"IN THE CONTRADICTION LIES THE HOPE": WHITE STUDENT AFFAIRS
ADMINISTRATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF WHITENESS

by

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ABSTRACT

RACHAEL FORESTER. "In the contradiction lies the hope": White student affairs administrators' understanding of whiteness. (Under the direction of Dr. Ryan A. Miller)

Among white people, there is a pervasive mentality that color-evasiveness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) is an ideal approach to racial equity, meaning many white student affairs professionals may equate refusing to see race as synonymous with being anti-racist. The narrative that white people do not see color is problematic and inaccurate when, in actuality, it serves to maintains white dominance and white supremacy. In order to promote racial equity on college campuses, race needs to be illuminated, recognized, and reckoned with by white people to counter this ideology. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how white student affairs administrators describe being white and how whiteness impacts their work in student affairs. Utilizing ontological expansiveness, a critical phenomenological methodology, the researcher interviewed nine white student affairs administrators at a historically white university in the Southeast region of the United States. This university has established diversity and inclusion as one of its top values. All nine participants completed two semi-structured interviews. Data analysis methods included several line-by-line readings and the development of a code-book utilizing the conceptual framework of whiteness and essential concepts from the literature. As a result, six themes with corresponding sub-themes emerged: distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and student affairs indoctrination. This study exemplified the ways whiteness permeated the division of student affairs, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the need for political and structural change, as well the need for genuine and authentic commitment by student affairs towards anti-racism.

DEDICATION

Somewhere between the past and the future lies the power of the
present. A moment for us to be still and reflect on what has been
and what is yet to come.

I am grateful for everyone who has gotten me to the present and
would like to dedicate this to my grandfather who lived 97
wonderful years, to my goddaughter, who has a world of
opportunity in front of her, and to my future children who I hope
will continue the fight for racial equity.

To Gordon Lawrence Forester, better known as Pops-
for instilling education and service as a family value. May you rest
in power and forever in my heart.

To my goddaughter, Zoey, and my future children-
may you never stop fighting for what is right and always be the
change you wish to see.

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To my participants- thank you for trusting me with your narratives and for your commitment to wanting the world and the division of student affairs to be a better place. This study would not have happened without your participation and honesty. I am forever grateful.

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Last, but definitely not least, I would like to acknowledge all of the folks who have been fighting for racial equity throughout the centuries and those who continue to fight for a world full of liberation and joy.

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Among all higher education administrators in 2016, 86% racially identified as white (Seltzer, 2017). Racial inequity in the United States leads to many disparities within higher education, especially at historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). In order to serve all students, it is important to address these racial inequities. One of the barriers to addressing inequity, however, is the absence of interrogation and consciousness. White administrators need to notice race and the role it plays on a daily basis, which is counter-intuitive to the narratives that suggest being color-evasive is synonymous with not being racist (DiAngelo, 2018). For white people, anti-racist work means recognizing their whiteness and the racial privilege that comes with it (Abrams & Gibson, 2007). It also means working through the complexities of feelings around guilt and shame (Thandeka, 1999) that make many white people feel like they are different or wrong when they start to uncover the ways they have been socialized to internalize white superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981) and racist beliefs and practices. As a white, cis, queer, woman with ADHD, committed to anti-racism, it is important I see myself and name myself as white. Sullivan (2008) suggests that instead of being evasive to their whiteness, "which allows unconscious habits of white privilege to proliferate unchecked, white people need to bring their whiteness to as much conscious awareness as possible so that they can try to change what it means" (p. 242), encouraging white people to not distance themselves from their group identity. While I own my group identity as a white person, as a researcher I also understand the importance of ensuring I am not captive to whiteness in order to truly capture and understand whiteness.

Racism in the United States is prevalent and rampant. By extension, racism is ever present on college and university campuses. Students of color experience daily microaggressions

and many times, white students, faculty, and staff are largely unaware of the impact they have. Narratives of racism have generally focused on the ways People of Color experience and are impacted by it instead of the ways white people benefit from, perpetuate, and maintain social and political power because of it (Manglitz, 2003).

Given this inequity and the lack of focus on decentering whiteness while whiteness is maintained and centered in society and, by extension in higher education, there are many themes in prior research that have emerged that support this study on whiteness. Whiteness includes the social construction of race, race neutrality, color-evasiveness, white privilege, white fragility, and white shame. These concepts are fueled by white supremacy culture and serve as the conceptual framework of whiteness for this study as they provide a foundation for understanding the functional role race plays in the larger context of society and, ultimately, in student affairs. This is important in higher education as it provides a framework to understand how white student affairs administrators understand whiteness in connection with how white people, in general, experience and perceive being white. The complexities of race are not unique to student affairs, but as a field that has set competencies in areas such as social justice and inclusion (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b), where racism is still pervasive, it is important to understand how white student affairs administrators experience and understand their racial identities as it relates to their professional identities.

Statement of Problem

Research shows diversity initiatives in higher education are often postulated as the work of students, faculty, and Staff of Color because diversity education is only needed when People of Color are present (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The common assumption is that white people do not need to see themselves as raced in America and, therefore, are race-neutral (Sensoy &

DiAngelo, 2017) which is the basis of Helms' work (1990). By making the work of *diversity* the work of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), white administrators are using their privilege to not have to engage in racial equity initiatives (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

To understand whiteness in higher education, we must first understand the complexity of racism. According to Jones (1972, 1981), three types of racism have emerged as a product of whiteness: institutional policies that have historically advantaged white people, individual superiority, and cultural racism which normalizes and prioritizes white culture. Narratives of racism have generally focused on the ways BIPOC experience and are impacted by it instead of the ways white people benefit from, perpetuate, and maintain social and political power because of it (Manglitz, 2003). Since racism is rooted in whiteness, it becomes important for white people to recognize that racism exists and to take ownership of their role in perpetuating it (Helms, 1990).

They can do this by developing a positive white racial identity and understanding the harm they cause by not understanding white privilege and white fragility (Helms, 1990; McIntosh, 1992; DiAngelo, 2011). Confronting white privilege can be painful and confusing (Thandeka, 1999; Manglitz, 2003), inducing feelings of guilt (DiAngelo, 2011) and shame (Thandeka, 1999). Engaging with and understanding this pain and confusion can lead to developing a positive understanding of white identity (Thandeka, 1999; Manglitz, 2003) and an anti-racist identity in student affairs and can contribute to less defensiveness associated with white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), leading to white administrators' self-reflection on the ways they are barriers to racial equity. Many times, this pain and confusion are contradictory to how they view white privilege, and, thus in the words of Brecht, "[with]in the contradiction, lies the hope" (Brecht, 2000, p. 148).

To create conditions of racial equity on college campuses, it becomes imperative for white administrators on campus to acknowledge their whiteness and the power and privilege they hold because of their whiteness. While we know that understanding whiteness is important, there is little known about how white student affairs administrators understand and describe their white racial identity or how they feel it impacts the ways they function in their positions. This study expands the understanding of the implications of whiteness as a way to work towards racial equity on college campuses by illuminating the dominant narrative to decenter whiteness in ways that are productive.

Understanding whiteness in student affairs is important because education does not solely happen in the classroom (Long, 2012). Much of student learning comes from participating in activities and engaging with resources outside of credit-bearing courses, including student affairs areas and with student affairs professionals. Student affairs is also an expansive field that incorporates many different departments (Long, 2012) and has grown as the field progressed. At its origins, primary roles within student affairs included the housing and discipline of students (Hevel, 2016). Over time, there was a struggle to maintain the balance of disciplining students while providing individual challenge and support for students (Williamson et al., 1949; Sanford, 1962, 1966). As a result, the field of student affairs expanded to include over 36 positions and functional responsibilities that are present today (Hevel, 2016; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018).

Student affairs administrators are responsible for decisions related to policy and practice that directly impact students (Long, 2012). Since student affairs encompasses functional areas such as student conduct, transition programming, housing, equity and justice, recreation, student involvement, fraternity and sorority life, student operations, and facilities, there are a variety of decisions that are made regarding policy and practice. For example, the determination of student

employment, inclusive housing practices, implementation and accountability for the student code of conduct, setting fees associated with participation in mandatory programming, scholarship decisions, and decisions impacting student enrollment withdrawals are all common responsibilities associated with student affairs roles. These decisions could have disparate outcomes for students from historically and presently minoritized racial backgrounds.

Presently, within student affairs, there are 10 competencies, set by College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), that provide descriptions of the skillsets needed to maintain within each of the functional areas, ultimately serving as guidance for the field (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). One of those competencies is social justice and inclusion (SJI), which postulates equity as both a process and a goal. Essentially, white student affairs professionals must understand their own identities and the identities of others--as well as how that situates them within the context of power, privilege, and oppression--in order to best serve their students and their institutions. One way to accomplish this involves raising social consciousness and reducing harm (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). This competency is most directly related to white student affairs administrators understanding their whiteness.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to uncover how white student affairs administrators understand whiteness. I sought to examine how white identity and whiteness were described and how white student affairs administrators perceived this part of their identity informing their work.

Research Questions

The two primary research questions for this study were:

1. How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

2. How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

Conceptual Framework Overview

Whiteness is synonymous with racism; therefore, it needs to be interrogated and understood. In order to promote racial equity in higher education, it becomes necessary for white administrators to understand and develop positive white identities (Mueller & Pope, 2001; Helms, 1990). This study, focusing on white administrators and their understanding of whiteness, utilizes a conceptual framework of whiteness. The components of this framework include race neutrality, color-evasiveness, white privilege, white fragility, white shame, and white supremacy culture and explains how whiteness is experienced and perpetuated in student affairs by white administrators.

Race neutrality is the concept that white people do not need to see themselves as raced because it is rendered the norm and the default (thus neutral), which fuels racism without cognition (Bell Jr., 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998). Color-evasiveness, as an extension, is the refusal to acknowledge or address race and racism (Annamma et al., 2016) and is similar to the ideologies of color-blind racism, often referred to as "racism lite" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 3). Color-evasiveness will be used instead to avoid the ableist implications of the language of color-blindness. Color-evasiveness allows for the justification that we are all the same, which allows the continuation of the normalization of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Annamma et al., 2016). White privilege refers to the often invisible and unearned benefits that white people receive on the basis of group membership (McIntosh, 1992), while white fragility is

a byproduct of white privilege. White fragility, coined by DiAngelo (2011) refers to "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p.54). White shame is used to designate the complexity of feelings of unresolved conflict as it relates to racial contexts (Thandeka, 1999). The discovery of this internal shame is illuminated when it is discovered in racial contexts (Thandeka, 1999). Meanwhile, white supremacy culture refers to the characteristics of organizations that uphold dominance (Okun & Jones, 2001). As a conceptual framework, this study examined how student affairs administrators experienced race neutrality, color-evasiveness, white privilege, white fragility, white shame, and white supremacy culture and how these concepts informed their understanding of whiteness.

Overview of Research Methodology

This study was grounded in qualitative research methodology and situated within a critical transformative epistemological approach, where the researcher sought to generate knowledge to serve society by understanding complex topics (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 17). Qualitative research methods usually include interviews, document analysis, and focus groups (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This study utilized semi-structured interviews and summarized informal conversations via email, in congruence with the critical phenomenological nature of this study, to illuminate the essence of participants' experiences as it relates to the intersections of identifying as white and as a student affairs professional.

Participants in this study included nine white administrators who worked in student affairs or operated within a student affairs functional role at a large university located in the Southeast region of the United States. For this study, an administrator was defined as someone

who had worked at least three years, full-time, post graduate school in student affairs or a student affairs related area at a college or university, including direct work with students.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used as specific criteria had been set for participation in this study to assist the researcher in answering the two research questions. Purposeful sampling allowed for selection of participants who had specific knowledge and experiences with being white in student affairs (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) was also used in this sample as each participant who interviewed was asked to pass the call for participants and the researcher's contact information to other white student affairs administrators who they believed would meet the study criterion. Each participant was asked to complete two 60- to 90-minute interviews and a demographic form related to their social identities, their roles within student affairs, and their experiences with social justice and equity work. Data from the interviews were transcribed and all data were analyzed through intentional holistic and line-by-line analysis in alignment with phenomenology (Vagle, 2018). Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) occurred after both sets of interviews to ensure quality of the study.

Positionality and Language Statement

As a white, queer, cis woman with ADHD, who believes in anti-racist work and racial equity, I experience the dissonance of not distancing myself from other white people as I continue on my own journey towards anti-racism, while ensuring that as a researcher, I am not captive to whiteness in order to truly capture and understand whiteness.

Although not consistent with APA, I will be capitalizing People of Color and other racial identities that have been historically minoritized and will not capitalize white racial identity in order to decenter whiteness and illuminate the strengths, experiences, and resilience of BIPOC

communities. As a white student affairs administrator who currently works in an identity and equity office, I am committed to understanding whiteness, white privilege, white fragility, white shame, how these concepts are situated within higher education, and the impact they have on students, faculty, and Staff of Color.

Significance of the Study

While we know understanding whiteness is important, there is little known about how white student affairs administrators understand and describe white racial identity or how it impacts the ways professionals function in their positions. Over three-quarters of student affairs professionals racially identify as white (Seltzer, 2017). At the same time, among white people, there is still the pervasive mentality of color-evasiveness as an approach to being anti-racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), meaning many white student affairs professionals may also believe not acknowledging race is synonymous with promoting racial equity. The narrative that white people do not see color is problematic and inaccurate as it leads to blaming BIPOC for creating a race problem (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) when, in actuality, color-evasiveness maintains white privilege without naming those who benefit. In order to promote racial equity on college campuses, race needs to be illuminated, recognized, and reckoned with by white people to counter this ideology. Implications that emerged from this study provide a better understanding of what white student affairs administrators need in order to make decisions with the consistent goal of racial equity. It also allows for a better understanding of the complexities white student affairs administrators experience as it relates to racially identifying as white and may illuminate some of the internal and external barriers to developing a positive white racial identity. This study contributes a greater understanding of how white student affairs administrators can promote racial equity through a better understanding of self.

Delimitations

This study was conducted at one large HWCU located in the Southeastern United States; therefore, a delimitation is geographic to understand the essence of this particular phenomenon at a university with several racist incidents in the South. Another delimitation is that this study only included participants that solely self-identify racially as white and did not include participants who self-identify as multi-racial with white heritage. As this study focused on student affairs administrators, it did not include faculty, staff, or administrators who work in higher education outside of a student affairs related field and did not include any participants with less than three years of experience. Participants also self-selected to be in this study, which may or may not have been based on the participants' comfort in discussing racial identity prior to the study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide a framework for understanding this study. While the concepts below have been defined, it is important to recognize that language changes over time and these terms may be defined differently in other contexts. For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be used.

BIPOC. Initialism used to refer to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Color-blind ideology/ color-evasiveness. The ideology that white people use perfectly logical explanations outside the context of race to justify the dynamics and experiences of People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). It is the idea that white people do not see color, they just see people and blame People of Color for creating a race problem by bringing it up (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The concept of being color-blind as it relates to not acknowledging the lived experiences of People of Color is a strategy of erasure used to maintain whiteness, yet the term also perpetuates ableism: "Color-evasiveness, as an expansive racial ideology, resists positioning

people with disabilities as problematic as it does not partake in dis/ability as a metaphor for undesired" (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 7). As such, color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016), "the refusal to address race, and its corollary racism" (p. 10) will be used.

Equity. Equity is what occurs when systems of oppression are dismantled and people take responsibility for interrogating socialized patterns of dominance, allowing all people to survive and thrive with necessary resources and leads to the ability to set expectations and standards for themselves.

HWCU. A term, coined by Bonilla-Silva (2015), used to refer to historically white colleges or universities. Bonilla-Silva (2015) purposefully refers to what is more widely known as predominantly white institutions (PWIs) as HWCUs to illuminate the normative invisibility of white racial history. HWCU will be used throughout this paper.

Identity. A term used as a product of settler colonialism that reduces the complexity of how one experiences history, spaces, and places. It is a byproduct of white supremacy culture and enforces the notions of simplification and reduction as it relates to human complexity (Spady, 2017) and serves to perpetuate either/or thinking. While identity can be reductive, it can also be complex. Understanding the origins of identity and engaging in decolonizing practices provides an opportunity to understand the complexity of humanity. For the purpose of this paper, identity will honor the complexity of humanity and will serve as a tool to assist in decentering whiteness in higher education.

Interrogation. Constant critical reflection of self, others, and systems for the purpose of noticing and dismantling harmful patterns of behaviors and policies.

Race/racial identity. Race is a social construct (Guess, 2006; Tatum, 2017) that posits human difference as products created by people and is ever-changing (Bonilla-Silva, 2003;

DiAngelo, 2018; Guess, 2006). It is a determining factor in economics, jobs, housing, access to resources, and treatment of others (DiAngelo, 2018; Haney Lopez, 1996). Race and racial identity are used interchangeably.

Race neutrality. The concept that white people do not need to see themselves as raced until interacting with BIPOC because it is deemed the norm. This then renders the concept of whiteness as neutral and allows for the perpetuation of racism with little to no cognition.

Racism. A "pervasive system of advantage and disadvantage based on the socially constructed category of race. Racism is enacted on multiple levels simultaneously: Institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and individual" (Bell et al., 2016, p. 134). Working together, these levels create systemic barriers for BIPOC, while working to systemically benefit white people (Bell et al., 2016). "By definition, racism is a deeply embedded historical system of institutional power" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24), and it is not multidirectional or fluid, meaning those with individual racial power—white people—cannot and do not experience racism (DiAngelo, 2011).

White fragility. Coined by DiAngelo (2011), white fragility "is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 54). Some of these moves demonstrated by white people include guilt, fear, anger, silence, flight, and argumentation (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018).

White privilege. White privilege, defined by McIntosh (1992), is "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant to remain oblivious'" (p. 71). This privilege is extremely visible to those without it and quite invisible to those who have it. This invisibility and power allow for the continued advantage of institutional benefits for white people.

White shame. White shame, defined by Thandeka (1999), is the complexity of reactions that occur when addressing one's own "contradictory racial statements, emotions, and mental states" (p. 12). This shame results when one believes something is wrong with oneself (Thandeka, 1999).

White supremacy culture. The prevalence of normalized whiteness, individual superiority, unnamed cultural expectations, and institutional policies that grant advantage to white people.

Whiteness. A system of dominant ideologies that sets parameters and limits the scope of how one can be, act, and do in any given space (Collins & Jun, 2017; Guess, 2006) and is often used as a normalized, invisible expectation (McIntosh, 1988).

Organization of the Study

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study on white student affairs administrators' understanding of whiteness. As such, chapter one began by situating the necessity for the study within the context of higher education. Next, it provided a statement of the problem; the purpose of the study, including relevant literature themes; the research questions; a positionality and language statement; delimitations; and definitions relevant to this study. The remaining chapters will provide a literature review, methodology, analysis, and findings. Chapter two provides an overview of different literature themes as it relates to the construct of race, whiteness, white identity development, higher education, and whiteness in student affairs. This chapter also provides the conceptual framework for which the study is situated. Chapter three includes a detailed overview of the methodology, participant selection, data collection methods, analysis method, and trustworthiness of the study. Next, chapter four provides analyzed data provided by the participant and emergent themes in alignment with the

methodological approach. Lastly, chapter five includes a summary of the study, conclusions based on the analyzed data, discussion on the role of the findings, and implications for the practical application of findings on college campuses.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study focuses on white student affairs administrators and their understanding of whiteness. There have been limited studies, including two dissertations, on white student affairs administrators and their understanding of whiteness (Bondi, 2012; Mata, 2018; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Young-Law, 2012) and this study contributes knowledge to the field to promote racial equity within higher education. In framing this study, multiple sources were utilized to give context to whiteness, white identity, and to provide an overview of competencies for student affairs administrators from a historical and contemporary perspective.

Chapter two explores and defines whiteness, white identity development, whiteness in higher education, and how these concepts apply to student affairs administrators. An overview of this literature is provided in greater detail in Table 1.

Table 1

White Student Affairs Administrators' Understanding of Whiteness

What is Whiteness?	• Race as a social construct (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; Guess, 2006; Haney Lopez, 1996; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Tatum, 2017)
	• Conceptual framework of whiteness (Annamma et al., 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2003: DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; McIntosh, 1988; McIntosh, 1992; Okun & Jones, 2001; Thandeka, 1999)
	• Whiteness defined (Collins & Jun, 2017; Deliovsky, 2008; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993; Guess, 2006; Helms, 1990; Leonardo, 2002; Lensmire, 2017; McIntosh, 1988; Moon, 1999; Roediger, 1991; Thandeka, 1999)
	• Race neutrality and color-blind ideologies/color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016; Bell Jr, 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Bloom et al., 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Cabrera et al., 2016; Diangelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; Helms, 2984; Helms, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Nebeker, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)
	• Three types of racism as it pertains to whiteness (Adams et al., 2016; DiAngelo, 2018; Jones, 1972, 1981; Tatum, 2017)

- White supremacy culture (Leonardo, 2013; Okun & Jones, 2001; Stewart, 2017)
- White privilege (Hays & Chang, 2003; Hays et al., 2008; Leonardo, 2013; Manglitz, 2003; McIntosh, 1988; McIntosh, 1992; Okun & Jones, 2001)
- Critiques of white privilege (Jacobson, 1998; Lensmire et al., 2013; Roediger, 1991)
- White fragility (Diangelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; Jones, 1972; Jones, 1981; Linder, 2015)
- White shame (Moon, 1999; Thandeka, 1999)

White Identity Development

- Stage models of white identity development (Dennis, 1981; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; Helms, 1990)
- White consciousness models (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984; Ponterotto, 1988; Rowe et al., 1994)
- Critiques of white identity models (Crenshaw, 1991; Miller & Fellows, 1997; Okun & Jones, 2001)

Whiteness in Higher Education

- Whiteness and the college/university (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Cabrera et al., 2016; DiAngelo, 2011; Gillborn, 2005; Nebeker, 1998; Poon, 2018; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Stewart, 2017)
- Equity initiatives (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Closson, 2010; Helms, 1990; Iverson, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2007; Kezar et al., 2008; Manglitz, 2003; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)
- White student identity development (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017; Cook & McCoy, 2017; DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; Ellis, 2004; Ford, 2012; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984;)

Student Affairs Administrators

- Student affairs roles and responsibilities (ACPA, n.d.; ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Herdlein, 2004; Herdlein, 2005; Hevel, 2016; Karunaratne et al., 2016; Manning, 2009; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012; NASPA, n.d.; Parker & Pascarella, 2013; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Seltzer, 2017; Williamson et al., 1949)
- White student affairs administrators (Bondi, 2012; Helms, 1990; Mata, 2018; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Poon, 2018; Young-Law, 2012)

What is Whiteness?

Race as a Social Construct

Race is a social construct with real implications (Guess, 2006; Tatum, 2017) that posits

human difference as products created by people and is ever-changing (Bonilla-Silva, 2003;

DiAngelo, 2018; Guess, 2006). How one is raced in America is a determining factor in

economics, jobs, housing, and access to resources, and how one is treated by others (DiAngelo,

2018; Haney Lopez, 1996). Race essentially influences every aspect of people's lives (Haney

Lopez, 1996); therefore, white people must also see themselves in the narrative of race

(DiAngelo, 2011, 2018; Haney Lopez, 1996).

Although race is socially constructed, boundaries have been created to classify those

considered white and others as non-white (DiAngelo, 2011; Guess, 2006; Tatum, 2017). The

distinction between white and non-white is inherently offensive as it uses white as the standard

for comparison (Tatum, 2017). The essence of the creation of race narratives was purposed to

rank people's worth based on the color of their skin beginning in the 1400s (Smedley &

Smedley, 2005). With the power to define race in the hands of landowning men who came to be

known as white, white racial dominance began. As a result, the definition of race and the ranking

that ensued allowed white people to justify the enslavement of Black and Brown people because

their very existence as humans were questioned based on the construction of race (Smedley &

Smedley, 2005). Therefore, race became an "important mechanism for limiting and restricting

access to privilege, power, and wealth" (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 22) for people who were

not considered white, while protecting the power, privilege and wealth of those who fell into

arbitrary categories of whiteness. This power and privilege allowed for the normalization of

white as standard; thus, the concept of whiteness emerged. This concept has created a standard of

success and a culture of individualism associated with fueling a continuation of dominance, which then limits access and perceived success to those who do not or cannot assimilate. Embedded in whiteness are legal, social, political, and economic advantages for those who are white or are raced as white in the United States (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018).

Conceptual Framework of Whiteness

This study was conducted utilizing the conceptual framework of whiteness (see Figure 1) to highlight the complexity of white identity being both a learned behavior and an unconscious identity. This conceptual framework incorporates color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016), race neutrality (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), white privilege (McIntosh, 1988, 1992), white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018), and white shame (Thandeka, 1999) as the core components. The gears in the model symbolize the way each of these components operate within and perpetuate white supremacy culture (Okun & Jones, 2001) and ultimately the ways each of these concepts fuel each other. As such, the gears are situated within the larger system of white supremacy culture.

White shame is a deep feeling of something being wrong with self as a product of the process of *Learning to be white* (Thandeka, 1999), while white fragility refers to the ways white people respond in defensive ways when feeling racial stress (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). These two gears are larger as they are responses fueled by the ways white people are socialized to believe in race neutrality and color-evasiveness, serving to maintain white privilege. Through this critical framework, the essence of participants' experiences as it relates to their white identities and their student affairs identities was illuminated to allow for a deeper understanding of the contradicting behaviors, feelings, and attitudes associated with both of these identities.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Whiteness
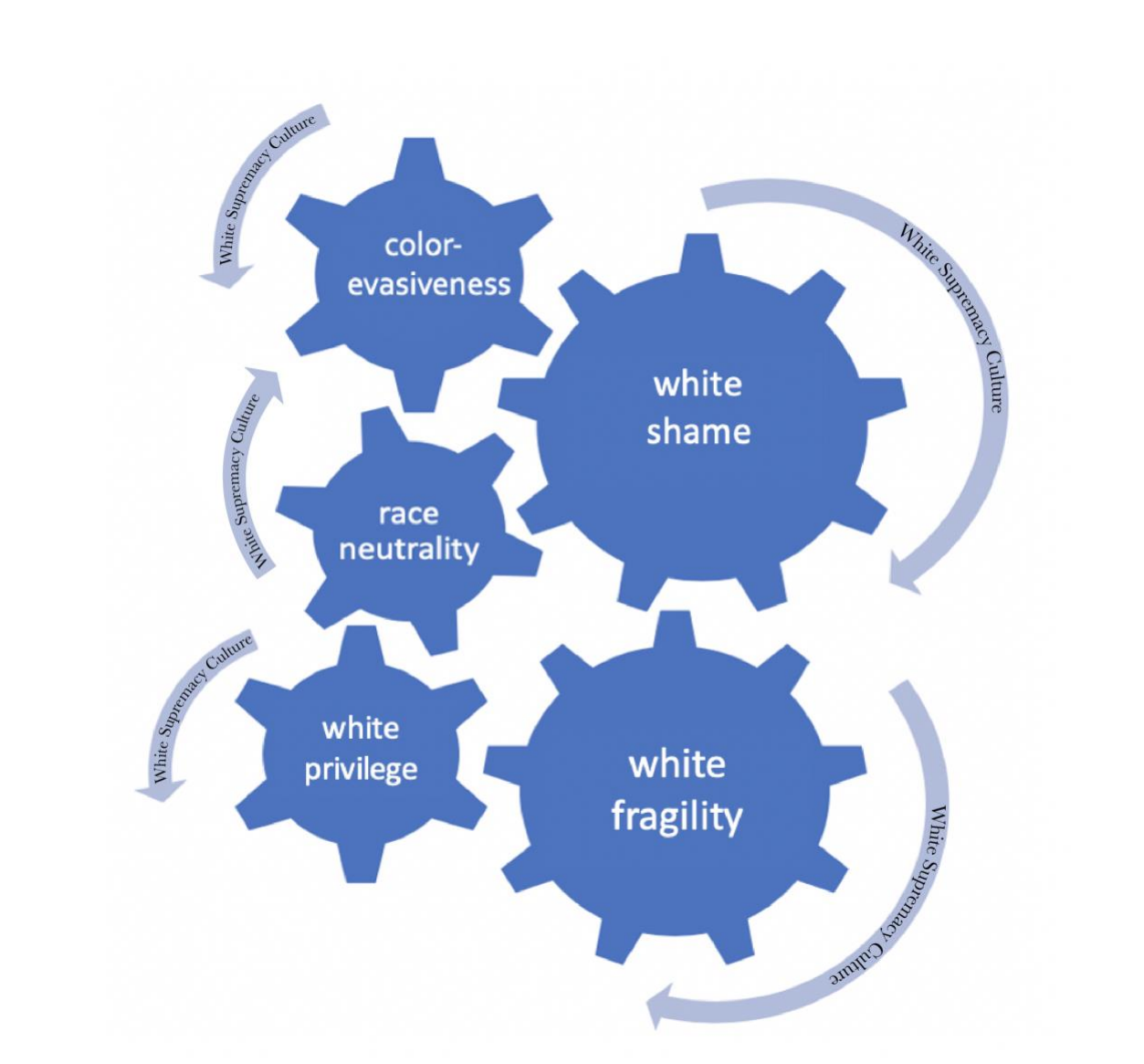
Note. Conceptual framework of whiteness. This model illustrates the relationship between the different concepts informing this study.

