make sure it [change] happens."

From a systems standpoint, Josuelynn sees wisdom in rejecting a deficit mindset. Just as she has reframed her work with students to focus on assets, she approaches institutional change with an assets mind. In her words; "doing this isn't a deficit, it's a restructuring." Highlighting this idea of restructuring can be seen in her work with policy development. She speaks about looking at policies through a student-centered lens and keeping equity at the forefront of that work. One example of this is talking about fire code. She said, "We don't get to change fire code, but we do get to help figure out our actual policies." While one might not initially see this as an equity issue, Josuelynn points out the various cultural and religious practices that use fire for candle light, sage burning, and other rituals.

Heather. Heather's commitment to professional development is grounded in excitement for change. She noted being optimistic and hopeful that "we're on the cusp of...actual system change." When it comes to institutional change, Heather advocates student-centeredness because "we're always trying to change students or to have students fit into...the academy and what we think...they should be or assimilate to instead of...how do we change...how do we remove barriers." Heather understands the necessity of policies and procedures, "but really there is a lot of room within policy to remove barriers for students."

Heather cites ways she advocates for student-centered change from her senior leadership position. First, she can advocate with professional staff development and

leadership. As a leader, Heather is focused on training her staff around shifting to a mentality around customer services so that it is linked to cultural awareness. This shift in mindset is especially important when working with “populations of students who have not traditionally accessed higher ed and are trying to kind of figure out the landscape.” By shifting to a culturally aware framework for student support, her staff is encouraged not to assume students know what questions to ask. Instead, they should focus on “what to ask so that we can get students what they need from the start.”

Another example of Heather’s influence is through her access to data and her intentionality in using this data to answer hard questions. In her words, “There is no shortage of data...we need to be looking at disaggregating data...using data to drill down and say where do we see gaps and then working to understand WHY there are gaps and then what's the action or strategy to reduce that gap." So far, she feels like her institution has been able to use this data to make “a lot of progress in terms of opening up access” to higher education beyond just access “at the front door,” but also in relation to “persistence and completion.” This type of systemic change is important for her because she sees this as a way for students to be able to “change the trajectory of their life and that of their families and community by obtaining an education.”

Influencing Institutional Change: Cross-Narrative Patterns

As I began to look at the patterns around impact to change I immediately noted the limited way the two youngest participants spoke about influencing campus change. When asked directly about their impact on change both Erica and Sarah spoke less about their current work and more about future practice. For instance, Erica used terms like “hope” to describe her desire for “shaking things up a bit” in the future. Similarly, Sarah

used terms such as barriers, climbing over, and needing a final push when connecting her role as a graduate assistant to change. She ultimately felt that much of her lack of influence had to do with her position on campus and the fact that her role was temporary. She noted that “when I’m in a role that has more perceived power, like not a graduate anymore,” she might feel differently. Though they may not feel empowered, they did display examples of making change that I will highlight along with their peers’ work in this section.

When reviewing all six participants' narratives I found three major themes related to practitioner impact to change. These themes centered around advocacy for student perspective, campus partnerships, and policy development. The first way in which all six participants illustrated their impact to change focused on their commitment to advocate for students' voice. Even with their perceived lack of impacting change both Erica and Sarah provided key examples of how they influenced change in the way they brought student voice and perspective up in their departments and with campus leadership. On the other side of the career trajectory spectrum Josuelyn and Heather also highlight how they bring student voice to the table when working to create change on their campuses.

While direct student contact is an important piece in advocating for students, my participants also pointed out the role of data in making change. As Heather stated, “There is no shortage of data,” and my participants have focused their use of data to understand the students behind the numbers. Data is used to understand what issues students care about, which aids in my participants’ ability to curate programming towards student interests. Data also provides a way to track “who they are programming for...[and] who they are missing” (Jessica). Additionally, my participants use data to “understand why

there are gaps and then what's the action or strategy to reduce that gap" (Heather) in order to use data to create meaningful change.

Another campus change strategy is partnerships. A major component of establishing these partnerships is creating meaningful cross-campus relationships cultivating authentic avenues for collaboration. One example of how these partnerships can influence change includes using campus partners to share their expertise in student training or programming. Doing this not only allows students to learn from a broader set of campus leaders, but also creates space for a more diverse representation of leaders on campus. Another example of using campus partnerships to influence change includes creating lines for open cross-campus communication. Several participants discussed the importance of open communication with their colleagues and students. Finally, creating campus partnerships between academic and student affairs engages students in conversations around social justice holistically on campus.

