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STUDENT AFFAIRS AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE: EXPLORING HOW BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT AFFAIRS STAFF EXPERIENCE RACE IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation in

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by

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Abstract

Racism in the American workplace is a topic that not many organizations attempt to tackle. For many, race is one of those taboo subjects that is rarely mentioned because there is a perception that someone will always become offended. So instead, we don’t talk about it. We just ignore it and believe racial problems will work themselves out. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Race is a real issue that needs to be dealt with within the work environment. We can sweep racial incidents under the rug like they are not there but, eventually, the pile under that rug will become so big that people will often trip on it. This study will specifically examine how black and African American Student Affairs staff of color experience race in predominantly white institutions.

In our global economy, it is becoming ever clear that we need to prepare the workforce to gain the skills and competency to work with a diverse group of people. Our workforce is becoming more diverse every day. As leaders, supervisors, directors, etc., we need to be able to provide our workforce with a safe working environment where they are free to express their identities.

As a result of this study, I would like workplace leaders (managers, supervisors, administrators, etc.,) to be able to recognize the intricacies that staff of color experience in their work environment. This study should increase awareness, provide a basis for open dialogue, enhance the way that workplace leaders deal with racial situations, create and enact policy, and build inclusive working environments where all staff can freely thrive.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historical Perspectives

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), allegations of racial discrimination, harassment, and retaliation are the claims most frequently filed. The EEOC reports that since 1992, racial/color based discrimination claims have risen at an alarming rate (EEOC, n.d.). In 2007, 27,200 race-based cases were filed, totaling 36% of all cases filed (EEOC, n.d.).

Over time, racial attitudes in the American workforce have shifted (Brief, Buttram, Reizenstein, Pugh, Callahan, McCline, & Vaslow, 1997). It is no longer socially acceptable for members of the workforce to exhibit blatant racial attitudes and behaviors; however, that does not mean that racism and other forms of workplace discrimination have gone away (Brief et al., 1997; Schuman, 1997). The challenge is that racism shows up in more subtle forms and microaggressions are prevalent.

In 1994, the Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington conducted a race-based experiment with black and white job candidates (Bendick, Jackson, & Reinoso, 1994). Candidates were identical in terms of age, experience, dress, articulateness, and gender. As candidates went out to the same organizations seeking employment, black applicants were told more frequently that the position had been filled, whereas white candidates were granted interviews. Essed (1991) defines this as “passive racism.” A 1992 study showed that blacks were often treated more poorly
than whites in the workplace. The study indicated that blacks were recruited less frequently and their performance was rated lower (Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992).

Throughout my career in Student Affairs working at multiple universities, there was one common denominator. The majority of the university’s workforce was made up of white individuals. What I found is that within those institutions, many staff of color who I personally knew did have negative experiences due to their race while employed at the institution. In examining my own experiences, I can recall on several instances when I walked in to a meeting, I was often the only person of color. When it was a meeting dealing with a diversity issue, consciously or unconsciously, eyes turned to me as if because of the color of my skin, I had all the answers when it came to race. This is not always a bad thing because by the nature of me being a staff person of color in a predominantly white workplace, I certainly have insight. However, where it becomes a negative experience of race is when people began to only see me as the voice of color and not as an individual in the room. What I have also heard from my white colleagues is that they are sick of talking about race. They have even gone as far as to say that “we” need to get over it. Some argue that race does not matter anymore and that talking about it only keeps racism going. I have even heard comments from colleagues of color that other white staff members have used Barak Obama’s presidency as proof that we no longer have race issues in the United States. The challenge with this thinking is that it discounts the history and the present experiences of staff of color. What is also troubling about this paradigm is that we as Student Affairs staff can recognize that our students of color may be
experiencing race on campus in less than positive ways, yet we are not able to transfer that to the staff of color experience.

Being a black professional in student affairs at a predominantly white institution has afforded me many unfortunate experiences of being in racialized situations. As mentioned above, I am often the only person of color around the table in many of my professional circles. I can recall on one particular occasion where I was meeting a black colleague for lunch. When I arrived to her office (she worked in an office of 10 individuals of which 9 were white), there was another colleague who she invited to join us for lunch who was also a black woman. As the three of us were preparing to leave the office, one of the administrative assistants asked one of my colleagues “Is this Black Lunch Day?” Unfortunately, I did not hear the comment or I may have pursued it more. I began to ponder why was it that when she noticed we were all black, somehow it was odd that we would all be together? I wonder if she thought that every other day was “White Lunch Day” since white people in the office had lunch together all the time. Dr. Beverly Danial-Tatum (1997), author and President of Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, discusses this very topic in her acclaimed book, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” Tatum notes that often within the discourse of race in the United States, members of dominant racial groups see everything they do as normal. Therefore, members of subordinate groups are automatically considered abnormal. Within a predominantly white workplace, if there are very few staff of color, they may be considered abnormal. When a black person walks in to a room full of white people, everyone notices because it is not the norm. When a white person walks into that same room,
no one may notice a thing. If a black man walks in late to a meeting, he has to bear the burden of not only representing himself, but his entire race. Being a minority in a majority workplace means that staff of color may not always have the privilege of being an individual because whites will judge them not only on their individual performance, but also based on their experience of interacting with other members of the person of color’s racial group. Therefore, when a black woman shows up late to a meeting, she hopes that whites won’t think that all blacks are late to meetings.

Recent research suggests that diversity programs are becoming less effective in promoting intercultural sensitivity (Henderson & Provo, 2006). They note that very few diversity education programs challenge participants to examine systemic or institutional racism, as this will most likely offend dominant group members. They also point out that many diversity programs do not discuss how to effectively address conflict and resistance within the workplace, two of the major skills needed to be able to start the process of creating change (Chesler & Moldenhauer-Salazar, 1998).

Brooks and Clunis (2007) conducted an in-depth literature review of issues dealing with workplace race and ethnicity in 2007. Their review examined workplace race and ethnicity in the frameworks of training, career development, mentoring and sponsorship, promotion, performance appraisal, and social networks. As I have been conducting my review of the literature on this topic, Brooks and Clunis' frameworks appropriately categorize and recapitulate the literature on this subject. As you read further through this dissertation, you will clearly note the parallels with the literature as relates to the study that I conducted. In the following
paragraphs, I have provided examples from the literature to support the six frameworks that Brooks and Clunis developed.

The authors examined the concept of slavery and noted from back in the 1800’s, whites dehumanized blacks, which was a means to justify that whites should own slaves. This dehumanization assisted in the development of systemic racism that created economic and political methods to advantage whites. Even poor blacks and poor whites could not look at themselves on the same level. Because of the system in place, whites could hold themselves to a higher standard despite their poverty (Zinn, 2005). The authors noted that success is linked to education, training, and development. Blacks weren’t allowed to be educated, so if we examine the fact that generation after generation blacks were seen as inferior to whites, this can help us understand the current divide and need for greater knowledge, awareness, training, and skill building within the workplace.

Research on Career Development

Research has shown that careers of blacks/African Americans in the workforce have been hampered due to structural factors in the workplace such as lack of diversity, lack of mentoring, and existence of a “good old boy” network (Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2005). Additionally, blacks face other factors that affect them in the workplace such as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. Blacks were also denied more requests for professional development, discouraged from applying for promotions, and experienced more of the “glass ceiling” effect (Ugorji, 1997). Researchers also noted that there is a consistent differing of perceptions on career opportunities such as advancement, mentoring, and assignments. Whites perceive
that both blacks and whites have the same career opportunities, and blacks perceive themselves as having fewer opportunities (Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Hite, 2004).

**Research on Training**

Brooks and Clunis' (2007) review demonstrated that white, married, unionized men with greater experience received more company sponsored formal training and had the highest participation in apprenticeships. They also showed that while minorities may not be as underrepresented as in the past, white men had higher percentages of attendance at conferences, seminars, and other professional trainings.

**Research on Performance Appraisal**

As Brooks and Clunis (2007) were completing their review, they were examining what role, if any, did race and ethnicity play in performance appraisals. They noted that research on this one question has been conducted since 1958. In an article by Stauffer & Buckley (2005), they stated that the race of the evaluator had an impact on the performance appraisals of the employee. This was the same for both blacks and whites. Brooks and Clunis (2007) noted in their research that white evaluators rated the average white employee higher than 64% of black employees. Reversely, black evaluators rated the average black employee higher than 67% of white employees.

**Research on Promotions**

American history supports the tenet that people of color have been disadvantaged in regards to access to quality education and training. Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, & Johnson (2005) found that blacks were underrepresented in
management as compared to whites. Baldi and McBrier (1997), Smith (2005), and Wilson (2012), all discuss the theory of homosocial reproduction as it relates to staff selection and promotion. The theory purports that when hiring staff, managers tend to hire people who are similar to themselves. Since senior executives and administrators are predominantly white, according to the theory, those hiring managers are more likely to socialize and associate with people who look like them. One participant in Bagati's 2007 study noted, "At the end of the day, the senior managers did not want to work with new people if there were other people available that they had worked with before and understood their ways better or knew them better. They did not want to coach a new person and develop and train new people and hence, would resort to picking and choosing" (Bagati, 2007 p 19).

Brooks and Clunis (2007) also note that when blacks are promoted to higher management positions, their credentials are more scrutinized than those of their white colleagues. Collins' (1997) study showed that blacks in higher management and administrative positions are often in “racialized” jobs that hinder their ability for further advancement such as Directors of Affirmative Action or Multicultural Affairs.

**Research on Mentoring**

While much of the current literature on mentor relationships in the workplace is dated, studies indicate the positive effects of quality mentorship programs and relationships (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Morrison, 2004; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). More specifically, these studies suggest that those employees with informal and formal mentors had a higher advancement rate, better job satisfaction, more professional growth, and better
salaries. Blake-Beard (1999) noted that white employees benefited more from mentor relationships than Latinos and blacks because as Dreher & Cox (1996), and K. M. Thomas, Willis, & Davis (2007) noted, racial and ethnic minorities have more trouble finding mentors. In relationship to compensation, a 1997 study showed that individuals with white male mentors earned an average of $16,840 more per year than those who had mentors who were women or other minorities (Ragins & Scandura, 1997).

There have been additional studies that have also reported this disparity in wages (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Gonzáles-Figueroa & Young, 2005). One study in particular examined the relationship between mentoring and the history of slavery. In this study the researcher wrote,

“The white man owned the blacks’ labor power. But at the intimate and primitive levels of social life, white men dominated because black men could not adequately protect their families, especially black women, from white men’s whimsical and most often violent intrusion. In contrast, black men could be lynched simply for speaking to white women. Women became pawns in an unequal struggle that not only undermined the black male’s status, but distorted the relationship between the men and women of both races” (Brooks & Clunis, 2007, p. 241).
This excerpt further explains the notion that having a white male mentor offers greater advantages. Several studies noted that mentors of the same race or ethnic background as the mentees provided more psychosocial support, especially for women in the workforce (Allen et al., 2004; Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Morrison, 2004; Wilson, 2012).

**Research on Social Networks**

Social networks in the workplace are beneficial in building relationships, gaining access to key information and resources, and potentially connecting with other employees and management to obtain promotions (Calvó-Armengol & Jackson, 2004; McGuire, 2000). Research suggests that often social networks are based upon the location of the job, and not on individual characteristics (McGuire, 2000). It becomes difficult to choose your social network if there are limited staff in your immediate work environment. One study concluded that the more people of color and women there are in an immediate workspace, the more difficult it may become for those individuals to have access to higher management since women and minorities are often underrepresented in upper level management positions (Fernandez & Fernandez-Mateo, 2006; McGuire, 2000).