Whiteness Defined

Whiteness is defined in a multitude of ways. DiAngelo (2018) defines it as "all the aspects of being white- aspects that go beyond mere physical differences and are related to the

meaning and resultant material advantage of being defined as white in society: what is granted and how it is granted based on that meaning" (p. 25). Two studies explain whiteness as a system of dominant ideologies that sets parameters and limits the scope of how one can be, act, and do in any given space (Collins & Jun, 2017; Guess, 2006) and is often used as a normalized, invisible expectation (McIntosh, 1988). According to Leonardo (2002), "whiteness is the attempt to homogenize diverse white ethnics into a single category (much like it attempts with People of Color) for purposes of racial domination" (p. 32). Race, and thus whiteness, is also considered a status or place of being that has been socially constructed (Collins & Jun, 2017; Guess, 2006) and was posited as either achievable or unattainable based on place of origin and phenotypes such as skin color and hair color and texture (Deliovsky, 2008). Whiteness also informs the way white people see and understand gender and class, including the concept of patriarchy as a form of white supremacy, extending certain rights solely to white land-owning men (Roediger, 1991). Often times, beauty norms are situated within proximity of standard white woman beauty, suggesting that beauty is also achievable or unattainable based on other social identities such as race and class (Deliovsky, 2008). Additionally, the divisions among BIPOC and white people based on class further fueled racism. In 1691, the Virginia House of Burgesses formally defined "white man" as any man with no African or Indigenous blood except for the direct male descendants of John Rolfe and Pocahontas (Racial Equity Institute, 2015). This definition was an important component as it relates to the designation of continued enslavement and servitude. Prior to 1705, people across racial and ethnic identities were enslaved in the United States. In 1705, in response to Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 where enslaved white people and enslaved BIPOC organized to rebel against General William Berkeley in response to their conditions, white people were elevated to white indentured servitude (Racial Equity Institute, 2015). This

servitude put an end date on the enslavement of white people and, in turn, each white person at the end of their servitude were given corn, money, clothing, and 50 acres of land (Thandeka, 1999). Meanwhile, in 1662, Virginia enacted a law stating that any child born to a Black woman would be born into slavery (Racial Equity Institute, 2015), creating what was known as chattel slavery, thus perpetuating a classist divide that justified the continued enslavement and inhumane treatment of Black people, fueling racism. This foundation of classist separation by race can be seen in modern classifications of Title I funding, gentrification, and red lining, among others. The intersections between race, gender, and class, as it relates to whiteness then becomes that much more complex as it pertains to three linked dimensions: (a) a social location embedded in institutional advantage and racial privilege, (b) a place to view the world, ourselves, and others from, normalizing it; and (c) unnamed cultural practices in which we all participate (Frankenberg, 1993). While there are multiple definitions of whiteness, all encompass the normalized superiority and power conferred to white people. Since whiteness is socially constructed, it is created or made. Therefore, people learn how to be, do, and act in a white identity. The making of whiteness is a complex process that often starts in the home (Moon, 1999). It is also synonymous with racism.

Whiteness and white identity are connected and intertwined with the existence and progress of racism in the United States (Helms, 1990). In conversations around race, it is normalized to talk about how racism hurts BIPOC, but racism would not exist without the creation of race and whiteness. Examining whiteness allows us to *flip the script* and pose the question how racism elevates white people (DiAngelo, 2018; Leonardo, 2002) and encourages the opportunity for white people to acknowledge how they maintain, perpetuate, and benefit from racism. While they benefit, they are simultaneously harmed. Racism and the protection of

white privilege can lead to "ambivalence, hypocrisy, difficulty in seeing who they really are as white people—these are among our inheritance [from our Founding Fathers], what we gained along with thin rationalizations for white privilege" (Lensmire, 2017, p. 48), meaning that in order to protect themselves from confronting their history, they often lose sight of self. They, then, protect themselves from the guilt and shame that emerge as a result of accepting this truth (Thandeka, 1999).

Race Neutrality and Color-Evasiveness

Racism can be maintained and perpetuated without cognition as a result of race neutrality and color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016), which are products of whiteness and tenets of Critical Race Theory (Bell Jr., 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This means white people do not need to see themselves as raced because it is deemed the norm, thus rendering whiteness as neutral. Remaining neutral in conversations around social justice, equity, and anti-racism then becomes about maintaining whiteness.

Meanwhile, color-evasiveness is the ideology that white people use perfectly logically explanations (to white people) outside the context of race to justify the dynamics and experiences of BIPOC (Annamma et al., 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). It is the idea that white people do not see color, they just see people and blame BIPOC for creating a race problem by bringing it up (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). It is a direct refusal to address race, racism, and the implications of both (Annamma et al., 2016). Explained as "racism lite" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 3), this racism is based on the justification that we are all human and allows for the normative social order of white people to be maintained. This ideology maintains white privilege without naming those who benefit from it. It allows white people to say they are committed to diversity, while also operating under the notion that acts and policies can be discriminatory against white people

(Ladson-Billings, 1998), ultimately focusing on silencing BIPOC about pro-white policies and decisions (Nebeker, 1998). A byproduct of this ideology leads to the notion of reverse racism, which does not actually exist based on the historical power white people have and continue to have individually, culturally, and institutionally (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; DiAngelo, 2018). This byproduct posits the idea of reverse racism as a bigger problem than the actual racism BIPOC experience (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016).

As a result of race neutrality, white people only need to see themselves as raced upon interaction with People of Color (DiAngelo, 2011; Helms, 1984, 1990; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This also allows them to believe that, as a collective, they are not racist. "By definition, racism is a deeply embedded historical system of institutional power" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24) and it is not multidirectional or fluid, meaning those with individual racial power, white people, cannot and do not experience racism (DiAngelo, 2011). While anyone across race can discriminate against others based on their race, racism is specific to the dominant racial group, white people. Only people with dominant social group identities have the power to oppress another group of people. The consequences associated with oppression have individual, social, cultural, and institutional implications that do not translate and are not experienced by the dominant social group.

Findings from a study on white pre-service teachers showed that many white students avoided conversations about race in the classroom and often took a color-evasive approach to teaching in both predominantly white schools and schools with students across multiple racial identities (Bloom et al., 2015). Through this approach, students maintained racial superiority as they did not recognize or consider the experiences of Students of Color in classroom settings (Bloom et al., 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). This normalized white culture and ideology and often

forced Students of Color to assimilate in order to be deemed successful by their pre-service teachers (Bloom et al., 2015).

Three Types of Racism as it Pertains to Whiteness

Three types of racism, according to Jones (1972, 1981), have emerged as a product of whiteness: individual superiority, institutional policies that give power and advantage to white people, and cultural racism, all of which have normalized white culture and white superiority. Whiteness permeates society and organizations through these three types of racism. Higher education operates within these same systems and, as a result, is also responsible for the perpetuation of these types of racism. Higher education in the United States was created for the advancement of white men, which created a standard of success that was in alignment with white cultural norms, standards, and values.

Individual superiority by white people is often unnamed and its existence is often denied leading to the explicit opposition of racism. This causes white people to deny their privilege granted by their racial status and contributes to the perpetuation of racism by matter of moral objection, increasing their complicity and collusion with racism (DiAngelo, 2018).

Institutional racism refers to the policies, laws, customs, and norms that disadvantage BIPOC while simultaneously advantaging white people (Adams et al., 2016). These policies, customs, and laws permeate all institutions; the healthcare system, the judicial system, and the educational system.

Cultural racism, defined by Tatum (2017), refers to "the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of whites and the assumed inferiority of People of Color" (p. 86). Tatum (2017) explains that these images and messages are engrained into the air we breathe and the water in which we all swim. It is sometimes thick and visible to some and less apparent

and invisible to others. Whether they notice it or not, it is what they are breathing (Tatum 2017).

All three aspects of racism, individual superiority; cultural racism; and institutional racism, are

interconnected.

White Supremacy Culture

The prevalence of normalized whiteness, individual superiority, unnamed cultural

expectations, and institutional policies that grant advantage to white people, that is often

invisible to them, encompass white supremacy culture. White supremacy culture is the context in

which society operates and is so embedded in how organizations function, it is hard to recognize

its existence. Okun and Jones (2001) state that the purpose of exploring "white supremacy

culture is to point out how organizations which unconsciously use these characteristics as their

norms and standards make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms

and standards" (p. 6). Components of white supremacy culture include power hoarding, fear of

open conflict, individualism, quantity over quality, defensiveness, perfectionism, sense of

urgency, paternalism, progress means bigger or more, fear of open conflict, either/or thinking,

objectivity, right to comfort, and worship of the written word (Okun & Jones, 2001). These

components are present and active in college and university culture, and make it difficult to

advance equity and justice because efforts for advancement, while well-intentioned, are

orchestrated within white supremacy culture (Stewart, 2017). Some examples of the ways

colleges and universities collude with white supremacy culture include the hierarchical

structuring of positions, the expectation that communication up the hierarchy is not permitted,

except with approval, the attachment to success and numbers, building designs, the structure of

meetings, the way time and space are controlled within meetings to further drive the hierarchal

power structures, the structured meeting agendas as power hoarding, and the attachment to

maintaining *perceived* harmony by not allowing for conflict. Operating within this culture makes it nearly impossible to integrate other norms, forcing other people and cultures to conform (Okun & Jones, 2001). For example, sense of urgency (Okun & Jones, 2001) frequently leads to rushed decisions and quick victories and wins for white people by not allowing space and time to partner with BIPOC. Things often taken longer than we allot time for. This means difficult conversations are either not had or are rushed to *respect peoples' time.* This makes white privilege possible because it "secures a process of domination" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 137) by and for white people. For example, feedback culture or call and respond culture is pervasive in many Communities of Color. Within higher education, the norm in classroom settings and meetings is that they are quiet until called upon. This does not allow for the full and rich experience of expression and often limits who is able to contribute in professionally or academically acceptable ways.

White Privilege

White privilege, defined by McIntosh (1992), is "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant to remain oblivious'" (p. 71). It is something that is extremely visible to those without it and quite invisible to those who have it. This invisibility and power allow privilege to stay in place. According to Hays and Chang (2003), "white privilege is the belief that only one's own standards and opinions are accurate (to the exclusion of all other standards and opinions) and that these standards and opinions are defined and supported by whites in a way to continually reinforce social distance between groups, thereby allowing whites to dominate, control access to, and escape challenges from racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 135). This is similar to the ideas expressed by Okun and Jones (2001) about white supremacy culture as it acknowledges the dominance and restricts the

existence of other cultural norms. The difference between the two is that the former refers to individuals and the latter refers to organizations. It is important, however, to understand the ways that individual and cultural privilege are connected. White people set the norms of organizations and control institutions by setting policies with this standardized conception of the norm.

Discussing privilege in more general terms, Leonardo (2013) states, "privilege is granted even without a subject's (re)cognition that life is made a bit easier for her. Privilege is also granted despite a subject's attempt to dis-identify with the white race" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 137) meaning it exists and is granted even without one knowing they have it. It is rendered invisible.

McIntosh (1988) originally shared the concept of privilege as it related to male privilege. She illuminated the daily microaggressions perpetuated by men, which were often evident and experienced by people of other genders. Since the acknowledgement of male privilege is easy for white women to understand, this can be used as a starting point to help white people understand that dominance can and is perpetuated as a result of being white. Therefore, using male privilege as a reference point for white privilege, McIntosh (1988) discusses how many people with privilege cannot move past the notion of it advantaging some while disadvantaging others, noting that understanding the concept is not synonymous with understanding how it functions or how it is perpetuated. While privilege grants power, it is unconscious power, meaning those who benefit from it do not necessarily feel powerful or feel like they have an advantage (McIntosh, 1988). Manglitz (2003), while critiquing white privilege in adult education, discusses the importance of not subjugating People of Color through solely naming white privilege and recommends that white people sit with their whiteness long enough to understand the pain and confusion that comes with it. Some examples of this privilege are being able to buy a house in an area they prefer, not being followed in a store while shopping, opening a newspaper or watching television

and seeing people who racially look like them, not having to educate their children on racism for survival, being able to speak as an individual and not on behalf of an entire racial group, having flesh colored band-aids that match their skin, and their leadership ability not be questioned solely because of their race (McIntosh, 1988).

Findings from a study on the relationship between white identity development and the awareness of white privilege among 197 counselor trainees showed that students that worked through and understood themselves to be white significantly contributed to white students understanding of white privilege (Hays et al., 2008). This means that the more white people were aware that they were white, the more aware they were that white privilege existed. Since they are socialized to understand white racial identity as the norm and neutral, the illumination of understanding the complexities of white racial identity as an identity that is historically and presently embedded in dominance is crucial. While understanding white privilege is important (McIntosh, 1988; DiAngelo, 2018), solely, this understanding does not lead to anti-racist practices and behaviors (Manglitz, 2003) as findings demonstrated that awareness of privilege did not necessarily lead to a shift in attitude or behavior (Hays et al., 2008).

Critique of White Privilege

While understanding the reality of white privilege is important, it can also serve as a barrier to taking anti-racist action (Lensmire et al., 2013). The concept of white privilege has been critiqued by second-wave whiteness scholars as it focuses specifically on the importance of white people merely acknowledging that they benefit from white privilege and, ultimately serves to undermine systemic racial oppression and white supremacy (Lensmire et al., 2013). Lack of acknowledgment, however, does not mean white supremacy does not exist and acknowledgment does not lead to dismantling through action (Lensmire et al., 2013). While it serves as an entry

point for white people to understand individual advantage, it also is contradictory in that it presumes that "lessening privilege for white people would also, in some direct ways, lessen oppression for People of Color" (Lensmire et al., 2013, p. 413) when most of the examples provided are examples of human rights. Focusing on individual implications and advantages serves as a barrier to addressing the political, social, economic, historical, and cultural roots of the system responsible for the conception that white privilege exists (Jacobson, 1998; Lensmire et al., 2013; Roediger 1991).

White Fragility

White privilege also protects white people from engaging in conversations about race. As a result, when they do engage, it can often cause them to respond in negative ways. Coined by DiAngelo (2011), white fragility "is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 54). Some of these moves demonstrated by white people include guilt, fear, anger, silence, flight, and argumentation (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). When they feel triggered during conversations about race and white privilege, they respond in a myriad of ways that shuts the conversation down or changes the focus to one that provides them comfort (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018).

This fragility is often caused by segregation, racial arrogance, universalism and individualism, racial belonging, entitlement to racial comfort, psychic freedom, and consistent messages through overrepresentation that they are racially superior (DiAngelo, 2011) and allows white people to decide "when, how, and to what extent racism is addressed or challenged" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 109). By illuminating or suggesting that white people have an institutional advantage, they often respond with patterns listed above. This preserves power and allows them

to protect their morality, thus excusing them from challenging themselves to stay in conversations about race (DiAngelo, 2018).

Another way white fragility shows up is by white people portraying themselves as victims, attacked, and falsely blamed in conversations or interactions around or about race (DiAngelo, 2018). They posit themselves as unsafe, even when they are not in any physical or psychological danger (DiAngelo, 2018), thus perpetuating the narrative of individual superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981) by utilizing their social positions to maintain racial comfort (DiAngelo, 2018) and ultimately, causing harm to BIPOC. This feeling of danger described by white people perpetuates stereotypes that BIPOC are violent through their narratives of not being safe, contributing to a "language of violence" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 110). These narratives often include naming that they are being attacked or that someone is questioning their character when confronted with feedback on the ways they microaggress, their racist beliefs, and racist attitudes or by naming the ways they are defensive in relation to the conversation.

In discussing the experiences of students who self-identify as white anti-racist feminists who recently completed courses in women's and gender studies at a PWI, Linder (2015) created a model of antiracist white feminist activism. Upon reflecting on their white privilege, participants commented on feeling defensive, resistant, and infuriated (Linder, 2015), which are all inculcators of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). In addition to demonstrating white fragility, this study, along with others explored later, serves as an example for the necessity of developing and understanding white identity development and the complex feelings that arise from seeing themselves as white.

White Shame

Thandeka (1999) coined the term white shame to capture the internalized feelings of not being good enough as it relates to one's white racial identity, stating, "white shame is the deeply private feeling of not being at home within one's own white community" (p. 13). Not being at home within one's own community means that in order to be part of the white community, white people first must detach from their full capacity for humanity. They have to learn how to see themselves as superior in order to be accepted by others who look like them. Being white is both an unconscious identity and a learned behavior. They learn first that they need to be accepted by the people around them for their own survival, forcing them to learn the rigidity that encompasses whiteness and to conform to white supremacy (Thandeka, 1999). This feeling of not being at home is a result of the way white children have been socialized to adapt and collude with white supremacy in order to be accepted within the white community. While white people learn to collude with whiteness, in actuality, they pine to rid themselves of the unnatural, socialized rigidity of whiteness because it is suffocating and not innate to who they are as people. White children long to be with BIPOC and to be present with their natural sense of self, but when they attempt to, they are often policed away from Blackness and into whiteness, leading to this deep shame and the internalization that there must be something wrong with them, in what Thandeka (1999) calls a "pitched battle" of the inner self (p. 12). Thus, this collusion with whiteness creates dissonance between who they are and who and how they are asked to be, do, and act, and ultimately demonstrates how deeply white people are harmed by white supremacy.

Shame is a difficult and complex emotion to navigate because it results from people thinking there is something wrong with them as opposed to them doing something wrong (Thandeka, 1999), which is harder to address or correct and which Thandeka would call guilt.

The messages white people received as small children is what causes them to develop white

identities (Thandeka, 1999; Moon, 1999). However, this identity development is a defense

mechanism to ensure they are accepted and loved:

> The Euro-American child…is a racial victim of its own white community of parents,
>
> caretakers, and peers, who attack it because it does not yet have a white racial identity.
>
> Rather than continue to suffer such attacks, the...child defends itself by creating white
>
> racial identity for itself" (Thandeka, 1999 p. 13).

Understanding white identity as a product of shame allows us to critically think about the ways

white people learn to be white as opposed to the ways they need to illuminate what being white

means. This white shame along with other concepts, assisted in serving as the conceptual

framework for this study.

White Identity Development

Stage Models of White Identity Development

Hardiman (1982) was the first person to propose a model on white identity. Before

Hardiman, most of the work on white identity was more focused on defining racism than it was

on defining what it means to be white (Helms, 1990). Hardiman's model includes five stages and

argues that white people live most of their lives unconscious of their whiteness and, therefore,

live unaware of the impact they have on others. Hardiman (1982) stated that understanding

whiteness is a process "by which white Americans develop a sense of racial identity as members

of a racially privileged group in a society that has at its foundation, white racism" (p. 4). The five

stages in the model are: no social consciousness, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and

internalization (Hardiman, 1982). The first stage, no social consciousness, posits that a person is

unaware of racial differences and racism. Acceptance is characterized by the internalizing of

racist beliefs and identifying with whiteness on an unconscious level. The third stage, resistance, is represented by the rejection of whiteness and a rejection of racist beliefs. Redefinition includes developing a white identity that is free from racism, while internalization occurs when this new white identity and behavior is permeated into the existing racial identity and becomes conscious (Hardiman, 1982). Criticism of this model includes that it is not based on empirical data (Helms, 1990).

Helms (1984) proposed a model of white racial identity development (WRID) that has become widely utilized and adopted. Helms (1990) stated that is essential that white people abandon racism in order to establish a non-racist white identity to have what is called a positive white racial identity. WRID is different than prior models as it acknowledges that white people can exist without ever having to see themselves as white (Helms, 1990): "In fact, it is only when whites come in contact with the idea of Blacks (or other visible racial/ethnic groups) that whiteness becomes a potential issue" (Helms, 1990, p. 54). In 1984, Helms created a five-stage model, but added a sixth stage after reflecting on the work of Hardiman (1982) that white people's self-examination of historical, political, and cultural contributions is important in the process of developing a positive white identity (Helms, 1990). As stated earlier, the six stages of this model fall within two phases: abandoning racism, which is representative of the contact, disintegration, and reintegration stages and positive white identity development, encompassing the pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy stages (Helms, 1990).

The contact stage starts as soon as a person is confronted with the idea of Blackness and may unconsciously evaluate Black people based on white standards or characteristics. There is usually limited interaction with Black people during this stage unless the person is thought of to act or seem "white" and there are generally limited to no feelings of shame or guilt because

people in this stage do not understand themselves to be racist on any level (Helms, 1990). The

second stage of disintegration occurs when white people become conflicted with their

understanding of whiteness and often triggers what Dennis (1981) refers to as a moral dilemma

with being white. During this stage, a person comes to realize that there is not racial equality and

that by not acknowledging that, there will be social consequences for the white person (Helms,

1990). A person may experience incongruence during this stage and may feel they need to

interact differently with white people and Black people (Helms, 1990). The third stage is the

reintegration stage which starts with the acknowledgment of a white identity. A person in this

stage has most likely internalized racial superiority as a white person, and, as a result, comes to

understand Black people as inferior. Cultural and institutional racism are recognized, but a

person at this stage believes that all privilege is earned (Helms, 1990).

Stage four marks the beginning of phase two. The pseudo-independent stage begins when

a white person starts to acknowledge the role of white people in creating and perpetuating racism

and, thus, questions the concept of Black inferiority (Helms, 1990). Typically, white people in

this stage still look for Black people to teach them about racism. While someone in this phase

has shifted from a negative white identity, they also have not developed a positive one (Helms,

1990). The following stage is the immersion/emersion stage and begins when "myths and

stereotypes" (Helms, 1990, p. 62) are exchanged with more factual information about what it

means to be white. There is a shift within this stage from trying to change Black people to trying

to work with other white people to acknowledge whiteness. The last stage in Helms' model is the

stage of autonomy. Characteristics of a person in this stage include "internalizing, nurturing, and

applying the new definition of whiteness evolved in the earlier stages" (Helms, 1990, p. 62). A

person in this stage no longer feels superior or the need to oppress and often starts to expand

their awareness of other forms of oppression. Although this is the "final" stage, positive WRID should be an ongoing process (Helms, 1990).

While Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984, 1990) contribute vast knowledge to the field of white identity development with their seminal works, their models operate and perpetuate a Black-white binary and do not discuss the importance of white consciousness. In order to understand white consciousness, it is important to explore the models of Ponterotto (1988) and Rowe et al. (1994).

White Consciousness Models

Ponterotto (1988) created a four-stage model of white racial consciousness using Cross' model of the negro-to-Black conversion experience (1971), which is a Black racial identity stage theory that looks at the evolution of Black people's self-perception of degradation as it evolves to feeling secure in their Blackness (Ponterotto, 1988), and Helm's white racial identity development (1984). Ponterotto's model looks at the white identity development of white counselors and includes the following four stages: pre-exposure, exposure, zealot-defensive, and integration.

White trainees in the pre-exposure stage often have not thought about what it means to be white and how that influences their role in contributing to a racist society. Many students in this stage have also not reflected on issues as it relates to multiculturalism (Ponterotto, 1988). Most students, upon entering their counseling programs, are in this initial stage. Upon enrolling and attending their first multicultural course, students generally enter into the second stage of exposure as they come in contact with Students of Color (Ponterotto, 1988).

Similar to Helm's stage of contact (Helms, 1984), the exposure stage occurs when white students are confronted with the existence of racism, forcing white students to think about the

role white people play in its existence (Ponterotto, 1988). As a result, white students can begin to feel angry and guilty as they start to consider the dissonance between what they have understood about the world and the reality of the world.

As these feelings are explored, students shift into the zealot-defensive stage, or third stage of the model. This stage is characterized by students responding in one of two ways: either by exploring multicultural issues or completely avoiding and retreating from multicultural issues. Students become responsive or distant from the material. Ponterotto (1988) compared this to Helms' (1990) stage of disintegration where students retreat back into the comfort of white culture and engage mostly with other white students.

In the final stage of integration, students' feelings of either zealot or defensiveness start to reduce. Students on both spectrums start to find balance in their approach to multicultural exploration and understanding after processing their feelings. This parallels Helms' final stage of autonomy (Ponterotto, 1988).

While this model uses both Cross and Helms as a reference, paralleling white identity development to Black identity development is problematic as it does not define the role that white supremacy culture plays on the necessity for racial identity development and its implications on Black people's self-perception of degradation.

Rowe et al. (1994), critiquing prior models, state that comparing or equating the process of white identity development to racially minoritized identity development is problematic as it does not acknowledge systems of dominance. In response, Rowe et al. (1994) developed a model of white racial consciousness. White consciousness is "one's awareness of being white and what that implies in relation to those who do not share white group membership…Whatever one's position on these matters, it will be reflected to some extent in…[their] attitudes, behaviors, and

related affect" (Rowe et al., 1994, pp. 133-134). Based on these attitude and beliefs, one's white racial consciousness can be inferred (Rowe et al., 1994). Unlike other models, this model is not described as developmental over time and does not indicate a linear process and, alternatively, is heavily influenced by social conditions. Depending on the climate of social justice and injustice, people can move both forward and in reverse at any point. Similarly, holding one attitude type does not mean people are working towards the next (Rowe et al., 1994).

As a result, Rowe et al. (1994) created a model that situates the role white people play in relationship to other white people and to people across other racial identities. This model has two categories: unachieved white racial consciousness and achieved white racial consciousness. Unachieved white racial consciousness encompasses three attitude types: avoidant, dependent, and dissonant. Achieved white racial consciousness includes four attitude types: dominative, active, reactive, and integrative (Rowe et al., 1994). This model is a response to the authors' critique that other models do not recognize when white people have not come to a place where they have internalized their racial attitudes.

White people with an avoidant attitude often do not engage in conversations about race and are usually unaware of the racial stratification of society. The preferred method of response with this attitude type is denying the issue exists, ignoring the issue, and, lastly, minimizing the issue (Rowe et al., 1994).

The second attitude type of unachieved white racial consciousness is the dependent attitude. Although many white people with a dependent attitude seem to have some sort of white consciousness, they are not open to and may have not considered perspectives outside of their own. Their racial attitudes are superficial and are often in congruence with messages of dominant family members or people they are dependent on. Some white people continue to have this as a

main attitude type well into adulthood and still rely on the opinions of others to shape how they think or feel about current issues or events (Rowe et al., 1994).

White people whose attitudes are dissonant, the third attitude type, often feel a level of uncertainty with their white racial consciousness. They are open to new information as a way to navigate this uncertainty, but they lack a commitment to exploring these ideas. The dissonance in this stage generally result from the previous attitudes held, maybe based on what family members instilled, and recent experiences with race. They are generally more likely to be confused in this stage because what they are experiencing may not be in alignment with their past beliefs. This attitude type is often referred to as a period of transition as it may allow them to look for more information. This attitude type concludes the first category of this model (Rowe et al., 1994).

The second category of this model is achieved white racial consciousness and begins with the first attitude type, the dominative attitude. White people with this attitude type are generally ethnocentric and may have limited knowledge of other racial groups, upholding beliefs that white people are culturally superior and more valuable than People of Color. This superiority could be expressed actively, including overtly violent behavior, or passively, where people choose not to interact with People of Color. Most people in this stage see whiteness as normative but may not see themselves as racist. White people, with dominative racial attitudes, often feel they do not have much in common with racially minoritized people (Rowe et al., 1994).

Meanwhile, white people with conflictive attitudes are usually against discrimination and discriminatory practices, but are generally against policies, procedures, and programs that prevent or eliminate discrimination, and often perpetuate the status quo. White people with this attitude believe fairness for all is important and the experiences of People of Color are generally

not noticed. People in this phase think that providing equity would create unfair environments for white people because it would grant advantage to racial minorities (Rowe et al., 1994).

The third attitude type in this category is the reactive type. Individuals with this attitude understand racial discrimination is real and hold views synonymous with understanding the white racial privilege they hold. They tend to see the commonalties between racial groups and they support equity. Within this category, there is a continuum stretching from passive to active. Passive expression includes an intellectualization around accepting racially minoritized people. Some people with this attitude may continue to learn about People of Color as a way to gain acceptance and prove themselves to other white people. Active reactive attitudes may show up as paternalistic and suggested ideas based on normative white experiences (Rowe et al., 1994).

The final attitude type in this category is the integrative attitude. White people with this attitude type generally have a thorough understanding of their white identity and understand the complexities of race. People with this level of consciousness are often realistic about and tempered in their approach to racial equity (Rowe et al., 1994).

Understanding white identity development stage and consciousness models, along with whiteness, white supremacy culture, white privilege, white fragility, and white shame are all extremely important in understanding the way white administrators in higher education operate in their positions. While these models are important to understand, they serve solely to demonstrate the complexities of understanding whiteness.

Critiques of White Identity Models

White identity models have been critiqued as they fail to extend past the Black/white binary (Miller & Fellows, 2007) which perpetuates the either/or thinking associated with white supremacy culture (Okun & Jones, 2001). Similarly, these models posit that identity

development is linear in nature, fail to explain how white people move between stages and attitudes, suggest white people who are not at the highest stage are less than or not good, and fail to address how white identities intersect with other social identities (Miller & Fellows, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991). Miller and Fellows (2007) alternatively proposed that white people experience dilemmas as opposed to stages: examining privilege, defining self with a white group membership, addressing and managing, and processing lifestyles to assist in anti-racist work. The following sections will explore these concepts as they relate specifically to higher education and student affairs.

Whiteness in Higher Education

Whiteness and Colleges/Universities

White racial identity development and white fragility have been applied within higher education through white student identity development in race-based or multicultural courses at PWIs, or historically white colleges or universities (HWCUs). Bonilla-Silva (2015) purposefully refers to HWCUs as such to illuminate the normative invisibility of white racial history. According to Gillborn (2005), "race inequity and racism are central features of the education system. These are not aberrant nor accidental phenomena that will be ironed out in time, they are fundamental characteristics of the system" (p. 498), stating that policies within the education system are acts of white supremacy. In higher education, there are often diversity agendas or initiatives to assert that they are inclusive, when they should actually be working towards being just and equitable (Stewart, 2017).

However, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) posit that despite diversity commitments, HWCUs have failed at increasing racial diversity among their faculty and state that this is a direct result of the protection of whiteness and an erasure of naming white power in the job

descriptions and hiring process. The authors give an overview of the "illustrative practices that serve to block greater diversification of academic units and thereby protect the inherent whiteness of HWCUs" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 561) which includes unnamed whiteness and measures of white success throughout each stage of the process. Constructive alternatives are given for each step of the process, ultimately encouraging white faculty to consider how a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding of white identity and consciousness, and seeing themselves as the "choir" in the work is what is keeping racial inequity in the academic workforce in place (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Speaking on campus ecology, Cabrera et al. (2016) discuss the importance of disrupting whiteness on college campuses, specifically focusing on the difference between safety and inclusion and preserving white comfort. White students, faculty, and staff need to experience dissonance in their white identities in order to disrupt racism (Cabrera et al., 2016).

Higher education, as a system, is often posited as more liberal than other organizations with most higher education professionals seeing themselves as liberal. DiAngelo (2011) stated "whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequality and domination" (p. 64). This enables white people to be selective in when, how, or how often they address racial inequity (DiAngelo, 2011). It also preserves the concept of race neutrality. Race neutrality in higher education recreates white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005; Cabrera et al., 2016) and leads to inequitable treatment for Students of Color (Nebeker, 1998). According to Poon (2018), "systemic and cultural anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism have been foundational to the establishment and expansion of higher education in the U.S." (p. 21). This serves to preserve and maintain white innocence (Poon, 2018). To counteract this, social

justice and equity work need to become the foundation for the work they do and needs to not be used as an additive to make it look like they are promoting equity with little to no actual support for Students of Color. They do this by strategically ending white innocence by understanding and dismantling the systems of oppression that are currently foundational to higher education policies and practices (Poon, 2018). Ending white innocence includes shifting the thought process from *was this racist* to *how was this racist and how am I responsible.* The section below addresses equity and access in higher education.