The last method depicted by my participants focuses on large campus-wide changes, including their approach to policy review. Heather, in particular, was very optimistic and hopeful that "we're on the cusp of like actual system change." Several participants provided examples of working with leadership and colleagues to shift the mindset and culture on campus. By working to shift to more student-centered mindsets, practitioners created space for campus change to better "engage with the students as they are" (Josuelyn). This approach to change was clearly important to my participants, because several of them also noted how policies oftentimes create barriers for students, or only support certain students. Applying a broader student-centered approach to policies has situated my participants in ways that keeps equity at the forefront of that work.

Bookending the younger professionals' unique perspective on change are Josue Lynn and Heather. Not only did they align with the collective strategies outlined above, they also spoke of their influence on those they supervise. This includes Josue Lynn's intentional focus on language and addressing whiteness with her staff, and Heather's commitment to provide training for her staff in order to implement a more culturally aware model of student support.

Whether new to the field or seasoned with decades of experience, all six participants clearly care about making an impact in their work. They highlight ways to balance individual student support and larger campus change. They humanize data to make informed decisions around programming, policies, and campus climate. Through creating campus partnerships, they hope to cultivate sustainable programming on their campuses that works for all of their students. They are change makers!

Final Thoughts on the Findings

The women I spoke to here were so open and honest with their personal and professional lives. The vulnerability in sharing their personal narratives was inspiring. Many of them spoke of their fears and insecurities, but none of them stopped doing the hard work of cyclical education and self-examination in order to best serve the students on their campuses. Their combined narratives showcased an active commitment to social justice and equitable access to student success that is grounded in action-oriented relationship-building, ongoing growth and development, and intentionality in addressing whiteness in themselves and in their work.

With regard to relationship-building, each participant highlighted specific examples of intentionally establishing authentic, trusting cross-racial relationships as well

as within peers, students, and colleagues who were White. Building authentic trusting cross-racial relationships, a key factor in the narratives focused on participants intentionally stepping aside to allow physical and metaphorical space for multiple perspectives and experiences outside of their own.

The relationships each participant noted provided space for them to push themselves outside their comfort zones. Additionally, many of the relationships spoken about were reciprocal in that the participants were seen both as the learner and as teacher throughout their narratives. This is important to note because when someone can embrace the duality of learning and teaching, they can build relationships that allow for space where mistakes do not cripple them but can be seen as learning opportunities.

Finally, they have all provided rich examples of the daily recommitment and ongoing nature of intentionally addressing whiteness within themselves, their work, and the institutions. By seeing this as an ongoing active commitment, they are able to balance their limitations while still pushing themselves to dig deeper—allowing for mistakes, the socialized need for perfectionism, and the other facets of White supremacy to be addressed—but allowing for grace in the process.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Discussion

Introduction

As I began my research journey, I was interested in learning from peers in concrete and applicable ways. Specifically, I wanted to examine the research question: In what ways do White student affairs professionals articulate the effects of whiteness on their campus interactions with racially diverse students and colleagues? I anticipated my investigation would (1) provide an understanding of White student affairs professionals' motivations for their commitment to social justice and (2) create a call to action for inclusive student affairs practice and professional development to build and sustain practitioners committed to social justice.

In this chapter, I will join the scholarly conversations on culturally responsive practices in student affairs. Building on that discussion, I revisit my participants' experiences of whiteness together with Okun's (2020) work on White supremacist culture. I will follow with implications of my research for individual practitioners, campus leaders, and professional preparation programs such as graduate programs and professional organizations. After addressing limitations of this research and identifying questions for further investigation, I close by reflecting on how my dissertation work has affected my professional practice.

Scholarly Conversation: Culturally Responsive Practices in Student Affairs

In chapter four, I applied Garmon's (2005) preservice teachers' diversity beliefs framework to student affairs professionals. Within participants' narratives I drew five characteristics needed for applying CRP to the field of student affairs: student centered

practices, personal beliefs and values, institutional context, career trajectory, and their personal lives. In this section, I will present an integrative discussion of the relevance of culturally responsive practices to higher education in non-classroom settings.

Student Centered Practices

CRP is a student-centered approach to learning essential to student affairs practice. CRP honors the social identities and cultures of students in order to actively create space for multiple ways of being, providing inclusive and equitable access to learning communities (Bolitzer et. al. 2016; Garmon, 2004, 2005; Gay, 2010; Kafele, 2021; Koshino, 2016; Lucey et. al, 2017; McNair et. al, 2016; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016; Schroder, 2015). Bolizer et. al. (2016) argue that educators must think “deeply about their students” and “the broader social context in which they and their students are situated (p.29). Culturally responsive education requires facilitators to create student-centered spaces that are caring and supportive for all members of the learning community (Lucey, T.A & White, E.S., 2017).