**The Problem**

Racism in the American workplace is a topic that not many organizations attempt to tackle. For many, race is one of those taboo subjects that is rarely mentioned because there is a perception that someone will always become offended (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Cullen, 2008; West, 2001). So instead, we don’t talk
about it. We just ignore it and believe racial problems will work themselves out. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Race is a real issue that needs to be dealt with in the work environment. We can sweep racial incidents under the rug like they are not there but, eventually, the pile under that rug will become so big that people will often trip on it. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how black and African American Student Affairs administrators experience race in predominantly white institutions. The study aims to create awareness of the subtle and not so subtle forms of racism that still exist in the American workplace, and to give voice to Student Affairs staff of color.

**Significance of the Study**

In our global economy, it is becoming ever clear that we need to prepare the workforce to gain the skills and competency to work with a diverse group of people. Our workforce is becoming more diverse every day (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Fernandez & Fernandez-Mateo, 2006; Gonzalez, 2010). As leaders, supervisors, directors, etc., we need to be able to provide our workforce with a safe working environment where they are free to express their identities. We know from research that staff of color experience race in very different ways than white staff (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, & Konrad, 2006; McKay & McDaniel, 2006; Mong & Roscigno, 2010). However, we also know from research that whites have historically minimized the experiences that staff of color face by telling them that they need to get over it, quit being so sensitive, or not to look at the situation that way, etc. (Cullen, 2008; Leary, 2005, ). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how black
and African American Student Affairs administrators experience race in predominantly white institutions.

From this study, I would like workplace leaders (managers, supervisors, administrators, etc.,) to be able to recognize the intricacies that staff of color experience in their work environment. This study will increase awareness, provide a basis for open dialogue, enhance the way that workplace leaders deal with racial situations, create and enact policy, and build inclusive working environments where all staff can freely thrive.

**Research Question**

In this study, I have one primary research question, what are the experiences of black or African-American administrators in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution? The following two interview questions will allow me to examine my primary research question.

1. As a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what are your experiences with race in the workplace?

2. Based on your experiences with race in the workplace as a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what suggestions can you provide to improve it?

**Limitations**

The limitation is that this study is primarily focusing on the experiences of black Student Affairs professionals and, therefore, not taking into account the
experiences of other underrepresented identity groups or not examining the experience of white staff. However, this is an opportunity for further research.

Assumptions

I make only one assumption in this study and that is that race is a valid part of the overall experience that blacks experience in the workforce, and that each participant has a story to tell about their experiences regarding race in the workplace.

Definition of Terms

Theory of capabilities: Equal freedoms that all members of the organization should have in order to do “that which they have reason to value” (Cornelius, 2002).

Hegemony: A perceived dominance where majority group members believe that the way they experience a phenomena is the same way that everyone experiences that certain phenomena (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007).

Theory of Homosocial Reproduction: Theoretical claim that most individuals primarily associate themselves with people who are similar to them (Kanter, 1977).

The Business Case for Diversity: Diversity directly affects the bottom line of organizations. Organizations that value diversity in all forms have employees who have higher job satisfaction rates, which promotes higher levels of productivity, retention, and increased revenue (Carnevale & Stone, 1994).

Microaggressions: subtle forms of racism and prejudice that still take place, but may not be as overt or easily detectable (Sue, 2010).

Student Affairs Administrators: Professional administrators employed within a university’s Division of Student Affairs or Student Services. These professionals primarily work in the areas of the university that provide non-academic services to
students such as residential life, student activities, counseling services, judicial affairs, study abroad, financial aid, and multi-cultural affairs.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT), as described by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, serves as the theoretical framework for my study. The formation or movement of CRT began in the 1970’s as activists and scholars began to come together to study the relationships among racism, race, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While CRT initially began as a legal movement to confront racial issues in the law, it has since become widely used throughout a myriad of other disciplines. One of the key components of CRT is that it contains an activist approach to addressing race and racism. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) write,

> It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p.3).

Critical Race Theory has five main tenets as described by Delgado & Stefancic (2001) and Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, (2005).

- **Racism is ordinary**- Racism happens every day. It’s the normal way that many folks conduct their business. Also, people of color experience racism on a continual basis.

- **The challenge to dominant ideology.** CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities to objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.
• A commitment to social justice and praxis. CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination.

• Intersectionality and anti-essentialism- All of our identities are multifaceted. We don’t have just one identity that defines who we are. A black man can also be a wealthy republican. A white woman may also be a single mother working two jobs, etc.

• Unique voice of color- By the very nature of being a person of color, people of color are often put in positions to represent the unique voice of color for white people. The authors argue that people of color are best suited to share their own experiences or tell their own stories dealing with racism.

With CRT serving as my theoretical framework for the study, it also provided a lens as I began to examine the literature around my topic. As CRT exerts, racism is ordinary. It is prevalent in the workplace and black and African American staff experience the effects of racism on a continual basis. In Chapter 2, I will review literature on this topic and demonstrate how race and racism impact the experiences of black and African American staff.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, African-Americans make up 11.6% of the US labor force (United States Department of Labor, 2012). This is an increase from 10.9% in 1991. More specifically, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a reflection of this growth, with a predicted annual 2.9% increase of blacks joining the education industry over the next eight years (United States Department of Labor, 2012).

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) is charged with enforcing affirmative action and nondiscrimination claims for all federal contractors and subcontractors. According to the OFCCP, approximately one-in-four American workers is employed by an organization that does business with the federal government, including many of our institutions of higher learning (United States Department of Labor, 2012). In 2011, the OFCCP reported that they resolved 134 cases of employment discrimination affecting women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities. Of those cases, 23 of them specifically involved African-Americans, which is an increase of 44% from 2010 (United States Department of Labor, 2012).

It is evident that organizations in the United States are becoming more and more diverse (Brooks & Clunis, 2007). Workers from various backgrounds, religions, sexual orientations, nationalities, ethnicities, and races are coming together and while this increase in diversity creates a rich environment, it also increases the
frequency of potential diversity challenges that develop in the workplace. Carnevale & Stone (1994) write that we need to engage diversity beyond the golden rule of treating everyone the way that we want to be treated, to treating everyone the way that they want to be treated. This is known as the platinum rule.

**Critical Race Theory**

To further explore my research question and provide a foundation for analysis, I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework for this study. The formation of CRT began in the 1970s as activists and scholars began to come together to study the relationships among racism, race, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While CRT initially began as a movement to confront racial issues in the law, it has since become widely used throughout other disciplines such as sociology, women’s studies, and education (Solaranzo, D.G., 1997; Solaranzo, D.G., 1998). One of the key components of CRT is that it contains an activist approach to addressing race and racism. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and Solorzano, D.G., Villalpando, O., and Oseguera, L. (2005) note that CRT not only tries to understand the current racial climate, but also to improve it by challenging the historical ways that racial dominance has marginalized people of color. Within the field of education, CRT is used to challenge and debunk notions of color blindness and to address how various policies, procedures, institutional structures and practices advantage white individuals and disadvantage people of color (Solorzano, D.G., Villalpando, O., and Oseguera, L., 2005).
Critical Race Theory has five main tenets:

- Racism is ordinary. Racism happens every day. It’s the normal way that many people conduct their business. Consequently, people of color experience racism on a continual basis.

- The challenge to dominant ideology. CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities to objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.

- A commitment to social justice and praxis. CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, and generation status, as well as class subordination.

- Intersectionality and anti-essentialism. All of our identities are multifaceted. We don’t have just one identity that defines who we are. For example, a black man can also be a wealthy Republican, or a white woman may also be a single mother working two jobs.

- Unique voice of color. By virtue of being a person of color, people of color are often put in positions to represent the unique voice of color to white people. The authors argue that each person of color is best suited to share his or her own experiences or stories dealing with racism.

For my study, I am focusing on two of the tenets of CRT: (a) racism is ordinary, and (b) unique voice of color. I focus on these two tenets because it is very

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1 Adapted from Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and Solórzano, D. G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005)

2 While this article focuses on black women, women of color in general are impacted by this “double
evident throughout the literature that racism within the workplace is prevalent. Additionally, by the very nature of being black and African American in the workplace, as CRT asserts, people of color are best suited to share their own narratives around issues with race and racism. Throughout the literature, staff of color share their own experiences of race and racism. I will then review the literature that addresses the issues, such as diversity, pertaining to the state of African American employees in the context of higher education in the United States.

**Racism is Ordinary and the Unique Voice of Color**

In order to understand the role of race and racism in the higher education workforce, it is important to break down the misconception that privilege and hegemony do not exist. Adams et al., (2007) define hegemony as a way that dominant groups see the world through their eyes as the reality for how everyone experiences the world. Hegemony and white privilege go hand in hand because often times white staff don’t see how they manifest themselves. In the context of my study on race in the workplace, white employees often consider that their perceptions of race are the same as everyone’s, in that race is usually not an issue in the modern United States. For example, Peggy McIntosh (1988) wrote a groundbreaking piece on white privilege that is still widely cited today. In her essay, McIntosh noted the following examples of white privilege:

- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see
people of my race widely represented.

• When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

• I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

• I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

• Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

• I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

• I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

• I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

• If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

• I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

• I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
One of the major challenges with hegemony is that if white staff members only view their perceptions as the true and valid perceptions, they automatically close themselves off to understanding some of the unique experiences of African American staff. Even further, when white staff move to mid-level and senior leadership positions within the organization and their hegemonic viewpoints are not successfully challenged, this point of view causes greater divide and further contributes to the negative experiences of African American staff.

Harper & Hurtado's (2007) study synthesizes 15 years of qualitative research on campus climates at predominantly white institutions (PWI’s). Their study revealed that white individuals see race as less of a problem than people of color do. One in four respondents perceived racial problems at their campus to be high (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). While this study was largely focused on students, staff was included as well. Eighty-eight percent of staff persons interviewed in this study were persons of color. They were all aware of the various situations that students of color faced on campus and were able to talk about them without prompting. However, staff admitted that they were often afraid of speaking out against racial situations for fear that they would be retaliated against. Because of this fear, entry and mid-level staff members talked about the fact that they felt silenced and powerless. One staff member noted that race was a topic that was simply not discussed on her campus. She shared that,

*We don’t talk about race on this campus because this state has long struggled with racial issues that trace back to slavery. So the political*
climate is such that the university would get into trouble with the state legislators if we talked too much about race. (p. 16)

Harper & Hurtado (2007) also noted the inconsistencies in the fact that university staff and administrators expect students to have cross-cultural interactions and discussions around race, but staff and administrators are not able to have those conversations. I argue that there is a fundamental challenge with this conundrum. As Student Affairs administrators, how can we expect our students to have these difficult conversations and to possess the necessary intercultural skills to be effective when we, as administrators, lack the very skill we’re attempting to build in our students?

While we know that discrimination is illegal, it still exists in the workplace. Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism and prejudice that still take place, but may not be as overt or easily detectable (Sue, et. al, 2009; Sue, 2010). According to Sue, microaggressions are the “constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups by well-intentioned, moral, and decent family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, students, teachers, clerks, waiters and waitresses, employers, health care professionals, and educators” (Sue, 2010, p. XV). It may no longer take the form of overt discrimination such as having a white only bathroom or water fountain; however, other microaggressions exist such as not including staff of color in office-wide casual conversations or inviting them to functions. It could also include certain glances or comments with hidden innuendoes and the “existence of the ‘good old boy’ network” (Brooks & Clunis, 2007, p. 234). What ultimately happens is that these
microaggressions begin to build up over time to create hostile work environments. The result, according to a study conducted by the Level Playing Field Institute (2008), is that microaggressions are amongst the top reasons why staff of color leave their organizations.