Equity Initiatives

Research shows diversity initiatives are often postulated as the work of students, faculty, and Staff of Color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). White people do not see themselves as raced and, as a result, they also do not see themselves as diverse. Therefore, diversity education is only needed when BIPOC are present (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). By making the work of "diversity" the work of BIPOC, white administrators are using their privilege to opt out of racial equity work (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Using diversity agendas as a means of advancing racial equity within higher education is problematic as they are derived from the framework of white inclusion. Iverson (2007) postulates that diversity policies posit Students of Color as outsiders to the university, comparing achievement and success to their white counterparts. Diversity, at the university level, is only deemed important because it is beneficial to white students' learning (Closson, 2010).

White administrators, particularly college presidents, play a role in perpetuating oppression and can also play a role in advancing equity initiatives. There are three main findings about the role of college presidents in advancing equity in higher education (Kezar et al., 2008). First, there has to be horizontal leadership with various webs of support, stressing a non-linear

model of leadership. Second, there has to be interconnectedness and collaboration among key players including administrators, faculty, staff, students, boards, and various organizations, with special emphasis given to the role of student affairs staff (Kezar et al., 2008; Kezar & Eckel, 2007). These key constituents need to work together to hire people committed to advancing social justice and focus on hiring and retaining Staff of Color. College presidents need to support this hiring and play a direct role. Third, through utilizing strategies within the human resource frame, college presidents need to support faculty and staff in their equity efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kezar et al., 2008).

Leaders of organizations, and in this case, college presidents, need to respond to advancing equity by working together to help Students of Color: "Organizational learning will not help support Students of Color unless it is spread among key groups that share responsibility for their success" (Kezar & Eckel, 2007, p. 22). While working together is critically important, it is also important to shift the narrative to thinking about how white student affairs administrators can understand their identities and organizations within the context of whiteness to create environments where Students of Color can be regarded for their strengths and not the ways they need help navigating an institution that was not set up for them. One of the ways white student affairs administrators can advance equity in a positive way is by understanding their white identities and by sitting with the complexity of feelings associated with illuminating what it means to be white. Understanding these feelings and sharing their affective responses as they hold themselves accountable with other whites will also lead to dismantling whiteness within themselves (Manglitz, 2003).

White Student Identity Development

While there are limited studies on white student affairs administrators' identity development, there are several studies on white students. These white students ultimately become the administrators of the future. This section will explore this research.

In a study of 62 white undergraduate men at a HWCU, Cabrera and Corces-Zimmerman (2017) found that most participants demonstrated racial ignorance, were dismissive to the idea that white privilege exists, and felt they experienced reverse racism in society, suggesting that universities need to do more to help white students reflect on issues of racism and white supremacy (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). Showing more promise, Ford (2012), like Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984), found that white participants in a HWCU learned about whiteness from intra-group white racial identity (IWRID) groups focused on dialogue. Similarly, Cook and McCoy (2017) documented how, through white affinity training sessions focused on identity, white participants reported deeper understanding of key concepts: a) segregation in racial training is necessary, b) white people need to learn from other white people, c) being "colorblind" is not good, and d) racism still exists. These concepts were in direct opposition to messages white students stated they received growing up (Cook & McCoy, 2017).

Limited research has been done on white identity development of students at two-year institutions. However, Ellis (2004) conducted a study on white student identity development at a predominantly Hispanic two-year college in southern California. This was a mixed methods study and included data from 150 white students who were involved in organizations at their community college. Results showed that white students often did not think about their whiteness or the implications of their whiteness. They had limited understanding of white privilege and often felt like at their institution they experienced reverse racism (Ellis, 2004). Participants

"simply accepted societal messages about racial/ethnic group membership and believed in the normalcy and superiority of whiteness and white culture" (Ellis, 2004, p. 756), which is consistent with the initial stages of white identity development proposed by Hardiman (1982).

Findings from most research studies on white identity development of students are extremely consistent. White students have had limited opportunity to engage in conversations about whiteness and often are somewhere in the early stages of WRID (Cook & McCoy, 2017). Findings suggest that white students benefit from conversations on white consciousness and often experience feelings of shame, guilt, and defensiveness through the process (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017), which are all reactions consistent with DiAngelo's (2011, 2018) concept of white fragility. White consciousness conversations are necessary as "white students are constantly engaging in racist actions but usually without the knowledge that what they are doing is oppressive" (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017, p. 311). It is important for white students to understand and interrogate their whiteness as a way of disrupting systemic oppression and to minimize harm done to Students of Color (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). Therefore, white student affairs administrators' understanding of white identity development and their ability to navigate white fragility is important and crucial as it applies to higher education.

Student Affairs Administrators

Student Affairs Roles and Responsibilities

Understanding the roles and responsibilities of student affairs administrators, both historically and currently is necessary for the context of this study. It is also important to note most professionals during the 20th century were white identified (Hevel, 2016). Similarly, among all higher education administrators in 2016, 86% racially identified as white (Seltzer, 2017).

Historically, primary roles of student affairs administrators were to oversee the housing and discipline of students, including inspecting private housing and the overall operation of residence halls (Hevel, 2016). Early on, there was often a dissonance between providing discipline and providing advising and support for students within higher education (Williamson et al., 1949). In the early 1910's, the roles of housing and discipline expanded for many deans at universities to include the role of advising various student government organizations, career counseling, maintaining health records, and assisting with academic advising (Herdlein, 2004, 2005; Hevel, 2016; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012). This shift is indicative of many of the functional areas present within student affairs today (Hevel, 2016). There are now 36 positions that are generally included under the umbrella of student affairs (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018) which "can be broadly classified into 'leadership' (top officers, heads, supervisors) or 'frontline' (coordinator, standard, or counselor) position" (p. 4). In 1949, the American Council on Education Studies published about the importance of the student personnel movement which posited that individual students and groups of students should be treated individually and not just as names on rosters, which is one of the earliest direct references to student affairs (Williamson et al., 1949).

To best explain the current roles and responsibilities of student affairs professionals, it is important to understand the competencies set forth by two primary organizations: College Student Educators International (ACPA), founded in 1924 (ACPA, n.d.) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), founded in 1919 (NASPA, n.d.). Student affairs practice requires a variety of skillsets including high level critical thinking skills, creativity, verbal, and writing communication (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). Ten competency areas have been set by NASPA and ACPA to expand on the specifics of these skillsets regardless of

functional area. These competencies include the critical skills, knowledge areas, and personal

dispositions of all student affairs professionals (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a). Each competency

area also includes proficiency levels of foundational, intermediate, and advanced (ACPA &

NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). While a professional may reach advanced proficiency in one area, it is

important for that mastery in multiple situations and contexts. Professionals must adapt to

changing concepts and must continue professional development in order to remain at an

advanced level.

These ten competencies include: personal and ethical foundations (PEF), values,

philosophy, and history (VPH), assessment, evaluation, and research (AER), law, policy, and

governance (LPG), advising and supporting (A/S), organizational and human resources (OHR),

leadership (LEAD), student learning and development (SLD), technology (TECH), and social

justice and inclusion (SJI) (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). The most applicable to this study

are below.

PEF "involves the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop and maintain integrity

in one's life and work" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, p. 12). Incorporated in this area is the premise

that student affairs professionals are committed to personal growth and wellness. Personal and

ethical foundations are in alignment when administrators' internal locus drives their integrity and

is informed by their lived experiences and their internal sense of care. White student affairs

professionals can grow in this area through self-reflection, curiosity, and self-authorship (ACPA

& NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). Self-reflection in white identity is important in minimizing harm.

VPH involves understanding the history of student affairs, the current values, and how

that aligns with the way professionals show up in practice (ACPA & NAPSA, 2015a, 2015b).

Understanding the historical context of student affairs, who it was intended for, who it originally

served, and how it aligns with operation today is important in informing practice. Student affairs professionals need have to have a foundational understanding of whiteness embedded in the profession in order to provide equity in education today.

With focus on the skills, knowledge, and disposition of policy creation and implementation, LPG also centers the complexities of governance structure within each respective division and university (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015) and administrators' ability to navigate such structures. It is imperative student affairs administrators understand the current policies as barriers and facilitators for minoritized student success. This can happen through interrogating whiteness engrained into policy.

SJI is both a process and a goal that leads to equity for all while understanding and addressing issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Student affairs professionals must understand their own identities, the identities of others, and how that situates them in the context of power, privilege, and oppression. One of the ways to do this is by raising social consciousness and reducing harm (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b). This competency is most directly related to white student affairs administrators understanding their whiteness.

Manning (2009) states that all student affairs administrators have a perspective on diversity, or "work about difference" (p. 11). It is important they understand their positions as it applies to diversity and their approach. There are seven positions which include "political correctness, historical analysis, color (or difference) blindness, diversity, cultural pluralism, anti-oppression, and social justice" (Manning, 2009, p. 11). It is necessary to understand each other's perspectives within student affairs to makes sure everyone is talking about the same topic, so they don't just think they understand the topic when they may not.

Political correctness refers to shifting language to seem more inclusive without shifting philosophies or reflecting on power, privilege, and oppression (Manning, 2009). Meanwhile, historical analysis refers to how student affairs professionals use their historical learnings to understand the world and each other. This is in alignment with the VPH competency within student affairs (ACPA & NAPSA, 2015a, 2015b). Most of the history known is from the perspective of those in power, often giving inaccurate depictions of reality. This can be problematic when false narratives or even accurate narratives of history lead to defensiveness and inaction (Manning, 2009).

Color evasiveness, unlike the definition by Annamma et al. (2016), is more general and includes the basis of ignoring difference in power, privilege, and oppression by justifying that all humans are inherently equal (Manning, 2009). Diversity, also referred to as structural diversity (Parker & Pascarella, 2013; Manning, 2009), refers to the number of minoritized bodies on campus. Many student affairs administrators use this concept to project that universities are equitable because diversity is educationally beneficial. However, "simply increasing the numbers of diverse people on a college campus does not change the power structure to more equitable forms" (Manning, 2009, p. 14). In many cases, power is not redistributed and the people who already have the power get to maintain it, while little is done to actually address inequity (Manning, 2009).

Cultural pluralism refers to coexistence between people with different identities, who are each secure in their identities, and who would like rights extended to other identities. This often shows up as assimilation or forcing marginalized groups to give up their culture to adopt to the dominant culture (usually through violence) or acculturation where cultures are willingly blended by choice. Acculturation can happen positively, where there are culturally appropriate

celebrations and negatively where dominant groups can appropriate a culture for capital gain (Manning, 2009).

Positive acculturation can happen through practicing anti-oppression, which is necessary to dismantle systems of oppression. Student affairs professionals must first understand oppression before they are able to dismantle it, which requires transformation. This position is more concerned with changing and transforming systems of power than equity alone. There is a shift of power to working with marginalized communities versus exerting power over communities (Manning, 2009).

Social justice is similar to anti-oppression as they are both rooted in transformation. Social justice is different as it is both a process and a goal (Manning, 2009, ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b) and focuses on the outcomes while anti-oppression focuses on the cause (Manning, 2009). It is encompassing of all discriminatory and inequitable practices where power is unequal (Manning, 2009). While ACPA and NASPA set SJI as an important competency and skillset within student affairs, implementing social justice is a challenge that many professionals experience (Karunaratne et al., 2016). Understanding how to critically take action with social justice initiatives and understanding how to do so while being identity conscious is important because white student affairs administrators must understand their positions in order to dismantle systems.

White Student Affairs Administrators

While there is limited research on the topic, there are a few studies examining white student affairs administrators and some additional literature about student affairs preparation programs. Below is an overview of this research.

Bondi (2012) conducted a study consisting of eight white participants who had just recently graduated with their master's from a student affairs program. This study, through semi-structured interviews, focused on the protection of whiteness by students in this program. CRT was used as an analysis tool. Findings showed that white students protected whiteness in three ways. First, students often felt they had the right to learn even at the expense of Students of Color. Second, students felt they should be centered in learning about race/racism, and, lastly, students protected their privilege of exclusion by maintaining segregation in the classroom (Bondi, 2012). This study provides context on how future white student affairs professionals are protecting whiteness. It also shows the need for white identity development.

This is consistent with findings on how white student affairs administrators, who identify as women protect their whiteness (Mata, 2018). Findings from 23 participants on how they felt about race issues and perceptions of themselves in the workplace showed that participants minimized their whiteness based on their gender identity, emotionally resisted conversations about race, distanced themselves from relevant terminology about race, and centered whiteness. This happened through displaying emotions to perpetuate and uphold privilege inherent in white supremacy and using other identities to minimize attention on racial issues (Mata, 2018), which is consistent with Bondi (2012) and findings by Young-Law (2012). Most of the participants did not feel they had power as white women in student affairs and did not own or recognize the amount of power they had as white individuals (Mata, 2018; Poon, 2018).

While many studies on whiteness are qualitative in nature, a quantitative study on the connections of white racial consciousness and multicultural competence among white student affairs professionals showed that white professionals who understood the meaning and implications of being white as it relates to privilege appeared to have an increased level of

multicultural competency compared to those who had not (Mueller & Pope, 2001). Participants who had more robust conceptual understanding of racism as a construct related to increased competence (Mueller & Pope, 2001). Therefore, having a positive white identity is important in understanding implications of race and white supremacy culture (Mueller & Pope, 2001; Helms, 1990).

Summary

Race influences every aspect of people's lives (Haney Lopez, 1996); therefore, white people must also see themselves in the narrative of race (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018; Haney Lopez, 1996). As a social construct, race was created to justify the mistreatment of Black and Brown people in the United States and is responsible for the creation of white privilege. This power and privilege allowed for the normalization of white as standard; thus, the concept of whiteness emerged. Embedded in whiteness are legal, social, political, and economic advantages for those who are white or are raced as white in the United States (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). These advantages become normalized and unnamed creating white supremacy culture, which include concepts of power hoarding, perfectionism, either/or thinking, and a sense of urgency, to name a few (Okun & Jones, 2001). Components of white supremacy culture are present in every organization and are, therefore, present within higher education and student affairs. As a result, white privilege and white fragility prosper, allowing for the maintenance of whiteness within organizations. As noted earlier, whiteness is synonymous with racism, and therefore, needs to be interrogated and understood. In order to promote racial equity in higher education, it becomes necessary for white administrators to understand and develop positive white identities. This study, focusing on white administrators and their understanding of whiteness, utilizing race neutrality, color-evasiveness, white privilege, white fragility, white shame, and white supremacy

culture as its conceptual framework, seeks to explain the implications of whiteness in higher

education.

Chapter Three: Method

This study focuses on white student affairs administrators' understanding of whiteness. There have been limited studies on white student affairs administrators (Bondi, 2012; Mata, 2019; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Young-Law, 2012) and this study seeks to fill that gap in order to contribute knowledge to the field and promote racial equity within higher education. In framing this study, multiple sources were utilized to give context to whiteness and white identity, and to provide an overview of current competencies of student affairs administrators from a historical and current day perspective.

Specifically, this study seeks to understand white student affairs administrators and their understanding of whiteness and will serve to explain participants' experiences. This study contributes to the growing body of literature to better understand race and the implications and perpetuation of racism through understanding dominant racial identities.

The following research questions guide this study.

1. How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

2. How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

Overview of Qualitative Methodology

The epistemological approach of this study is transformative as the researcher seeks to generate "knowledge that can serve the society studied, whether through immediate impact on a decision, through shaping people's understandings of a complex topic, through interpreting and reinterpreting the meaning of events, or through actions that can empower participants" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 17). Transformative learning often refers to how adults come to

form their own understanding, beliefs, and values and pushes back against socialized learning (Mezirow, 2003). Many white adults do not see themselves as raced in the United States and have been socialized to internalize racist practices and beliefs as a result. The researcher sought to understand how participants have come to understand their racial identities and the process of their understanding. The approach is transformative as it relates to contributing to social change and is critical as it relates to interrogating and understanding systems of power, privilege, and oppression.

This study was a phenomenological study that utilized semi-structured interviews and individual informal follow-up meetings as the data collection method. In alignment with Dahlberg et al. (2001), "a person doing phenomenological research is interested in the way that consciousness grasps an object or event as something, as it is meant" (p. 56), which is referred to as intentionality by Husserl (1913/1962). This study merges the ideas of intentionality (Husserl, 1913/1962), of-ness (Vagle, 2018), and consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1962) as the researcher sought to understand how participants become conscious of their white racial identity and how they become intentional about co-conspiring to reduce racism on college campuses. While these ideas are utilized to explain consciousness, they fall short of examining the roles of power, privilege, and oppression as it relates to social identities and do not account for the reality that whiteness is both a learned behavior, which one needs to learn to be conscious of, and an unconscious identity, which lives in the subconscious.

Therefore, this study also utilized a critical phenomenological approach of ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2019), which is "a person's unconscious habit of assuming that all spaces are rightfully available for the person to enter comfortably" (p. 249) and is a common occurring phenomenon of white people, who hold social privilege. Ontological expansiveness

(2019) also allowed the researcher to engage participants in critical awareness of whiteness and provided a framework for analyzing participants as it relates to their linguistic and physical use of space. This critical methodology assisted with analyzing the ways participants non-verbally displayed whiteness and emotions attached to whiteness, such as crying, heavy breathing, apprehensiveness, etc.

One of the strengths of this methodology is the connection and connectedness between participants (Vagle, 2018, p. 28), which posits that we are all connected to each other. This study looks at the connections between white student affairs administrators and racism and how white people and BIPOC are interconnected through systems of power, privilege, and oppression. As such, we are all positioned in "particular spaces at particular moments in time…this positioning is only known through intentionality" (Vagle, 2018, p. 31). The way white student affairs professionals operate in space and presume comfort in space can only be known through their understanding of ontological expansiveness (Sullivan 2019). As a researcher, I use the ideas of connectedness and ontological expansiveness as they relate to data analysis. While this study illuminated white student affairs' experiences with being white, the connectedness between participants' essence of the phenomenon was important to counteract the individualism inherit in white culture and white experience. Referred to as lifeworld (Husserl, 1913/1962), the findings from this study contribute to understanding white student affairs professionals' human experience as it relates to their racial and professional identities.

Some limitations of phenomenological research are the ongoing arguments about subjectivity and objectivity in the analysis process (Shi, 2011) referring to the difficulty of researchers not bringing their own biases and reflections to the analysis method. However,

Giorgi (1983) argues that this can be minimized when researchers bracket their assumptions during the analysis phase.

The research questions for this study ask participants to describe their experiences as it relates to race, student affairs, and race in student affairs. This study is directly situated within the context of the participants describing their lifeworlds as it relates to their identities, in alignment with fundamental tenants of phenomenology (Husserl, 1913/1962). Therefore, this study was best suited as a phenomenological study, utilizing semi-structured interviews and informal individual conversations, as it seeks to explain participants' experience with whiteness and hopes to uncover "the essence or basic structure of experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26) of what it means to be white and a professional in student affairs.

Researcher's Role

As a white, queer, cis woman with ADHD, who believes in anti-racist work and racial equity, I grapple with the dissonance of not distancing myself from other white people as I continue on my own journey towards anti-racism, while ensuring that as a researcher, I am not captive to whiteness while capturing and understanding whiteness. As a white student affairs administrator who currently works in an identity and equity office in student affairs, I am committed to understanding whiteness, white privilege, white fragility, how these concepts are situated within higher education, and the impact they have on students, faculty, and Staff of Color.

During my first professional job working in an equity center several years ago, I was asked to lead a discussion on why white people needed to talk about race by my supervisor who racially identifies as a Person of Color. At the time, I had no idea why it was important to discuss, had no idea that racism was anything besides individual racist beliefs and behaviors held

by some people, and I had no idea what my role was supposed to be in creating racial equity. I remember feeling afraid, inadequate, and ashamed that I did not understand the importance especially because I was committed to social justice and equity. It was far easier to see the ways I experienced marginalization based on my gender and sexual identities than it was to understand or believe that I also experienced power and privilege in my dominant identities. Even my identity as a queer woman with ADHD are experienced through my dominant white and cisgender identities. I have since gone on a journey of critical consciousness in order to understand the interplay between all of my various identities and the ways I perpetuate harm. It is an ongoing journey that will never end. The more I learn about myself, the more I realize there is more to unpack and discover. During this journey, I started to understand the truth of individual, cultural, and systemic racism, and I also realized racism is structurally rooted in power; the power of hundreds of years of policies, laws, and actions created, maintained, and perpetuated by people who look like me- white people.

My role as a white person committed to anti-racism is to deconstruct the ways I have been socialized to be racist and to hold other white people accountable for the same, all while elevating BIPOC in ways that should have and have not been afforded to them based on these maintained systems of dominance and oppression. My role as a researcher during this study was to examine the ways other white student affairs professionals understood their whiteness in order to move towards racial equity on college campuses.

As suggested earlier, it was crucial I reflected on the ways my identities were situated within the study and imperative I constantly interrogated my understanding of self and others to reduce and minimize bias. Similarly, each participant understood their identities and the roles they played in student affairs through their individual lenses. Given this was a phenomenological

study, the purpose was for participants to describe their experiences as it related to their racial identity and student affairs work. As a researcher, it was my job to make meaning of the way participants described their experiences as it related to the conceptual framework. Based on my shared identities with the participants and my practical experience working within a social justice, identity, and equity office, there were preconceived hopes and expectations for this study.

As someone who shares racial and professional identities with the participants of this study, I am afforded an insider view on my topic. In many ways, I believe this to be beneficial. My racial identity may have made participants feel understood and less afraid to share their experiences about the phenomenon studied. It may have also been a barrier as participants might have wanted to be seen as the 'good white person' and may not have shared authentically and/or honestly out of fear of how I perceived them. My professional role may have also created a barrier to participants' sharing out of the perception that I know more about or engage more frequently in conversations about race due to power associated with my role.

My personal connection to the study and my past and current experiences understanding my own racial identity influenced the sequence of questions in my interview protocol. Reflecting on the ways I came to know myself as white in relation to systems allowed me the opportunity to create a protocol that would allow participants to share their experiences in a scaffolded way. The sequence of the protocol was helpful to assist them in understanding the question prompt as this interview may be the first time participants intentionally answered questions about their racial identity and/or their racial identity in relation to their student affairs identity.

Since I am directly connected to the identities and topic I am studying, it was important as a researcher to illuminate bias in order to reduce and manage it. To minimize this bias and to hold myself accountable, I:

- conducted interviews in alignment with the interview protocol and design;

- utilized open ended questions that did not attempt to lead or influence participant responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016);

- analyzed and reported all data in alignment with the study design and stated methodology;

- kept a reflexive journal;

- conducted member-checks with my participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985);

- consulted a peer-debriefer and my dissertation committee, while maintaining participant confidentiality; and

- bracketed judgements, in alignment with *epoche*, to illuminate consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).

Protection of Human Subjects

A pilot study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and is included as data in this study. Consent is extremely important as it relates to doing research with human participants. As such, once determination that criteria was met, each participant was given a consent form and was given ample time to read over, ask questions, and complete (see Appendix A). Throughout the study, at any point, participants were able to withdraw their consent and all data from these participants were destroyed.

Since this study was about dominant identities, there was minimal psychological risk because there is no historical trauma or oppression as it relates to identifying as white in the

United States. However, all participants were given resources for an employee assistance program that offers free counseling to any individual that works at this particular university.

There was no disclosure of individual participation in this study and therefore, there were no social risks. Given the high number of employees at the study site who worked in student affairs and solely identified as white, there was minimal risk of deductive disclosure. Pseudonyms were also used. The low number of participants actually lowered the risk of deductive disclosure since there was such a small percentage of participants as it relates to those who would qualify. While there were no specific individual benefits guaranteed as a result of participation in this study, findings give participants and readers a greater understanding of the role whiteness plays in higher education.

Additionally, all participants selected or were given a pseudonym based on their preferences. These pseudonyms, along with the date and first and last initial of the participants were saved in a locking file cabinet in the researcher's office. All audio files and transcriptions were saved on Dropbox, a secure file storage platform offering two factor authentication and end-to-end encryption, which requires strong passwords. Information was saved with pseudonyms. All information uploaded to Dedoose also only include participants' pseudonyms.

As stated earlier, all data was saved in password-protected online spaces in order to protect confidentiality. In addition, all participants were given the option to determine the location of their interview in order to ensure participants comfort during the process. For in person-interviews, the location was set by the researcher, if one was not offered by the participant and was in a location where meetings took place throughout the day. Traffic from participants did not seem alarming and was in alignment with regular operations in that space. This space had lockable doors, thick walls, and blinds so that people could not see in. All virtual

interviews were password protected. All interviews scheduled were through a private calendar invite unless the participants requested not to receive a calendar invite. The researcher maintained ethical considerations in alignment with what was approved by the IRB.

In order to address ethics and reduce risk, the researcher ensured that participants did not share their name during the interview. Additionally, participants were reminded throughout the study that participation was optional. While breach of confidentiality was a minimal risk, this risk was mitigated through conversations with the participants about location of interviews and scheduling. All other risk were mitigated through intentional separation of documents with identifiable data from participant data. However, there is a small chance that participants within the study, if they read the study, will be able to make assumptions about participants. There will not be enough identifiable data to ascertain participants for certain.

Sampling

In order to meet criteria for this study, participants had to racially identify as white and work in a designated student affairs field or a field that does student affairs work within higher education. All participants had at least three years of experience working full-time in higher education, post graduate school by the start of the first interview. This study excluded any participant that did not solely identify racially as white. Participants were all between the ages of 21 and 99 years old. This study included nine participants, who met this criteria, at one large, public institution, located in the Southeast United States.

This sample of participants was suited to answer the research questions based on each of their dual identities in student affairs and as someone who identified racially as only white, which fit with the phenomenon studied. Additionally, the criteria of working professionally for at least three years in student affairs contributed to a greater likelihood of the participant also

holding a student affairs identity. Participants included in this study were information rich as they had a minimum of 21 years within their racial identity, either aware or unaware, and at least three years of professional experience. All participants worked within the division of student affairs or in a functionally related area that situated a commitment to diversity and equity as one of its top five values.

This study was conducted at one large HWCU located in the Southeast region of the United States, which will not be referred to by its name. This particular site had been selected based on proximity to the researcher, its large student affairs division, and its experience with racist incidents over the past few years. This ensured a large recruitment pool as there were more than twenty times the amount of people who met the criteria to recruit from. This also assisted with maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were all employees of this university during the time both semi-structured interviews were conducted, in alignment with the criteria for participation.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used as specific criteria had been set for participation in this study to assist the researcher in answering the two research questions. Purposeful sampling allowed for "information rich" data (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) was also used in this sample as each participant that interviewed was asked to pass the call for participants and the researcher's contact information to other white student affairs administrators who they believed would meet the study criterion. A demographic form (see Appendix B) was provided to each participant before the study to ensure they solely self-identified racially as white. This sampling type was intentionally utilized to assist the researcher in identifying participants that were interested in the study. Due to the researchers' proximity to the research site and involvement with race-based initiatives within student affairs, this sampling

type allowed for the recruitment of participants that the researcher did not personally know or have a relationship with in order to reduce bias in the study.

To recruit participants, the university email system where the research was taking place was utilized as it was open directory information. The researcher also utilized the weekly university student affairs newsletter through the vice president for student affairs to share the recruitment script and link to the demographic form.

As stated previously, this study included nine white student affairs administrators, who had at least three years of experience working full-time in higher education post graduate school. The researcher collected all demographic forms initially until all nine interviews were completed. Interview selection, for those who met criteria, were conducted with folks in a variety of functional areas. Once all interviews were completed, other interested participants were contacted and were told that data saturation had occurred. All of their demographic forms were destroyed. The researcher was mindful of selecting participants with varied functional areas and varied amount of years in the field.

Data Collection Techniques

Data in this phenomenological study was collected in a few ways. First, all interested participants were sent a demographic form, which included information on racial identity, past roles in student affairs, age, and other social identities they held. This information allowed the researcher to determine if the potential participant met the criteria for participation and, if so, provided the researcher with initial information to assist with understanding their experiences before the interviews. Everyone who completed the demographic form was asked to pass the call for participants and the researcher's contact information to other white student affairs

administrators who they believed would meet the study criterion to assist with the snowball sampling utilized in this study. Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Once criteria were met, each participant was given a consent form and was given ample time to read over, ask questions, and complete the form, if they chose to continue in the study. At any point, participants were able to withdraw their consent and all data from those participants were destroyed. Next, the researcher scheduled the first of two semi-structured interviews, lasting about 60-90 minutes each. These interviews were a combination of in-person and virtual. While the original plan was to conduct interviews solely in-person, virtual options were also offered in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, causing a shift to virtual learning. Each interview was transcribed and sent to the participant for member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), directly following transcription and preceding the scheduling of a second interview, to ensure credibility. Following the interviews, some participants self-selected to share their reflections about the pandemic and the uprising against racial injustice, both which occurred after data collection started. All participants were given the opportunity to meet to discuss preliminary findings from the study. All data was saved on the researcher's password protected computer. All transcripts were then uploaded to Dedoose, an online research tool to assist with coding.

Instrumentation

Research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, informal follow-up emails over the course of six months following the second interview, and a demographic form. Two participants were interviewed in person, while the other seven had either a combination of in-person and virtual, and solely virtual interviews. Interviews were audio recorded with a small recording device for in-person interviews and recorded through Webex for virtual interviews.

Audio files were transcribed and, once accuracy was ensured through member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), audio files were deleted.

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were appropriate and were in alignment with assisting participants in sharing their experiences as it related to the phenomenon. All questions were open-ended, which encouraged participants to share more freely about their experiences. Open ended questions included: "On your demographic form, you indicated you work in {field}, please tell me a bit about what that means to you," "What was your first interaction with race?" and, "What is the role of white student affairs professionals in engaging in conversations about racism?" (see Appendix C). A pilot study was also conducted to test the interview protocol and how it aligned with the research questions and methods.

Data Analysis Procedure

In order to understand how white student affairs administrators understood themselves as white and how being white impacted their roles in student affairs, phenomenological research and its appropriate analytic methods were used. Specifically, this study centered around systems of power, privilege, and oppression and therefore, the critical approach of ontological expansiveness was used to ensure the researcher appropriately utilized the conceptual framework of whiteness and concepts in the literature review as part of the analysis process. A critical phenomenological approach of ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2019) encompasses "a person's unconscious habit of assuming that all spaces are rightfully available for the person to enter comfortably" (p. 249).