The student-centered approach my participants highlighted directly connects to CRP. My participants depicted several ways they work to create caring and supportive spaces that honor multiple ways of being. Further aligning with CRP’s attention to social context, my participants' student-centered approaches include valuing their students' lived experiences prior to coming to college. By understanding the impact of social context on student learning, they call attention to an understanding that their institutions, like so many others, are experienced differently depending on the student’s racial identity (Kim, Espinoza-Para, Rennick, Franco, Dam, & Rensberger, 2018; Ncube, Jacobson, Whitefield, & McNamara, 2018; Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007;

Rankin & Reason, 2005). To address this discrepancy my participants expressed a desire for enhancing their inclusive practices through building more culturally responsive skills.

Personal Beliefs and Values

Another key characteristic of CRP established through participants' narratives was practitioners' personal beliefs and values. This was seen most clearly through their self-motivated-engagement in personal and professional development. Aligning with CRP, my participants "acknowledge the different experiences and ways of knowing in the room," as well as owning their limitations (Schroder-Arce, 2015 p. 217). They have invested time in learning about the students they serve and understanding they are not the expert in their students' lived experience (Schroder-Arce, 2015). Participants demonstrated strong commitment to ongoing work of facing assumptions and biases rooted in themselves (McNair et. al. (2016). These personal commitments to professional development and growth are examples of moving beyond Ahmed's (2012) audit culture. Ahmed (2012) notes that "just because we might see diversity work being done on the surface it does not necessarily mean it has been incorporated as a value by individuals" (p. 113). All six of my participants did not see their professional development activity as a way to "generate...image." Rather, they reported choosing to participate in book clubs and other DEI programs outside the scope of their formal roles on campus. Clearly, they were "beyond the tick box approach to diversity work" (Ahmed, 113).

Institutional Context

Participants also spoke to the importance of working within institutions that share their personal beliefs and values. Their reflections on institutional context relate back to the NODA core competency focused on institutional knowledge and the need for

practitioners to understand their institution on a deeper level. “Deeper Level” includes student demographics, institutional mission and values, and gaps between official statements and lived experiences. In order to be fully effective in sustaining positive practices and creating change in a meaningful way, one must ask: “Does my institutional context align with my values and beliefs?”

Examining whiteness in institutional contexts heightens the importance of this question. Chance (2007) says that individuals benefit not only from multicultural interactions but by being part of “institutions that sustain positive race relations” (p. 29). Further, as Ahmed (2012) suggests “the labor required to leave whiteness is also worth noting: in some institutional contexts, it is hard work not to reproduce the whiteness of events” (p. 37). Whether focused on positive interracial interactions or on the reproduction of whiteness in campus life, both individual and systemic perspectives are necessary.

Further solidifying the importance of institutional context is the need for practitioners to “understand the context within which the students are educated and socialized” (Koshino, 2016, p. 99). Institutional context influences not only how facilitators present information, but the different ways students evaluate and take in what is being taught. Kuh’s (1995) research established an understanding that who we say we are as an institution, and how we carry that out in our programs and policies, creates a dynamic relationship between curricular and co-curricular impact on student learning.

Career Trajectory

As reported in my findings, participants’ student-centered practices shifted with their career stage. Regardless of the level of direct contact the practitioners had with

students, they all understood that “each person plays a role and must take responsibility for the effectiveness of that role in supporting student success” (McNair et. al, 2016, p. 76). Career trajectory did not change participants' perception of responsibility but it did shift spheres of influence. While senior student affairs practitioners may not have the same day-to-day contact with students, they are at the forefront of examining things like inequities in areas such as “acceptance criteria for systemically underserved students, difficulties for faculty [and staff] of color to attain tenure and promotion, and low numbers of faculty members or leaders of color” (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p. 22). In spite of differences across career stages in student contact and sphere of influence, my research participants reported consistency in holding themselves accountable. All participants affirmed the need to “unlearn behaviors that result in ignored, and thus unintentionally enabled status quo patterns of institutionalized discrimination” (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p. 22) as they evolve in the field.

Personal Life

Poon’s (2018) assertion that social justice, equity, and inclusion must not be segregated within our professional core competencies. My participants confirm that social justice, equity, and inclusion must also not be segregated between our personal and professional lives. Their openness to speak beyond professional experience depicts a holistic commitment to social justice. By expanding their commitment beyond their professional practice, they continue to separate themselves from the tick box approach to diversity work described above. This is particularly important as it relates to the focused questions on whiteness within my research. Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson (2018) noted that "whiteness scholars need to look beyond undergraduate student populations and

include an examination of administrators, faculty, and graduate students" (p. 10).