Racial minorities experience several barriers affecting their experiences within the workplace such as a general lack of diversity, prejudice, stereotyping, lack of networking, mentoring, and advancement opportunities, and the “existence of the ‘good old boy’ network” (Brooks & Clunis, 2007, p. 234). Brooks and Clunis noted that a significant barrier to advancement with African Americans was being able to negotiate political forces within the workplace. Depending on the relationship with the supervisor, it influenced the increased visibility of the employees, the assignments and tasks the individuals were given, and greater access to training opportunities.

According to Brooks and Clunis (2007), different racial groups experienced the political climate in various ways. The researchers noted that black employees spoke to the perceived discomfort that white employees had with them and that discomfort affected the ability for black employees to develop alliances with white supervisors. Latino men appeared to be undecided in how the political climate affected them, but they did believe that women were often more disadvantaged when it came to career development. Latina women felt that they had access to training opportunities, but did not see that these training opportunities led to advancement within the organization. Both Asian women and men reported having access to technical training opportunities, but that there was difficulty moving in to
leadership/management roles. With performance appraisals, depending on the race of the supervisor, both white and black supervisors rated their same race subordinates higher.

According to a study conducted by the Runnymede Trust, minorities are still grossly underrepresented in upper leadership positions (Cornelius, 2002). While organization literature can state the goals in creating inclusive environments, it may not always reflect what is really happening in the organization, and staff of color may not feel that the environment is as inclusive as upper management believes it to be (Cornelius, 2002; The Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007).

Maume (1999) also found that blacks are proportionately underrepresented in management positions as compared to their white counterparts. Further, blacks are also promoted less often to upper management positions (G. Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy, & West, 1999). Baldi & McBrier (1997) support Kanter’s Theory of Homosocial Reproduction (1977) in that individuals mostly associate with those who are like them; therefore, with the majority of an organization’s leadership being white, they are more likely to promote other white employees. Collins (1989) and Mong & Roscigno (2010) also noted that some black professionals were placed in racialized positions that negatively affected their abilities for professional growth, i.e, directors of multi-cultural affairs, affirmative action officers, and diversity officers. These positions are often filled by people of color who typically experience the glass ceiling when looking to advance within the organization (Mong & Roscigno, 2010).
There are a myriad of ways that individuals identify themselves. As Critical Race Theory informs us, our multiple identities have a significant impact on how we experience race and racism. Each of us possesses identities that interact with each other. An important aspect to note in the literature is the relationship between race and gender, specifically looking at the experiences of black women. Sesko & Biernat (2010) argue that black women are disadvantaged by this “double minority” status because they are affected by both racism and sexism. Sesko & Biernat describe the notion that, as a result of this dual subordinate identity, black women sometimes feel invisible. This invisibility manifests itself in black women feeling as if they are going unnoticed and sometimes not being heard, relative to white women and men in general.

Simien's (2007) work specifically looks at the intersections of identity of women in politics and argues that race and gender impact public opinion and political behavior. She argues that no one social group is homogeneous and that to fully understand a woman’s experience, we have to also understand how racism, sexism, stereotyping, and silencing all lead to the marginalization of her identity.

**Diversity and Retention**

Diversity has become a commonplace word referring to a host of issues concerning difference in the workplace. Byrd (2007) states that the conversation on race has been diminished as a result. According to Byrd, due to the historical significance that race plays in American society, it is important to decouple race and deal with it on its own rather than simply include it with diversity programs. While I

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2 While this article focuses on black women, women of color in general are impacted by this “double minority” status.
understand the essence of what Byrd is speaking to, I do think we have to further examine the definition of the word diversity because race is a part of diversity. Overlooking this fact may unintentionally minimize other individuals’ experience of diversity.

A colleague once shared with me that diversity is like a house- the organization can appear perfectly clean and beautiful, but when racial and other diversity related situations occur, leaders cannot continue to sweep incidents under the rug. Eventually, someone may trip and get hurt. We know from the literature that white staff typically have a very different perception of workplace diversity issues and climate than staff of color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). Because of this, when leaders fail to address racial concerns that occur in the workplace, it is often staff of color who consequently experience the negative impact.

Byrd (2007) argues that diversity is a leadership issue. Cornelius (2002) notes that to have successful management of diversity, diversity has to be a priority at all levels of the organization. Diversity initiatives typically fail because they lack participation by the top leaders of the organizations (Byrd, 2007; Carnevale & Stone, 1994). Educating leaders around issues of race will, in turn, assist in building the organization’s capacity to deal with racial issues in the workplace. “Leadership drives performance” (Byrd, 2007, p. 277). Organizational leaders need to not only verbally support diversity efforts, but also to a commit to those efforts with appropriate allocations of time, finances, and support. While middle managers need and mostly receive diversity education and awareness
training, they lack the organizational power to make significant changes. Staff of color also felt that senior white male managers still believed that individual qualifications were the only criteria that mattered in advancing within the organization and that, while diversity programs occur in the workplace, the glass ceiling still remains in place (Cornelius, 2002).

Positive mentoring relationships affect overall job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Workers with informal mentor relationships were shown to have better career advancement and higher salaries (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). However, racial and ethnic group members often find it challenging to find mentors, especially white male mentors (Brooks & Clunis, 2007). Many staff of color lack mentors who can help them plan their careers properly and guide them through the upper ranks of organizations (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). McGuire (2000) notes that the more people of color and women there are in organizations, the less likely it is they will have access to Senior executive mentors because women and people of color are not widely represented in those positions. Brooks and Clunis (2007) also note that mentors of the same race, ethnicity, and gender, tend to provide more psychosocial support, especially for women employees.

The business case for diversity asserts that diversity in organizations is directly related to the bottom line or profits (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). Researchers argue that creating and maintaining a diverse workforce is overall good for business. While we know that there are some challenges with diversity in the workplace and the potential for clashes, having a more diverse workforce increases market share and
gives the organization a more competitive edge. A diverse workforce can create higher employee satisfaction, thus creating less turnover and employee absenteeism, which in turn leads to increased production and financial gains (T. Cox, 1993; Herring, 2009). Maintaining a diverse organization creates the ability to generate more diverse ideas and reach a wider market (Cornelius, 2002).

While working in teams is not a new concept, we know from research that working in culturally diverse teams has several benefits such as increased creativity, the ability to build collaborative relationships, include diverse perspectives, and increase multicultural competence (Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012; Salas, Goodwin, & Burke, 2009). The business case for diversity is about maximizing the diverse talent that make up our organizations, which Brovelli & Ifamr (2012) refer to as capitalizing on the skills, knowledge, and experience held by an individual or population.

Retaining staff of color in today’s workforce has proven to be a challenge for many organizations (Bagati, 2007; The Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007; Schwartz, Weinberg, Hagenbuch, & Scott, n.d.). In 2007, The Level Playing Field Institute conducted a survey to specifically look at why staff of color are leaving the workplace. According to the survey, over 2 million professionals leave their jobs because of small comments, inappropriate and not-so-funny emails, and whispered jokes; otherwise known as microaggressions (The Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007). The survey took a look at three factors: the effect of unfairness on an employee’s decision to leave the employer, the financial cost to employers due to voluntary turnover based on unfairness, and what, if anything, employers could
have done to retain employees who left due to unfairness (The Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007). The survey revealed the following (see figures 1-3 below):

- People of color are three times more likely to cite workplace unfairness as the only reason for leaving their employer.
- The behaviors which were most likely to prompt someone to quit were the following: (a) being asked to attend extra recruiting or community events based on one’s race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation; (b) being passed over for a promotion due to one’s personal characteristics; (c) being publicly humiliated; and (d) being compared to a terrorist.

Figure 1 This figure demonstrates based on identity, that people of color are more likely to leave their organizations based on race.
Figure 2: This figure represents the various forms of unfairness that caused employees to leave their organizations.

Figure 3: Reasons staff would remain at their organizations based on identity.

Given the highly competitive and talented pool of African-Americans in the workplace, organizations have to be ready and willing to recognize that in
order to retain these individuals, organizations must have the infrastructure and environments to be inclusive of this population. Building a visually diverse staff is important, but organizations then have to also take into account how to retain a diverse workforce and respond to their unique needs (Cornelius, 2002).

Bagati (2007) asserts that many people of color experience the glass ceiling in the organization. Bagati also noted that in dealing with issues related to inclusiveness, many staff of color do not talk about their feelings with their colleagues and managers in the organization. Bagati (2007) recommends that one of the first steps that organizations can take to build more awareness and inclusivity within organizations is to better understand the needs of employees of color. According to Bagati's 2007 study of 208 employees of color, approximately 50% of women and men of color do not feel obligated to remain in their organization. They perceive double standards regarding performance evaluation, lack of professional development, and stereotyping as barriers to advancement.

Staff also noted the importance of organizational fit. One African American female participant stated, “Of course it is important to fit in. At the end of the day, management picks and chooses who they want to work with and it all comes down to whether you are likable. That will determine your capability to be on a project in some twisted way” (Bagati, 2007, p 18). An Asian female also noted, “It is important to fit in if you want to move up. I was very private about my personal life and kept things to myself. I had a work side and a personal side, and I never crossed the two...I think it matters [for advancement] who you are and where you are coming from, and I guess your race would make a difference in that case” (Bagati,
As mentioned earlier in this chapter, relationships were noted as a key factor to the experiences of African American staff. One female participant noted, “What’s different is that a lot of my peers [white men and women] could build trust by building relationships and going to lunch and I can’t…It was only after people knew that I did a good job, all of a sudden they asked me to work on a job and asked me to go out to lunch. Whereas my peers, they just get asked out and get on the job because they [partners and senior managers] think that person is like them” (Bagati, 2007, p 19). This response is supported by Kanter’s (1977) Theory of Homosocial Reproduction noted earlier in this chapter.

Summary

As I conducted my review of the literature on race and racism in the workplace, I discovered common themes in how staff of color experience race and racism. Within the literature, there were several factors or components that contributed to the experiences of staff of color. All of these experiences, in one form or other, have helped to shape or frame the way that race and racism have had an impact on their everyday experiences on the job. A conceptual map of these themes is presented in Figure 4 below.
As time progresses, the American workforce has become increasingly more diverse. As workplace diversity continues to grow, so does the opportunity for racial and discrimination issues to surface. Workplace leaders need to become better equipped to manage and support staff from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

A direct challenge to this is the fact that white staff members often do not believe that racism is as bad as staff of color believe it to be due to hegemonic viewpoints. Since whites often dominate the workplace and are socially the majority group, they have the privilege of believing the world to be as they envision it and have trouble understanding how their world view shapes policy and practice within workplaces. When that majority view is perceived as the only or right viewpoint, it minimizes the experiences of staff of color and has the potential to create significant racial clashes.

Managing racism in the workplace is a leadership issue. Managers, directors, and executive leaders need to be on board if they are to create any sustainable change as it relates to addressing issues of race in the workplace and creating inclusive work...
environments. Support needs to go further than simply verbalizing that management values diversity. There must be full commitment and support to include appropriate time and the allocation of financial resources for awareness, training, and development.