The first round of analysis included a holistic readthrough of participant transcripts, without taking notes (Vagle, 2018) to become refamiliarized with the data. Next, I completed a

first line-by-line reading of the data and created excerpts and made notes of significant meaning (Vagle, 2018) utilizing the memo feature in Dedoose. This allowed me to bracket preliminary thoughts and illuminate potential bias in the process. The third round of analysis included a second line-by-line reading, focusing on phenomenological reduction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During this phase of the analysis process, I created preliminary codes and identified emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016) based on the line-by-line reading and the memos created during phase two. Because I treated each participant independently when reading the data, over 700 preliminary codes were identified. I then arranged codes by each of the participants and combined like codes, allowing me to gain a better understanding of the "essence of the phenomenon" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 52). The codes were then printed and cut into strips of paper.

In alignment with horizontalization (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), similar codes were chunked across participant. I then physically moved each of the strips of paper and combined like codes together to create codes and subcodes, resulting in 24 initial codes and 31 subcodes. This initial code book included themes such as roles and messages of upbringing, liberal, racism is over there, racism is insidious, perception, white supremacy culture, learning about race, and so on. Example subthemes included identity dissonance, structural diversity, segregation, deficit perspective, policy, and race doesn't come up.

Once the initial code book was developed, I utilized the codes and subcodes to create a color-coded mind map (see Appendix D for an initial version of the map) that included each of the research questions and each of the cogs of the conceptual framework. At this point, I noticed that the conceptual framework did not operate in isolation and was embedded within white supremacy culture. Therefore, the conceptual framework of whiteness was modified to

encompass this change. Utilizing the conceptual framework, I then created interpretive codes by linking codes within the framework, creating a more solidified code book.

During the next phase of analysis, a third read-through of transcripts was conducted and excerpts were assigned themes and codes to make meaning of the data. The themes included distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and student affairs indoctrination, all with a variety of subthemes. Analysis, however, continued through the writing process, allowing me to more explicitly make connections between the themes, the conceptual framework, the literature, and the essence of participants' experiences resulting in some editing of themes.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness in the study, all participants were sent a copy of each of their transcripts. This process was called member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and allowed participants to be part of the process to ensure their interviews were accurate representations of their experiences and gave participants the opportunity to check for errors and accuracy. As part of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), participants were asked for their feedback on their transcripts after each of the interviews. This allowed them to review for accuracy. Participants were also asked to share updates and were given the opportunity to clarify and expand on concepts shared during the first interview during their second interview. The interview protocol was piloted with two participants. Based on feedback, revisions were made to ensure the quality of the protocol. Emergent findings were also shared with participants in the pilot study.

As this study was a dissertation study, the researcher had a dissertation chair, a methodologist, and two additional committee members, which ensured efficacy in alignment

with IRB protocol and departmental guidelines. The researcher worked with a peer debriefer for consultation while maintaining the anonymity of the participants.

Analysis procedures and methods were discussed with the methodologist and the dissertation chair throughout the study and committee members had the opportunity to provide feedback and guidance to ensure the study was conducted within its phenomenological framework.

Limitations

This study included nine white student affairs professionals at a single university in the Southeast region of the United States. While selection was purposeful, a limitation of the study was the amount of experience participants had with understanding their own social identities. For example, some participants had done prior reflection on their racial, gender, sexual, and other identities, whereas, some participants had not thought about the ways their identities shaped their lives or experiences. The study served to look at the common essence of whiteness as it interplays with all of their social identities. A participant's rationale for participation was also a limitation in this study. Although asked during the first interview, a participant's relationship to the study and their desire to participate may have influenced what was shared. For example, participants who self-selected may had already been thinking about their white identity, which could limit the scope of this study. Since this was a phenomenological study, the number of participants selected was in alignment with the methodological recommendations. While this sample of the population shared their experiences, these nine participants cannot share the essence of every white student affairs professional's experience with whiteness. This offers a limited perspective.

A limitation as it relates to phenomenology is the impossibility in truly conducting a bias-free study. While recognizing bias is important and setting aside judgment are key factors in phenomenological studies, as human beings it is hard to truly operate without judgment. However, in alignment with Giorgi (1983), this can be minimized when researchers bracket their assumptions during the analysis phase. This limitation was also be addressed through conferring with the dissertation committee during the study.

Summary and Transition

This chapter provided a methodological overview of the study. This study was a phenomenological study, with the purpose of understanding the essence of what it means to be a white student affairs administrator as it relates to whiteness. Purposeful (Patton, 2002) and snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) was used to recruit nine white student affairs administrators who solely identified racially as white, had at least three years student affairs experience, and who worked at this one specific university. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted, followed by individual informal emails by participants who self-selected, and all data was analyzed utilizing line-by-line coding as it relates to the conceptual framework.

Chapter four will provide an analysis of the data, along with emergent themes. Chapter five will include a summary of the study, conclusions based on the analyzed data, discussion on the role of the findings, and implications for the practical application of findings on college campuses.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

Chapter four features a participant summary, including information about each participant's upbringing, years in student affairs, and features a participant quote that allows the reader to become more acquainted to each of the participants. This chapter also provides an overview of each of the six themes: distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and student affairs indoctrination, and concludes with a summary of the chapter.

The purpose of this study was to understand how white student affairs administrators understood whiteness, how participants described their white identity and whiteness, and how white student affairs administrators perceived this part of their identity informing their work.

The two primary research questions for this study were:

1. How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

2. How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

Participant Summary

Abby

Abby (she/her/hers) identified as a white, able-bodied, Jewish woman with over 11 years of experience in student affairs. At the time of her interviews, she had been in her position for less than a year. Abby desired to spend her entire career within student affairs and aspired to become a vice chancellor within the division in the future. She valued the students and the ways students benefited from programs, events, and conversations within her role.

While Abby worked in the Southeast for over 10 years, she grew up in the Northeast and lived in a predominantly white neighborhood for most of her childhood life, although she moved several times. She described her parents as both liberal and pure and shared that they provided the foundation for her understanding of racial equity and her passion to make the world a better place, although they did not explicitly talk about what it meant to be white.

Abby experienced dissonance between her white and Jewish identities, but also shared that her minoritized faith identity was an access point for her to understand power, privilege, and oppression. The access point was born out of the empathy Abby had for others based on knowing what it felt like to be treated as different or othered. Throughout Abby's interview, she commented on wanting to support and advocate for her Black colleagues and her Colleagues of Color. She shared examples of times she followed through, the times she missed, and the feelings associated with both.

> I'm in my head a lot. I don't know if I'm almost more in tune to it now, maybe because I supervise People of Color, but I'm almost always aware or thinking about how they feel in a situation and then how I come across and like constantly navigating that. Because I know that one person, I know that that's on their mind a lot. So, I almost want that to be on my mind too, so that I can try my best to support in some way. But I know, it's still not the same. I'm not someone of Color. So, they still might not feel 100% comfortable, but I hope that they feel like I'm in their corner.

Amber

Amber (she/her/hers) identified as a cis-het, able-bodied, white woman, who also had over 11 years of experience in student affairs, with four years of experience at the university. She had been in her current position at the university for less than a year at the time of her interview

as well. She transitioned into higher education after realizing how much she enjoyed mentoring college students. While she has worked in student affairs for most of her career, she shared that she did not feel like she had a student affairs identity.

Amber grew up primarily in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, but moved around a lot due to her father's military career. Her family did not talk about race or racism and she grew up in mostly white neighborhoods in military housing. She vividly remembered the first time she realized she was white when her family moved to Hawaii. Amber was one of the only white children in the school and she felt uncomfortable and afraid she would be bullied, after having seen another white child be bullied at lunch. She shared:

> My first knowledge that race was a thing was when I moved to Hawaii and I learned that the word Hoale meant white. And when it was yelled at you, it was not in a good way. And that's when I first realized that, we, as this white military family, had moved to this island that doesn't belong to us. And there's probably a lot of hurt and pain in that and sort of even just being 10 or 11 years old and understanding that race mattered all of a sudden in a way it never had before.

Brad

Brad (he/him/his) identified as a white, heterosexual, able-bodied man with over 26 years in higher education. He worked in both academic and student affairs during his career in various regions across the United States and had been in his position at this university for a little over two years at the time of the interviews. Connectivity and mentorship were what attracted and kept Brad in the field for all of these years. He, like many other participants, described being an overly involved student during his undergraduate career, which allowed for him to enter into the field after he graduated.

Brad primarily grew up in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United states, in a very affluent and white neighborhood. He shared that he lived in what was the second wealthiest zip code in the country at the time. His parents highly valued education and it was always an expectation that he attend college. Brad's father worked for the government and distinctly remembered receiving messages about the importance of his father not showing bias. In turn, Brad did not have many conversations about race or gender growing up and felt this was a detriment to his current understanding. He shared,

> I think my upbringing left me where a lot of things that I've experienced in my life since then have been very flawed. Just weren't part of my upbringing. Everything from dealing with folks from different racial backgrounds, socio economic backgrounds to dealing with things like mental illness and divorce and all those things. It's been so foreign to me. So, it's made life the entire learning process.

Gary

Gary (he/him/his) identified as a white, cis-het, able-bodied man with over 22 years of experience in student affairs. At the time of his interview, he had been in his position for 2 years at this university. Gary was specifically interested in the why behind students' experiences and was driven by both data and assessment. Although he worked in a variety of capacities, he was most interested in student recruitment and retention.

Gary grew up in what he called the "most traditional middle class, mid-America" where his mom stayed home and his dad went to work. He described his upbringing as more working-middle class and shared his family's commitment to relationships. He commented that his parents, siblings, and himself were all in heterosexual, married relationships and that his upbringing was very paternalistic in nature. Gary also described his parents as "quintessential,

borderline bigots" and recalled messages around his parents not necessarily liking Black people, as a group, but liking Black individuals. He, however, shared that his family did not talk about race or racism except for when it "influenced perceived negative actions" against his family. He shared that his family were not big on deep discussions, stating:

> One thing about my family is that they're not real big topic-discussion people. We're not, again, that concept of reflection and topics of that nature are just not really in my family's personalities. To this day, I know very little about my parents' childhood and upbringing. That's just not something they talk about. It's not that they're resistant to it, it's just not a part of the way they discuss things. And so that reflective or conversation or topical about, well, let's sit around the dinner table and have a topic of the evening, it's not really the way my family works to this day.

Jacob

Jacob (he/him/his) identified as a white, cisgender, gay, abled-bodied man with almost four years of experience in student affairs. At the time of his interview, he had worked in his current position for a year and a half. Jacob also desired to continue his career in higher education, but was unsure about whether he would continue to work in student affairs or transition into academic affairs as a faculty member. He really enjoyed student interaction and knew that whatever position he was in, he would like it to involve daily interaction with students.

Jacob grew up in the Midwest region of the United States and in one of the most racially diverse counties in his state. He shared that there was a large population of Arab-Americans within the county, but later shared that his specific neighborhood, including his high school was predominantly white. He lived with both of his parents, his sibling, and his grandmother for most

of his life. Jacob recalled that his first interaction with race was after 9/11 when he first realized that people negatively perceived people who were Muslim, sharing

> I think 9/11 for me as a whole was one of the very first times in my life where someone framed this idea of people are just generally bad in the world. And I think unfortunately a lot of profiling happened with Muslim folks after 9/11. And I kind of remember that it, you know, not just, you know, day to day, but in media and things like that.

Kevin

Kevin (he/him/his) identified as a white, cisgender, gay, able-bodied man with eight years of professional experience in student affairs all at universities within the Southeast region of the United states. At the time of his interview, he had been in his position for one year, but had been at the university for five years. Kevin felt like student affairs was a field where he could not only be himself, but serve with purpose. He most enjoyed helping first year students.

Kevin grew up in a Southern college town with both of his parents and his two siblings. He described his town as rural with suburban qualities, predominantly white, conservative and as a town with a big culture for football, stating it was "Friday Night Lights-esque." He was raised as a Southern Baptist, which guided much of his upbringing, although he does not practice anymore. Kevin was the first in his family to move away and not return home. He shared that his first interaction with race was when he entered graduate school and participated in a privilege walk activity. He recounted that it was jarring and induced feelings of "typical white guilt." He also shared that he came from a family of educators and that education was in his DNA. He shared that his family did not necessarily have conversations about race and racism, but that his parents both worked with People of Color. Kevin had a particularly difficult time when he

realized that his family members often reverted to stereotypes to inform their understanding of their students.

> I think at times [I have] been disappointed with them- it's like they can sometimes revert
>
> to the stereotype or allow a student's behavior to confirm a stereotype in their mind. I
>
> don't know. I shouldn't just, I'm probably not fully, no one's fully innocent.

Megan

Megan (she/her/hers) identified as a white, cis-het, able-bodied woman who has worked for more than 10 years within student affairs. At the time of the interview, she had been in her position for over a year, but had been at the university for several years prior. Prior to student affairs, Megan had worked in local government and the non-profit industry. However, she shifted into student affairs as she shared how much she enjoyed creating opportunities for students, helping students, and overall believed in the power of opportunities created by higher education.

Megan grew up in the Southeast region of the United States and lived with both of her parents and her younger brother. Her parents, however, were transplants from other regions of the United States, which she felt impacted the values they instilled in her growing up. She shared that her town consisted of only one school system and was predominantly white. Megan grew up in a small incorporated town of about 500 people, which was situated in a larger town. She commented that while the larger town was pretty evenly split between Black families and white families, there were only one or two Black families who lived in her neighborhood. This resulted in Megan thinking of race in binary terms. When asked about her first interaction with race, she recalled one of the trips she and her family took to Washington D.C. to visit her grandmother.

> Going to DC would have been the first time that I was exposed to People of Color who
>
> are not African-American. I distinctly remember going to the mall as a kid, old enough to

know these things but just not been exposed. I remember asking my mom, why are there

so many people from China here? Is there a conference or, where are we? She had

explained to me that DC has a huge population of people from all over different

ethnicities and she didn't use those words. I don't remember what she said, but that was

really the first time and it wasn't until high school, I think that an Asian family moved

into my small town and opened up the Chinese restaurant and this was like a big deal.

Suddenly we had an Asian student at our school, we were all like, wow.

Sarah

Sarah (she/her/hers) identified as a white, cis-het, able-bodied woman who had over 26

years of experience within student affairs. At the time of the interview, she had been in her role

for about eight years. Sarah really appreciated the ways she could interact with and make

connections with students within higher education. She enjoyed helping students figure out their

own path and found all of her connections to be really fulfilling.

Sarah grew up in the Midwestern region of the United States in a suburb outside of a

major city. She described her upbringing as working class where her dad was in construction and

her mother stayed at home before working in sales. While Sarah grew up near a mixed-race city,

her town was predominantly white, which Sarah did not reflect on until her first interaction with

race in the sixth grade when racial tensions were illuminated. She shared that her town was still

very white and racist in relationship to People of Color. She recalled a conversation she had with

her mother after realizing the overt racism and segregation in her neighborhood.

And I came to the place where I said help me understand why we live here. And her

response at the time was that they didn't know that when they moved into the

neighborhood. It's right across the street from a very mixed race neighborhood. So, they

didn't know that when they moved in and they just didn't have the financial means to sell the house and move someplace else.

Tim

Tim (he/him/his) identified as a white, heterosexual, able-bodied man who had worked in student affairs for over seven years. At the time of his interview, he had been in his current position for over five years. Tim had always been passionate about personal growth and facilitation for personal growth, which played a huge role in him pursuing a career path in student affairs. Originally, Tim wanted to be a teacher, but found himself in a graduate assistantship that paved his way towards student affairs.

Tim grew up in the Northeastern region of the United States with his parents and his sister. Both of his parents were engineers. He shared that he was raised upper-middle class and had attended a college-prep high school. He attended as a day-student at a traditional boarding school, which he felt was rigorous, allowing him to feel academically prepared for college. Tim described his upbringing as sheltered and described his upbringing as predominantly white. Before attending high school, he recalled having a total of three Black classmates in his class year. Tim shared that his first interaction with race was with one of the Black kids in his kindergarten class, who he did not hang out with outside of class. He remarked,

> I think probably the kid, the one of the Black kids in my kindergarten class. And I remember that he was a bit of a troublemaker. And then there was one time that he and I were talking having a playdate or whatever, about hanging out and it didn't end up happening. I don't think it was necessarily because, you know of [race]... but that might have been somewhat of a factor.

Findings

A total of six themes emerged during data analysis. These themes include distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and student affairs indoctrination (see Table 2). Each of these themes emerged as a product of the overlap between emergent codes and the conceptual framework. While these themes are shared individually, they are interconnected and interdependent on each other and on each of the research questions. Specifically distance and proximity, navigating judgement, and values of whiteness directly assisted in answering research question one; performative commitment and racism (in)action also provided greater context to answer this question. Each of the themes assisted in answering research question two, although this question was most closely addressed by performative commitment, distance and proximity, and student affairs indoctrination. Additionally, many of the subthemes within each of the themes assisted in explaining other themes. This nuanced interdependency is consistent with the symbolic representation of cogs in a system as demonstrated in the conceptual framework of whiteness.

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Description
Distance and Proximity: The Other Side of the Tracks	• Geographical Distance • Generational Distance • Political Distance	Distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks captured the ways participants did or did not understand race and racism based on their geographical proximity to people of color, region where they lived, political affiliation, and their generational upbringing.
Navigating Judgement	• Protecting Reputations • Identity Dissonance: Shame and Self-Image	Navigating judgement illuminated the ways participants were more concerned with being perceived as racist than the impact of their racist attitudes and behaviors.

Values of Whiteness	• Discovering Whiteness • It's All in the Numbers	Values of whiteness included the ways participants discovered they were white and the ways they internalized messages and values during their upbringing that maintained systems of whiteness.
Performative Commitment	• Less Talk, More Action • Performative Caring • Insidious and Evasive	Performative commitment highlighted participants' performance during their interviews and the performative aspects of their commitment towards racial equity.
Racism (In)action	• Justifying and Colluding	Racism (in)action included participants' racist attitudes and behaviors during the interview and the ways they colluded with and justified their collusion with white supremacy.
Student Affairs Indoctrination	• Cyclical Misinformation of Student Affairs • The Future of Student Affairs	Student affairs indoctrination captured the way participants relied on information and education from their field, but how that information still did not facilitate their understanding of racial equity. This finding also included participants' views on the future of student affairs.

Distance and Proximity: The Other Side of the Tracks

Distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks captured the ways participants did or did not understand race and racism based on their geographical proximity to people of color, region where they lived, political affiliation, and their generational upbringing. As such, the subthemes within this theme are: geographical distance, generational distance, and political distance. While these are the primary subthemes, most participants also demonstrated a distancing from their white racial identities throughout the duration of their interviews.

Geographical Distance. There is a clear relationship between how participants distanced themselves or became proximate from and to other white people, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), white supremacy, and racism. Participants demonstrated the notion that geographical distance from Communities of Color was responsible for their inability to see

themselves as raced. Participants discussed racial segregation during their upbringing and the "self-selected" segregation by BIPOC from white people, illuminating white participants' distancing from responsibility and lack of understanding of the physical and psychological toll of white supremacy on BIPOC. This racial segregation contributed to white participants explaining the exceptionalism that white people place on BIPOC to justify their belonging. This perpetuated the notion that white is normal or standard, so anything outside of that is the exception or different.

Many participants talked about their proximity to People of Color during their upbringing by sharing about the diversity of their towns, but then noted that their particular neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, and friend groups were predominantly white. For example, Megan shared that there was about a one to one ratio of Black people and white people in her town, but that there were only one to two Black families in her neighborhood, stating "My neighborhood was predominantly white for sure. Like, you just had different pockets. For the most part, white people carved out their neighborhoods and Black people, People of Color had their neighborhoods, right?" All of the participants in this study explained that they grew up in white neighborhoods whether or not they were conscious of the racial composition during their youth.

Sarah, who grew up in a mixed race major city, explicitly discussed the geographical divide in her town as a "dividing line…the street across the street from where I lived was the dividing line of where people could or couldn't go" stating her neighborhood was "predominantly white and still very racist in relationship to People of Color." While Jacob, who also grew up in a predominantly white town, shared about the dividing line segregating where he grew up from the closest major city, sharing that he did not know why there were not more People of Color living in his town.

You could pretty much draw the line of, well, [city] is dangerous. We don't spend a lot of

time in [city]. And [city] also has a lot of Black people. I don't think anyone ever sat me

down and said Black people are inherently dangerous or Black people are criminals. But

essentially, one plus one equals two.

These implicit messages and his physical distance from a predominantly Black neighborhood

resulted in Jacob internalizing white superiority and negative associations with race that were not

directly connected to experience, but rather the lack of experience and exposure to Communities

of Color.

Participants explained that racism was not an issue because of the pervasive whiteness,

which posits whiteness as outside the scope of race and racism, neutralizing their experiences

with being white. For example, Kevin equated rural with being white. Living in this area

contributed to the absence of racial conversation in Kevin's family. He stated, "We were a white

family who went to a white church for the middle class." While he reflected on his mostly white

upbringing, he did not equate white people with being raced and attributed this to the ways his

parents did not engage in conversations about race and racism, demonstrating the socialization of

race neutrality. He shared "I don't know if we weren't seeing it every day and weren't interacting

with [race]. I was young, so I don't know if I was paying attention, but my parents weren't talking

about it." The racial segregation in Kevin's town was justified by the geographical orientation of

his upbringing, equating rural with being an all-white environment. This neutrality of whiteness

allowed Kevin to not see white as being part of the race narrative.

While participants discussed growing up in racially segregated towns, they also talked

about the pattern of self-segregation by People of Color. Most participants had friends that were

primarily white, but put the blame on BIPOC for creating exclusive and uncomfortable

environments. Due to this racial segregation and fear of going against the status quo, Tim shared about his uncertainty with engaging with peers across race out of "fear of upsetting the apple cart." While he wanted everyone to get along and to not self-segregate, he was "afraid to be the first one to step across that line," so he chose not, stating it was more comfortable. Tim continued to say that he longed to be proximate to People of Color, but did not know how and was afraid of the backlash from not colluding with white solidarity. Doing so, he commented, "I can relate to that when you don't specifically [fit] in a certain space. You are not the normal, you are not the default." This description of BIPOC as not-normal, not-default reinforced the ideology of race neutrality. This positionality allowed Tim to create a narrative around racial grouping.

There was also a desire to be proximate to People of Color. Tim explained this desire, but acknowledged that segregation had been a barrier to him knowing how to achieve that goal. He had to choose between people who looked like him and people who didn't and feared not being embraced by those who look like him. This is congruent with how white people often have to choose white solidarity in order to be loved and led to white fragility behaviors.

There was a shared assumption that white people had more in common with those who had the same racial identity, leading students on college campuses to seek out people who looked like them. Brad shared that the easiest way to visually do that is by race, but acknowledged that this self-selecting of groups "create these dynamics where they create barriers to the interaction. Not intentional, but they just they start to happen and without concerted and concrete efforts, you don't tend to break those down." Brad, along with other participants, placed blame on BIPOC for self-segregating, creating what he deemed an uncomfortable and fearful environment for white people. Jacob echoed this sentiment when he said "predominately you would notice Students of

Color associating with other Students of Color and not so much white students," distancing white people from the responsibility of creating expansive environments.

Due to this geographical and self-segregation of white participants from BIPOC, a few participants shared how this shaped their expectations of BIPOC. Gary, using dominant-comparative language of non-white to refer to his Friend of Color, shared that his friend was the best in his class academically, but that because he was used to playing sports in "an integrated environment...there was never an environment where exceptionalism from a non-white individual was just unseen or unacknowledged or unknown." This reference to exceptionalism demonstrated Gary's attentiveness to the performance of Black students within his athletic program, which suggested that this exceptionalism is surprising. This was further showcased by the absence of commentary on the performance of his white peers, equating exceptionalism as necessary for BIPOC to be seen, highlighting his deficit perspective of his Black peers.

This deficit perspective was also shared by Tim and Jacob as they discussed stereotypes that had been created as a result of geographical distance as a reference point for understanding BIPOC. Tim shared about a time when he worked at a camp. He talked about his students as being not white, stating it "wasn't like there was some big difference of, oh, this is how you treat, you know, this sort of kid." His labeling of his BIPOC campers as non-white, similar to Gary, and referring to them as "this sort of kid" served as a form of othering. He was distancing his campers from what he would deem a "typical" camper. Similarly, Jacob shared,

> I think oftentimes when that happens, people refer to stereotypes to inform their decisions
> and their beliefs about those other groups because they haven't been around those people.
> And so, I don't think that's like a very good way that we learn because stereotypes
> generally have negative connotations associated with them.

The result of physical distancing, as explained by Jacob, caused white participants to associate negative connotations with BIPOC, creating a deficit perspective and causing BIPOC to be exceptional in order to be deemed worthy or more proximate to white. This was a result of what Jacob described as living "in your little bubble." The insular notion of segregation, not only created stereotypes, but reinforced segregation because "people wanted to go live in this little area where they felt insulated from anything uncomfortable or the "dangers" of the world as they perceive them." This showcased the cyclical nature of white people's desire to proximate themselves to white communities and distance themselves from 'dangerous' environments, which they associated as being predominated by BIPOC as a result of growing up in predominately white communities.

Generational Distance. Many participants often used age as a reason for either understanding or not understanding race and racism. This finding was captured by the subtheme generational distance. Participants discussed the generational difference between racial identity infusion into newer graduate school programs, current students' indoctrination into race conversations, and offered age as a rationale for both their own and others' racist attitudes and behaviors. This allowed participants to distance themselves from taking responsibility for what they did and did not know and what they did and did not believe.

Generational distance demonstrated by participants can be seen through the perception of differences between generational understanding of race and racism. For example, Kevin shared about his parents growing up in the southern region of the United States and how the age in which both his parents and grandparents grew up was responsible for minimal conversations about race. He stated, "so I think both of [my] grandparents are, you know, even, my grandmother's in her 80s, so I think they just came of age at a time when society was much more

segregated." Similarly, Brad shared about his grandmother and inappropriate language that she used. He and Kevin distanced themselves as they both discussed understanding dynamics of race and racism as an evolutionary process or something that is learned over time. When discussing his grandmother, he recalled the outdated terminology she used. Stating "some of the phrases and terminology she used were things that we just would cringe at…back then were even fairly cringe worthy." Conceptualizing and contextualizing problematic language when referring to the past demonstrated this idea that white people became proximate to and distant from what was and was not acceptable based on the generation or time period. Brad also provided protection and solidarity to his family member by using her age, her big heart, and her good intent as justification for her attitudes and behaviors, which shifted the onus from the individual to something arbitrary and uncontrollable. This message was also conveyed within the field of student affairs.

Generational understanding was also portrayed within the field of student affairs. For example, Kevin shared how current students had more exposure to conversations about race and racism and more exposure to students who were different than previous generations, stating,

> I also think that there's a generational level to that. I think students today have lived
>
> through this broadening of the conversation about race...the Internet probably plays some
>
> role in it. I think our leadership are currently this older generation of mainly white dudes
>
> who aren't comfortable talking about this, but now they're being met with this resistance.

Kevin rendered that student affairs will be forced to broaden its commitment to racial equity through student advocacy, driving out older white men. This example demonstrated the ease at which participants distanced themselves from their own white identities. As a younger white man, Kevin postulated that the issue was because of age, distancing himself from his own

identities. Meanwhile, Megan and Sarah felt like they had missed out on important identity

conversations as a result of their respective graduate programs, making them both feel behind as

it relates to their understanding of race and racism. This demonstrated participants' reliance on

higher education to understand themselves and others. Megan said,

> I think the main difference is…the assistant directors or the newer hires that I've seen in
>
> the last 5 or 10 years, at least from the higher ed programs, are coming in with more
>
> experience with counseling dedicated to working with different students, different
>
> identities, just a deeper understanding of student success and how underrepresented
>
> populations experienced barriers to that success.

Megan's narrative suggested that generational difference within graduate programs over the

years and her distance from higher education resulted in less access to conversations about

identity. This also speaks to the ways white student affairs professionals relied on their field for

education. For example, Sarah, who went to graduate school for higher education, felt like she

had to "catch up" sharing, "I need to go and read the articles because I didn't read them as part of

my grad program and I need to read the books and I need to be gaining experience."

Sarah generationally distanced herself from younger professionals, who attended

graduate school more recently. She stated that she felt behind in conversations about identities

because of when she had attended graduate school, which is a sentiment echoed by Brad. This

not only demonstrated generational distancing, but showcased temporal distancing as well. Sarah

also associated the necessity for learning this information to her career field and put the

responsibility on her generation of schooling for her limited experience in conversations about

race and racism. This demonstrated the way Sarah also relied on theories to understand

experiences with race, demonstrating the ways race neutrality and segregation created barriers to understanding self and others.

Political Distance. White supremacy was demonstrated by participants' relationship to either-or thinking when they discussed political distancing. They distanced away from who they thought to be conservative and Republican. Participants' proximity to being politically Democrat seemed to be in alignment with the ideology that they were liberal and; therefore, arrived at this metaphorical place of being a good, anti-racist white person. Through that, participants were still trying to figure out their role as it related to being white and how that role impacted their experience in student affairs.

Many participants discussed politics and political affiliation during their interviews. They often equated being Democrat and liberal with being anti-racist and conservative and Republican with being racist. This political distancing justified who participants chose to interact with both in their personal lives and at work. Participants also associated geographical regions with particular political affiliations. This binary sense of thinking perpetuated white supremacy culture and was a barrier to actually forming anti-racist identities as participants often felt that being liberal was enough.

Abby grew up in the Northeast region of the United States. When describing her family, she shared they are "pure. They're just like, I don't know the word, but they're like hippies, like very liberal family." She discusses that the North was also seen as more Democratic and diverse, but that that was not her experience. While she associated political affiliation with structural diversity, she also talked about the association with geography. She continued to state, "not that a liberal family is perfect, but growing up in a more liberal Democrat family tends to be more aware and teaching about racism." But Abby also understood that these labels could sometimes

be a "scapegoat to pretend like you're perfect. Just because you have those values or those beliefs." Unlike other participants, Abby referred to her family as more liberal and instilling values of fighting racism. She did, however, classify different types of white people based on their political affiliation, "like a very conservative religious white person is definitely not going to be the same as a liberal, atheist, white person. I think they have the same color skin, but their values and views on life is completely different." While Abby had many white friends, she shared that they were usually pretty liberal as well and stated she finds "discomfort in white power, like people that don't see their privilege and obviously, anyone else that's like racist." Abby equated racist with Republicans and not-racist with Democrats. Kevin similarly classified white people into good white people and bad white people. Kevin, however, also equated bad white people with being Republican "I mean, when I think about bad, I think about Republicans."

This political distancing served as a form of self-protection from being seen as racist either by themselves or by others and reinforced the ways political parties have been associated with behaviors and attitudes. This self-protection was pervasive throughout this study, demonstrating the ways participants longed to be seen as moral and good. Another example of political distancing was seen in the ways participants described feeling unsafe having conversations with more conservative friends. However, this sense of feeling unsafe was really a fear of conflict and a fear of being isolated or not accepted by friends, demonstrating the ways whiteness harms white people. Gary discussed the lack of conversation about politics with his family.