Scholarly Conversation: Focusing on Whiteness

Cabrera et. al. (2018) point out that within predominantly White institutions (PWI) "there is a troubling trend of White students existing within highly segregated White environments" (p. 40). Bell hooks (2003) urges Whites educators to push "White students to unlearn racism" (p. 64). Katz (1978) points that because "race has been such a contentious and difficult subject for many, we talk around it rather than address it head on" (p. 3). Additionally, by not naming race and whiteness we have the ability to "provide plausible deniability" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 44). The evidence I presented in chapter four confirms that practitioners do not directly address whiteness within their work with White students, despite their proclaimed commitment to social justice.

Joe Feagin (2013) describes that the White racial frame "provides the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of society" (p.11). The White racial frame is so ingrained in us that even those who are actively working to disengage default to our socialized understanding of whiteness. The findings in chapter four confirm several ways practitioners' internalized racism is embedded in White professional practice. However, participants also provided examples of active resistance to the White racial frame in order to enact equitable change as practitioners. In this section I will use Tema Okun's (2021) *Characteristics of White Supremacist Culture* to demonstrate participants internalization and active resistance of whiteness in order to learn from their example.

Internalization of White Supremacist Thinking

My participants supported Helms' notion that "Whites seem to be the only racial

group that spends more time and effort wondering about the implications of race for other groups than it does for itself” (2010, p. xii). As I analyzed participant narratives, I learned that five of the six interviewees acknowledged that they are more conscious of their racial identity when engaging with BIPOC students, and less conscious of addressing race with White students. The trend of detaching from their whiteness within White communities connects to Okun’s (2001) *Characteristics of White Supremacist Culture* in several ways. My participants displayed several examples of *objectivity* or the act of staying neutral when topics of race or racism come up. There is safety in privilege that allows for claiming neutrality to be prevalent in our work. This perceived neutrality contributes to an unspoken White solidarity which serves to “protect White advantage and not cause another White person to feel racial discomfort by confronting them when they say or do something racially problematic” DiAngelo (2018) p. 57.

Understanding *objectivity* in this way supports White people's internalized *right to comfort* in many ways. There is a vulnerability in stepping away from neutrality. It threatens practitioners' relationships with other White people. Additionally, it sets practitioners up for possible failure, something my participants highlighted as a great fear. Thus, compounding White practitioners' avoidance of race is a fear of making mistakes. Okun’s characteristics of *perfectionism* and *fear of open conflict* speak to this specifically. According to Okun’s definition, perfection is where “mistakes are seen as personal,” and “making a mistake is confused with being a mistake.” This notion of perfectionism was a running theme across half of my participants, particularly the younger professionals. Three of them noted barriers like anxiety and self-doubt as major contributors to not wanting to make mistakes. Making mistakes can lead to social

conflict, which is another fear Okun identifies with White supremacy.

CRP calls for practitioners to engage in ongoing self-reflective practices (Garmon 2004, Garmon 2005, Lucey et. al, 2017). Self-awareness should include “a sense of...agency and social responsibility” (ACPA/NASPA Core Competencies, p. 14). Phillips and Bender (2013) point out that this is important in order to decentralize the White perspective, because in doing so we recognize our racialization and become aware of the fact that our experiences are not neutral. Being more self-aware in these ways creates practitioners with more confidence. Focused on learning, a practitioner’s lens shifts away from things like *objectivity, right for comfort, perfectionism, and fear of conflict*. Bell hooks (2003) acknowledges there is a risk involved for White folks doing this work and that it will not come easy. Naming the inevitability of mistakes, hooks says what we do about mistakes is most important. She asserts that a major part of White anti-racist work is being “able to face it [our mistakes] and make needed repair” (p.61).

Lessons in Resisting White Supremacist Thinking

It is important to also note the ways in which my participants provide rich evidence that White practitioners can choose to confront White supremacist thinking and actively engage in anti-racist practices. Okun (2021) points out that when those in power feel “threatened when anyone suggests change,” they are engaging in the White supremacist characteristic of *power hoarding*. Additionally, power hoarding is exhibited when people see “little, if any, value around sharing power.” By devaluing the suggestions of others, hoarding power also aligns with the notion that there is *only one right way*. Okun (2021) notes that an antidote for *power hoarding* is making sure “the organization is focused on the mission. Additionally, to combat *only one right way* she

calls for practitioners to “accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal.” Noted in chapter two, practitioner growth in knowledge and skill depends upon their openness to new ideas and perspectives (Garmon, 2004, Garmon, 2005, Senge, 2006). All participants in my research reported practices that oppose power hoarding and one-right-way thinking. Regardless of career stage, this was the case. Among these practices are culturally responsive (student-centered) practices, seeking multiple perspectives, openness to feedback, and honoring students’ lived experiences in decision making.