Staff of color face many obstacles in the workplace that negatively affect their experiences such as prejudice, racism, lack of mentors, stereotyping, and advancement opportunities. While the literature on mentorship shows that mentors and mentoring programs have positive effects on staff, staff of color find it challenging to find mentors, especially mentors in executive positions because there are historically few people of color in those positions.

What employers need to understand is that managing racism and diversity influences organizational success. Whether leaders and employees realize it or not, a diverse workforce brings in diverse ideas, creates a positive image to external and internal stakeholders, potentially increases profit margin, and gives the organization a competitive edge in today’s global economy. When leaders learn to successfully manage diversity, the ramifications are that they develop more inclusive work environments and may see increased job satisfaction. This increased satisfaction directly relates to better workplace attitudes, willingness to work together in teams, increased productivity, staff retention, and, ultimately, potentially greater financial gains.
Chapter 3

Methodology

In our global economy, it is becoming ever clear that we need to prepare the workforce to gain the skills and competency to work with a diverse group of people. Our workforce is becoming more diverse every day (Brief et al., 1997; Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Gonzalez, 2010). As leaders, supervisors, directors, etc., we need to be able to provide our workforce with a safe working environment where they are free to express their identities. We know from research that staff of color experience race in very different ways than white staff (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, & Konrad, 2006; McKay & McDaniel, 2006; Mong & Roscigno, 2010). However, we also know from research that whites have historically minimized the experiences that staff of color face by telling them that they need to get over it, quit being so sensitive, or not to look at the situation that way, etc. (Cullen, 2008; Leary, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how black and African American Student Affairs administrators experience race in predominantly white institutions. The study aims to create awareness of the subtle and not so subtle forms of racism that still exist in the American workplace, and to give voice to black and African-American Student Affairs professionals. From this study, I would like workplace leaders (managers, supervisors, administrators, etc.) to recognize the intricacies that staff of color face on a daily basis in their work environment. This study will increase awareness, provide a basis for open dialogue, enhance the way workplace leaders deal with racial situations, create and enact policy, and build inclusive working environments where all staff can freely thrive.
Researcher’s Identity

Throughout my career in Student Affairs working at multiple universities, there was one common denominator. The majority of the university’s workforce was made up of white individuals. What I found is that within those institutions, many staff of color, including myself, did experience racism. In examining my own experiences, I can recall on several instances when I walked in to a meeting, I was often the only person of color. When it was a meeting dealing with a diversity issue, consciously or unconsciously, eyes turned to me as if because of the color of my skin, I had all the answers when it came to race. This is not always a bad thing because by the nature of me being a black Student Affairs professional, I certainly have insight. However, where it becomes a negative experience of race is when people began to only see me as the voice of color and not as an individual in the room.

I identify as a black professional in Student Affairs. As stated above, I have had my own experiences with race and racism within my workplace. My identity as a black professional in Student Affairs played a crucial role in this study. Because of my identity, I was able to establish an immediate, positive connection with my participants. Because of my identity, participants were able to interact with me in a way that perhaps they would not have felt comfortable to do with someone who didn’t look like them. It was due to my identity that my participants were able to open up to me and share their real and candid stories about their experiences with race and racism in the workplace.
Research Question

In this study, I have one primary research question; what are the experiences of black or African-American administrators in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution? The following two interview questions will allow me to examine my primary research question.

1. As a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what are your experiences with race in the workplace?

2. Based on your experiences with race in the workplace as a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what suggestions can you provide to improve it?

Population

This study is focusing exclusively on black and African American Student Affairs professionals at predominantly white institutions. I chose to focus on this particular population because historically, this group is underrepresented within the field of Student Affairs. Additionally, according to the literature, staff of color have been marginalized and their race has had a significant impact on their workplace experiences (Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Brief et al., 1997; Gonzalez, 2010; Maume, 1999; McGuire, 2000).

My study was conducted at a large Research One university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Student Affairs staff were invited from multiple locations to be a part of this study. In total, 12 individuals met the research criteria for this study. Four of those 12 individuals agreed to participate in my pilot study,
which is discussed later in this chapter. The remaining eight individuals were contacted again and invited to participate in the study. Six individuals responded and ultimately agreed to take part in the study. It is important to note that due to the fact that I used multiple locations, the Division of Student Affairs may be made up of varying departments, depending on the location. For the purpose of my study, I defined Student Affairs staff as what each location defined as Student Affairs. For example, at one particular location, Financial Aid Counselors may be considered Student Affairs administrators and at another location, Financial Aid Counselors may be considered as employees in Business and Finance Services.

**Design and Data Collection**

I used criterion sampling to recruit participants. Criteria for participation in this study required that the participants self-identify as black and African American, be employed in a full-time exempt position within their Division of Student Affairs, have worked within the division for at least two years, and have been employed at the institution for at least two years. The rationale for these criteria was due to the fact that I wanted participants to have worked in the field long enough to have developed a greater understanding of the field of Student Affairs, and a strong knowledge base of the profession. I also wanted participants to be employed in their current positions for at least two years because they needed to have had adequate time to experience institutional culture and develop an awareness of how race is experienced at their institution.

Email messages were sent to participants who qualified for the study to invite them to participate. Selected participants received a consent form and were contacted
to set up a 60-90 minute in-person interview. Interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. After interviews were transcribed, I conducted a member check and contacted participants again so that they could read and verify the data collected.

Because the population that I am studying is so small, I took extra precautions to protect their identities. Each participant selected a pseudonym for the study and I made sure to take out any identifying information based on the location where these individuals were employed.

**Analyzing and Coding**

One of my goals was to capture the narrative of my participants and tell their story, to share their experiences with race in the workplace, and give voice to those experiences. Based on the tenets of Critical Race Theory, people of color experience racism on a continual basis, and CRT also informs us that people of color are the best catalyst for sharing their own experiences. Additionally, people of color are often put in positions to share their unique voice of color for white group members. Because my focus is heavily on the narrative of my participants, I decided to conduct a narrative analysis of the data I gathered.

As described by Paulston & Tucker (2003), narrative analysis examines the structure in extended spoken and written text. Riessman (2007) states that, “interpretation of meaning begins with close examination of how a narrative is spoken” (p. 93) and because of that, she notes the narrative approach of James Gee, which requires detailed attention to the audio recording of interviews. Gee’s approach is not only focused on what is being said, but *how* it’s being said.
According to Riessman, when utilizing Gee’s method, the researcher’s participation in the interview is minimal. The researcher asks enough questions to solicit the narrative from the participant. When transcribing the data, back channel utterances, such as “ums”, are omitted from the text. As the researcher begins to analyze the transcripts, stanzas can be developed which aids the researcher in appropriately analyzing the data. For my study, I used this approach because of its appropriateness for my topic. It also demonstrated to be the best analytical approach to provide a rich description of the experiences of my participants. From the transcripts and stanzas, I used Atlas TI software to assist in the analysis of the data. Additionally, narrative analysis coupled well with CRT because the last tenant of CRT focuses on people of color being able to tell their own story.

**Pilot**

The pilot of this qualitative study was conducted at a large Research One university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States during the summer of 2011 as part of a research course. Criterion and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Participants had to be currently employed in their institution’s division of Student Affairs. They had to be exempt staff who have been employed in their current position for at least one year, and needed to also have been in their current institution for at least one year. This requirement was made because I wanted each participant to have enough experience and knowledge of the institutional culture to base their experiences. Finally, each participant had to self-identify as a person of color. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted to conduct the pilot.
To recruit participants for the pilot study, I sent email messages to 11 individuals who met the criteria for the study. My goal was to have at least four participants. I received a total of 10 responses back and all 10 respondents agreed to be a part of the study. I selected the first four who replied since for the basis of the course, I only was required to interview four participants at this time. Of my four participants, three were African American females and one identified as a black male.

Each of my participants selected a pseudonym. My participants were Gloria, Jennifer, and Kesha, all African American women. I also had one male who I will refer to as Jim who identified as a black male. All of these participants fully met the criteria for my study.

When contacting each of the participants, I asked them to identify a location that they felt would be best and the most comfortable for them to share their experiences with me. Jennifer and Gloria invited me to their offices. Kesha and Jim decided to come to my office. Each interview was scheduled to last one hour and most lasted for about that long. Each interview was audio recorded. During the interviews, I made the decision to not take notes since the topic of the interview was such that I wanted to give my full attention to the participants.

My primary research question was how do student affairs staff of color experience race at predominantly white institutions? To get to that question, I asked the following questions:

- How would you describe the racial climate at your campus?
- Does your campus have a bias protocol? Do you feel it's effective? Why or why not?
• Have you personally dealt with any bias incidents in your work environment?

• Does your institution offer diversity education and awareness training? If yes, do you feel they are effective? Why or why not? If no, why do you think this is? How do you feel about this?

• How would you describe your interaction with other colleagues from other racial minority groups? How would you describe your interactions with white colleagues? How do those experiences differ?

• How would you describe the morale of minority staff at your institution?

• Do you feel that your institution is sensitive to the needs of minority staff? If so, how? If not, please explain.

• How do your experiences with race impact your relationship and work with students?

As stated above, this pilot was conducted as part of a class requirement. Four interviews had to be conducted; however, one interview had to be transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The interview was transcribed using Inqscribe transcription software. After transcribing the interview, data from the pilot study was analyzed using Gee’s approach as noted by Riessman’s (2007) narrative analysis. The transcript was divided into stanzas, and as I began to review the transcript numerous times and listen to the audio recording of the interview, I began to develop my initial set of codes and from those codes, I began to develop themes.

For the purposes of my analysis, I chose to focus on only one of my participants, Gloria. When I contacted her about the study, she quickly agreed to take
part. However, she told me that I had to buy her lunch. Even though I couldn’t do that, she decided to remain in the study.

Once I arrived to Gloria’s office for the interview, she was just finishing up a conversation with another student. She invited me in. We then sat down to begin the interview. As I began explaining my study again, it seemed as if Gloria was becoming a bit nervous. She began to stop making direct eye contact with me, would look at me, and then look away. She began to become fidgety and constantly shifted in her chair, clasped and unclasped her hands, and looked around her office. I made sure to go over the consent form and made sure that she was aware that she could back out of the study at any time and that this would all be confidential. She selected the name Gloria as her pseudonym. I then began setting up the digital recorders and she became a little more nervous and fidgeted with the mouse on her computer, and with a bracelet and necklace she was wearing. To put her at ease, my first of couple questions were about her career path in Student Affairs. She seemed to calm down significantly after this.

As we began to get further into the interview, I noticed that Gloria started to become somewhat frustrated as she was sharing her experiences and reliving some of them. She began to shake her head left to right as she spoke and often looked down at the floor. Throughout the interview, I noticed that she kept a pensive smile on her face, not a smile that noted happiness, rather a smile that conveyed a sense of hopelessness that things would not change.

I began by asking Gloria about the racial climate on her campus, to which she described as, “not bad.” As Delgado & Stefancic (2001) note with Critical Race
Theory, identity is intersectional. While Gloria identified as an African American, you can read from her comment below that her race and her gender played a dual role in her experiences at the institution.

_I wouldn't say chilly, but I would say unique and different as far as not only as a person of color, but as a woman of color on this campus. I think there's different dynamics as being a person of color, but being a woman of color and being heard and being seen._

Gloria noted that as an African American woman, she would speak up and make a suggestion and not be heard, yet when someone white made the exact same comment, they were heard.

_You can say something and another person could say it and it's like, ‘did I not just say that?’ Or did I make that, maybe I didn't make myself clear or something._

When I tried to get more information from Gloria about this statement, she stated that she does not have these issues with other black colleagues of hers. She further goes on to say how this affects her morale in the workplace.