> My family doesn't talk about politics, we don't really talk about religion, it's just not. And
> that being said, my family knows that my wife, [redacted], and I are liberals. And that we

are going to have a counter perspective and that we are going to think differently than

they are…. I don't think that that would be accepted as a topic and I don't think that it

would it would garner a whole lot of engagement.

Liberal and conservative were seen as counter to each other, upholding either/or thinking. This

example demonstrated the ways that the difference in political orientation among Gary and his

family distanced all of them from engaging in conversations about race and racism. Gary's

geographical location paired with his political affiliation led to him feeling like his beliefs were

not in the majority as he stated,

Because we are in the South, and because it's an environment where my opinions and my

thoughts and beliefs are not always those of the people around me, that is not something

that I would decide to [engage in] with people that I'm not friends with.

As participants distanced themselves politically, they also distanced themselves from engaging in

practices that led to having an anti-racist identity, such as engaging in conversations with other

white people about race and racism and not distancing themselves from their dominant group

identity. This distancing actually resulted in disengagement based on their own white privilege.

Higher education was often posited as liberal as well. Participants associated student

affairs with being more advanced on issues of social justice and equity due to the values set by

the division and the competencies set from national organizations. Jacob specifically discussed

how higher education, and thus student affairs, was built in a "system of whiteness" and how

universities are taking "more of a position around issues of social justice than they might have in

the past, which I don't think is inherently a bad thing." Jacob not only equated higher education

with whiteness, but also with being more liberal. This was an interesting finding that

demonstrated being liberal still led to collusion with white supremacy. The political divide that

participants explained was pervasive and demonstrated a distancing from responsibility and a proximity to being anti-racist without commitment to shift in behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

Navigating Judgement

This theme illuminated the ways all participants were more concerned about being perceived as racist than actually impacting BIPOC through their racist attitudes and behaviors. Participants, in various ways, remarked that being labeled as racist was "bad," and that they were afraid to be viewed or perceived this way by others and even more worried they would have to see themselves this way. However, rather than demonstrating a desire to do less harm, most participants were more concerned about convincing themselves and others they were not racist. As such, many participants commented on good white people and bad white people. This theme included the following two subthemes: protecting reputations and identity dissonance: shame and self-image. Within this theme, participants shielded themselves and family members from being labeled as racist or problematic, often justifying their actions and comments as harmless or unintentional because they were good people. This protection allowed participants to not acknowledge the reality of the racist attitudes and beliefs held by people within their family units to ensure their family members were represented and perceived positively by others and by them. Participants also utilized either/or thinking of white supremacy culture when labeling white people as either good or bad. This binary view of what it meant to be white fits into both subthemes and, therefore, appropriate participant excerpts were captured in both sections.

Protecting Reputations. Protecting reputations was exhibited through the way participants described and justified the actions of people close to them. There was a shared fear that participants and/or their family members would be seen as racist by both BIPOC and other white people. A few participants also mentioned being afraid to harm others, although that was

less pervasive. This fear of being discovered as racist was minimized by participants through their direct usage of the word *perceived*. This posited the experience of racism as a product of white subjectivity. For example, Brad shared "there's always a fear of am I being racist and or am I am I being in a position where I could be perceived as racist because that's not my intent." Jacob similarly shared, "it's really interesting to think about how do you as a white person navigate, trying to help other folks see if you have good intention."

Many participants described and exhibited behaviors of white fragility as a result of this fear. This emphasized participants' focus on intent rather than impact. For example, Amber experienced guilt and anxiety when asked how she felt about being white. While she did not think about being white often, she thought about it when conversing with BIPOC who she did not know well. She remarked:

> I usually feel a lot of, I don't know if guilt is the right word. It's just on the tip of my tongue. I am very aware. Maybe anxious is the right word. I get very anxious because I am afraid of saying the "wrong thing" to people and doing the wrong thing and offending someone and therefore not being a good, sort of white person.

These feelings of guilt and anxiety demonstrated Amber's fear of doing the wrong thing. While she mentioned not wanting to hurt people, this was secondary to the fear of being wrong or being bad, demonstrating the ways her own morality was connected to how she was or was not perceived. When asked what Amber believed a good white person was, she explained it as something unreachable:

> A good white person would be someone who actively works to dismantle racism…someone who is somehow already without work, magically aware of all the things that are racist and therefore are able to have conversations with people who are

non-white without offending anybody. Some sort of like idealized thing that feels very
unachievable.

Action and knowledge were at the center of Amber's description of what it means to be a good
white person.

However, most participants did not feel they had the skills or competency necessary to
advocate in the ways they wanted to. Therefore, they relied on making sure they protected how
people perceived them to ensure they still felt like they were good people. They were also afraid
of offending other people because it was not in alignment with who they saw themselves to be.
As described above, Amber described being a good white person as unachievable. She did not
describe herself as bad but did not believe being good was something she could be, which also
contributed to identity dissonance. Megan, like Amber, was most apprehensive about saying
something wrong or doing harm to others. At the same time, there was a desire to avoid conflict
as to not be judged. She believed that this was a shared experience amongst white student affairs
administrators. She remarked,

> I think there are many white student affairs professionals who would benefit by having
> more honest conversations, but yet remain quiet and don't speak up out of fear of being
> judged or labeled or say or saying the wrong thing or being hurtful.

Megan first described the fear of being judged. The ways Megan and Sarah both discussed their
feelings portrayed how important it was for them to be viewed as not racist. Both described
disagreements as confrontational rather than an opportunity for connection or as an opportunity
for relationships.

Similar to Amber and Megan, Kevin also shared his anxiety about not wanting to say the
wrong thing as he stated, "especially in this cancel culture that we're currently experiencing for

white folks of like this fear or anxiety of, if I engage incorrectly, then the blowback on that will be, you know, insurmountable or whatever." Not only did Kevin talk about this anxiety generally, he shared that most white people have "a level of anxiety of white perfectionism- of not wanting to say the wrong thing, especially with people who are different than you or People of Color," which was ever present especially around People of Color. Kevin talked about feeling like he needed to prove to his Students of Color that he was on their side and that he was a good white person. Kevin remarked:

> With our team being two thirds [Students of Color], I think there's definitely a level of hoping that- I don't know if anxiety is the right word, but it's just this consciousness around I want you to know that I'm on your side. I want you to know that I am wanting to fight the stereotype of a white person, acknowledging that and knowing that you can do harm.

The importance of being seen as a good white person was more important to Kevin when he worked with more Students of Color. Kevin's commentary on perfectionism illuminated the way white participants upheld dominance even when discussing what it meant to not be racist and demonstrated the ways he and others had been socialized to not make mistakes. Similar to Amber, this status of being good was often unachievable. While he demonstrated his commitment to wanting to support students, Kevin also exhibited fear of how his students would perceive him as a white man. When asked by his students if he was proud to be white, he relied on his sense of humor and shared "white people suck basically," demonstrating the ways participants were unable to attach systems of white supremacy and white socialization from the white identity. At the same time, he also commented on the "tribe mentality" of white people and needing to collude in order to not be pushed out. He shared, "Do you want to push too hard? Will

they ostracize you? It's kind of this family mentality with people who are of the same race- are you one of us?"

These conflicting emotions led to identity dissonance. Kevin wanted to be good, but did not equate white with being good, leaving him in a place of uncertainty about his identity. The commentary of white solidarity also portrayed the way white people colluded with white supremacy and upheld systems of whiteness to protect each other from feeling any sense of discomfort. This not only illuminated white superiority, but also demonstrated how white people were harmed by whiteness, often having to choose between being accepted by people who look like them, being seen as good by People of Color, and protecting their feelings around the ever-present dissonance experienced in their identities.

While participants exhibited self-protection against labeling and judgment, they also did the same for their families, often justifying their racist attitudes and beliefs. For example, Gary shared how much he adored his parents who he described as "the quintessential, non-reflective borderline bigots that you can imagine." As he reminisced about his former Black vice principal during his school years, he shared how fond his parents were of him, commenting:

> And they loved [redacted]. Actually, you know, he was wonderful. But, Black people in general, not so sure. And so, it's that quintessential where, you know, that individual relationship made a lot of sense. But, that stereotypical, the stereotypical still kind of played out.

Gary described his parent's relationship with the Black principal and highlighted that while his parents did not like Black people in general, they liked some Black individuals, justifying this as a product of their midwestern value structure, calling it "Minnesota nice." He continued to share about his parents, "You know they didn't use the N-word. Not that that wasn't used in our house,

but not a lot. Even then I understood the gravity of that." Unlike other participants, Gary shared

pride about his upbringing, rather than a sense of shame about his family's value system. By not

positing their beliefs as racist, he protected them through collusion and normalization,

minimizing and justifying their actions as quintessential.

Saying or not saying the "n" word became the criteria for what most participants

described as racist or not racist. Jacob minimized the actions and attitudes of his family stating

that he never really heard them use the "n" word and that they never relayed messages of overt

racism, but that they did rely on stereotypes. He shared that these stereotypes were products of

"just their own general upbringing and their belief systems." This familial protection and

acceptance were demonstrated by Jacob comparing his family's attitudes and beliefs against

what would be deemed unacceptable and overt. This rendered their reliance on stereotypes as

not-racist and normalized covert racism as expected and not problematic. In many ways, Jacob

also distanced himself from his family throughout his interview by not seeing the ways their

messages influenced his understanding of race and racism. He shared that he had a better

understanding and different values because of his educational level and his experiences within

student affairs.

Identity Dissonance: Shame and Self-Image. Identity dissonance captured the difficulty

participants had with seeing themselves as white because they associated their racial identity as

negative or bad as opposed to their attitudes and behaviors as something that needed to change in

order to become anti-racist. Participants demonstrated distancing from their white identity and

other white people in order to navigate their own shame and self-image. By distancing from

other white people who they perceived as racist, participants did not have to face their own

perceptions of what it meant to be white, especially in student affairs. Most participants also did

not equate white with being good, which pushed them to distance themselves for their own self-preservation. At the same time, most participants shared that most of their friends and family were white. This served as a barrier to white student affairs administrators acting in anti-racist ways because they were able to not see themselves as part of the narrative.

As mentioned in protecting reputations, participants often differentiated between good and bad white people and had similar descriptions of what each entailed. Being a good white person often was not in alignment with maintaining whiteness, which led to participants having to grapple with who they were, who they wanted to be, and why. Holistically, most participants experienced guilt and shame and felt stuck in those emotions causing them to distance themselves from other white people. Abby, who also identified as Jewish, expressed the sentiment of not feeling like she particularly fit in with white norms and standards because of her religious identity. She remarked that the only part of her identity she struggled with "is being Jewish. I still felt different and I feel like I look different. So, I'm white. But my religion is, sometimes people say ethnicity, is a little bit different." While Abby believed she struggled with what it meant to be Jewish, it was the pairing of her Jewish and white identities that felt conflicting. Abby did not feel truly white because she was also Jewish. Throughout her interview, she connected Christianity with whiteness. Although Abby identified racially as white, her Jewish identity created a sense of dissonance for her in her white racial identity, demonstrating a standard of whiteness that she felt invisibilized her religious identity, as if they could not coexist.

Meanwhile, shame pushed Amber to utilize distancing as a strategy and led to identity dissonance. Amber distanced herself from white men to navigate shame associated with being

white, sharing "If I can say white men are the problem then I don't have to own as much of the problem. I don't have to feel as bad about me, the things that I do that help perpetuate racism." By harnessing on her minoritized identity of being a woman, Amber did not have to confront the realities of what it would mean if she were racist. She commented,

> I think that's probably guilt and shame. So, if I find out that I've harmed someone whether through my own reflection or someone telling me or to see the reaction of the person, I think I have a lot of guilt or worry, it really becomes all about me. I don't want to be seen as a bad person.

As a result of being socialized in a racist society, Amber started to experience shame when she realized she contributed to and perpetuated racism, commenting "so, there's shame in finding out that you are a part of that, even if it it's covert." While she believed being a good white person was unachievable her shame stemmed from feeling like "a bad person for not having known all the things…I will really sort of shut down my behaviors when there's people, other people of different races because I'm so worried about messing up and making a mistake…I don't allow myself even to engage." This dissonance within Amber's identity made it hard for her to develop an anti-racist identity because of the pervasive fear of not wanting to be a bad white person. By distancing herself from white men, she colluded with the system of whiteness that made her feel she was inherently bad while not having to see herself as part of the problem.

Sarah also commented on how being white made her feel guilty. For Sarah, however, her sense of dissonance was between liking the comfort her whiteness afforded her and feeling guilty about wanting to also do more. Sarah recognized that being white made her life easy. However, she still felt like "myself and my community are missing out on a whole lot." While Sarah enjoyed the comfort and ease of her racial identity, she felt a looming guilt, stating, "It's guilt

combined with anger combined with desire to create change and not knowing how to fully commit to that and still have the level of comfort that I enjoy." This guilt emerged when she realized she played a role in the oppression of others, even without her cognition after attending a racial equity program.

> I had not considered myself somebody who would intentionally or unintentionally add to oppression. And that was the place where I realized that my joy in my comfort prevents me from doing some of the hard stuff that could actually have a larger impact than some of the other things I do.

Sarah's realization of her role forced her to confront the reality of the privilege she enjoyed. This created a sense of dissonance and made her question who she was as a person. She was, however, afraid to confront her own reality and judged herself for not knowing what to do to, stating, "I don't want to be that person who believes this is important but doesn't always act on that. And I don't know how to resolve that…It truly is from a place of fear. And that's core- very deeply core."

> The racial equity program Sarah attended was eye-opening. It was one of the first times she was able to exist solely as Sarah and not as Sarah, the student affairs administrator, stating "I actually felt like I got to be 100% me. I genuinely didn't worry about anybody in the room connecting it to my position and connecting it to me." Although Sarah entered the space as herself, she left with the heaviness of the reality of her collusion with white supremacy.

> I don't want to sound the way I feel like that sounds when I tell you that I like my comfort. And I know that that's a part of the reason I don't fight as hard and I can hide behind it being family. But some of it is genuinely owning that I like my comfort.

Her position in student affairs was a barrier to Sarah being authentic in equity trainings because of white supremacy culture that made her feel like she needed to show up perfectly and not make mistakes. Sarah also questioned what other people thought of her and utilized both her position in student affairs and her identity as a mother as a source of protection against confronting racism. This dissonance was contrary to Sarah's value of fairness, leading her to not just grapple with being white, but with her sense of morality as well.

Societal expectations felt confusing for Kevin, leading him to experience dissonance as a white man in student affairs. As white man, he felt "like others have placed that stereotype onto me." Kevin believed that others expected him to show up like other white men, which he did not feel like was congruent to how he showed up in spaces, leading him to think about how to show up authentically.

> I could be internally trying to be really intentional and think about how I'm showing up in a meeting and trying to support someone, but then in the same vein, someone who maybe doesn't hold my identity is saying you're just a white guy who's taking up more space. That's hard, that's difficult.

This led to dissonance as he felt stuck between who others thought he was and who he thought he was. He did not view himself as the stereotypical white man, which created internal conflict. Kevin's privilege was also illuminated in this example as he painted himself as a victim in a society where white male dominance is the standard. He also commented that he experienced dissonance as it related to people seeing him the way he wants to show up. While Kevin experienced dissonance, it was a product of self-reflection. After being given feedback about repeating what a Woman of Color said, he shared "I had some dissonance…you did do that and you need to name that and recognize, don't do that again…I've been thinking a lot about too how

do you support people who don't hold the same identities?" Kevin's experience with dissonance was directly influenced by his role in student affairs as both of his examples were work related. Kevin tried to navigate his identities and utilize his privilege without realizing the harm he was doing. This led to self-reflection and inner conflict as he had to grapple with what his role was in his identities and who he was in his identities.

Values of Whiteness

Holistically this theme captured how participants explained being white and how they discovered their whiteness mainly in proximity to BIPOC. Values of whiteness included the following two subthemes: discovering whiteness and it's all in the numbers. Participants throughout their interviews referred to structural diversity, often conflating equity with the presence of BIPOC.

Discovering whiteness specifically explained how and when participants knew themselves to be white and when they realized their environments conveyed values of whiteness. Participants only realized their white identities in relation to the presence of BIPOC. Every participant shared that they realized they were white when they became proximate to People of Color. This subtheme also captured the values espoused by participants including being kind, treating everyone the same, being welcoming, being the white savior, and not talking about race, which are values of whiteness, or values that are directly correlated to race-neutral socialization. These values were illuminated at home, within student affairs, and within participants' educational upbringing. The pervasive mentality of white saviorism of participants was showcased as they described feeling like their role was to save others, while they utilized BIPOC as their own personal teachers.

Discovering Whiteness. Participants all described when and how they learned about their race. As they shared, they also simultaneously described how they discovered whiteness either in themselves or in others. This was highlighted by Tim as he shared that he could not completely remember when he first realized he was white. He then shared that white was comparative:

> You can really only define whiteness in comparison with something else. So, I don't
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> know the first time. It probably would have been in Sesame Street or as a child watching
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> something on TV, because I don't think I met a Black child until I was in preschool.

Because being white was normalized and standard in the United States, Tim could only see it in relation to BIPOC, demonstrating the hypervisibility of Black people to Tim. While, Tim had this experience in preschool, he also shared about one of the only times he was the only white person in high school when he drove to one of his tournaments with one of his Black teammates and their family. Tim remarked,

> It was just the newness of being a minority. When we drove from point A to point B, I
>
> was the little white person of that car that was proud of the first time that I'd had that
>
> experience in my life. So, I was just much more aware that I was white in that instance.
>
> But there wasn't anything remarkable about the experience.

Tim's experience of being the only "little" white person in the car spoke to how Tim was feeling in the moment. Although he commented that it was not a remarkable experience, it was a memorable experience in which he understood what it was like to be the only white person for the first time in his life. This experience happened when Tim was in high school, meaning he had spent more than 13 years never having to be the only white person in a space. Tim's white identity felt visible and present to him for the first time in his life because of how proximate he

was to his Black friend and family. Tim's commentary on being a minority illuminated the importance of dominance and language and demonstrated the attachment that white people had to structural diversity. Although Tim was the only white person, his experience was pretty normal or standard, which showcased the privilege and dominance of the white identity.

Another example of the realization of white identity as dependent on the presence of BIPOC was when Brad tried to think who his first Black friend was as he was reminiscing about his first interaction with race. This reinforced the notion of white dependency. He shared that his friend was not different than any of his other friends, illuminating how one would expect that to be the case. While Brad discussed his first Black friend, he never mentioned being white or having white friends, neutralizing the white experience. Like Brad and Tim, Jacob also only noticed being white in comparison to others. However, his experience was in relation to anti-Muslim sentiment that was illuminated after 9/11. Jacob's discovery of whiteness was in relation to adopting a negative association with a minoritized population during his childhood as a result of ongoing messages from his caregivers and educational environment, increasing Jacob's unconscious understanding of white superiority.

Meanwhile, Megan did not realize she was white until after she had gotten into a car accident at the age of 16 on her way to school. She had gone through a stop sign and hit another vehicle in a predominately Black neighborhood. One of the residents in the neighborhood had witnessed the accident and came running out to make sure everyone was alright. Megan shared,

> I remember her saying "I don't care what color you, I don't care if you're white, just come in the house- you need to call somebody" …I think that was the first time that I had been called white. I never really realized that I'm white, am I [a] white person? I guess I am a white person and the Black people know that I am white.

Megan not only discovered she was white, she realized that Black people knew she was white. This experience shifted Megan's reality of race and racial tensions to a tangible place where she realized she, too, was part of the race narrative. The fact that Megan had gone 16 years of her life before someone else illuminated that she was white was indicative of her color-evasive and race neutral upbringing. It also illuminated the privilege Megan experienced not having to see herself as part of a race narrative. Lastly, Sarah also had a similar experience of discovering she was white and discovering the reality of racism in her community.

Segregation in the community meant that Sarah grew up in a predominately white neighborhood, which she did not realize until she was in middle school.

I was finally old enough to hang out without other people around. And so, I was coming back and one of my friends was walking me back home and he stopped at [the dividing line] and I was like, what's going on? I live one block that way. And he said, "Sarah, have you ever seen anybody who looks like me in your neighborhood?" And I was like, no. And that was the point where I realized all of my friends who were not white lived across the street.

While this segregation was illuminated to Sarah for the first time, what she really learned was that this segregation was intentional and dangerous. She shared, "that was the moment that I realized that he could be harmed if he walked me all the way home. And so, I went home in tears and had that conversation with my parents."

Sarah referenced the weight of this experience throughout her interview as it was a pinnacle time in Sarah's life. Up until that point, Sarah did not have to see herself as raced and did not realize the segregation around her, normalizing whiteness. At the same time, Sarah's friend was able to communicate that he could not cross the street because there were different

parameters of where he could go and be for his safety as a Black boy. She not only learned about racism from her friend, she also felt the emotional weight of this discovery, illuminating the privilege Sarah had experienced during her upbringing. This demonstrated the ways participants relied on BIPOC for self-discovery.

White privilege was not just contingent on living in all-white communities. While in another country, Gary explained that he was one of the only minorities, but how he was still seen as privileged, sharing, "Here I am, one person in the space of 10,000 feeling no othering…I can remember being in the subway, being down in that space, looking around, and being the only one there but never feeling like I don't belong." Gary's understanding of being white was not in relationship to dominance or privilege. Based on his excerpt, his understanding of oppression related to the whether he was the majority or the minority in a given space, similar to Tim. Gary's recollection of his experience in China showcased what it meant to be white not only in the United States, but in the world. He shared that he did not experience othering, but had expected to because of the lack of other white people in China. Instead, he still experienced white privilege. This demonstrated the ways language usage was important. The language of minority and majority did not allude to power structures and systems of dominance and oppression, which is language that was probably learned during his education/career. As a result, Gary saw racial oppression as a product of underrepresentation rather than as a product of white dominance.

Discovering whiteness also captured the way white culture had been normalized not only through white privilege, but by what Amber referred to as "cultural privilege," stating,

So far back in history, from the very beginning of colonizers coming to the Americas and basically just sort of killing all the Indigenous peoples that were here- from that moment

forward, being white was right. And so, anything that was white culture, or the white way

is the way that everyone should be. That was considered civilized.

Amber's retelling of this history showed the symbiotic nature of whiteness and colonization,

which set the standard for what it meant to be right. Amber also discussed cultural appropriation

and illuminated the sense of ownership white people had with history, time, and space, which

was in alignment with the ways ontological expansiveness was used in this study.

Race-neutrality also was a value of whiteness that had consequences as, according to

Kevin, "a negative side effect of whiteness is this exotification…like, oh, your culture is so

great." Whiteness was considered the default and therefore created a standard for being, doing,

and acting. The exotification Kevin referred to can be interpreted as a longing for rather than an

othering. He demonstrated the ways white people wanted to be proximate to culture because they

were unable to see their own. While he shared that white culture was hard to see, he, along with

other participants, were able to describe whiteness and white values, often referring to it as

boring. This demonstrated saturation rather than invisibility. Kevin further shared,

Everything that we teach a child to do is based in whiteness or [what] an education

system teaches people to do. But it probably goes beyond that because when you think

about manners and professionalism and all of those things are still based [in whiteness]. I

remember in grad school being like "what is white culture?" And someone being like,

"it's everything." It's just blows your mind when you first see it for the first time.

The pervasiveness of whiteness rendered it invisible to many white people. When Kevin

discovered whiteness, he was shocked and realized that he had been indoctrinated into this

system, making it hard to see. He also referenced realizing that most of what he had been taught

was coded language and often had alternative messaging. The socialization of these messages upheld individual superiority. These messages were also communicated through values.

Familial values included respect for all people and treating everyone the same. These values were centered in whiteness as they were often color-evasive or reduced racialized experiences. For example, Megan shared there was "definitely a message of respect for all people, whether it was, we weren't overly religious, but it was, what's the little song of Jesus? Black, white, red and like those things?" These values were symbolic of covert messaging of equality without addressing the systems of oppression that perpetuated racism. She continued to share that her family "tried to instill in us values of respecting everyone… always tried to instill in us values of respect, manners. I'm not allowed to use the "n" word, that was wrong." Throughout her interview, Megan returned to these family values as foundational tenants of her upbringing. While these values were important to her family, she realized the reality of them was not in alignment with their intentions. For example, when Megan's brother brought a Black girl to the homecoming dance, she explained that internal conflict her mother faced, explaining that she was "accepting, but not necessarily welcoming," showcasing that these values did not lead to anti-racism.

Treating all people equally was a shared value amongst participants as an antidote to racism. This value, however, further perpetuated participants' lack of understanding about racism as they were socialized to not talk about race and racism because racism was bad. For example, Tim shared,

> The verbal messaging coming from, whether it be parents or school growing up, is that racism is bad. You know, that we should treat everyone the same. But I think that

actually putting that into practice when you are not living in a diverse area can be a lot

harder because you really just know it as this messaging.

Treating everyone the same was a value of whiteness as it painted a picture that everyone started

in the same place. This highlighted the notion of equality and sameness as opposed to equity. It's

the idea that as long as white people were kind, racism could not exist. These messages from

Tim's upbringing were demonstrated as he described his own values as it related to racial equity.

Within his position, he shared that he did not want to cause more disparities and that the way to

do that was to be welcoming and inclusive, stating "I'm trying to be welcoming, trying to

anticipate differences of experience. Just asking about what backgrounds people have coming

into things, but then also at the same time trying not to make it more painfully obvious that

they're different."

As a result of segregation, Tim felt it was hard to actually implement these values of

equality. As a result, Tim had a deficit understanding of Students of Color, alluding to the fact

that they were different. This demonstrated not only the harm of segregation, but the harm of

value systems that are not embedded in accurate historical representations of reality. Tim wanted

all of his students to feel welcomed and included and did not want them to feel less than or

different. Tim's projection of how he believed his students felt was a direct result of the values of

whiteness that failed to address systemic issues and posit deficit experiences as an individual

problem. Similarly, Gary shared about the value of being a "polite society" which was "the

hetero-normative, white supremist culture of, let's talk about the things that are comfortable and

convenient and are pleasant, that aren't going to challenge peoples' beliefs and thoughts."

On the contrary, receiving messages about the reality of inequity assisted Abby in

understanding race and racism. Abby's family values included watching the news together and

engaging in conversations about inequity: "society doesn't treat certain people equally or how they should and that...to not pretend it does and that it's harder for some people than others." While other families instilled values of color-evasiveness and race neutrality, Abby's family had intentional conversations about the reality of being raced in the United States, which contributed to Abby's understanding of privilege and self-reflection. The values of whiteness that emerged in this study were not inherently negative as they were often considered well-meaning and positive values by participants and their families. However, this paired with the lack of conversation about race and racism in school, lack of accurate education in school, and the consequences of color-evasiveness, upheld systems of dominance. This also led to white shame as participants discovered their own whiteness and the history around racism.

K-12 education also assisted in how participants understood values and whiteness through what was and was not taught. Amber, Sarah, Kevin, Tim, and Brad all felt that their K-12 schools failed to teach them about race and racism, outside of the civil war, reinforcing to white children that racism did not exist. Amber shared the following:

> Given that, even from elementary school and through college, I don't ever remember talking about race ever… In high school, I'm sure it had to come up. I honestly feel like it was probably a history class. We talked about the civil rights or something, but I have no distinct memory of it.

Even when race had come up, it was from a historical distance, was mostly about the civil war, and did not allow participants to see themselves in the narrative, while simultaneously inaugurating them into the dominant system of whiteness. Brad similarly shared that the only reference to racism in school was when he learned about the civil war.

This hyper focus on the civil war rendered racism a thing of the past. It served to uphold whiteness and only centered dominant narratives. Kevin shared that his K-12 experience subconsciously indoctrinated him into whiteness. He shared,

> If you think about grammar school through high school graduation, most of that content is based in whiteness. Like the history that they teach you, the skills that you're being taught. I don't think any of that was conscious for me, but I'm sure that that was also something that was a part of that experience.

While race was not explicitly discussed, messages around racial dominance were conveyed through what was and was not taught during participants' schooling. Most of Sarah's K-12 education "erased most history of non-dominant cultures…[the] curriculum was predominantly white." Tim commented that he did not really know what it meant to be white or what it meant to be a white student because there was no class on it. His schooling led him to believe that after the Emancipation Proclamation, everything was good. Although white their whole lives, participants had to discover what it meant to be white.

It's All in the Numbers. It's all in the numbers highlighted the attachment participants had to structural diversity. There was a cyclical relationship between participants needing to talk about race and racism based on the number of Students of Color at their institutions, rendering whiteness as neutral. At the same time, this theme also captured how participants desired to be proximate to BIPOC. However, participants mostly only referred to engaging with BIPOC when they needed someone to teach them. Participants became proximate to individual superiority as they distanced themselves from BIPOC through the use of dominant-comparative language when referring to BIPOC as non-white.

This subtheme represented participants' attachment to structural diversity and the ways they felt they needed to increase their understanding of race and racism based on the number of Students of Color at their university or in their area. This demonstrated participants' understanding of whiteness as neutral and illuminated the ways participants used language in ways that were self-serving. When asked how often Kevin thought about being white, he remarked,

> I mean, not every day, but I do think about it pretty frequently. I think about it a lot just because of the student population that I work with and work most closely with and I think about it a lot in terms of the staff that I work with or that I supervise.

The racial identities of students played a huge role in participants being aware of whiteness. Kevin stated that there was a direct correlation between how often he thought about being white and his number of years in the field, which directly highlighted the interconnectedness between participants' understanding of white in relation to their student affairs identities. Sarah also shared that she thought about being white more than ever before based on the racial make-up of her institution.

While Kevin and Sarah had a heightened awareness of being white, Tim expressed not having to be as conscious of being white because there were more racially diverse students on campus, which was indicative of his discomfort in engaging in conversations with Students of Color because he was socialized to see them as different.

> One really cool thing about [university] is that I don't feel like there's that dynamic of if you see a nonwhite student walking around campus that you feel like this is one of the few nonwhite students walking around campus. Like, how should I act around them for them to feel welcome.

This awareness of the presence of People of Color led to Tim being hyper-aware of him being white and his discomfort with engaging while also providing him comfort that he was not solely responsible for engaging Students of Color. Tim used dominant-comparative language when he referred to Students of Color as non-white. He described being white as something that only exists when compared to another racial identity, but still used dominant comparative language, showcasing individual superiority and normative whiteness. Tim was simultaneously concerned about preserving his own comfort and ensuring that BIPOC felt welcomed and alluded to a sense of relief of knowing that Students of Color had other Students of Color on campus, thus, reducing his need to engage.