Okun identifies *individualism* as a characteristic of White supremacist culture which includes having “little experience or comfort working as part of a team.” Among my participants, none believed they were “responsible for solving problems alone” (Okun, 2021). Each found ways of building relationships and actively engaging their campus communities outside of “the work” in order to create a reciprocal approach to dialogue and growth. Such practices are, according to Okun, antidotes to individualism. They focus on valuing teamwork in order to work “towards shared goals” so that people’s performance will improve through working together.

My participants reported relying on student data in decision making in ways that show direct opposition to the characteristic of *quantity over quality*. As a characteristic of White supremacy, valuing *quantity of quality* includes the idea that “if it can’t be measured, it has no value.” This leads to measurable outcomes being valued and funded more highly than things that cannot. Additionally, it places little value on the process, and leaders are uncomfortable with emotions or feelings being attributed to the work. Early in my dissertation process my chair sent me a greeting card with a popular Albert Einstein quote: “Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be

counted.” Data is important, but it is how data is used that really matters. My participants showcase this by the way they humanize data in order to keep the focus on organizational values “which express the ways in which you want to do your work” (Okun, 2021).

Implications

In chapter one I noted that the purpose of my dissertation was to influence lasting change in the daily practices of White student affairs practitioners. Specifically, I wanted it to change my practice. I wanted to use inquiry to critically examine my own practice. As the research process concludes, I see implications of the findings for multiple arenas: individual practice, student affairs and other campus leadership, and student affairs preparation programs.

For Individual Practice

My findings and existing research together support the role of racial identity awareness and development among White practitioners. “The willingness of White people to name ourselves and others like us as ‘White’ in everyday conversations, just as we identify people of color, is essential to moving toward equal footing in a conversation” Kendall, 2013, p. xviii). This includes understanding our own racial identity as individuals as well as the large social implications of White normativity in the world in which we work. By naming whiteness, we are able to shift our practice. This is important because “as White people, we have to believe that we can change ourselves and our institutions” (Kendall, 2013, p. 17). By doing the self-work to change, we can engage in active anti-racism by resisting White supremacy culture.

Another important lesson gleaned through my research is that we cannot compartmentalize our commitment to social justice. We cannot separate our personal and

professional lives. We cannot dismantle White supremacy characteristics in a vacuum. According to Peter Senge (2006), we fail to put into practice new methods, or adapt policies because we all have “deeply held internal images of how the world works” or mental models (p. 163). Whiteness is a deeply internalized mental model of superiority over others. In order to shift our mental models and dismantle White supremacy within us, it must be part of our daily practice. Shifting our mental model of whiteness is important because it moves us beyond the audit culture described by Ahmed (2012) where practitioners take a tick box approach to diversity work.

“Yes, it's uncomfortable to be confronted with an aspect of ourselves that we don't like, but we can't change what we refuse to see” DiAngelo (2018, p. 42). My research confirms that this work requires risk-taking and willingness to be vulnerable. Heightening the stakes is the fact that students are watching us: “One learns to act White, but not to be White. White people teach each other to lie about being White” (Helms, 2020, p. 14). We do not do justice to our White students if we continue to perpetuate White lies. My participants teach us to embrace the approach Phillips and Bender (2013) describe: “It's important to not present myself as the expert who has arrived at a place where I can easily talk about our race...that I know exactly the right thing to say and how to create safe space—because I don't feel that way” (p. 27). Participant narratives model ways to balance the role of educator and learner through their honoring of shared expertise and their transparency with students regarding their ongoing reflective practices.

BIPOC students are watching us too. White professionals' inaction perpetuates whiteness as a norm to which BIPOC students must assimilate (Kendi, 2016). Sarah Ahmed explains that “people of color in White organizations are treated as

guests...[they] are welcomed on the condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 43). This contributes to BIPOC students' feelings of lack safety and belonging on campus. We are not inclusive if we must make others feel they belong. If we work to dismantle White supremacist characteristics in ourselves, we can shift from a paternalistic power structure creating open lines of communication. This creates avenues for shared decision making between our colleagues and students. This then widens our understanding of inclusion. Practitioners are then able to ask who is at the table, and whether those at the table feel they belong, and these are important questions for campus leaders as well.