_You feel devalued, and that's not a good feeling, especially when you know that you have skills and a lot to offer._

_So and I find if I'm feeling a certain way as a person, as a woman of color on this campus, then how do I give back to these students who may confront me as students of color on this campus, and I do have students who, not only female, but males who, you know, confront me_
about different situations and how to deal with situations and yet I
have my own situations that I'm trying to deal with.

As you can see from above, Gloria struggles with the challenge of dealing with racial
issues not only as a woman of color, but she struggles with being the advocate for
students of color who come to her for support.

As the interview progressed, it appeared that Gloria became very relaxed, but
she was also showing more frustrations as she was speaking. At one point in the
interview, she began sharing about a certain experience and was being so vague that it
almost seemed as if she were speaking in code to be very careful not to say
someone’s name. This went on for a bit to the point where I had to interject and ask
her clarifying questions so that I could try to make sense of where she was going.

Gloria then began to speak about the challenges she faces when trying to
confront a racial incident. She talked about the fact that because she identifies as an
African American woman, she’s not allowed to get upset and just respond the way
she may want to because white people would see her as threatening and there are
risks associated with that.

Because that can lead to not being able to being promoted. That could
lead to missing opportunities that are out there that you could also
miss opportunities into helping the department that you're in, whatever
part that may be of Student Affairs. Being able to help a student in
situations and being able to look at how things can grow and how to
be able to also know that you have skills and things that you can give
to other folks as well, especially when you know we are trying to do a lot with less.

Gloria and I then began to talk about reporting structures and I asked her about places where she could report incidents that occur. I asked her about Human Resources (HR) in her organization and if she could use them as a resource. Gloria vehemently began to share her distrust for HR and how they were not a resource. She made the following comments about HR.

Yet when you sit down with Human Resources and you discuss it, it's almost like you're the problem because you're doing your job. Or you're the problem because of [who] you are doing your job. Ok. That makes a difference.

Because in the another situation, this would be a no no. Ok. but yet I have to keep dealing with it and dealing with it and it wears a person down emotionally, physically, it's not good. It's not healthy in no way shape or form for no one's mind to keep tolerating something that should not be tolerated.

Things are not taken like it's important. And so once again, you start feeling like, am I valued? Or am I valued only when something is needed from me? Or they need something from me or something like that.
As Brooks and Clunis (2007) describe in their research, one of the challenges faced by people of color in the workplace is building relationships. Gloria began sharing that she has a pretty good relationship with her supervisor who is white, but that with another white colleague in the office, there are some tensions. Part of her frustrations with this individual is that she feels that the supervisor treats the other white colleague different from her.

*I don't want to be taken advantage of in that relationship. Because it starts to feel that what I do is not important. It's devalued once again.*

*But yet, when someone else asks for it, could be on the same level, if something had to be done, it's done right away. So you start to wonder, why is that being done for this person but not for me? Or if I give you something, it's put in a drawer until months later.*

From this analysis of Gloria’s interview, three themes emerged,

- Intersectionality of identities
- Lack of trust with HR
- Supervisory relationships

Intersectionality of identities and roles dealing with race play a significant role in how people of color experience race in the workplace. This is directly related to CRT. As a person of color dealing with racial incidents in the workplace, they also have to take into account the intersection of other identities and decipher how all those identities play a role in dealing with racial incidents.
Human Resources is the office on campus where all employees should be able to go to have their voice heard and address situations as they arise. If staff of color lack trust in their HR offices, this becomes a challenging problem. Who then do staff of color go to on campus?

As Brooks and Clunis (2007) identify in their research, work relationships are important. Supervisory relationships have a much stronger impact because of the power dynamic. Supervisors need to be trained to be aware of potential racial incidents that can occur and learn appropriate ways to address them. Supervisors need to also take into account the role that their own racial identity plays in dealing with workplace incidents.

The above three themes were themes that emerged solely from Gloria’s data; however, themes that emerged from all four interviews was the role that supervisors played in creating racial situations within the work environment, the importance of developing a strong network of other staff of color, and the feeling of being silenced by white co-workers and supervisors. All of these themes are supported by the related literature on this topic.

Based on my pilot study and on feedback received from the professor instructing this particular research course, I wanted to expand this study by adding additional participants. The professor also recommended that I decrease the amount of questions I asked, and to listen more attentively to the responses that I was receiving since I was using narrative analysis. I also noted that since my population was so small and the fact that I am a member of the population, it put my participants more at
ease when telling me their stories because they were able to relate to me due to the fact that we were from the same racial identity.
Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

In our global economy, it is becoming ever clear that we need to prepare the workforce to gain the skills and competency to work with a diverse group of people. Our workforce is becoming more diverse every day (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Fernandez & Fernandez-Mateo, 2006; Gonzalez, 2010). As leaders, supervisors, directors, etc., we need to be able to provide our workforce with a safe working environment where they are free to express their identities. We know from research that staff of color experience race in very different ways than white staff (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, & Konrad, 2006; McKay & McDaniel, 2006; Mong & Roscigno, 2010). However, we also know from research that whites have historically minimized the experiences that staff of color face by telling them that they need to get over it, quit being so sensitive, or not to look at the situation that way, etc. (Cullen, 2008; Leary, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how black and African American Student Affairs administrators experience race in predominantly white institutions.

Participant Profiles

For this study, I had a total of six participants who agreed to take part in the project. Each of the participants had been employed in the Division of Student Affairs for over three years and come from a wide range of departments within the division. I had a total of four women and two men participate. To help protect the identity of each participant, everyone self-selected a pseudonym. For the purposes of the dissertation, their names are Keshia, John, Reba, Carlos, Jane, and Kim. I spent
anywhere from 35 to 90 minutes with each participant. After interviews were transcribed and transcriptions were returned from a professional transcriber, I conducted member check by sending the transcripts back to participants. I then had to have follow-up conversations with two different participants to ask further questions and get further clarification. Because of the extremely limited amount of black and African American professionals in Student Affairs at my study site who fit the minimum criteria for the study, I had to be very careful to eliminate as much potential identifiable information as possible. My initial intent was to write about each participant separately to give the reader a richer sense of the individual’s experience with race in the workplace. However, as I began to write about each of their individual experiences, I quickly realized that due to the small number of black administrators in the division, readers would be able to trace stories and experiences back to the participants. Therefore, in an effort to protect the anonymity of the participants, I decided to focus more on the themes and populate those themes with the various experiences rather than discuss each participant separately.

I had two interview questions for the study.

1. As a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what are your experiences with race in the workplace?

2. Based on your experiences with race in the workplace as a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what suggestions can you provide to improve it?
From the responses of these two questions, I initially developed 104 codes. From that initial set of 104 codes, I began to dissect them and look at areas of overlap and repetitiveness to eventually reduce and combine them to approximately 50 codes.

From that set of 50, I began to develop code families, and from those code families, I began to notice and develop the three following overall themes for interview question #1.

- Relationships with Other Staff of Color
- Emotional Well-being and Coping Mechanisms
- Microaggressions

The figure below is a graphical depiction of the three overall themes for interview question #1, the number of codes that contributed to that theme, and the density or number of comments made by the participants for that particular theme.

Figure 6. Graph depicting themes for interview question #1 with code and density values.

For interview question #2, the following three themes were created and the figure below provides a graphical depiction for question #2.
• Increased Social Opportunities
• Training and Development
• Senior Administrator Support and Buy-In

Figure 7. Graph depicting themes for question #2 with code and density values

Interview Question #1: As a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what are your experiences with race in the workplace?

Theme One: Relationships with Other Staff of Color

As I began to look at the data from my interviews, the overall theme of relationships became very apparent throughout all of my participants. For each of these individuals, the relationships with others in the work environment were relationships that sustained them and brought them comfort, solace, and support, or
brought them some sort of emotional harm and stress. Participants spoke about their relationships in three general ways: relationships with other staff of color, relationships with supervisors, and relationships with students.

**Relationships With Other Staff of Color**

It was quite evident from the data that the relationships that participants desired with other staff of color were very important to them. One participant stated, *While picking cotton was bad, at least we all picked it together.* (Carlos)

This statement captures the sentiment that the majority of participants longed for better relationships with other staff of color.

Because there are so few staff of color within the Division of Student Affairs, you will notice from the statements below that participants were somewhat displeased at the lack of camaraderie amongst the small group.

*I feel like as African Americans at a predominately white institution, we have all experienced pretty much the same thing and none of us have talked to each other about it or helped each other get through it. It’s like you are left out there to fend for yourself and if you fail, oh well. In a predominately white institution, there are so few of us and yet we do not know each other very well. I am not saying that we have to go out to dinner and hold hands and sing Negro spirituals together or anything like that. But we do not utilize each other’s talents. We do not communicate with each other. We get that typical nod or smile when we see each other sometimes, which is unfortunate to me. I feel like as a community, we should…I don’t know….have a better bond?* (Jane)
It was just me and a couple other African Americans when I got hired here. I thought we initially would be closer when I got here, then found out that we all had different interests, so I didn’t get as close to them as I thought. It bothers me sometimes because I feel that we should be closer. I get along with my colleagues, both black and white, I just wish I was closer to the black ones than I was the white ones because there are times where I want to share stories with them or life issues that I know someone of color has maybe experienced and know a little more about than to expose someone who is white and have to explain the back story before I can even tell the actual story. (Kim)

Carlos and John both note that it may not just be an issue that staff of color are not close or that there is no bond, it just may be that it is hard for staff to come together because they are so spread out amongst all the various departments in the division, thus making it hard to connect. However, you will see in John’s statement that there is great benefit when staff of color are able to come together.

We are so spread out and kept busy, that we do not have those opportunities to get together, and the stresses of our jobs, whatever the job is, does not allow us to be together all the time. We don’t have that opportunity to get together, all of us and say, “Okay, how can we help each other out?” (Carlos)

And there is something cathartic, (about coming together). This is not (just) me. Because when you are in isolation sometimes and you are challenged,
like, “No. Everything is just fine (from white staff), this is just you. To hear other people in shared positions, in shared kind of things reassures me, “This is not just me! This is real!” (John)

One concept that both John and Carlos referenced in their interviews is this notion of staff of color who have been in their positions for an extended number of years at the university, and there’s a perceived notion that they are members of what is referred to as “The Old Guard,” meaning that they are institutional history and hold certain levels of power and influence. For John and Carlos, this Old Guard includes staff of color. However, both John and Carlos experienced a disconnect in that they perceived the Old Guard as not always helping pave the way for staff of color behind them and a perceived fear that staff of color have in bringing up issues.

Well you know people do a lot of things to get where they are. Once they have achieved something, sometimes they do not look back. (John)

We do not have that opportunity to get together, all of us, and say, “Okay, how can we help each other out?” Or even, “Hey shit. I just had this experience and I’m about to write this letter that talks about the institutional racism, will you all sign it? And you have people that will be like, “Oh no. I cannot do that.” It’s almost like you have the house nigger and the field nigger. The house nigger is saying, “What is better is better than we have here?”, and the field nigger is saying, “I got to get the fuck up out of here
because it ain’t good out here! You are living in the big house so it’s all gravy for you. I’m the one out here!” (Carlos)

**Relationships With Supervisors**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, supervisory relationships play a key role in creating an inclusive and open working environment. When looking at the role of supervisors’ relationships with staff of color in my study, it was important for me to note that my participants also felt that their relationships and experiences with their supervisors had an impact on them. For Kim, she noted a special connection that she had with her supervisor because he was a black male.