> You don't think about it, which I think is in some ways a good thing, because I think being hyper aware of race all the time, I don't know how productive that is, or at least I don't know that that allows us to put our best foot forward. Because we become self-conscious and then we're less natural. It makes it awkward.

This awkwardness and self-consciousness highlighted the ways segregation and color-evasive socialization contributed to participants not feeling equipped to engage in conversations about race or racism or to engage across race.

Structural diversity was also equated with universities being racially equitable. For example, Brad shared, "racial equity on a campus would be that campus is reflective of the community and society as a whole as far as numbers." This hyper focus on numbers as opposed to experiences demonstrated the ways white participants did not fully understand what racial equity entailed. Brad's reduction of racial equity to numbers demonstrated his lack of understanding of systemic and institutional racism and his understanding of white supremacy

culture. This reduction did not account for the specific experiences of BIPOC at HWCUs and shifted the onus of responsibility away from white people.

Meanwhile, Abby, at her prior university, was pressured to get more white students at her events. Her supervisor told her that the events were not diverse enough because they did not represent the exact demographics of the student body.

> I will say the last institution I was at, I really struggled with my own values because I started having upper administration want me to have a more diverse population at my events, which to me meant white because I had mostly Black students at my events. So that's - I just remember that - that's a whole thing that bothered me for years that I never quite understood.

In Abby's example, the term "diversify" was used to maintain white racial dominance. Abby's supervisor did not explicitly state she needed more white students at events the first few times she was given that feedback. Instead, coded language was used, including on her end of year evaluation, demonstrating the ways leadership in student affairs upheld white supremacy culture.

While this subtheme discussed participants' attachment to structural diversity, it also demonstrated the lack of unified messaging about language. Many participants used language that they learned from equity training, making it seem like they were social justice minded. However, this language usage actually captured how participants upheld white supremacy and individual superiority. For example, as shared a bit in discovering whiteness, participants utilized terms such as majority and minority in ways that were not congruent with systemic and systematic oppression. This allowed participants to view majority and minority in terms of representation and structural diversity as opposed to systemic injustice.

Performative Commitment

Performative commitment highlighted participants' performance during their interviews and the performative aspects of their commitment towards racial equity. This theme embodied the pervasive notion that the existence of racism was dependent on whether or not participants chose to see it. This theme included the following three subthemes: less talk, more action; performative caring; and insidious and evasive.

Less Talk, More Action. While many participants shared that they felt student affairs was liberal (see distance and proximity), there were a few participants who illuminated the performative nature of student affairs. Amber discussed the lack of accountability and alluded to the fact that she wanted less talk and more action. Referring to her last university, she shared they discussed diversity, but that the conversations did not lead to real change: "The system stayed the same, the policy stayed the same, the students stayed white and wealthy. They cared about diversity enough to do the training…but not enough to see how they could change their student population." She continued to share more holistically,

> It's like the proof is in the pudding. They can say all they want about diversity, have a diversity mission statement, and diversity on their website, and they have pictures of People of Color on their landing page. But until you're actually on campus living day to day, until that changes, I don't think it really matters.

While there were symbolic representations of student affairs' commitment, these were superficial and lacked follow through or action. The division was also a barrier to participants fighting for racial equity. Abby, for example, commented on wanting to be vocal about fighting racism, while also doing self-work and learning about her own personal biases. She, however, was conflicted because of her role in student affairs as she saw her workplace as a barrier to engaging in anti-racism out of fear of repercussions.

I remember being in a work session where they were like, you have to be careful, even just being politically active…I think it's a weird, blurred line between what you advocate for as a staff member and then knowing the hierarchy and needing to have a job and so, there's this weird line. Like I feel like a lot people in higher education are obviously passionate about a lot of things. But then I feel like sometimes we're told to hide them- that kind of thing.

While all the participants in this study worked in a division that had diversity and inclusion as their top value, the messages Abby and others received from their work environment were contradictory to those values, demonstrating the division's surface-level and performative commitment to racial equity. The fact that Abby felt like she could not vocally convey her support for racial equity further demonstrated the way student affairs valued neutrality, which was synonymous with white superiority, over racial equity. The reality of the daily decisions that were made within student affairs were not in alignment with the way student affairs painted themselves to be, and thus, demonstrated its performativity.

This performativity was also illuminated in staff hiring practices. Kevin, who recently chaired two search processes, discussed the ways he had to challenge the search committee to actually value diversity in the hiring process, despite the already established value of diversity and inclusion within the division. He commented,

When I look around at staff hiring practices and who is actually in roles on campus, I think often times there is a level of racism that is permeating that because people are selecting people who look like them. And having done two processes as well, I can see how intentional you have to be as a search committee chair to really challenge people to think beyond themselves.

Kevin also shared about the disconnect between what student affairs said they valued and what they were actually looking for in student and professional staff members, commenting that it is "oftentimes based on whiteness- you know like professionalism. How do they dress? How do they present themselves is all very much based in whiteness? And so, it's interesting to see how that plays out in those policy decisions."

This performative commitment was also demonstrated by the pervasive overrepresentation of white leadership and the underrepresentation of BIPOC staff at all levels. Amber found her supervisor to be a barrier, sharing that her supervisor often power hoarded information.

> My supervisor does not share that information down. The two people above me are both white…Beyond that, I don't know who's in the room. Especially when I'm with a Student of Color, I worry that we don't have who they need to support them. There's not another person, full-time staff in our office who can relate to their identity, to their racial identity specifically, cause we're all white.

Five out of the nine participants in this study were part of all-white staffs within the division of student affairs, which was contradictory to the values espoused within the division. Amber also shared about her master's program, which was outside the scope of student affairs, sharing that diversity "became one lesson, one week during the semester...so, we're gonna put it at the end of the semester and we're gonna talk about it…like once it gets into the curriculum, it becomes a checkbox."

While not specifically about student affairs, Amber's example demonstrated the ideology that diversity was additive and not foundational, which was parallel to the way participants described their experience within student affairs. She also referred to the lack of introspection in

coursework, which posited diversity as outside of and racism as thing that was "over there," rather than something that lived within and was perpetuated by white people, systems of whiteness, and white supremacy culture.

Performative Caring. Participants also demonstrated and alluded to performative caring within student affairs. This subtheme represented the superficial commitment of participants and other student affairs leaders to racial equity and how participants centered themselves instead of racial equity. Similar to the sentiments in less talk, more action, Amber expressed her frustration with the performative caring of leadership at her university. She remarked,

> I don't get the sense that they really want to make changes that matter. I think they're just
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> sort of propping up the system as is…they don't seem to be making any changes. So they
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> say the right things but they're not doing anything to change… I also don't feel like they
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> care.

While Amber believed the higher-ups knew what was right and wrong to say, she did not believe they genuinely cared about committing to racial equity, rendering their commitment as superficial and performative in nature. This performative caring was dangerous because it was collusion with racism and anti-Blackness, under the façade of action. Amber further explained that within her unit, she was often the only person that even thought about equity and justice and that she would constantly remind her team to make sure they were not forgetting to nominate Students of Color. Not only did Amber feel she was the only one who cared, she felt like she was doing the absolute bare minimum within her office and doing it in isolation. While the division verbalized ideals of diversity and inclusion, the actual commitment had not transcended. Kevin, Brad, and Megan all agreed that genuine commitment needed to be demonstrated at the top.

This top down approach impacted staff members at a variety of different levels. Kevin compared the genuine commitment of his departmental supervisor to that of the university and also shared that the ones who were actually committing themselves to racial equity were in lower positions, creating a hierarchal barrier as opposed to positional support.

> I have seen a lot of that conversation be bottom up. The people who are in the trenches with the students are the ones who are having those in-depth conversations about race and trying to push them up the ladder versus having it come down the ladder where it's like this is a culture, this is what we talk about.

This bottom up approach did not allow for the infusion of anti-racism into the foundation of the university, meaning the ones who were most committed usually had less positional power over systemic change. While they had reduced collective power, every participant in this study had power within their position to make change, even if not at the systemic level. Kevin continued to share that support from leadership created genuine dialogue.

> My supervisor welcomes those conversations and creates spaces for them and creates that expectation of staff. There are much more robust discussions about those, both informally and formally and there's expectations that are created about how that is incorporated into our work. But then I think on the flip side, if a president doesn't really build a culture of that, then it's really easy for people who are uncomfortable with that to exit from the conversation or to enter that in a very superficial image-based way.

When the image of racial equity was superficial, it became optional, allowing white supremacy to thrive. Brad echoed "lead by an example on that one. Don't say you need to be having these conversations and then senior leadership is not having those conversations. That would be seen as very inauthentic."

Another example of performative caring was demonstrated by the whiteness of leadership. Most participants discussed being on all white staffs. The leadership at this university was also predominantly white. Jacob commented that the all-white legal team was a barrier to racial equity and that they often justified their decision making in the name of law, often vetoing request for change. Brad, however, believed the university "scored" well because of the structural diversity of the university, sharing "we're doing above middle of the road because our population that we serve alone means that we have to be doing better than in some places." Since he believed the university was already doing well, there was not much else that needed to be done. So, while Brad cared about racial equity, his miseducation of what racial equity was could be conveyed as performative caring. At the same time, he believed senior leadership should and could do more and that the overall 'score' for the university was lower because of the lack of effort by divisions outside of student affairs. The way Brad discussed the score of how the university was doing posited racial equity as something that people could either win or lose at, rather than positioning it as an ongoing commitment, upholding either/or thinking of white supremacy. The way he positioned student affairs as better than other divisions also symbolically demonstrated the ways student affairs was posited as liberal. While this did not specifically address performative caring, it demonstrated the ways structural diversity were used as performative markers.

Participants also individually showcased a level of performative caring as they tried to find a balance of demonstrating their commitment while still centering themselves and utilizing their privilege. For example, Kevin shared that he believed representation of BIPOC in leadership was important, but was concerned that if he truly advocated for that, he would no longer have a place in student affairs. He shared,

So how do I ensure that we have a diverse applicant pool and bring people with different identities into our office and to the conversation?...But I think that there is this idea of like we have this zero-sum game that I think we're trained on, or we're taught through life of - you're always in competition with someone, and so I think that there's this innate fear of you've got to fight people out for whatever. And so how do you do that and also be an ally?

Much of this performative caring was out of fear of what it meant to actually achieve racial equity. Because Kevin understood the importance of representation, he did not see how he would still fit into the equation if there were to be racial equity. This upheld the notion of either/or thinking by seeing the division as either white or having Staff of Color. Kevin's performative caring was also a product of the culture of competition and the socialized individualism of whiteness. While he cared about representation across race, he was afraid that striving for racial equity would render him unneeded. Not only did this exhibit performative caring, it also demonstrated the conflict Kevin experienced in his white identity and the ways he could not see how, as a white person, he could still contribute to racial equity as he equated equity with representation.

Or how are you more intentional about when you put your name in the hat and when you don't? I'm saying like I need to recognize that my identity is not going to positively contribute to this division moving forward in the way that I say I want it to, so I need to get myself out of the way and like push this forward.

This hyper-focus on the white identity as a barrier to racial equity as opposed to systems of whiteness and white supremacy culture demonstrated the miseducation of what racial equity

means. While Kevin wanted things to change, he also really enjoyed his level of access and was conflicted about what his role needed to be moving forward.

Insidious and Evasive. Participants also exemplified the insidious and evasive nature of student affairs as it relates to race and racism. While participants shared it was important to recognize racism, they alluded to the fact that it was often hard to see in student affairs because the field was posited as liberal. There was also a refusal to acknowledge the reality of participants' privilege within the system because of the insidious nature of racism for these white participants. For example, Megan demonstrated how she could not identify institutional racism at the university because it was "hard for me to see whether it's just because I'm white or because I'm not looking for it or because it is not, my experience doesn't force me to take a hard look at that in that way." Being white and being socialized with a lens of race neutrality served as barriers to being able to identify and address racism at the university. While Megan and other participants wanted to achieve racial equity on campus, they were unable to address what they were unable to see.

Due to the insidious nature of racism within the division, Megan spent more time wondering about the things she didn't know, such as how her team was portrayed by others and how her Staff of Color experienced the university. She shared, "I spend a fair amount of time wondering if there are things affecting them that I have no idea because my whiteness blinds me to even considering how that possibly could have been hurtful." Similar to Megan, Amber discussed the insidious nature of student affairs and higher education. However, she specifically highlighted the ways the commitment to racial equity was performative in nature as a result of the insidious racism and whiteness. She remarked,

The idea that not everyone is treated the same or has the same experience is really

upsetting. And it's just amazing how I think insidious, insidious is a good word, insidious

it is including in higher education where we're supposed to be so open minded and liberal

in all these things and we're not. We're the same as the rest of society.

While higher education was supposed to be open-minded, Amber stated that the field of student

affairs was the same as the rest of society. The labeling of higher education as liberal could be

seen as performative caring as it stripped the institution of the responsibility of working towards

racial equity. According to Amber, this evasive environment made it "almost impossible" to

imagine a system that's different. She commented, "I know that the system is racist but I don't

know how - I don't know what those pieces actually are and what they look like and how to

identify them."

Sarah also had a hard time imagining how any system outside of whiteness would work

within student affairs because of the ways she was socialized to understand time and goal

orientation and how she had come to value white culture even when she had a hard time

articulating or seeing it. One of the barriers she discussed was how to address cultural

differences, such as time orientation, sharing, "If part of the group thinks the meeting starts at

this particular time and part of the group thinks that the meeting starts when everybody gets

there, how do you actually run a meeting?" Sarah articulated the ways she was comforted by her

current time orientation, but had a hard time seeing another alternative, demonstrating the

pervasive whiteness not only in her life, but in her career. This made it hard for her to imagine

anything different: "And so, I don't, I can't see it. And I struggle a lot with figuring out how to

make those changes when I can't see what the end product looks like. Very stereotypical, goal

oriented." Anything outside of her current context was too insidious to imagine, creating a

barrier for truly striving for anything different than what was. This excerpt also demonstrated the ways Sarah relied on stereotypes of People of Color and the ways she felt they are differently oriented to time, questioning how they possibly could live their lives that way. While Sarah said she was invested in racial equity, this investment was somewhat performative as she was still attached to the idea of white cultural superiority.

Sarah was also able to see some people as a barrier to racial equity and in some instances was able to see herself as a barrier as well. But mostly, she alluded to the insidious nature of racism as the primary barrier for her and her white colleagues as she shared "but I honestly don't know what it looks like if it's equitable." When she was able to recognize racism and/or barriers to racism, she explained that she often still spent "a lot of energy thinking about the cost-benefit." She authentically shared, "I think even people who, myself included, who have good intentions aren't necessarily willing to, able to, some combination thereof to figure out how to get through the barriers," showcasing her performative caring. This served to recenter her needs over racial equity, highlighting the individualism of white society.

Race evasiveness also contributed to not seeing the magnitude of racism or the multiple ways racism was perpetuated or experienced. For example, Gary did not believe individual racism existed on his campus. He believed the issues were solely systemic. However, when he described systemic racism, he mostly discussed how BIPOC were weeded out from experiences during their upbringing. While Gary shared about systemic racism, he often painted BIPOC from a deficit perspective, demonstrating how white superiority was engrained in him through socialization in a system of dominance. He explained

> By the time an 18 to 24-year-old traditional college-aged student hits our campus, they've already been weeded out from advanced learning, they've already been weeded out from

ACT/SAT prep. They have been weeded out from summer internship projects...By the time they get to higher ed, they've experienced all of that. That weeding out has already occurred…We need to look at potential in a different way. We need to look at that potential in a way that is truly open to the individual and not open to our stereotypes.

Gary's attachment to potential exemplified the ways systemic racism was more insidious to him than he realized. While his intent was to call out the system that created systemic barriers for BIPOC, the impact was that he often placed blame on individuals and on BIPOC based on potential and expectations. He continued to share a sports analogy about hockey players and how their birthdates are at a certain time of the year, making them "almost a full year older than their counterparts and so they were bigger, stronger, faster...They weren't inherently better- just inherently better because they were older. And so, I think our system is biased in the same way." This analogy exemplified how Gary posited white students as better based on the ways the systems supported them more than Students of Color, but did not address the reasons why Students of Color were weeded out.

While this theme was on performative commitment, participants also demonstrated their commitment to racial equity. Abby, for example, showcased her thought process and how she understood her white privilege, sharing,

Just knowing that it's easier as a white person to go about in society or even at work, I really try to remember how I am in a room versus how other people are. What they're going through could be completely different from what I'm going through. So for me to try to best understand, [I] put myself in their shoes, but also realize I could never fully understand what they're going through, but understand my own privilege as how I am in a room or what extra privileges I actually might get from being who I am.

Abby focused on the how societal experiences were different for her as a white person than for someone who is BIPOC. This demonstrated her commitment to being conscious of the way her privilege created access for her in spaces.

This commitment was also demonstrated through pushing back and challenging students to think more critically about racism and how history was whitewashed. For example, Kevin utilized his privilege to reinforce messages about the reality of power, privilege, and oppression. One of his students asked "'Why does the Bible say you can't have tattoos?' And I was like, 'it says your body is a temple…The King James version is where you're getting that and that's a white man's interpretation of the Hebrew document.'" By illuminating the ways whiteness permeated his students' understanding of history, Kevin was able to uphold his commitment to integrating conversations about race, racism, whiteness, and dominance into the curriculum.

Racism In(action)

While participants in this study elected to interview because they felt like this topic was important, they were not exempt from racist attitudes and behaviors. This theme captured the ways participants labeled racism, the ways they demonstrated racist attitudes during their interview, examples of times they noticed racism within student affairs, and examples of systemic racism within student affairs. Racist attitudes by participants did not register as racist to participants at the time of their interviews. Participants' inactions also led to collusion with racism. This theme featured the main theme of racism (in)action and a subtheme of justifying and colluding.

Participants described two different levels of racism: overt and covert. Overt racism referred to extremely obvious actions or behaviors, such as using the "n" word or being part of the KKK. However, covert racism was described in a way that minimized the impact of racist

attitudes and behaviors. Many participants did not fully convey that covert racism was still racism. Their definitions and explanations represented that this type of racism was less severe and, perhaps, not racism at all. Megan summarized the difference between these different levels of racism in a way that represented the sentiments of a many participants. She shared,

> The obvious racism for me, being in my forties is when you see, if you hear people using the "n" word in a direct way, or hear white people using the "n" word in a derogatory way. If you hear white people directing hatred, disrespect, derogatory actions, comments, violence towards People of Color.

This definition of overt racism included intentionality- behaviors that were directed at People of Color. Her definition did not just include using the "n" word, but using the word in a direct or derogatory way. On the other hand, "hidden racism," as Megan referred to it, encompassed "the forms of microaggressions, assumptions, or actions…that we don't even realize because they have just been ingrained as a part of what we consider normalcy."

The way white participants referred to hidden or covert racism were similar in that they served to minimize or reduce any sort of responsibility by the person doing harm. Covert generally referred to something that was hard to see or that was not obvious. However, even the framing of covert served to uphold white individual superiority as it decentered the impact and consequences experienced by BIPOC.

Abby, while at a past institution, described how her boss treated and served Black students differently than white students. This was the same supervisor who mandated she had more white students at her events. She remarked, "If a Black student came up and asked for help, he did not jump up and help like he would with a white student, especially a white Greek student. So just subtle things." Subtle was another word that participants used to describe covert or

hidden racism. This example illuminated the ways that individual racism, as a result of operating within the United States, was perpetuated by a white student affairs professional. Abby's language, while not intentional, downplayed the severity of the experience, upholding white protection. Policing practices disproportionately impacted Students of Color at both Abby's past and current institutions, with Abby sharing that any time there was an event "that had a lot of Black students at, we were asked to have police and the events where mostly white students were, we were never asked…No one ever came out and said, this is pure racism." This demonstrated the ways that both universities stereotyped Students of Color.

Another example of racism (in)action at the institution was the presence of "clubs," or groups of white men that congregated together. Megan shared that people who were not in the club, were excluded and often insulted- essentially BIPOC, stating, "There are racial jokes that you might even hear that really shouldn't be in the workplace… I don't think the university created that environment of white supremacy attitudes. I think the people brought them themselves to the job." Megan showcased the way whiteness and individual superiority within groups of white people played out when she discussed the presence of these "clubs." These clubs represented congregations of people with racist attitudes and beliefs. However, the term club, represented the exclusiveness and elitism of these socialized attitudes and behaviors. While Megan did not believe this was a product of the university, these behaviors were present, noticeable, and harmful- upholding whiteness and racism at the university.

The ways racism was explained to be experienced by BIPOC and perpetuated and upheld by white people were minimized as well. For example, Gary shared that he only believed people who had an internal dialogue could experience racism:

> If you don't understand your internal construct, if you don't understand what makes you
> you, I don't know that you can experience it. And the differentiation that I will make is if
> you are a historically oppressed race, you experienced racism but you probably wouldn't
> call it racism; it would just be oppression. It would just be a systematic oppressing of you
> as an individual.

Gary did not see the ways that systematic oppression towards BIPOC were synonymous with racism. He continued that both people needed to be aware of their race in order for someone to be racist or experience racism, letting white people off the hook from being racist because of their color-evasive and race neutral mentalities. He remarked, "Racism requires an understanding of, and then an identification of this is occurring because of this identity versus if I'm the oppressive race, but I don't understand that that's why I'm being oppressive, it's just the way it is."

Gary's sentiment of "it's just the way it is" as a white person upheld racism and white supremacy by normalizing oppression and racism. He continued,

> I don't know why we don't trust all people. I don't know why we push them into roles of
> servitude. I don't know why, that's just the way it is. And I don't know that that's
> necessarily racism. It's oppression, but it's not necessarily racism. I think racism requires
> the understanding of the self.

The normalizing of racist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in combination with the minimization of those attitudes and behaviors demonstrated the ways Gary excused himself and other white people from holding themselves accountable for them. This was an example of collusion and racism.

While racism can only exist when power is at play, Brad believed racism could be multidirectional, meaning that both BIPOC and white people could experience racism. He commented,

> You know, for someone to look at me and say, oh, you're racist because they don't know my history. They don't know my backstory. They don't know my interactions with folks. They [are] flipping the coin, flipping that on its head. And by making assumptions, they are being racist.

Assuming that someone was racist was equated as experiencing racism. This illuminated Brad's defensiveness and white fragility. While Brad stated that racism and discrimination were different, he did not necessarily see them differently. He also did not believe in reverse racism because reverse "doesn't mean anything. It's saying that because you are in the typical power position, because it's now impacting you, it has to be reversed. No…You could have a peer group that knowingly or unknowingly is racist towards white students." While Brad acknowledged white privilege, he still believed that white people could experience racism, although less common. This demonstrated how Brad understood racism as purely racial discrimination and not something that was embedded within systems of power, privilege, and oppression. However, this was not just a semantic interpretation of racism, it rather represented the ways Brad did not understand the weight and consequences associated with racism.

Justifying and Colluding. Participants also justified reasons why they did not engage in conversations about race and racism, showcasing their collusion with white supremacy culture. A few participants were honest and transparent about the ways they colluded and provided their thought process, while others were not cognizant that what they had shared was racist in nature. Some participants were afraid of the perceived repercussions of what they felt they could lose

and did not believe advocating was worth the risk. This demonstrated the ways dominant systems of whiteness served to keep whiteness in place, especially in student affairs. For example, Sarah shared about a time that she did not push as hard as she should have on an issue, but pushed enough to feel like she did something. She shared,

> I pushed several years ago on something that I knew I would get smacked back on, but I didn't push. I was careful in how I pushed, so I felt good about myself because I didn't just let it lie. But I knew when I was doing it that I didn't push as hard as I could have. And that definitely felt like a bit of a copout.

In this example, Sarah colluded with racism by selecting to not push as hard as she could. She did not feel the risk was worth it, which also demonstrated her performative commitment to racial equity and the ways that she did not feel supported to push for racial equity within her division. She did enough to feel like she did something, avoiding shame, but knew that it would not lead to actual change. She continued to share the way she positionally felt stuck in how she addressed the situation, showcasing the way that student affairs was not committed fully to addressing racism or creating racial equity.

Advocating for Students of Color was portrayed as not being committed to serving all students. For example, after the murder of an unarmed Black man, Students of Color protested. Sarah was conflicted about whether she should attend or not out of fear of being seen on tv, stating, "What does that mean for my job? Because I am at a positional level where…what is likely to be said is that I can't serve all students because I've seen it this way." The message this conveyed was that student affairs prioritized serving white students. Not being able to express her support for Students of Color out of fear of not being seen as qualified for her position, reinforced the reality of white superiority and white dominance in student affairs. Whether this

was the reality or not, Sarah's internalized fear of repercussion was a barrier to her fully engaging. She, however, did comment that she at least realized when she was making those decisions, stating "and so it was another moment where I think the good thing for me is, I now actually realize that when I'm making these decisions. So, I'm making them as compared to just copping out completely." In doing so, she prioritized her own comfort and pride over racial equity.

Similarly, Jacob shared that he did not want people to fear getting fired for being held accountable for racism or racist attitudes and behaviors. He expressed that you may lose your job if you said or did something that was overtly racist. That someone could do something overtly racist and only potentially lose their job in Jacob's example, showcased a performative commitment to racial equity. This example demonstrated the ways that universities show a commitment when their reputation is in question. This is an example of the way student affairs colluded with white supremacy and dominant ideologies of whiteness. Jacob also demonstrated collusion by wanting to protect people from being in fear of losing their job as opposed to fear of doing harm to others.

> But also, not creating a situation where people exist in fear. I don't think people should run around and be like I'm going to lose my job all the time. But also recognizing that a lot of times this stuff can be based on a person's individual values. I mean, that's challenging. What do we do with that?

This justified the harshness of termination by reducing racist actions and attitudes to an individual's values, illuminating white people's fear of being seen as racist. Jacob demonstrated white solidarity as he tried to justify white protection, although without cognition.

Justification and collusion were also demonstrated by lack of engagement with conversations about race and racism. For Amber, this collusion was born out of wanting to avoid conflict, which was a tenant of white supremacy culture. She shared "There are times I hold back…I don't wanna deal with the conflict… other times for me, I just don't think about whatever it is we're talking about and how that relates into race and racism." Brad also shared that addressing race and racism all the time was exhausting and that there were times where he did not engage because he was lazy or because he was unsure of his role in addressing it. For example, some of his Students of Color used the "n" word in the office and Brad felt like it was not his place to address it. Similarly, Abby shared about how disappointed she was in herself when she colluded with silence in a meeting where there were racial disparities.

> I didn't say anything, but a lot of people didn't. But that's my place to say something. It is one thing if I just support them in a smaller group setting, but I need to also speak up and advocate in a bigger setting.

Although Abby demonstrated care and believed in accountability, her example illuminated the ways it was easy to collude with the system. She justified her inaction with the inaction of others.

Additionally, being color-evasive did not lead to anti-racism. Brad and Jacob both believed racial equity looked like color-evasive campuses. This was contradictory and demonstrated the ways they were both socialized to justify racism as a product of noticing race and racism. Jacob shared "I think the idea of colorblindness is obviously stupid. We can't not talk about the thing because it's there. But I think for me, that that would be something that I think would be pretty ideal."

Lastly, Gary demonstrated that engaging in conversations about race and racism were situationally based for him. He shared that he engaged more when he oversaw identity-based

units and that race was less of a part of his portfolio now. Gary justified his level of engagement with race and racism based on the presence of needing to support specific programs geared towards Students of Color. This contributed to white racial framing as it showcased how Gary attached necessity for conversation based on the presence of BIPOC, excluding him and other white people from the narrative of race and racism.

Student Affairs Indoctrination

Student affairs indoctrination represents the way participants saw themselves in student affairs and what they had gained and learned from their career path as white professionals. This theme encompassed two subthemes: cyclical misinformation of student affairs and the future of student affairs.

Cyclical Misinformation of Student Affairs. Every participant in this study shared that their career in student affairs had contributed to their understanding of race and racism. Whether it was through their graduate school programs, equity trainings they attended, or conversations with other professionals, participants showcased the way student affairs provided them access, education, and insight into their identities. Much of this was derivative from the commitment the field had to social justice and inclusion. While participants learned from student affairs, the other themes in this study, especially racism (in)action and performative commitment, demonstrated the ways that student affairs fell short. However, despite how participants felt about student affairs and about the amount of education and conversations they had in their professional careers, they often were still unable to identify racism, white supremacy, or the way whiteness upheld racism.

Student affairs graduate preparation programs provided both Jacob and Kevin the opportunity to learn about being white and about race and racism. Jacob, who had an

assistantship in a multicultural center, participated in a series of talks that assisted him in understanding his identities. "We would talk a lot about our identities and how those impacted us and what these systems looked like. That was a really good eye-opening experience for me" calling it his "aha moment." Jacob shared the salience of his student affairs identity and the interplay between his white identity and role in student affairs. He commented,

> Student affairs is a part of my identity as a human all the time. So, a lot of the way I think how that impacts me out of work is very similar to the work… and so for me it's kind of all rolled together. The way I believe how my race and other identities together operate outside of student affairs, operates within student affairs as well. I don't think there's a really huge difference.

Most participants had very salient student affairs identities. Jacob saw this identity as one of his primary identities, equating it to part of who he was as a human. His experience in graduate school allowed him the opportunity to discuss his identities for the first time and he thought more about his race at work than he did outside of work, demonstrating the way these identities informed each other and the impact of his graduate program on his understanding of self. While Jacob learned about his white identity, he still did not think about what it meant to be white all the time and had a difficult time defining patterns of whiteness.

Similarly, Kevin first explored what it meant to be white in his student affairs graduate program during a privilege walk activity, which he found jarring, especially for him and his white classmates that came directly from undergrad. This exploration was forced and left him feeling guilty and defensive,

> One group did a privilege walk and it was led by one of the Women of Color in our cohort who had some pretty strong- she brought a lot of perspective or whatever into the

facilitation of that activity. And I think that, honestly, that was probably my first time having a conversation about privilege or oppression in that activity.

This multicultural course assisted Kevin in learning about power and privilege from one of his peers, a Woman of Color, who he described as having strong opinions. This description demonstrated not only his resistance to the activity, but his resistance to the facilitation by a Woman of Color. He described this introduction as jarring, "this conversation and the facilitation itself was off-putting. Maybe folks who were living in their ignorance in this place of defensiveness and feelings of guilt. And then folks who were aware of it were feeling like crap." This feeling of guilt was illuminated for Kevin as a result of not having had to think about being white before. Kevin also shared that his minoritized sexual identity was a bit of a barrier to him seeing his white identity because he felt minoritized and oppressed, especially since he had not shared this part of his identity with his family. Kevin had continued to reflect on what it meant to be white as a result of this experience and because of his experience in student affairs. Even so, he continued to feel conflicted about how to been seen as good and how to make actual change.