For Student Affairs Leaders

The practitioners I spoke with called for campus leaders to provide practitioners with action-oriented professional development. Leaders need to invest in professional development that creates a balance between contextual knowledge and application. One way for leaders to support skills based professional development is to model a commitment to White identity development in themselves. Just as we model for our students, we need leaders to model for us. Additionally, campus leadership must engage in critical examination of their campus' stated and lived values. My findings affirm the work of McNair et. al, 2016) that identified a connection between value-driven campus culture and professional awareness of their own values. Student affairs leaders attentive to the culture of their campus will address the fact that “White students experienced a greater sense of belonging and a more positive campus climate than their peers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds" (Kim et. al, 2018, p. 244).

Holding campuses accountable to their espoused mission and values is not a

simple task. Rather it is only possible if leaders are in close touch with who their students are. This is particularly important given the racial disparities between students' sense of belonging. Gay (2010) adds that:

Culture is multidimensional and continually changing and thus must remain central to those who create educational spaces and the students those spaces serve...designating core characteristics does not imply that they will be manifested by all members of a group in exactly the same ways and thus it should not negate the needs of members whose culture does not exhibit them” (Gay, 2010, p. 10).

Leaders must recognize that their campus cultures are multidimensional and changing, so they must not impose a rigid interpretation. It is necessary to communicate campus mission and values clearly, and to engage all members of campus in ongoing conversation. Leaders need to create cultures that are moldable so that campus culture can shift as the community shifts.

For Professional Organizations and Preparation Programs

The ACPA/NASPA Core Competence are designed to “examine our practice, professional development, and the preparation of new professionals through graduate study” (p. 4) through a set of shared standards. Having a framework to examine practice is important, but just as with campus culture, those standards must not be static bodies of knowledge. Professional organizations and graduation programs must provide the needed training to establish base-level competencies and ongoing advancement in professional skill development.

My participants made a direct plea for more skill-building professional

development opportunities centered on unpacking whiteness within their work in order to apply a critical race lens to their daily practice. Paton et. al. affirms the importance of establishing a critical race lens through professional preparation programs: “issues related to organizational leadership are often addressed in graduate preparation program courses. Thus, faculty who use a critical race perspective can engage newcomers to the profession in a way that challenges them to think about the ways race and racism are embedded in the organization and functions of higher education” (p. 46). As it pertains to my research this is important because “a critical race lens should also be demonstrated in the preparation of new professionals to help them understand the complex dynamics of how race is constructed to grant agency to one group while disadvantaging and stifling the progress of others” (Patton et. al., 2007, p. 47).

Professional preparation programs that apply a critical race perspective cultivate practitioners more readily able to engage in critical examination of the institutions in which we are working. Giving practitioners the skill of critical analysis without the tools to create change is like giving construction workers the blueprints to a house, but no hammer. Professional development organizations and graduation programs must couple critical theory with mentorship, applied practice, and skill building so practitioners can influence change. My research confirmed that practitioners are leaving their programs feeling well versed in theory. However, they are thirsty to demonstrate that learning in daily practice. Specifically, they are lacking the skills to actively address whiteness and interrupt the internalization of White supremacist culture within themselves, their work, and the White students they are working with.

Limitations and Capacity for Future Research

There are always limitations to what can be accomplished within the scope of any research project. Some of these limitations can be mitigated through comprehensive preparation of the researcher, however some are unavoidable. As I wrote the final chapters of my dissertation I observed limitations based on scope of my participants, the scope of my question, and my own racial positionality as a White researcher. In this section I will describe each of these limitations and offer recommendations for further research which could respond to remaining questions.

Scope of Participants

I interviewed six participants, all women in a 30-mile radius at different career points. Having a narrow scope was important, but poses several questions such as: in what ways would White male-identifying student affairs professionals who are committed to social justice respond differently to these questions? How would a wider geographic net shape the content of narratives? What might be learned from BIPOC professionals who are committed to social justice? Thus, there is capacity for future research which would listen to a wider array of voices.

Narrowing the scope of my participants further was my criteria for professionals who self-identified as committed to social justice. My research has taught me that even those who identified as committed still internalize characteristics of White supremacist culture. Therefore, I continue to ask, what about those who do not identify as committed to social justice, or do not see it as essential to the work within the field? My research could be expanded upon by removing the participant requirements for self-determined commitment to social justice. Further research could explore where within higher

education these practitioners feel social justice programming and conversations should lie. Research could also examine why they do not see social justice as important to their work.