*The supervisor I had for my first year was shocking to me. He is a man of color and I thought, "There are two of us in one office! I'm excited! Yes!" And I called my mom. I actually called her and was like, "My boss is black! I don’t know how it is going to work, but it's great!" But he is amazing. We built a great relationship both personally and professionally and I thought that was great. I feel like there were times where if I had a racial issue, I felt more comfortable going to him than I would if I had a supervisor that was not of color. Even though I am open to talking to new people, it's just some things that I do not feel comfortable sharing with everyone. So it was good to come in and have him there. (Kim)*

Kim also noted how the relationship with her supervisor was important for instances where there had to be some form of corrective action or difficult interaction between her and her supervisor.

*I also wanted to maintain a professional relationship with him as well so that*
he did not see me as somebody as kind of just trying to come in to fit in or because he is black and I am black, I am not going to get in trouble or have any issues. When we had to ever come across that stage, we did, but he was very professional about it so it was not a race thing. It was more if you did your job well, you did. If you did not, you did not. I feel like sometimes when you have a supervisor who is not of color, I think about that in the back of my head. Like are they picking on me because I am black? Or is it that I truly just did not do my job well? So there is always something that is in the back of my head that I think is different for people of color in Student Affairs versus those who are not. (Kim)

Reba’s experience with her supervisor was not a bad one, but she made mention of the impact that team building had on creating an inclusive work environment and that her supervisor did not focus on that.

Team building is important. We do not build a team anymore. The current white male who is in the position does not build a team anymore either. He wants the jobs done. He gets the job done, and he puts on a great face. If you all do not get along, he does not want to know about it. I do not see how that is going to impact us in a positive way, or change the face, or the color, or the ability to partner, or promotion. (Reba)

Having a positive relationship with a supervisor was seen as crucial to participants. Because of the positive relationships, even when the conversation had to be difficult, it could still take place because the respect for the individual was present. Note Jane’s experience below.
I actually had to address a supervisor with his inappropriate jokes that he had made. He went a little too far with a comment about color. I actually forgot the joke itself but it was something along the lines of—it was really hot outside and walking back from another end of campus to the location that I work at you can easily get a tan—and he mentioned something along the lines of, "Oh. Jane does not get a tan." Or you know, "She does not get a tan because of the fact that it is already imbedded in her." Something like that. I had to say, "Whoa. That was crossing the line. That was inappropriate." And I felt comfortable to say it, just like that. And my supervisor, you know, he apologized. I believed it was sincere and he has never made a joke about color or anything I know of that was offensive since. Do I think that will work (confronting a supervisor) all over the campus that I work at? No. I do not think so. I think it was just the individual that was my supervisor pretty much understood where I was coming from and realized he crossed the line and took a step back to reflect and he apologized. (Jane)

Relationships With Students

The beauty of doing this study with Student Affairs administrators is that there is a real passion about working with students and positively affecting the student experience while at the university and for the future in general. When looking at the staff experience of race, participants were quick to relate how they experienced race in the workplace directly impacted their relationships with students, and even more specifically, students of color, and vice versa. In fact, both John and Keshia comment below on how mentorship and guidance was important for them.
The opportunity to do training and supervise graduate students...having come through that experience, I knew all the questions that I did not know to ask and the mentoring pieces that I did not get, so the opportunity to provide that for others, for people kind of following that path was important. (John)

I think that African American people, or people of color have an extra/feel this extra duty to help their students. (Keshia)

Jane felt this duty as well, but she commented below that she struggles to combat the stereotype of the angry black woman. She wants to make sure that students don’t view her that way because she wants them to be able to approach her.

That is my biggest thing, combating those stereotypes because--like I said--I do not want to be the angry black woman. I do not want to come across like that because then people are afraid to approach me or afraid to use me as a resource, because that is what I am here for. I find my students are like that too until they get to know me. You know? When they finally get to know me they are like, "Oh my God. You are like the best thing since sliced bread." So, you know, it is something that I keep in mind. Especially being here. (Jane)

Carlos has close relationships with his students and talks about his mentorship role with the students he serves.

I feel their pains when they’re coming in here telling me a story or in instances where I am there to experience a similar experience. So me being in the role I’m in and working so closely with students of color, I kind of
Because of Carlos’ high activity with students, and the fact that he spends so much of his time with them, he provides two examples below of stories in working with his students where their experience with race had an indirect impact on his experience of race. The first story describes an experience about how angry and frustrated he became at a program with students. The second story describes an experience that a student had in the classroom that also impacted Carlos because of how upset his student became due to the incident.

*I can think of a time where I had convinced the vice president of Student Affairs to hold these workshops for all Student Affairs staff, including the administrative staff. The program was designed to allow these people to hear stories from students about their experiences at a predominantly white institution, but from the students’ mouth, not from mine. So I had an African American panel, I had a Latino panel, I had an Asian panel and Native American students. So at first we started out with African Americans. We had large numbers of African American students and we had very few females at the time. So the panel was all males. And so I had each student introduce themselves, tell their story, tell why they were at the institution. So there are five males. Of the five, one came there for athletics. One. So when they were all done, we opened the floor up for questions. The first question was asked about athletics and one of the males on the panel had said, "Who was that question directed to?" And the response from the white man that asked the question was, "All of you." So before they could even answer, I stopped them.*
I said, "Nobody answer the question." And at this moment, I had to gather myself because I was heated. I was so frustrated. I was angry because you would have thought with a room full...it was 100 white people in this room now, you would have thought that somebody else would have been like, "Wait a minute. Only one of them came here for athletics, why are you asking that question of all of them?" So I had to gather myself and then I calmly said, "Obviously you were not paying attention. And that is the reason you are here. Because these students feel like they are invisible and obviously four of them were invisible to you. Or you did not care enough to pay attention to what they said because if you paid attention, you would have said that that question was directed to the student athlete since he was the only one who came here because of athletics." (Carlos)

I had a faculty member that taught in project management—building construction management—and so the students for their project would build homes. So basically, they were project managers. They were going to be the white hat guy at the construction site—so they subcontracted out to the people for different things for the house. In this one instance, they subcontracted to a father and son dry walling company. The entry way to this particular home they were working on was circular and the company was able to put dry wall on there. So the students in the class wanted to know how they were able to get the dry wall into a circle without breaking it. There was one black student
in this course and the teacher asked the father to come and explain how they had done this. So the father made a comment that he was just an owner and that his son was really the person doing all the stuff, he just did all the "nigger work". Some of the students laughed. The black student walked out of the house and the teacher’s immediate response was to come back to campus, make phone calls and then he subsequently fired the subcontractor. The instructor did the thing that he felt was morally right and that was to not have that student subjected to that person anymore. However, the most trying part was not the fact that the student was not upset that the man used the "N"-word. The student was mad because his classmates laughed. That was what hurt his feelings. That people that are in class with him who pretend to be his friend would laugh at that joke. (Carlos)

Jane, too, was able to recount her experience dealing with a racial incident that occurred on the campus where the campus police issued a crime alert to the campus community targeting black male students. Jane was very angered and frustrated at the way the incident was handled by police.

There was an incident that happened on campus where a crime was committed. To catch the perpetrators that were involved with this crime, the police put up a crime alert or description of the possible suspects that they were looking for and for the community to be on the lookout. And I was upset by the description that was given because if you ask me, it just pin pointed all black male, college-age students. It pretty much described all of our black male students here and that made me feel uncomfortable as a woman of color
in a predominately white institution. I already know that feeling that you have to watch what you say, you have to watch what you do; and to have that thought in your mind and then see something like that posted, I feel that that would bring unwanted attention and make my students feel more uncomfortable.

**Theme Two: Emotional Well-being and Coping Mechanisms**

For the participants in my study, feeling a sense of support and community within the workplace proved to be quite important for their overall well-being. Understandingly, support looks different for different individuals; however, by and large, my data revealed that my participants experienced a lack of support in their work environments and it did have an impact. As the researcher, it was quite difficult for me to take all the data around support (or lack thereof) to come up with a very concise code that would capture the data around all the different ways that my participants experienced this lack of support. However, the more I kept analyzing the data, I began to see how the notion of emotional well-being and coping mechanisms came to life.

**Lack of Support**

Being the only black administrator or one of few black administrators in the office proved to be challenging for some of the participants. Because the numbers are so low, participants found themselves desiring different levels of support from supervisors, colleagues, administration, community, etc. As eluded to above, support from supervisors was considered very important to participants. Keshia describes an
experience below where she was dealing with a difficult administrative assistant and how frustrating it was for her because she did not have the support of her supervisor.

Several years ago, I had gotten an administrative assistant who was referred to me by another administrator. It turned out to be a nightmare. This person had been here a number of years. She was very aggressive, controlling, and she certainly did not respect me. And then I had another person who chided in with her, because she felt that if I were gone, certainly she could move into my place. When I went to my supervisor, he did nothing.

He did not support me. (Keshia)

However, below, Kim reminds us how valuable it was for her to have the support of her supervisor when she arrived to her position.

We built a great relationship both personally and professionally and I thought that was great. I feel like there were times where if I had a racial issue, I felt more comfortable going to him than I would if I had a supervisor that was not of color. Even though I am open to talking to new people, it's just some things that I do not feel comfortable sharing with everyone. So it was good to come in and have him there. (Kim)

As you can read in Reba’s statement below, the lack of support from her colleagues was a challenge for her.

My work unit is right down the hall from one of our larger units. They apparently celebrate birthdays every month, and they apparently have their holiday gatherings, or their Christmas party and I do not get invited. So this is sad because I am in a small office and no one remembers it or thinks about
it. So tell me where is the collegiality? Where is the socialization if you are at an institution that is not celebrating holidays, acknowledging your births, your deaths, your anniversaries, or what have you? How is that environment supportive? (Reba)

Reba expands further on the lack of support that she feels from her colleagues.

I want to accomplish things. How do I get them done? No one is lending a hand to help you. If you do not have staff support that has been here for 100 years running your office for you, how do you find things out as a new employee? And who cares? That is the most devastating part. I mean, I ask a million questions and people will tell me, “I do not know how she does it.” And they are okay with not knowing how I do it, just that it gets done. If I do my job really well, people will be happy to keep me, but they are not doing anything to support me or to promote me. (Reba)

John takes a different approach to the lack of support and talks about the lack of creating supportive systems not only for retaining staff of color, but also having systems in place so that recruiting staff of color can be improved as well. John recounts an experience below where he was speaking with colleagues about creating these support systems to help with recruitment and retention.