> As a student affairs person, I have tended to surround myself with people who have the same racial identity, but have the same understanding and are challenging themselves in similar ways, which is helpful…But, I don't know. I don't often feel pride about it. I think, that's such a white savior complex. I think that there also is some feeling of responsibility around… being a good white person… We tell students all the time- use your privilege for good. Lift up voices. So, there's this feeling you have this responsibility to, if you're aware of it, you have to do something about it. But then they're in the same vein, the white savior complex. You don't have to save anyone. That's just trying to make yourself feel good.

Kevin's conflict with being white in student affairs was ensuring that he was not just providing "lip service," while being worried that some of the actions were self-fulfilling.

Most participants described learning about equity and being white as student affairs professionals. Brad and Megan shared that most of what they had come to understand was a direct result of their careers. For example, Brad shared that it was mostly his college experience and "experiences in graduate school, my experiences in the profession was when I began to look outside of the box that I was in and begin to see the challenges of race, racism, and all of those isms." These sentiments reflected the ways segregation was a barrier to understanding race and racism as a white person and the ways student affairs assisted participants' learning. This metaphorical box represented whiteness. While he was exposed to race and racism, he still did not have many conversations about his own race.

Student affairs allowed Megan to expand her understanding of the complexity of racism. Megan had explained the difference between obvious and hidden racism and shared that she knew obvious racism existed prior to college, but her student affairs career was what illuminated what she called hidden racism. She continued,

> Without student affairs, my understanding of racism would be much less…I don't think I had an understanding of racism. So, I think I've only gotten that post-college. I mean it's weird though. I had an understanding, but it was based on no real understanding.

While Megan believed she was still lacking an understanding, she felt student affairs provided the foundation to her understanding.

The examples in this theme showcased the ways white participants relied on student affairs for their education around race and racism. However, student affairs was still part of a system that was embedded in white dominant ideology and white supremacy. Participants

throughout their interviews shared the ways they were afraid of how others perceived them and their dissonance between being good or bad. They exhibited their commitment to racial equity and the ways they colluded with the system in addition to the ways they felt pulled by student affairs to stick to the status quo and to not push too hard for change out of fear of being obsolete or losing their job. While participants relied on student affairs, they often received or delivered mixed messages about what the university was truly committed to.

The Future of Student Affairs. This subtheme captured participants observations of the field, their advice for achieving racial equity on their campus, and the resources and the support they felt they needed. This subtheme reiterated that systemic racism exists in student affairs. As such, it was important to find out how participants felt about the future of student affairs and their views on racial equity within the field.

Within the division, there was a preference for hiring white people, creating barriers for racial equity. For example, Sarah shared

> I just have become a lot more aware of how our field is built to preference people who look like us, who are white. …There's been a lot of instances over the past couple of years where…two Black men who had some really challenging experiences around their race and how they were responded to or treated. And so, I think being aware of that, reading about that, too, has also made me think about more what role I play in this and where I fit in the ecosystem.

The current state of student affairs resulted in Sarah thinking more about the future of student affairs and what her role was and where she fit, emphasizing the importance of white people engaging in conversations about race. She shared, "It's having the conversations and initiating

conversations with our entire student body, but certainly with white people to spark conversation and dialogue and open people's eyes to these conversations, whether they're difficult or not." White people engaging in conversations about race and racism felt central to Sarah's understanding of shifting the field. She wanted to illuminate barriers, especially the ones that were hard for her and others to see, but did not feel the desire for true change was a shared sentiment.

Collaboration, time, and resources were also important aspects for creating racial equity in the division. Sarah remarked that it was important to figure out "how to get people who do have passion for it together, work on it, and be given the time and resources to be able to do that and have it be an expectation of the division." At the same time, she had a hard time seeing what racial equity looked like or the process by which to achieve racial equity that is primary and central to the daily work within the field, demonstrating just how central whiteness was within student affairs. Even white participants who desired change, could not envision the path to get there. For example, Kevin remarked,

> We have this weird disconnection between the why of our field and the actual way our field is managed. We go into undergrad and we have these experiences with student affairs professionals and who are all about equity and justice and they train us on these things. But then you get into the field and higher ed programs and you're like, wow, this whole thing is by white men and they have been moving up into positions. And the way that we structure everything is really based on whiteness.

This illuminated the ways student affairs upheld whiteness and demonstrated the performative nature of the field by showcasing that the racially just symbolic narrative of student affairs was not what happens in actuality. He continued to share that because of the way student affairs was

embedded in whiteness and promoted people who looked like him, that he was unsure of where he fit in the future of student affairs. He was afraid that by advocating for racial equity he would render himself obsolete within the field, sharing, "essentially, if there's 10 leadership positions in the field, there are going to be opportunities that in order for us to create this utopian, equitable field, that means that there's not going to be white people in those positions."

Accountability, representation, and policy reform were all essential to Kevin's vision of racial equity, which created a disconnect between where he wanted student affairs to be and what that would mean for him within the field. The idea of scarcity or white tribe mentality served to uphold systems of oppression as it centered Kevin in the experience and not the needs within the field. This also demonstrated the ways Kevin reduced equity to structural diversity and the ways he could not fully envision his role in advancing equity within the field as a white person. Throughout his interview, Kevin grappled with how he saw himself as a white person. Even though he was self-reflective, committed to educating his students, and had a vision for racial equity, this dissonance was a barrier to Kevin really seeing himself as a facilitator for equity.

Brad believed that a lack of racism was better than anti-racism, but that the United States was founded on racism. Therefore, anti-racism was the only option given the country's history. He described anti-racism as always "address[ing] anything as soon as it presents… We all always take that moment to stop and engage in the conversation about the inappropriateness or the racism." He believed that this did not logically make sense "because if we are all always addressing it, there's no one to address it to because it's all of us. Regardless of that, it's exhausting."

White people's exhaustion from confronting racism did not compare to the exhaustion and harm experienced by BIPOC. Brad had a difficult time envisioning collective accountability,

but similar to Sarah and Kevin, believed it was important, illuminating individualism and paternalism as barriers to racial equity. Brad also believed that people needed to be open to addressing racial equity sharing, "It's a big part because then it takes, it helps to take racism from a 'your' problem to an 'our' problem. 'Your' issue to an 'our' issue. And I think that's, that's the value that can be brought to it." The focus on individualism paired with group accountability demonstrated the disconnect between vision and path.

Most participants believed student affairs administrators and student affairs as a whole, needed to talk more about race and racism, infusing it into the fabric of the university. Abby shared "during like a normal workday, there's no space to just talk about racism. Like, no, this is a daily thing for people. So, I think it would be good to talk about it more." At the same time, she felt that there was a lack of opportunity to get to know her colleagues that she worked with every day, making it harder to understand each other. "I just find it odd. I feel like in student affairs we act like we're so busy and we don't have time for certain things, but like you're going to work better with someone when you understand them."

Interpersonal relationships were an extremely important part of advancing racial equity. Abby, while she tried to always advocate and support her Staff of Color, felt student affairs needed to provide more training around cross-racial supervision. She also felt that there needed to be more equitable practices related to policing on campus by creating a standard for police attendance at events, rather than it being on an event-by-event basis, which disproportionately impacted Students of Color.

Racial diversity in the classroom and in leadership, specifically to create a more positive experience for Students of Color, were also extremely important. Abby remarked,

If you're a Person of Color, sitting in a classroom, you don't see or even being supervised, you don't see someone like you- of course it's going to be a different experience. I think if more People of Color are in higher positions, I think that would then help trickle down.

This representation described by Abby was for the benefit of Students of Color. She shared that although she was racially conscious in supervision, it was still difficult to advance racial equity or advocate for her staff members because everyone above her was white and did not always see the ways they also upheld racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy. Meanwhile, Amber shared "working in higher education, I think it's easier to engage in conversation... so if you want to put the work in to expand your understanding of your identities, you can." She shared that she infused diversity into the curriculum of the courses she taught and how she utilized the equity office within the division to supplement her students' learning. Amber commented "ignoring race is not going to make this an anti-racist society" and offered the following advice:

Do the reading, find podcasts, find some authors and do the work- you need to. I think for me, probably because this is what I usually do is to find out for myself, where am I showing up in the space…. And so, starting out with just like simple things you can read really quickly, but from reliable sources…There are already experts out there who are doing this. It's okay to learn from them.

Self-education and utilizing pre-existing resources was important for Amber in her journey to learning about race and racism. She encouraged others to seek out information as opposed to relying on BIPOC for their own personal education. While she emphasized the access to education within the field, she also demonstrated the necessity for taking responsibility for her own learning. Similarly, Jacob echoed Amber's sentiments around access and engagement.

While student affairs provided access, individuals still needed to opt-in to conversations about race and racism. The personal ability to elect in or to opt-out of crucial conversations was a barrier to many participants as they navigated their desire for change, considered the role they played, and confronted the ways they colluded with the system.

Summary and Transition

There were six major themes as a result of this study. Each of the themes assisted the researcher in answering both of the research questions as they were directly connected. The themes and sub-themes also helped inform each other. The researcher utilized critical ontological expansiveness as part of the phenomenological study. Data was collected, analyzed through the lens of the conceptual framework, and the following six themes emerged.

Distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks captured the ways participants did or did not understand race and racism based on their geographical proximity to People of Color, region where they lived, political affiliation, and their generational upbringing. Meanwhile, navigating judgement illuminated the ways participants were more concerned with being perceived as racist than the impact of their racist attitudes and behaviors. The next finding was values of whiteness, which included the ways participants discovered they were white and the ways they internalized messages and values during their upbringing that maintained systems of whiteness. The fourth finding that emerged from the data was performative commitment, which highlighted participants' performance during their interviews and the performative aspects of their commitment towards racial equity. The fifth finding was racism (in)action. This finding included participants' racist attitudes and behaviors during the interview and the ways they colluded with and justified their collusion with white supremacy. Lastly, student affairs indoctrination captured the way participants relied on information and education from their field,

but how that information still did not facilitate their understanding of racial equity. This finding also included participants' views on the future of student affairs.

      Chapter five will provide an overview of the study, a summary of the six themes, and a discussion of these themes by each of the two research questions guiding this study. Implications from this study will be addressed and recommendations for policy, practice, and research will be provided.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussions, and Future Considerations

Summary of Study

In 2016, 86% of all student affairs administrators racially identified as white (Seltzer, 2017). Racial inequity in the United States is prevalent and permeates all systems, including higher education, leading to disparities especially at historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). To serve all students and work towards racial equity within student affairs, it is important to address these inequities. Since these inequities are a product of racial superiority, it is important to understand the ways white student affairs administrators describe and experience whiteness. The purpose of this study was to understand how white student affairs administrators understood whiteness, how participants described their white identity and whiteness, and how white student affairs administrators perceived this part of their identity informing their work.

The two primary research questions for this study were:

1. How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

2. How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

Phenomenological research and its appropriate analytic methods were used to answer these research questions. Specifically, ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2019) was used to ensure a critical analysis, infusing the conceptual framework of whiteness and pertinent concepts from the literature. As a result, six themes and their corresponding subthemes emerged. While chapter four provided an overview of each of the themes, chapter five includes a discussion of each of the themes by research question and implications for policy, practice, and research. As

stated in chapter four, each of the research questions informed the other, and therefore, each of the themes assisted the researcher in understanding the research questions holistically, as opposed to in isolation. The six themes included distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and the indoctrination of student affairs.

Summary of Findings

Most participants did not come to understand themselves as white until college or graduate school. Some may have known that they were raced as white earlier, but limited reflection occurred until later in life. Participants felt they were liberal and anti-racist because of their career in student affairs. Student affairs was seen as a field that "gets it," so racism was something they all felt they talked about. However, most participants, when they engaged, engaged in conversations about race from a deficit perspective and had a limited understanding of how their racial identity impacted their role in student affairs. Based on the data, being in student affairs contributed more to their understanding of being white, but being white and exhibiting fragility and shame influenced how they showed up in their roles as student affairs professionals. Participants' roles in student affairs often led to white identity dissonance as they felt pulled by the bureaucracy of student affairs, received mixed messages about the importance of engaging in dialogue about race and racism without full support for being anti-racist, and, ultimately, had a lack of understanding of what it meant to be white. While each of the research questions were directly connected and informed the other, an overview of the themes by research question is presented below.

Research Question One

How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

White student affairs administrators described their experiences with their white racial identity in a variety of ways. They described their identities through their upbringing, through their experiences in graduate school, through their experiences within student affairs, and through their distance to and from other white people and BIPOC. This is evident in all six of the themes from this study.

First, participants understood their white identity based on the structural diversity of their towns, neighborhoods, and schools. Most of the participants described or alluded to being white in comparison to someone else's racial identity and often shared that they did not realize they were white or did not see themselves as raced until they interacted with BIPOC. This was represented in the finding distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, and was further captured by each of the corresponding subthemes. These subthemes included geographical distance, which represented the segregation participants experienced and the ways they blamed BIPOC for self-segregation at their schools and universities; political distance, which represented the ways participants described different types of white people: good and bad based on their political affiliations; and through generational distance, which showcased the ways participants viewed their understanding of being white as it related to their age and the age of their family members and friends, often using the excuse that the older someone was, the less they understood. Through this finding, it was clear that student affairs professionals described their whiteness as dependent versus independent, rendering whiteness as neutral.

Participants also demonstrated the ways they were fragile in their white identities, often being more afraid of how others perceived them than about the impact their attitudes and behaviors had on others, which was evidenced in navigating judgement. This theme consisted of the subthemes protecting reputations and identity dissonance: shame and self-image, which captured the ways participants wanted to not only protect themselves, but how they wanted to protect family and friends from being labeled as racist or problematic. This stemmed from the ways participants viewed whiteness in binary terms- either as good or bad, creating identity dissonance. Many participants did not believe they were good white people but did not want to be seen as bad, perspectives that were both arbitrary, subjective, and served to uphold white supremacy. Participants also described good and bad as it related to overt and covert racism. They believed bad white people were overtly racist, while they believed being good was unattainable, resulting in shame and guilt. This caused white participants to want to distance themselves from other white people who they believed to be racist, which pushed them away from owning their own group identity and away from being anti-racist. Their goal was to be seen as not racist as opposed to actually acting in anti-racist ways, serving as a source of self-protection.

Participants also described their experiences being white through the ways they discussed their values and the values instilled in them during their upbringing, which was captured in values of whiteness. These values included treating everyone the same, being welcoming, being inclusive, being kind, being color-evasive, and also maintaining the status quo. Participants were so engrained in these values; it was hard for them to see past them. This theme included discovering whiteness and it's all in the numbers, which captured the ways participants learned about being white, how they felt about being white, and how that was often dependent on the

number of BIPOC present. They also superficially valued diversity by equating anti-racism with the presence of BIPOC.

Performative commitment was the next theme that demonstrated the ways participants understood themselves as white, which included the subthemes of performative caring, less talk, more action, and insidious and evasive. While participants cared about racial equity, it was often self-serving and in order to avoid shame and guilt. Participants wanted to be seen as good and therefore interacted with people in their life to ensure they kept that reputation. However, they also had their own personal threshold of what they deemed "good enough," meaning they often made decisions about when and how they acted in anti-racist ways. Participants were afraid to risk their comfort and, therefore, described their whiteness as both comfortable and guilt-inducing.

While all of the participants in this study cared about racial equity in their personal lives and careers, they were not immune from demonstrating their own racist attitudes and behaviors, which was captured in the finding labeled racism (in)action. This theme demonstrated how participants were unable to describe the ways they exuded whiteness as they were often unaware that their rhetoric or attitudes colluded with whiteness and white supremacy. Racism (in)action, as a theme, showed the ways participants authentically shared their views and beliefs and demonstrated that they did not just share what they thought should be said. This theme expressed the ways the researcher experienced participants' interviews and captured the ways participants truly did not understand the implications of whiteness.

Lastly, student affairs indoctrination helped illuminate the ways student affairs administrators described their experience with their white racial identity. As shared previously, each of the research questions were co-dependent on the other because participants explained

that they learned more about their white identities during their career or during their student affairs graduate programs and assistantships than at any other point in their lives. Therefore, much of how they understood themselves to be white was as a direct result of their professional careers. This section also demonstrated the ways student affairs contributed to the ways they displayed, experienced, and upheld whiteness because of the expectations set forth by student affairs to be and remain neutral, thus sending the message that their main responsibility was to support and uplift white students.

Research Question Two

How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

White student affairs administrators viewed whiteness informing their work within student affairs in a few ways. At the same time, they believed their student affairs identities often informed their white racial identities. Most of the participants viewed their student affairs identity as more salient than their white identity and therefore, participants had a difficult time describing how whiteness informed their work.

Often times, the participants over 40 felt like they did not have as clear of an understanding of race and racism as their younger colleagues because they felt they missed out on much of that content in graduate school, as evidenced in distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, values of whiteness, and student affairs indoctrination. This demonstrated the ways participants heavily depended on their schooling and careers to better understand themselves. At the same time, it also demonstrated how participants were unaware of the ways whiteness informed their work because it felt neutral, standard, and often unidentifiable to them. Participants often learned more about race and racism than they did about the ways they

contributed to it during their upbringing and from professional development opportunities, positing whiteness as irrelevant to the experiences within student affairs. Many participants never explicitly talked about what it meant to be white outside the context of this study, further demonstrating the ways whiteness was foundational to their understanding and approach within their field and the ways their values were in alignment with the white standards of student affairs. While it may seem contradictory, this illuminated the magnitude of how whiteness informed participants' work in student affairs, without cognition.

Furthermore, the themes of racism (in)action, navigating judgement, and performative commitment demonstrated the ways whiteness informed participants' work with and without cognition. Many participants demonstrated, stated, or displayed racist attitudes, behaviors, or practices during their interviews. However, these perspectives did not register as racism to participants during their interview based on the ways they asserted themselves and the ways their statements were often contradictory to what participants espoused as their commitments. This demonstrated the ways white participants' values and beliefs informed the ways they understood both race and racism. Because participants' division of student affairs often espoused the values of neutrality and performative commitment, participants were able to collude and justify their collusion with and without cognition. White student affairs professionals often spent a lot of energy protecting the ways their colleagues and students saw them by trying to demonstrate and convince people they were not racist. However, because their division had not committed to and supported them in being fully anti-racist, they only strived to not be seen as racist.

Additionally, many participants did not talk about race and racism during their upbringing and had a hard time identifying what racism looked like on a college campus. They also had a difficult time envisioning racial equity, leaving them in a place that allowed them to

uphold white supremacy through status quo. This resulted in participants not having to see the ways their whiteness informed their work.

Discussion of Findings

Each of the six main themes connected to the conceptual framework of whiteness and concepts explored in the literature. This section provides an overview of these themes, an interpretation based on the framework and literature, and the original contributions of the study.

Distance and Proximity: The Other Side of the Tracks

Participants in this study demonstrated a distancing from their white identities throughout the duration of their interviews. All of the participants grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods and demonstrated the impact of segregation by only seeing themselves as raced in relation to People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), rendering whiteness as neutral (Bell Jr., 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998). When engaging in conversations about race and racism, seven out of the nine participants felt more comfortable engaging with other white people than they did with People of Color because it felt "safer" (DiAngelo, 2018), upholding the narrative of individual superiority (Jones, 1972; 1981) to maintain social order (DiAngelo, 2018). At the same time, these participants still felt it was important to share that their communities were diverse and that they worked at a university with many Students of Color, justifying their credibility. The two participants who felt more comfortable engaging with People of Color were Gary and Tim. Both Gary and Tim felt less judged by People of Color because they believed BIPOC were appreciative that they were even trying to engage, illuminating the concept of white saviorism, deriving from individual superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981) and demonstrating the individualism (Okun & Jones, 2001) they experienced within their white identities. They

explained that this was a result of BIPOC not giving them negative feedback. They felt more judged by white people, positing these engagements as more competitive.

In alignment with Tatum (2017), participants blamed BIPOC for self-segregation, ridding them of the responsibility of engaging across race. They did not see how only having relationships with white people contributed to segregation and often blamed BIPOC for creating distance, upholding the ideology of white superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981). This is similar to the findings by Bondi (2012) that stated recent graduates from a student affairs master's program protected their privilege of exclusion by maintaining segregation. Findings from this study, however, not only demonstrated the ways white student affairs professionals maintained segregation, but also highlighted the ways they did not see this as their responsibility, which allowed them to place blame on BIPOC for upholding structures of racism. This illuminated the ways racism were also central to the education system (Gillborn, 2005; Poon, 2018). White participants in this study also distanced themselves politically, equating being liberal and Democrat with being good and anti-racist, while positing white conservative Republicans as bad and racist, upholding either/or thinking of white supremacy culture (Okun & Jones, 2001) which allowed them to be selective about addressing racial inequity (DiAngelo, 2011).

This theme was directly related to previous findings within the literature and the conceptual framework as it demonstrated the way participants upheld white supremacy as a result of their socialization within white supremacy and the concepts of race neutrality (Bell Jr., 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998). However, this finding also presented new insight into understanding the ways participants longed to be proximate to BIPOC (Thandeka, 1999). The projection of blame on BIPOC and the avoidance of conversations about race and racism with both white people and BIPOC illuminated the ways participants were afraid of doing,

acting, or being wrong and losing credibility or being seen as racist. While this is directly

connected to participants caring more about their perception than the impact of their behavior, it

also showcased the ways participants internalized shame within their white identities and the

ways their fight, flight, and freeze responses of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018) were

activated as a result. Specifically, this demonstrated the ways student affairs professionals

projected their fears and shame within their positions.

Navigating Judgement

Participants were extremely concerned about how other people perceived them and how

they perceived themselves. The findings in this theme included the subthemes of protecting

reputations and identity dissonance: shame and self-image. As shared in the last discussion,

participants cared more about people perceiving them as racist than the impact of their racist

attitudes and behaviors, which provides new insight into how white student affairs administrators

described whiteness informing their work as many of their actions, conversations, and behaviors

with people were coming from a place of self-protection as opposed to a commitment to racial

equity. As it relates to the conceptual framework, this finding showcased the characteristic of

right to comfort embedded in white supremacy culture (Okun & Jones, 2001). It also

demonstrated the ways participants' white privilege (McIntosh, 1988, 1992) allowed them to be

more concerned about the perceptions of others.

Participants also described what they believed to be good white people and bad white

people, upholding the characteristic of either/or thinking (Okun & Jones, 2001). They equated

their white identities with something they could either be good in or be bad in, demonstrating

their dissonance with their racial identities. Identities are not something one could be good or bad

at, they just are. This correlation showcased the ways participants saw their white identities as a

barrier to them being anti-racist as opposed to the anti-racist identity as a complementary

identity. Their careers as student affairs professionals were often more salient to participants and

assisted them in navigating some of this dissonance justifying that they talk about race and

racism more because of their careers. Participants needed to learn to separate their morality from

their white identities to understand that their identities do not make them "bad" or immoral. Once

participants can reconcile this dissonance, they will then be able to develop anti-racist identities.

Meanwhile, Cabrera et al. (2016) shared that white people need to experience dissonance in their

white identities in order to disrupt racism. However, identity dissonance in this study still led to

inaction, confusion, and shame, serving as a barrier to disruption, upholding what Poon (2018)

discussed as white innocence. The dissonance experienced by white participants served as a

starting point to illuminating the existence of racism, however, it also left them worried about

how others saw them and how they saw themselves. This fear of perception often led to inaction

and silence. This theme captured the ways participants felt shame in themselves and justified the

actions and behaviors of family members to not have to confront the ways their families also

colluded with white supremacy. This served as a form of protection (Poon, 2018) to not have to

engage with the pain participants were caused by realizing their own racist attitudes or behaviors

and those of family members.

Values of Whiteness

Participants explained how they first discovered they were white and how they

convoluted the ideas of structural diversity (Parker & Pascarella, 2013) with equity. This was

captured in the two subthemes: discovering whiteness and it's all in the numbers. This theme and

its corresponding subthemes also captured values of whiteness espoused by participants

including being kind, treating everyone the same, being welcoming, being the white savior, and

not talking about race, which all served to uphold racism as they paralleled conflict avoidance, paternalism, and right to comfort associated with white supremacy culture (Okun & Jones, 2001). Additionally, participants often shared examples of equality and noted that they wished people were treated fairly and the same, highlighting the ways they did not see the three types of racism (Jones, 1972, 1981) as the foundational reason why inequity existed. Most participants described diversity and inclusion when asked about racial equity, rather than equity and justice (Stewart, 2017), showcasing how even their solutions were embedded in assimilationist ideologies of whiteness. This was a result of the values instilled during their upbringing, during their K-12 education, and during their careers in student affairs and often caused participants to have a deficit understanding of BIPOC.

Participants were minimally taught about racism in schools. When racism was discussed, it was discussed as it related to enslavement and the civil war. Meanwhile, at home, participants were taught about race and racism and the rules of engagement through their lack of engagement in conversations, their segregated upbringings, and the messages passed down from their families. Participants in this study, although they knew they were white, never talked about what it meant to be white nor did they discuss the roles their whiteness played in upholding racism, leading to color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016) and reinforcing the ways whiteness were foundational to higher education (Gillborn, 2005). This, coupled with the lack of engagement about what it means to be white in student affairs, contributed to white participants still needing to truly discover their whiteness.

Student affairs also espoused similar values of whiteness. Participants described the ways they were consistently told they needed to treat students fairly, rather than equitably. Both Sarah and Abby shared the ways they walked on eggshells around advocating for racial equity because

they did not feel supported within the division. Participants also shared how talking about race and racism became more important based on the number of Students of Color at their respective institutions, positing race and racism outside of themselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). At the same time, Brad believed that racial equity was achieved once there was structural and representative diversity, contradicting the need to discuss racial equity, further fueling the cycle of whiteness within student affairs.

Performative Commitment

This theme included the following three subthemes: performative caring, less talk, more action, and insidious and evasive and highlighted not only participants' performance to their commitment to racial equity, but also their performance during their interviews. The existence of racism was dependent on whether participants elected to see it, capturing their color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2013) not only within their personal lives, but within student affairs. Participants often centered themselves over their commitment to racial equity by staying silent (DiAngelo, 2017), pushing enough to feel good about themselves, and by believing that if they really fought for racial equity, white student affairs professionals would become obsolete in the field. This performative commitment, specifically within a division that claimed to value diversity and inclusion, demonstrated the ways student affairs professionals were barriers to their own divisional values.

Student affairs, as a division, also embodied color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016) and race-neutrality (Bell Jr., 1980; Bergerson, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998), all serving to uphold white supremacy (Okun & Jones, 2001; Gillborn, 2005; Poon, 2018). Participants received messages from leaders within their division and, more holistically, from university leadership, that made them afraid to commit to racial equity. Participants were told that they needed to be

careful about what messages they posted on social media and one participant was afraid that if they supported Black students during a protest, the university would deem her unfit to serve all students, highlighting the ways racial equity was valued, but not encouraged. The commitment, in actuality, was surface level and performative, allowing the university to adhere to the competencies (ACPA & NASPA, 2015a, 2015b) without actually demonstrating competency. It also served to center white students as the only students at the university worth serving (Closson, 2010), marginalizing BIPOC students and positing them as outsiders at their own institutions (Iverson, 2007). At the same, time, participants had a hard time recognizing and describing racism because of how liberal the field seemed to be and their lack of education around all three types of racism. This was in alignment with how Tatum (2017) described cultural racism as insidious as the air we breathe, demonstrating the ways student affairs was immersed in this culture.

Participants also described the over saturation of white student affairs professionals within the division and within leadership. While participants said they valued racial equity, they often explained they needed more BIPOC within the division, illuminating the ways they felt unequipped to contribute to racial equity as white professionals, without discussing the ways Administrators of Color already within the division experience whiteness and were harmed by the division. This was congruent with the way Closson (2010) described diversity as deemed only important for white learning.

Additionally, many participants shared that they felt student affairs was liberal as a field, but discussed pervasive inaction as there was a lack of accountability and alluded to the fact that the field was all talk. Participants were cautious about engaging in conversations about race and racism because they did not feel a true commitment from leadership at the university (Kezar et

al., 2008) and therefore, were afraid of the real or perceived repercussions, silencing participants into collusion with white supremacy (Okun & Jones, 2001). When conversations were had, they often featured the use of dominant-comparative language, upholding individual superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981) and were absent of the role whiteness played in racism, rendering racism as outside of and not connected to whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Racism (In)action

This theme captured the racist attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by participants during their interviews, examples of times they noticed racism within student affairs, and the ways student affairs upheld systemic racism. Justifying and colluding was a subtheme within racism (in)action and demonstrated the ways participants justified and colluded with white supremacy within student affairs.

Participants demonstrated or alluded to all three types of racism as defined by Jones (1972, 1981): individual superiority, cultural racism, and institutional laws and policies. At the same time, participants did not recognize or acknowledge racism in the way Jones' (1972, 1981) described. Instead, they viewed racism as either covert or overt individual behaviors. They also explained that racism was defined by intentionality rather than impact, serving to protect participants from seeing themselves as racist or holding racist attitudes and behavior, upholding white innocence (Poon, 2018). The ways participants described racism served as a form of individual superiority (Okun & Jones, 2001) as they projected racism as a tenet of individualism rather than systemically and systematically embedded into their attitudes, behaviors, and values.

One of the byproducts of color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2016) and "racism-lite," explained by Bonilla-Silva (2003) was the ideology of reverse racism, or the idea that white people could experience racism. While reverse racism does not actually exist based on the

historical power white people have, a few participants believed that white people could experience racism. Brad shared that it should just be called racism because there was nothing reverse about it. While each of the participants shared that they were committed to racial equity, there were a few that did not even have a foundational understanding of the context in which racism existed. Racism cannot be multi-directional or fluid based on the "deeply embedded system of institutional power" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24).

Participants also justified why they did not engage in conversations about race and racism. Often times, this lack of engagement was out of fear of how others would perceive them and out of conflict avoidance (Okun & Jones, 2001; DiAngelo, 2018). There were also a few participants that commented that it was not worth the risk, that they were lazy, or that they were tired, all serving to uphold their own comfort and individual superiority (Jones, 1972, 1981), while illuminating the ways they benefited from white privilege (McIntosh, 1988, 1992). This justification allowed participants to collude with racism and white supremacy both in their personal lives and within their student affairs professions.