Scope of Research Question

My research initially focused on working with students new to campus. That focus receded as I spoke with participants. When I posed direct questions about new students, each shared a broader student development focus. An alternative is to propose research that centers new student programming and selecting participants most likely to speak directly to that work. Choosing that route may shed more light on connections between student success and programs for orientation, transition and retention of students.

However, the shift in my focus is in and of itself an important finding. Just as we can learn from what participants said, much can be in what they did not say. By broadening their student-centered approach, they confirm the notion that conversations and programming about belonging, inclusion, and social justice must go beyond single source programs.

Another limitation of my research question was its focus on the individual examination of White normativity. There is an argument to be made that the racial self-awareness of White people is an important first step in White anti-racism. However, Conwright (2022) points out “the typical remedies for racist thought and conduct featured in many white-drafted self-help tracts” will not lead to needed systemic change. Through my research I have realized another layer of this work should focus on an institutional level of collective action for change.

Researcher Positionality

As a White student affairs professional, I focused on one side of a reciprocal relationship. I claim that White student affairs practitioners' self-work impacts the student success of students of color. However, to truly measure the influence on BIPOC student success I recommend research focused on the BIPOC students' experience working with White student affairs professionals. Specifically, what do BIPOC students say they need from White student affairs practitioners to build the trusted relationships the literature calls for? Additionally, what can institutions do to support BIPOC students' sense of belonging on campus in order to create inclusive and equitable campuses?

Additionally, I focused specifically on race, however, an intersectional approach to addressing race and equity in higher education is a major component of CRP (Boltzter, Castillo-Montonya, Williams, 2016; Gay, 2010; Lucey, White, 2017; Santamaria, Santamaria, 2010). The expansive application to CRP across social identities makes my research a relevant building block for further researchers. My research may inspire others to examine culturally responsive practices addressing issues of power and oppression across different social identities beyond race within social institutions. For example, someone could replicate my research with regard to inclusive practices and sense of belonging across institutional types through other social identity lenses such as religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or others.

Closing Reflection

The purpose of my research began with my work in student affairs, my White identity and my commitment to social justice. I wanted to learn how to be a better student affairs practitioner, one who could support all students. Just as my participants were

vulnerable in their reflections, so too was I when I allowed their stories to enrich my life and professional practice. I opened this dissertation with words from bell hooks (2003):

I am no longer the same! All white people who choose to be anti-racist proclaim this truth. Challenging racism, white supremacy, they are transformed. Free of the will to dominate on the basis of race, they can bond with people of color in beloved community living the truth of our essential humanness (p. 66).

What I have learned through my research is that racial dominance is held together by racial socialization, internalized whiteness and the culture of White supremacy. It is held together like my favorite sweater, with many threads. My sweater makes me feel safe, and comfortable. It fills me with warm fuzzies and brings back memories of family holidays and a good bourbon cocktail next to a fireplace. What would ever make me part with my favorite sweater? Well my sweater is outdated, itchy, and ill fitted because it was made to fit one body type. It is filled with holes, and I could patch those holes, trim the loose threads, and ignore that it no longer serves a purpose, or I could tug the loose threads and tear the whole sweater apart.

I proclaim that I am no longer the same after doing my research. I have been transformed. I stated that “I write this to White people who are afraid to ask the questions, or do not know the questions to ask but just know they need to ask something.” I believe that it is in asking the hard questions that we begin to unweave the sweater that is White supremacy within ourselves. I am grateful to have found myself in community with six brave White women who have taught me tangible ways to unlearn and dismantle the White supremacist characteristics within myself and within the institutions where I

work. As I conclude my paper I offer a few examples of the ways my practice has already been changed by their example.

During my dissertation process I was working at an institution that proudly claimed to be anti-racist in policy, practice, and procedures. It became obvious throughout my research that simply claiming to be anti-racist is not the same as being actively anti-racist. I found my institution's proclamation problematic. Did I want my institution to be anti-racist? Of course. Did I believe it to be? No. There were plenty of active racists on the campus working to maintain the White superiority it was built on. I sat in countless meetings where White supremacist characteristics such as power hoarding, quantity over quality, and right for comfort were immensely visible. While I listened to colleagues share my frustration, I did not often speak up. My research has given me the confidence to directly address issues as I witnessed them in meetings. When a faculty member did not want to engage their first-year students in discussing Ibram Kendi's *How to be an Anti-Racist* (a shared campus reading), I spoke up. When strategic enrollment management meetings failed to see the students behind the numbers, I spoke up.