I was actually facilitating an inquiry where we were talking about this exact question, what are the barriers to recruiting and retaining faculty and staff of color? And so this was a large meeting with people representing various groups on campus. And so people were talking about the recruiting seems to work better than the retention in some ways. People were talking
about different resources, places to eat, places to get your hair done, you know? A lot of different things. Social things to financial, and a whole host of reasons when people are saying why they have been tempted or they know people who have left. You know? These two older white men in the back of the room were quiet. Through most of it, they would whisper over to each other. Finally at one point, one of them raises his hand and asks me...he says, "I do not understand this conversation." "Okay. What can I help you with? What is it that I can clarify?" He says, "Well, we are talking about expending additional resources to try to entice people to come here and then get them to stay here who obviously do not fit, who do not want to be here at this point. How does that make sense from any kind of philosophical or definitely economic perspective? I know lots of people who are willing to take a pay cut, who are willing to make other sacrifices to come to here because for them, this is where they fit. We do not have to change a thing for this to be a happy place for them, so why are we talking about investing resources in this? Even this meeting, how much professional time is being expended even having this conversation about trying to fix something that from a whole host of perspectives, is not broken?" Well, people were all up in arms. People were heated! As the facilitator I said, "I understand people's reaction, but I do think we need to slow down. I think that is a legitimate question." Why fix something that is not broke? Now we are all saying the fact that we are not able to recruit and retain people of color at the levels we think would be ideal means that it is broke, for a whole host of people. We think it is the right thing
to do to try to promote equality, to try to promote diversity, to try to support those things, but in theory, when the rubber meets the road, when it comes to supporting with resources, then really we are not quite as comfortable with that. If it’s about location, we can not change that. So then what do we need to do to compensate for that? And then it gets to, "Well that would not be fair.

John talks about the fallacy of fair below and shares a humorous but powerful and relevant story about fairness and equity.

There is a--I believe it is a Oliver Wendell Holmes quote--that "There is nothing less fair than the equal treatment of unequals." It is funny, I have had this conversation with my kids. My kids are two and a half years apart and they are in the back of the car as we are driving. They are doing the whole "Well how come he gets to do this and I do not get to do that?" "Well he is two and a half years older. He did not get to do that when he was your age." Or either, "How come he still gets this and I do not get that anymore." Or, "I have to do this..." "Well you are older. You have more responsibility."

And it is like, "Well that is not fair. You should treat everybody the same, that is what is fair." So then they were having a conversation in the car and they were in this phase where they were doing the, "Well what would win in a battle between..." You know? So that is where we are going with this so I think, "Oh this is a great opportunity." So I was like, "I am going to get in on this." So I was like, "Well, okay. Try this. Who would win a battle between a shark and a lion?" And they were like, "Oh well I think..." You know? I said, "If you put them in the ocean." They were like, "That is not fair!" "That is
"ridiculous!" You know? It is like, "You cannot put them in the ocean. Of course the shark is going to win. That is not fair to the lion." I said, "What do you mean that is not fair? You treat them both the same. You are treating them exactly the same. Why is that not fair?" "Well Dad, that is not fair." I said, "Well okay. Let's put them both in the jungle. That would be fair, right?"
"No!" "Well why is it not fair if you are treating them the same?" They said, "Well it is not always fair if you treat them the same if they need different things." And I am like okay, I can get my three year old to understand that, but I worked with really educated people and I haven't been able to articulate this in a way that it gets captured and held on to. So I say that in that this has been part of my frustration, this sense of...we are coming from such significantly different places on this. (John)

**Stressed, Isolated, Silenced, and Hopeless**

Being a black or African American administrator in Student Affairs brings its own level of complexity. The situations that staff experience can be emotionally exhausting. As participants were sharing their experiences with me, I was able to discern levels of stress, feelings of being isolated, silenced, and I even felt a sense of hopelessness from Keshia.

*As long as I have been here, I have come to realize that in some cases, racism is so deep that there is not anything you can do, or waste your time with but to keep moving forward. I think there is still a lot of work and a long way and people talk about diversity. I do not want to talk about it anymore. I'm tired of all the talking. (Keshia)*
John describes the isolation that he experiences that contributes to levels of stress he has in his position. Carlos also shares how his experience of being somewhat isolated impacts him.

The piece that has probably been one of the biggest things, is feeling isolated. I feel like sometimes, to be honest, that's one of the hardest things here. There is a lot of potential here and a lot of opportunity, but I also get that it is very isolating. It can be very frustrating and there are those moments where I am dissolutioned; where I believe the commitment to diversity is not as much of a commitment as I had originally believed. (John)

It’s tough to not have that avenue to discuss issues of importance to me and my work environment or with people that I work with on a daily basis. I think it adds more stress to my job. It’s stressful carrying around that burden of not having that outlet. (Carlos)

One of the other challenges that participants experienced was the notion of being silenced. For my participants, being silenced meant that they felt at times that they could not speak up or speak out for fear that they did not want to be labeled a trouble maker or show emotion. There was this sense of having to constantly be mindful of how they represented themselves which sometimes caused them to just be silent, even as issues were being raised around them. Note the examples below.

I cannot be emotional. As an African-American male growing up in a household of 10 and being the ninth child...to hold a conversation, or just have a family discussion when all of us are talking at the same time, you learn
certain behaviors, to talk louder or more passionately so that you can be heard. Being at a predominately white institution, to be able to show emotion about a subject matter around predominately white people, they do not understand my culture and it is difficult to speak sometimes. However, depending on the situation, I do at times find it difficult to be silent. I find there are times when it’s necessary to be silent, but I know that I cannot make a difference if I am silent because everyone else is going to be silent. And at some point in time, when does the silence, as Dr. King said, become betrayal? (Carlos)

I also found myself choosing my words carefully. You know? Really putting some serious thought into it so that I would not appear as the angry black woman. I found myself doing that a lot here because that is the stereotype that black women seem to have. I already know that feeling that you have to watch what you say, and you have to watch what you do because you don’t want to be classified in that serotype that is out there. You almost feel like you are combating the stereotype even though no one is necessarily coming out and saying it. It’s just the overall feeling that you have to be mindful of. (Jane)

I decided at some point if I were to get angry at all of this, I would be walking around every day angry, and it would be very upsetting to me and I would probably just lose it. It was not going to be a happy situation for me. Some things I have stood up and fought for, and other things I have let go because in the end I said, “What will I gain out of this? Or how will this be a benefit to
anybody?" I will go home and they will see me as a crazed woman. I have realized that after a while with white people, you are going to lose an opportunity to communicate because everybody is going to avoid you, because they will figure, “You do not know what to say to this person because they are going to go off.” (Keshia)

Coping Mechanisms

One concept that I wanted to briefly touch upon was how my participants stated that they coped with all the stresses of being black or African American in the workplace. While the question about coping mechanisms was not asked, it did show up in the data, so I felt it was important to mention here. For Keshia, she focused on her spiritual well-being as a way to handle the stresses.

I’ve learned that you always do the best you can with what you got until you can do better. So one thing that has helped me here is that I went on to develop a spiritual life. You have to have a spiritual centering and remind yourself that these people are not gods and that we are going to have to answer to one person. So if I had not had a spiritual life to nurture me on a daily basis, I do not know where I would be. (Keshia)

For Jane, her coping mechanism was her ability to be self-reflective and constantly look back on situations to reflect on her reactions and emotions.

I always look back at a situation to see if there was something that I said or did I make it seem that everything was so comfortable for you to feel that you can say things like that to me? And for the example with the supervisor making that comment towards me in reference to my skin color and the tan,
did I really make him feel that comfortable where he thought, "Oh. We are friends. I get to say this stuff." And then did I give him the impression that I would be okay with that comment? So once I have those reflective questions go across my mind and replay the incident in my mind I always think back, "Okay. Maybe I could have done something different to deal with this situation. Maybe I could have done something different to where the supervisor would think that it was not appropriate to make these comments." (Jane)

Finally, Reba and Keshia talked about the need for adequate social outlets for staff to come together to release some of the stresses in the workplace.

You know? One thing that wears us down as people of color is that there's no safe haven. Where are we getting away to? If we're not going to somebody’s house, where are we going? (Reba)

I wanted to open up avenues where we could come together and meet other women of color and perhaps have more... some friends and maybe establish someone that they felt comfortable to talk about their issues. For people of color working at predominantly white institutions, we really need to learn more about stress release. Stress release like getting massages and taking time off and being around good vibe people. Do you know what I mean? (Keshia)

Theme Three: Microaggressions

As written in chapter two, Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism and prejudice that still take place, but may not be as overt or easily detectable (Sue, et. al,
According to Sue, microaggressions are the, “constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups by well-intentioned, moral, and decent family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, students, teachers, clerks, waiters and waitresses, employers, health care professionals, and educators” (Sue, 2010, p. XV). It may no longer take the form of overt discrimination such as having a white only bathroom or water fountain; however, microaggressions exist such as not including staff of color in office-wide casual conversations or inviting them to functions. It could also include certain glances or comments with hidden innuendoes and the “existence of the ‘good old boy’ network” (Brooks & Clunis, 2007, p. 234). What ultimately happens is that these microaggressions begin to build up overtime to create hostile work environments and according to a study conducted by the Level Playing Field Institute, microaggressions are amongst the top reasons why staff of color leave their organizations (Carnevale & Stone, 1994).

As Keshia was speaking to me about microaggressions, she spoke very slowly and crisply to clearly articulate her point about microaggressions that she has experienced. I could almost feel the pain as she describes below.

\textit{In terms of racism, it is very subtle. And if you were not on to them (white people), or on to what people are thinking, you would totally miss some of the subtleness of it. And what I noticed, certainly, they learned very quickly...they meaning white people learned very quickly... to use the words and to make sure it sounds like they are really, you know, equal opportunity employees and what have you. But they go right back to the same old institutional racism.}
You see the subtleness in the little things like how they address you. I know that no matter where I go, and working with predominantly white people, that racism is always going to exist because it is so deeply ingrained in these people of being superior. (Keshia)

John and Reba also speak about microaggressions below.

It does not come out blatant like they talk about my figure, or the color of my hair or anything like that. It is indirect and that is the invisible part. For example, I have a colleague who deliberately will not spell my name correctly and she will print out documents that go to a lot of different people with the name and title incorrect, even though she knows this. It is deliberate. I can sometimes not be invited to the staff awards reception, or my student’s award is the only one left unsigned and has to be brought back to the office, or she forgets to print out a name tag for when I am there to present the award. This is the slight of hand that another person of color will feel. (Reba)

But some of it I think, legitimately is not conscious on that level, but it is more aversive racism. It is that piece that people do not even realize what they’re reacting to. You know? And so I think that puts a whole different challenge, because you cannot really change that through policy either. (John)

**White Privilege**

In order to better grasp the concept of microaggressions you have to understand what white privilege is and the role that it plays in causing microaggressions. What was interesting for me as a diversity educator and trainer is the fact that I can name white privilege when I see it. I can describe it, but I struggled with providing a
concrete definition of it. So, like all quality researchers who need a quick answer, I searched for the term on Google. Ironically, the most clear and concise definition that I found was on Wikipedia. Below is how Wikipedia defines white privilege.

*White privilege (or white skin privilege) refers to the set of societal privileges that white people are argued to benefit from beyond those commonly experienced by people of color in the same social, political, or economic spaces (nation, community, workplace, income, etc). The term denotes both obvious and less obvious unspoken advantages that white individuals may not recognize they have, which distinguishes it from overt bias or prejudice. These include cultural affirmations of one's own worth; greater presumed social status; and freedom to move, buy, work, play, and speak freely. The concept of white privilege also implies the right to assume the universality of one's own experiences, marking others as different or exceptional while perceiving oneself as normal (White Privilege, 2009).*

In my study, as participants were sharing their experiences, white privilege became something that came up several times. Below, Carlos shares a story of a time when he was dealing with an incident in the workplace where a white male colleague spoke up and spoke out against an injustice that occurred.

*... With that one person having the ability to be that voice I could afford to be silent because I knew he was going to speak up. But him also being that one white voice that was respected in the room got people to do the things that we did. But at that time, he didn’t understand what privileges he had as a white*
man in America. It took him listening to Tim Wise⁴ and hearing what white privilege was and a story that Tim Wise shared about his grandfather for him to say, “Oh shit. Now I get it.” This white male then became one of our greatest allies. (Carlos)

Carlos also makes another statement below about needing a white person to help you advance to the next level in your career. This is another example of white privilege.