Student Affairs Indoctrination

This finding represented the ways participants saw themselves in student affairs and the ways they relied on student affairs for their education as white professionals. It encompassed two subthemes: the cyclical misinformation of student affairs and the future of student affairs.

Since white student affairs professionals had limited accurate education about race and racism, they often learned about it in their graduate school programs or during their careers. Student affairs provided access to education, but did not necessarily provide participants with the skills to recognize individual, cultural, or institutional racism (Jones, 1972, 1981). Education and training also did not center or challenge participants to learn about being white or the ways

whiteness was upheld within the division, serving to maintain white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005; Poon, 2018; Bondi, 2012). This heavy reliance on student affairs for participants' education led to a cycle of miseducation as participants believed to know more than they thought they knew, leading to less action because participants felt they arrived at a metaphorical place of "wokeness" and saw themselves as part of the "choir" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

For example, participants were asked about what racial equity looked like in student affairs and what resources they needed in order to strive towards racial equity. Many participants could not envision it and could not identify what needed to change, demonstrating the ways their view of the future of student affairs seemed to mirror the current state of the field. Most participants, while they understood racism existed, felt that student affairs as a field was way ahead of other industries and fields because of the openness to engage in conversations. This upheld whiteness as it did not lead participants to disrupt whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2016). However, participants throughout their interviews discussed the difficulties engaging in conversations and the fears they had of losing their jobs or becoming obsolete, highlighting their indoctrination to the idea that student affairs was working towards achieving racial equity. This finding provided new insight into the cyclical way that student affairs administrators bought into the performative notion that student affairs truly valued equity and justice, while continuing to operate with white standards, norms, and policies.

Limitations

As a qualitative study on white student affairs administrators, this project is not generalizable to different career fields. This study did not extend into other areas within the university, although participants shared their narratives about their interactions with campus partners and university policies. This study offered a situated and contextual account of the ways

nine white student affairs professionals, ranging from assistant directors to assistant vice presidents, at one university in the Southeast region of the United States experienced their white identities and the ways whiteness impacted their work within the field. Insights gained from this study might be useful to student affairs divisions across the United States as many of the participants had worked at institutions in several different regions before starting at this particular university and provided examples and narratives that were parallel to their experience at this university.

Further, participants self-selected into this study and shared that they were interested in the topic. As such, a limitation is that this study only included white cisgender, able-bodied, men and women. Two participants identified as gay and one participant identified as questioning. Therefore, this study did not capture the full breadth of white identity as it did not include participants who were transgender, nonbinary, and/or disabled, along with many other social identities. All participants stated that this topic was important to them and that they believed in racial equity. Therefore, the themes of this study are not transferable to all student affairs administrators. However, participants had a wide range of understanding and buy-in and all explained whiteness is similar ways. This study also took place at a HWCU. As such, these themes may not be applicable to white student affairs administrators at HBCUs or HSIs.

Recommendations for Practice/Policy

The experiences articulated by participants demonstrate the changes that need to be made within student affairs. Participants shared that most of their education and training related to race and racism came directly from their experiences within student affairs and their graduate student affairs programs and had therefore postulated student affairs as more liberal than other fields. However, most participants still were not able to identify racism in themselves, in their practices,

or in the cultural or policies within the division. Additionally, many participants also saw race as outside of themselves and saw their white identities as secondary to their student affairs identities. White student affairs administrators would benefit from direct education about the history of race and racism and the role whiteness plays in upholding systems of dominance. While every participant wanted racial equity, many did not feel equipped to engage in conversations. As such, recommendations for the division of student affairs are articulated below.

While white student affairs administrators need more support as it relates to understanding their own racial identities, they need to be supported by leadership within the division of student affairs. The field of student affairs needs to move from the notion of structural diversity as a goal (Parker & Pascarella, 2013) towards equity and justice (Stewart, 2017). Since the process of understanding racial identity is complex and ongoing, a short-term recommendation for student affairs administrators is to work with an equity coach, funded by the university, to ensure decisions are made from an equitable lens. This coach would assist administrators in thinking through their own identities and through systems of dominance as it relates to policies, decisions, and structure. It will also allow them to develop in their racial identities while simultaneously receiving support for the in-the-moment decisions that administrators make that serve to uphold white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

A genuine and authentic commitment needs to be made to promoting and advancing equity through structural and political changes. University administrators need to make equity and justice competency a mandatory requirement at all levels. Senior student affairs administrators can do this by creating equity standards in hiring practices, integrating equity and justice as standards for annual evaluations, and by appropriately compensating people who are

doing equity and justice work both within and beyond the scope of their positions. Hiring processes should include questions related to understanding of identities and commitments to racial equity. This should be a highly weighted criteria for hiring processes.

Additionally, senior student affairs leaders need to do regular equity reviews of their division to assess the ways whiteness permeates all departments and positions and to assess the reality of equity infusion within the division. Each departmental director should also conduct a regular review. For example, utilizing an assessment such as the Multicultural Organization Development model provides senior leaders with a greater understanding of the stage of the organization and provides tangible steps to assess improvement (Jackson, 2006). Assessment also needs to be conducted to evaluate the ways policies and procedures uphold white supremacy to provide an understanding of the barriers the culture of the university has on the ways white student affairs administrators operate within their positions and the harm this does to students, faculty, and Staff of Color. Senior administrators should be in constant conversation with the legal staff of the university to advocate for policy review and policy change that disproportionately impact students, faculty, and Staff of Color.

There also needs to be a commitment to the recruitment and retention of Staff of Color. However, this commitment needs to be in tandem with policies, procedures, and expectations put in place for addressing anti-Blackness and racism. The field needs to consider the ways Staff of Color currently experience the field and the ways they are often tapped by white student affairs administrators to educate them on race and racism. Staff of Color need to be compensated for this work. Additionally, senior student affairs administrators and departmental directors need to ensure clear pathways for hiring and promoting Staff of Color at all positions, and not just those

at entry-level positions or within areas of equity and justice. Regular reviews should be conducted at all positional levels to ensure hiring practices are equitable.

Student affairs administrators at all levels also need ongoing professional development that includes understanding white supremacy culture, racism, and anti-Blackness. Education needs to be provided around identity-conscious supervision and policy review and employees need to be given time to attend these educational sessions without fear of repercussion. While there needs to be information and contextual history, there also needs to be a focus on introspection, reflection, and self-accountability. Trainings on giving and accepting feedback and how to review policy for disparate outcomes are essential.

Staff should be encouraged to consistently provide feedback that disrupts white supremacy without the fear of backlash of losing their jobs. This feedback should happen at all levels and between all levels. As such, racist attitudes and behaviors should not be tolerated within the division. Accountability measures, such as staff discipline, warning, ongoing training, and termination need to be considered when staff uphold white supremacy and anti-Blackness. There also has to be collaboration and interconnectedness among all staff to address racism and anti-Blackness (Kezar et al., 2008; Kezar & Eckel, 2007). For example, all staff, including entry level staff should have access to addressing their concerns with senior leadership without fear of repercussion. Participants noted their supervisors were often barriers to them striving for racial equity. Staff need to be able to communicate about the barriers that prevent them from working towards racial equity and their feedback needs to be taken seriously.

Since most student affairs positions require master's degrees, graduate preparation programs also need to ensure they are contributing to racial equity. Graduate student programs should consider courses beyond multicultural education- courses that allow students to explore

power and privilege. These courses should offer strategies for identifying disparate policies within the field and should infuse equity and justice into all courses within the curriculum.

Finally, both ACPA and NASPA need to expand their competencies beyond diversity and inclusion. These national organizations need to set the tone for the ways professionals operate and, therefore, need to provide the necessary workshops to build capacity for racial equity and to address the performative commitment that has been demonstrated within the field. Equity and justice need to be infused to each of the communities within the organizations and money should be allocated to assist practitioners in combatting white supremacy within their organizations.

While the implementation of these recommendations are essential and necessary to reducing white supremacy in student affairs, they will not be successful if there is no follow through. Often times, administrators begin these initiatives with great intentions, but fall short once they receive any sort of pushback from staff within the division, university leadership, and other stakeholders. Pushback may include rhetoric around advancing a liberal agenda, creating divisiveness within the division, not upholding equal standards for students, faculty, and staff, and can often derail initiatives. It is imperative that leaders understand that this rhetoric preserves white supremacy culture and upholds racist systems and policies. When faced with pushback, administrators need to uphold their commitment to racial equity by challenging the ideologies that serve to maintain whiteness and by following through on infusing these recommendations into the standard practice of their divisions.

Recommendations for Research

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the ways white student affairs administrators described their experience with being white and how whiteness impacted their work. While the themes of this study provide important insight to student affairs, further research needs to be

conducted on the experiences specifically of white administrators within other divisions of the university. Student affairs is a practitioner-based field and has a different set of bureaucracy than academic or business affairs. Understanding the ways whiteness plays out more holistically will be beneficial in understanding the ways whiteness is a barrier to racial equity.

This study specifically focused on student affairs administrators who solely identified racially as white. More research needs to be done on the ways multi-racial administrators, Black administrators, Indigenous administrators, and other Administrators of Color experience whiteness, anti-Blackness, racism, and white supremacy within the division and the impact all student affairs administrators have on students and student perceptions. This insight will allow the field to understand and address barriers to racial equity and ultimately create more positive environments for BIPOC and provide the necessary representation for students. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on the ways policies and procedures within student affairs serve to uphold white supremacy. Illuminating these policies would contribute to greater understanding of racism within policies and allow for policy reform.

This was a qualitative study, which did not allow for numerical comparison. Therefore, more quantitative research needs to be done around the pervasiveness of white administrators in upper administrative roles in comparison to Administrators of Color to better understand the oversaturation of white administrators within the field and the ways this upholds white supremacy.

Finally, more research needs to be done on white student affairs administrators and the ways the Covid-19 pandemic and the current uprising against racial injustice impacts their understanding and investment in racial equity. A longitudinal study with these same participants may provide relevant information to the field of student affairs as it relates the ways they did or

did not shift their practices, procedures, or their approach to self-education as a result of the current context.

Context of Data Collection

This study was situated in the middle of a global pandemic and in an era of continued mistreatment and genocide of BIPOC and multi-racial folks across intersecting and intersectional identities. Covid-19 disproportionately impacted Black and Indigenous Communities, and Communities of Color due to the ways institutional and systematic racism permeated each and every system including, but not limited to housing, healthcare, education, incarceration, and employment. Innumerable Black and Brown people died during the course of this study as a result. While it's important to illuminate how many people died, were murdered, or were injured as result of racism, even one death is one too many.

While most of the interviews were planned to take place face-to-face, halfway through, the university shifted to virtual learning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Both Sarah and Megan had the entirety of their interviews in person, while Tim, Kevin, and Amber had one interview in person and one interview via an online virtual platform. Gary, Brad, Jacob, and Abby completed both of their interviews virtually due to the timing of their interviews and a stay at home order issued by the state's governor.

Interviews for this study concluded at the beginning of May 2020 right before video footage was release of Ahmaud Arbery's murder and preceding the murders of George Floyd, Nina Pop, and Tony McDade. The murder of Breonna Taylor in her home by police had not yet gained attention on national news. During the analysis process, there was a continued national uprising against police brutality, racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy in the United States which continued throughout the writing process. Two days before starting to write chapter

five, Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by Kenosha police, while a seventeen-year old white man paraded through the streets of Kenosha, Wisconsin during a Black Lives Matter protest with an AR-15, openly murdered two protesters, and was praised by many as a patriot and endorsed by police officers. In September of 2020, the occupants of the white house passed an executive order on combatting race and sex stereotyping, which was a declaration of white supremacy as it served to disband any federal organization from educating about the realities of racism and misogyny. While there was collective momentum for racial equity, there was also collective momentum towards white nationalism, demonstrating the ways racism has been rooted into the foundation of the systems and structures within the United States. These are just a few names of many who have been killed or injured due to police brutality and racial injustice.

Prior to the 2020 uprising, the division of student affairs at this university had not yet fully demonstrated its commitment to racial equity, but had a surge of energy around addressing race and racism as a result of the national uprising, demonstrating the reactivity of the field on this pervasive issue. As a follow up, each of the participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the current context. Here is what they had to say:

Abby

During the uprising, Abby attended protests to show her solidarity. Throughout her interview, she reflected on how the onus of addressing racism and white supremacy should not fall on her Black friends. She reaffirmed her stance and explained the various ways she felt as a result.

> Covid (and the disproportionate way it affects Black and Brown people) and most
> importantly, the police shootings and BLM movement and protests that occurred this
> summer has made me feel even more that I need to use my white privilege and standing

in the world to fight for what is right - to end systematic racism and police brutality. I have been more vocal on social media platforms too, trying to educate others and to stand up, so that it is not just my tired Black friends having to do it. I also went to a large protest in [city], even with concerns with COVID, but we all wore masks and I felt safe and inspired. I have seen even more divisiveness and racism on social media and in the news this past summer. I feel like people don't seem to be afraid to hide it anymore. I also cannot fathom how others aren't outraged by these police shootings. I am having a really difficult time seeing their "side" when I just think it is morally and ethically wrong. Covid and the uprisings this summer probably just helps me be attuned to our students' lives and what they are going through even more. I have always tried to be empathetic and understanding of what they are going through or how they are treated but I think this summer makes me want to support and advocate for them even more now. I have always had a voice but I think I have found even more strength to use that voice even more this summer and I hope it lasts for a long time.

I have been angry and sad a lot because of Covid and mostly because of the shootings this summer. It's starting to make me realize how much I don't want anyone with racist beliefs or "covered up" racist beliefs in my life. Luckily, none of my family or friends actually are like that but when it comes to dating, sadly, I have encountered more Trump or non-BLM supporters than I would have wanted to. So, even if this summer has brought me down it also has given me strength to continue to speak up, and out, about inequities and systematic racism and police brutality. It's also exhausting and emotionally draining, but I know it is even more so for my Black and Brown friends and family who deal with it daily so I know I have to continue so they don't have to always feel the

burden to stand up for themselves. Us white people need to use our voice, our privilege, and our influence to fight for equity, equality, and the end of systematic racism.

Amber

Amber, throughout her interview, shared that she felt like she was the only one that addressed inequity. That remained true upon reflection after her interview. However, she still felt it was easier to address inequity because there was a common understanding that it existed. She reflected on how she is no longer centering her comfort, and rather centering and illuminating racism.

> What strikes me the most is how it has been easier for me to speak up at work about social injustice because others in my office have openly acknowledged the current uprising. They seem to have been affected by this new "white" awareness- more white people seem to be engaging in conversations about social justice, especially around race. While I still feel I am (often) the only person to remind the team to be mindful of (for example) our decision making (to ensure we are considering everyone), knowing that both our director and my colleagues are now aware of the injustice makes it easier for me to push harder to make changes in our program. The reason it is easier? Probably there is less fear of being "the Debby Downer" and I am less tired/ drained by feeling like I am alone in trying to make sure we become and remain aware of injustice in our program area.

> I think it is probably also easier because I am a part of the upsurge of white awareness of injustice. For me, it comes in the form of more easily remembering that it's not about my comfort (i.e. being a Debby Downer) or my (white) teammates' comfort (i.e. feeling bad

about a decision they made), but about reducing harm to others and ensuring all of our

students are supported, included, and given opportunities to grow.

Jacob

Jacob, after his interviews, reflected on his commitment to racial equity and the amount

of vulnerability it will take to continue to learn more. He also shared about his belief that

students will create a new future.

> I think as I reflect on this summer and the murder of George Floyd, I had several
>
> emotional reactions related to race in America. I found myself feeling a continued
>
> commitment to the importance of this work, but also realizing that it will likely take more
>
> vulnerability than ever to learn and grow on the topic. In general, folks seem to be at their
>
> wits ends with the stress of the world/Covid and I have felt like it is costing a lot of the
>
> grace that I believe is needed to do this work, given its complex, personal nature.
>
> However, I have been uplifted by the voices of our students who continue to push the
>
> university to do more--hoping that these will be our leaders someday.

Sarah

Upon reflection during the racial uprising, Sarah became more aware of the need to

prioritize racial equity and her own journey of becoming anti-racist. She shared that this was no

longer an option for her, but rather saw it as a new necessity.

> The time we are in has definitely changed my experience of racism, anti-racism, and
>
> equity. I have alternated between anger, sadness, and readiness for change. The books,
>
> films, and other resources that have been on my list "to get to" have become the core of
>
> what I am reading and watching. The challenges of racism and oppression being too big
>
> to know where and how to start sound like excuses for inaction again. I have committed

to learning and changing now beginning with my own education, the beginning of

reviews of policies and procedures, and owning that the conversations need to happen

even if I feel completely incompetent in my language and actions. Topics I would

previously not considered possible now cause me to pause and consider them - to do

some research on the history and current context rather than just assuming I know

because someone taught me about that at some point.

Participant Reflection Summary

Each of the participants who shared their reflections post-interviews reaffirmed their

commitment to learning and the importance of racial equity in not only student affairs, but in the

world. They each acknowledged the role of white people and the vulnerability it would take for

them to continue their journey towards anti-racism. While their desire for racial equity was a

rationale for their participation, the murders of unarmed Black men during the spring and

summer of 2020 allowed them to see how pervasive racism and white supremacy really were.

This led to participants naming their commitment as a priority in a new way.

Researcher's Reflection

As a white, queer, cisgender woman, with ADHD, who is committed to anti-racism work,

I felt extremely connected to this study and worked diligently to not distance myself from or

judge participants during data collection an analysis. While I was transcribing participant

interviews, there was a national uprising against racial injustice as a result of the pervasive police

brutality in the nation (see context section). As someone committed to this work, I naturally felt

anger, disgust, and rage around the continued modern-day lynching of Black people in this

country, which made it difficult to transcribe, code, and write. I constantly needed to journal and

self-reflect on the ways my emotions could impact the way I viewed participants and their

experiences. At the same time, I started an international white accountability group with Dr. Kathy Obear to help hold myself and other white people accountable to shifting and changing our racist attitudes and behaviors. This, along with journaling and checking in with my dissertation chair, allowed me to recenter myself on the purpose of this study and humbled me in my understanding of participants' experiences.

Some of the things I was most afraid of during this study were colluding with white solidarity or letting participants off the hook for their own racist attitudes and behaviors out of fear of what they would think. However, my responsibility as a researcher was to critically analyze participant interviews within the conceptual framework and literature to honestly answer the questions. This is why it was extremely important to illuminate each of the findings, but particularly within the theme of racism (in)action. While participants operated within a larger context of white supremacy culture, they still were responsible for their attitudes, actions, and behaviors and, thus, this finding emerged. Through exploring my own biases and holding myself accountable, I could not ignore the fact that there were gendered differences and performance. As a cisgender woman, I reflected on the ways I have come to understand patriarchy and male dominance and engaged with a peer debriefer to ensure I represented participants authentically and not through my own gendered lens.

This study has and will always be important to me and to the ways I view my work. Now that the study has concluded, I have begun to reflect on the ways I can see myself in each and every one of the themes, illuminating the importance of an ongoing and constant commitment to reducing the harm I do each day. This study is a reminder of the importance of co-conspiring towards our collective liberation and a reminder of all the work we have ahead of us on this ever-going, necessary journey towards racial equity and away from white supremacy.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to uncover how white student affairs administrators understood whiteness by examining how they described their experiences and how they viewed whiteness informing their work. As such, the two research questions that informed this study were:

1. How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?

 2. How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness informing their work in student affairs?

There were six main themes from this study: distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks, navigating judgement, values of whiteness, performative commitment, racism (in)action, and student affairs indoctrination. Each of these themes contributed to a greater understanding of the ways white student affairs administrators experienced whiteness informing their work. This study illuminated the pervasive whiteness within the field of student affairs and the ways white participants attached their morality to how other people perceived them as racist or not racist. In order to shift to becoming anti-racist, it is imperative we acknowledge that "[with]in the contradiction, lies the hope" (Brecht, 2000, p. 148).

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Appendix A: Consent Form

UNC CHARLOTTE
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t/ 704.687.8730 f/ 704.687.3493 http://education.uncc.edu/eart/

Researcher(s): **Rachael Forester, University of North Carolina at Charlotte**
Dissertation Chair: **Ryan Miller, University of North Carolina at Charlotte**
Study Title: **White Student Affairs Administrators' Understanding of Whiteness**

WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

1. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participants have to racially identify as white and must work in a designated student affairs field or a field that does student affairs work within higher education. All participants must have at least three years of experience in higher education. This study will exclude any participant that does not racially identify as only white. Participants must be at least 21 years old to participate.

2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This study, focusing on white administrators and their understanding of whiteness, seeks to explain the implications of whiteness in higher education in order to promote racial equity on college campuses.

3. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographics form. If you meet the eligibility criteria stated above [Section 2], a member of the research team will work with you to schedule your interviews, either in person or via video conferencing, at a time and place convenient for you. Unless you suggest an alternate location, the interviews will take place in an office in the Popp Martin Student Union by the researcher at the university that you are currently employed. Interviews will take place during the Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and/or Summer 2020 semesters.

4. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

Participants in this study will be asked to participate in two interviews, both semi-structured forms of

conversation, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. During that time, you will be asked to respond to approximately twenty questions about your experiences with your white identity and your role/position in student affairs. These questions will focus on creating a space for you to share and describe your experiences. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering and may withdraw your participation at any point. Participants may also choose to participate in informal one-on-one meetings, either in person, online, or via video conference, with the researcher after the interviews have been completed to discuss their ongoing experiences as it relates to their white racial identities and for the researcher to discuss preliminary findings from the study. Summarized notes from these meetings may be included as data for this study, with participant's consent, but no audio will be recorded.

5. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may help researchers to better understand how white student affairs administrators describe their white racial identity and how that particular identity informs/doesn't inform your role within your position in higher education. This knowledge will help colleges and universities to examine the necessary areas of identity consciousness needed to reduce racism on campus.

6. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study. Additionally, you may experience similar feelings or emotional reactions to questions about your white racial identity. If you do experience strong feelings or emotional reactions as a result of this study, you can tell any member of the research team, and they will tell you about resources available to help you.

7. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records. With your permission, we will make an audio or video recording of the interview, whichever you prefer. That recording will be transcribed into a written format and then the original file will be destroyed. The researchers will keep all study records, including any codes to your data, in a secure location. All physical files will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office. All digital records will be stored on password protected computers in a separate password protected file storage system. Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and all other identifying information will be destroyed three years after the close of the study. Until that time, only members of the research team will have access to this data. We will seek to publish key findings from this study, but when we do so, the information will not identify you by name and a variety of strategies (including pseudonyms, data aggregation, and composites) will be used to protect your anonymity and confidentiality.

8. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

There will be no compensation for taking part in this study.

9. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher or dissertation advisor:

> University of North Carolina, Charlotte (Primary researcher)
> Rachael Forester

University of North Carolina Charlotte (Dissertation Advisor)
Ryan Miller (Assistant Professor)

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the UNC Charlotte Office of Research Compliance.

10. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

11. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When you sign this form, you agree that you are voluntarily entering this study. You also agree that you have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which you use and understand.
Finally, you state that you have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. Consent to participate may be withdrawn at any time. A copy of this Informed Consent Form will be given to me.

Please check the statement that reflects your wishes regarding audio recording:

__I **do** grant the researchers permission to make an audio/video recording of my interview.

__I **do not** grant the researchers permission to make an audio/video recording of my interview.

Please check the statement that reflects your wishes regarding informal meetings:

__I **do** grant the researchers permission to summarize meeting notes for 6 months following my interview.

__I **do not** grant the researchers permission to summarize meeting notes for 6 months following my interview.

_____   _____   _____
Participant Signature: Print Name: Date:

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Person   Print Name: Date:
Obtaining Consent

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Form

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Participant Demographic Form

Name:_____ ____

Phone:_____

Email:_____

Age:

What is your age in years? _____

Gender Identity (check all that apply):

Woman___ Man ___ Transgender ___ *Cisgender___ Genderqueer___

Non-binary_____

Not Listed (Please Specify) _____

*Cisgender means that the assigned sex at birth is in congruence with your current gender identity

Sexual Identity (check all that apply):

Asexual ___ Bisexual ___ Gay ___ Heterosexual ___ Lesbian ___ Pansexual ___

Queer ___ Questioning ___ Not Listed (Please Specify) _____ Prefer not to disclose ____

Pronouns:

What pronouns do you use to refer to yourself? (e.g., they/them, she/her, he/him, etc.) _____

Race: (check all that apply)

Black___   Latinx ___   Asian American/ Pacific Islander ___   White___

Indigenous ___ Bi/ Multi-Racial ___   Not Listed (please specify): _____

Disability:

Do you have a disability?   Yes___ No____ Prefer not to disclose_____

If yes, please describe your disability:_____

Other Things About You:

What is your current title and unit/office at the university? _____

Is your position housed under student affairs? Yes___   No____

If no, please explain: _____

How many years have you been in your current role?_____

Years within profession?_____

Prior roles in student affairs?_____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

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Researcher(s): **Rachael Forester, University of North Carolina at Charlotte**
Dissertation Chair: **Ryan Miller, University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

Study Title: **White Student Affairs Administrators' Understanding of Whiteness**

The following research questions will guide this study.

1. **How do white student affairs administrators describe their experiences with their white racial identity?**
2. **How do white student affairs administrators view whiteness information their work in student affairs?**

<u>**First interview**</u>

1. History/Background in Student Affairs
   M: Why did you choose to participate in this study?
   M: Tell me a little bit about your educational background (degree, institutions, etc.).
   M: On your demographic form, you indicated you work in {Field}
   please let me know a bit about what that means to you.
   M: How did you decide you wanted to go into student affairs?
   M: What experiences shaped your student affairs career?
   M: What has your career path looked like to this point?
2. Upbringing
   M: Tell me about your life when you were growing up.
       F: What was your family structure?
       F: Where did you live? (i.e., rural, city size)
       F: Was your community racially diverse?
   M: What was your first interaction with race?
       F: What messages did you receive from your family and your environment
regarding race?
       M: How did your family talk about race/racism? Why do you think that was the case?
How and where did you learn about your race?

M: How would you define race? How would you define racism?

    F: Could you share a little about what racism looks like to you in day-to-day life?

    F: How is your understanding of racism influenced by your environment/upbringing?

    F: How do you feel when you hear the term racism?

M: Do you engage in conversations about race/racism? How often?

    F: with family, friends, people you don't know very well?

    F: If not, what may be the reasons?

M: Is there anything else you would like to share about… (focus of interview 1)?

Second Interview

1. White Identity

M: Have you thought more about what we talked about since our last interview? Do you have anything you would like to add or revisit?

M: Last time, you shared about what racism looks like to you. Tell me more specifically what racism looks like on a college campus or how race dynamics play out?

    F: Are there policies that reflect racism?

    F: Systemic practices? (define it)

    F: Individual examples?

M: One of the criteria for participation is having a white racial identity. Tell me what it means to be white.

    F: When did you first realize you were white?

    F: What do you know about the concept of white privilege?

    F: Tell me about what this phrase means to you

    F: How have you experienced white privilege?

    F: How often do you think about being white?

M: Does your racial identity impact your experience in student affairs? How?

M: How often do you think about being white as it relates to your role in student affairs?

    F: As it relates to supervision, programming, conversations with students, funding/budgets, decision making, policies?

M: How has your education shaped your understanding of whiteness and/or race?

    F: Who's responsibility is it to talk about race on campus?

M: How often do you engage in conversations about race? Tell me more about with who. What stories do you have from these conversations?

    F: To the same extent, less, more at work than outside of work?

M: How do you feel engaging in conversations about race within your institution?

    F: With POC, white people, students, administrators?

    F: Outside of work?

M: In your own experiences what has impacted your ability and understanding to engage in conversations around race?

GT Other Identities

M: On your demographic form, you also indicated {Other Identities}. How often do you

think about those identities?

           F: In relation to being white?

           F: In relation to your position in student affairs?

           F: In relation to being white in student affairs?

      M: How do these identities impact your role in student affairs?

GT Race

      M: In what circumstances do you think about race or racism at work?

      M: In what ways do you integrate understanding of racism into your role in student affairs?

      M: How does your upbringing and what you learned about race/racism relate to how you operate now in life?

           F: In student affairs?

GT Equity

      M: What does racial equity look like to you on a college campus?

      M: What is the role of white student affairs professionals in engaging in conversations about racism?

           F: How do you demonstrate that in your work?

      M: What advice would you give to other white student affairs administrators that would also like to reduce racism on a college campus?

      M: What was most important to you from our conversation today?

           F: Is there anything else you would like to share about being white and working in student affairs?

Guiding Questions for Informal Meetings

1. Some of the initial findings from this study include _____, could you share your thoughts around this? Do these findings resonate with you? Why/why not?
2. What else is coming up for you as it relates to being white in student affairs?
3. Have you thought more about your white racial identity?
4. What are some things you've learned about yourself or some things you have been navigating as it relates to understanding what it means to be white in student affairs?

Appendix D: Analysis Mind Map

White Supremacy Culture
The lies my school told me
False binaries and dichotomies

Performative commitment

SOC need to see POC
Welcoming, but not accepting
It's hidden so it's not racism
I don't see color
It's generational
It's not really how it looks

color evasiveness

Values of whiteness

Research Questions (both)
1. How do white SAA describe their experience with white racial identity?
2. How do white SAA view whiteness informing their work?

All 5
I guess I'm white
Who belongs here?
We need to be nice and welcoming
The lies my school told me

white shame

Identity dissonance
Illuminating the harm of good white people
I can't be racist
They're a little racist, but they are good people

Color evasive, neutrality, and privilege
I wouldn't have learned that without SA
Without SA, I wouldn't know I'm white
Structural diversity

neutrality and color-evasiveness
race doesn't come up
my family isn't racist bc we didn't talk about it
everywhere I am is white
false and binaries and dichotomies

Who would I be w/o SA and what would SA be without me?

But what will they think of me?

Distance and proximity: the other side of the tracks

Fragility and shame
Talking on eggshells
But, what will they think of me?
Can I be white and good?
It makes me feel unsafe

It's a policy thing

race neutrality

Fragility and privilege and shame
I'm not just white
But what will they think of me?

White fragility

Color evasive and privilege
racism is over there
change has to happen at the top
we talk about it more, or do we?

white fragility

Fragility and privilege
You need me

white privilege

Believing isn't seeing, seeing is believing

The other side of the tracks
You need me
Your role is to teach me
Liberal, so I've arrived
I am because you are
Paths and barriers
you want me to do what?
White privilege
You must be the exception
What is white?
Racism is over there
It's because they are republican

Fragility and neutrality
It depends where you're from

neutrality and privilege
racism is insidious
you're different

I'm here for the students

SA for life

How can SA be better?