When my voice got tired I started searching for a new job, at a new institution, where I felt my values would be shared. My research then provided me the ability to enter my job search knowing what questions I wanted to ask. I was able to start holding potential work environments accountable in a way I had not done in my earlier career. My new institution also proclaims a commitment to anti-racism. The difference is they have intentionally added the word *becoming* to their proclamation. This one word makes a huge difference because it acknowledges the process and the work it takes to truly be

anti-racist.

I also believe my research has made me a better supervisor. Speaking with practitioners across various career stages has been immensely important. Speaking with graduate students and early professionals allowed me to gain deeper insights into what I should be providing my staff. This includes access to purposeful professional development as well as modeling how to apply a critical race lens in our work. Heather and others also served as necessary mentors, teaching invaluable lessons on how to receive feedback, create team ownership, and bring student voice to the table even when not in a student-facing role. Like many institutions, my campus has seen a level of turnover. When I began, the office was down two additional staff beyond the position I had filled. Learning from my research, I embraced this discomfort. It became essential for me to share power and embrace more than one way (my way) of doing things. Perfectionism simply was not an option, and I think the department's work is better for it. Our work has allowed students to feel comfortable in our space because they can come as they are and just be themselves.

Some days I still want the warm fuzzies of my favorite sweater. I want the bourbon by the fireplace, but thread by thread my sweater is being dismantled. My hope is that other White people will read my words and start picking at their sweaters until we are left with piles of yarn on the ground. In pulling apart our sweaters we can “bond with people of color in beloved community living the truth of our essential humanness,” and that fills me with warm fuzzies that keep me much warmer than that of an old, ill-fitting sweater I have outgrown and wish to replace.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Opening Questions:

1. As part of the informed consent it was noted that you will have the ability to choose your own pseudonym for publication. What is your chosen pseudonym?
2. What are your pronouns?
3. Tell me a little bit about your campus
 - a. Two-year vs four-year
 - b. Residential campus
 - c. Racial demographics
 - d. Etc.
4. How long have you been working in student affairs?
 - a. Current institution
5. What is your current position/functional area?
6. In what ways does your work involve working with students new to campus?

Personal Beliefs and Commitments (Dispositions)

7. How do you define social justice and how does that definition inform your work, particularly as it pertains to students new to your campus?
8. How do you define inclusion and how does that definition inform your work, particularly as it pertains to students new to your campus?
9. How would you describe the “fit” between your campus values (mission) and your own beliefs and commitments?

Experiences with Inclusion and Social Justice

10. What experiences have been significant to your growth and understanding of social justice and inclusion? [open time frame]
 - a. Points of celebration
 - b. Mistakes and regrets
 - c. Advice you’ve been given
 - d. Interactions with significant people/mentors
 - e. Other
11. As a White professional doing diversity/social justice work, what critical feedback have you received from BIPOC professionals and students that helped shape your work?
12. How does your understanding of your own racial identity impact your work with students with different racial identities from you/same as you?
 - a. How directly do you address your whiteness in the work that you do?
 - b. Where do you see whiteness play out in the work that you do?

Professional Development and Institutional Change

13. Based on your professional experience so far, what are some areas of professional development that would better equip you to do this work?
14. In what ways do you see your work influencing social justice efforts in higher education? [at your institution or in the field broadly]

Appendix B

Post-interview Journal/Debrief Process

1. What surprised me or stood out to me during this interview? (e.g., if I had to give our interaction a title, what would it be?)
2. Is there anything I could have done differently in terms of the process? (e.g., be better at establishing rapport, questions I wish I had asked, moments I interrupted or otherwise wasn't inviting)
3. Were there moments when I felt like the interview was going well?
 - a. What was happening in these moments? (e.g., identifying with interviewee, sharing a difficult experience, feeling affirmed)
 - b. What moments did I feel a strong connection between my thinking and that of my participant?
4. When did I feel uncomfortable, why?
5. Did this interview raise anything I need to consider in the next interview? If so, what?

Appendix C

Interview Summary

Participant Name (will be listed as pseudonym):		
Interview Segment	Participant Insight	Transcript timestamp
Institution Description <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● private/public ● Institution size ● Student racial demographics ● Etc. 		
Years of experience		
Current Functional Area		
Personal Definition of Social Justice		
Personal Definition of Inclusion		
Something that stood out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Common phrase ● Powerful quote ● Question they struggled with ● Point of passion ● Etc. 		

Synopsis of Interview:

Institutional Context:

Personal Beliefs and Commitments:

Experiences with Inclusion and Social Justice:

Professional Development and Institutional Change:

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