To get that next job, you’ve got to pin down that white person that was supervising you to help you get that job. Whether that be through a good reference or they know somebody or whatever. (Carlos)

If you remember John’s story that he shared earlier in the chapter about putting extra resources in place to recruit and retain staff of color, the response that he received from the white male who asked the question about the need for these resources clearly did not understand the notion of white privilege. This in and of itself can be considered a microaggression.

"Well, we are talking about expending additional resources to try to entice people to come here and then get them to stay here who obviously do not fit, who do not want to be here at this point. How does that make sense from any kind of philosophical or definitely economic perspective? I know lots of people who are willing to take a pay cut, who are willing to make other sacrifices to come to here because for them, this is where they fit. We do not have to change a thing for this to be a happy place for them, so why are we talking about investing resources in this? (John)

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⁴ Tim Wise is a nationally renowned speaker on white privilege.
What this individual failed to realize is the reasons why people of color did not feel like they fit at the institution. Why was this institution a place that seemed happier and more accepting for someone who was white versus someone who was a color? Keshia, Reba, and Kim adequately sum it up below.

*I think it is a challenge that white people never have to think about. You know? But people of color do. (Keshia)*

*But it is allowed to go on because they are in privilege and they are in power. (Reba)*

*I do not think they have to think if their race played a part in their performance or how they are doing their job. But I think for black people or African-Americans or any person of color for that matter, we have to think about that. (Kim)*

**Advancement**

Professional advancement in their respective careers was also a theme that emerged from participant narratives. The data revealed that participants had to wonder how their race played a factor in their ability to advance. As Keisha described below, she feels that black administrators hit the glass ceiling and it impedes their ability to get promoted. She also points out that sometimes people of color can be put in racialized positions of authority to appear as figure heads.

*There is a ceiling for African-Americans in terms of their growth here. People who are looking for promotions here need to ask about upward mobility and look at how people have progressed throughout the system and what roads they had to take and how many have actually gone through. And some of*
them have what they call the “house-nigger” syndrome where there is someone of color in charge of all the other folks of color. I have seen where they have gone about the hiring practices where they have their friends to apply and they are just going through the motions, because even if they are not qualified, those people have been hired. I have seen that happen over and over and a person of color does not even have a chance. (Keshia)

I feel like we get stuck sometimes and don’t make it up the chain. (Kim)

Inappropriate Comments

Another form of microaggressions that occurred in the workplace were inappropriate comments made by white colleagues or supervisors. For Kim, she speaks about her discomfort about some of the questions that she is asked, but also understands some of them because by her being a person of color, she is the best person to ask. However, according to Kim, some questions were insulting and frustrating.

I am an individual who used to wear my hair braided all the time and I got a lot of questions, which I did not mind answering. It was just how they asked the question that I had a problem with. I’ve never had anyone ask me a rude question such as, “Did you wash your hair today?” But more so, “How long did it take to get that done?” Things of that nature. But those are questions that obviously someone of color or someone that wears that style would have to answer. But there are other questions that might come up that are more serious questions but sometimes I do not feel comfortable answering because I have not had the experience to answer them or I do not want to be the person
to represent the entire population. For example, I am from the inner city and people have asked me questions like, “Is that what the ghetto looks like?” or, “Do all people talk like that in your city? That kind of bothers me sometimes because then I feel like they’re stereotyping all people of color and people from the inner city. That bothers me when they ask me questions like that and they don’t see me as a well-educated black woman who is trying to succeed and not be the stereotypical person that you see on the news every day. (Kim)

Jane also speaks about some of the inappropriate comments that she has encountered in the workplace.

I had some situations that made me feel uncomfortable with my colleagues in the department where I had to address the color line, or color issue, I guess you would say, and the inappropriate comments. I actually had to address a supervisor with his inappropriate jokes that he had made. He went a little too far with a comment about color. I actually forgot the joke itself but it was something along the lines of--it was really hot outside and walking back from another end of campus to the location that I work at you can easily get a tan--and he mentioned something along the lines of, "Oh. Jane does not get a tan."

Or you know, "She does not get a tan because of the fact that it is already imbedded in her." Something like that. I had to say, "Whoa. That was crossing the line. That was inappropriate." And I felt comfortable to say it, just like that. And my supervisor, you know, he apologized. I believed it was sincere and he has never made a joke about color or anything I know of that was offensive since. Do I think that will work (confronting a supervisor) all
over the campus that I work at? No. I do not think so. I think it was just
the individual that was my supervisor pretty much understood where I was
coming from and realized he crossed the line and took a step back to reflect
and he apologized. I think there is a time and place for everything and I think
that some people need to be reminded that we are colleagues, we work
together, but that does not mean that we are necessarily friends and that you
can be comfortable where you think it’s okay to say these things that you may
say in the privacy of your own home or with your fellow friends. I’m not going
to judge you on what it is that you say because you know it is wrong. You
know it is inappropriate. I feel like people know the difference between right
and wrong. I think they should know better than to do it, especially in the
professional setting. (Jane)

One of the major challenges that both Carlos and Jane mentioned with the
inappropriate comments is that their white colleagues would hear the comments but
did not speak up or did not address the comment when they heard it. Rather, they
would wait for the person of color to respond and would privately show support or
sympathy.

_I have had people make comments and people later in the room come to me
and say, “Oh, I am so sorry I did not say anything.” It’s too late now!_

(Carlos)

_When I self-reflect and I look back on it I am like, "Why did not anybody say
anything? Why didn’t anyone speak up?" And it gets on my nerves, honestly.
You get irritated when you are hearing these things and then no one is saying_
anything, or they look at you like, “Are you going to say something? And I
almost want to look back and say to them, “Are YOU going to say
something?!” (Jane)

Interview Question #2: Based on your experiences with race in the workplace as
a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a
predominantly white institution, what suggestions can you provide to improve
it?

With my second interview question, I wanted to garner ideas about what staff
felt would improve experiences with race in the workplace, barring any restriction.
From the data, three distinct themes were developed; (a) Senior administrator support
and buy in; (b) training and development; and (c) increased social opportunities.

Theme One: Senior Administrator Support and Buy-In

In order for diversity efforts to take real effect and impactful change can begin
in the organization, senior level administrators need to support them. One of the
primary themes for interview question #2 was the necessity for senior administrator
commitment.

I think it just takes budget and that one administrator. I was blessed in my
former institution where I had that one middle-aged white male who not only
had all the racists but all the sexists. He was able to engage them in real
dialogue. He was truly committed. And with that one person and him having
the ability to be that voice, I could afford to be silent because I knew he was
going to speak up. (Carlos)
I would want to be able to have the administration understand the importance
(of race) so that it would filter down. (Carlos)

As John states below, he struggled to think about what he thought would be needed to
really improve the experiences of black staff.

I don’t think there is an easy answer. I think there is not an immediate
solution to these things. Things that I think would make it better, from my
perspective, is if there were a really clear top-down commitment. You know?
And not just a rhetorical, on paper kind of commitment. There needs to be an
ongoing effort and dialogue to change those deep seeded, personal kind of
things. I think there needs to be a deep commitment. (John)

Keshia also mentions the importance of senior level commitment in her response. She
states that offices that deal directly with diversity and equity should report directly to
the president of the university so that the presidents are able to hold those
administrators accountable for improving conditions.

I think that those offices that are equity offices and things like that need to be
under the president instead of under the deans. That way, the president can
hold them accountable for these things. (Keshia)

Theme Two: Training and Development

Another method noted in the data was that there needs to be continuous
training and development as it relates to diversity. It is through consistent efforts to
further educate staff that intercultural competence can increase within the workplace.
With this increased knowledge and awareness of difference, staff can begin to feel as
if the work environment is more inclusive and diversity is appreciated.
I would want to have the administration understand the importance of mandating training; specific training, by specific people to engage in the conversation. I don’t think it takes an infinite amount of money; just persistence, time, and it takes a group effort. (Carlos)

At my previous institution, the president mandated a four-hour or two-hour session with Tim Wise on white privilege for all faculty and staff. He then mandated a follow up eight-hour workshop for his entire cabinet. He gave up one day of their retreat so that his cabinet could go through the eight-hour session on race relations training. That is change. Whether you would say they were willing participants or not, I don’t know. But they showed up. Not only did they show up for the one, but they showed up for both, and for some, it made a difference. (Carlos)

In Jane’s comments below, she eludes to the fact that people need to just be willing to talk and listen.

We had a professional development session here with other departments talking about diversity in the workplace. The conversation of black-and-white always seemed to come up. The training session was good to have, but I just wanted people to understand that it is okay to talk about black-and-white or just difference period. You just have to be willing to talk about it and hear the things that are going to come out of peoples’ mouths and accept the differences. (Jane)
John makes mention that departments need to go further than the “one shot” programs that only occur occasionally and they need to spend time making training an ongoing process.

*I think the university does a good job of bringing in the big name speaker, you know? The one-shot thing. Yes, people feel good and they get all fired up for that hour, and then that dissipates. There needs to be a process. There needs to be something on-going. I’ve heard faculty and staff talk about, “Oh, I did not get my three-hour diversity training in this year. I have to get something in.” And then they take the path of least resistance. It needs to be more than a check off. It needs to be a serious commitment because it’s not an easy process. (John)*

Kim also contributes to the data below by talking about the need to have the conversation around diversity.

*I think people are not aware. There needs to be more awareness, whether it be the terminology that is out, diverse films, or just having a casual conversation to help people. I would like to do some type of workshop where we can all just sit down and ask questions in a safe space about race or serotypes that we might have, and how do we think we can go about changing them. I also feel that we need to have more white people show up at these trainings, but they do not. I don't know if it is due to the titles or then assuming that it's just going to be a soapbox of African-Americans talking about the sad stories. I don’t think it always has to be sad. It can be very positive as well. (Kim)*
Theme Three: Increased Social Opportunities

The final theme that showed up in the data from interview question #2 centered around staff being able to come together to build relationships with each other. As noted earlier in this chapter, the black administrators in my study longed for better relationships and camaraderie with other black professionals in Student Affairs. Those relationships are important because staff felt that they could come together to connect in different ways based partially on their racial identities and that their experiences may be similar with regards to race.

Keshia notes in her statement below that she feels that black staff need to come together more and find ways to connect, be social, and relieve stress.

*One of the things that we have tried to do here is to have more opportunities for people to come together across the board. Working all the time makes everyone dull and people want to get out and dance and relax. (Keshia)*

*For people of color working at predominantly white institutions, they really need to learn more about stress release like getting massages, taking time off and being around good vibe people. (Keshia)*

In Reba’s example below, she uses an analogy that black professionals are like buildings. Each racial experience they have in the workplace is like building a wall around them. For example, whenever a black professional feels isolated, layers of bricks are being built around them. Whenever they hear an inappropriate comment or receive a negative glance, another layer of bricks is being built. Whenever they experience any form of microaggression, another layer of bricks is created, etc.

Eventually, Reba feels that because of the experiences with racism in the work
environment, black staff eventually build a protective wall around themselves and they begin to isolate themselves from others in the workplace and don’t allow themselves to socialize with anyone. As a remedy to that, Reba talks about the necessity of team building to help create better relationships.

People shut down. They stay in their offices. They do what they have to do and then they go home at the end of the day. If everybody shares that mentality, they’re never going to come across the hall (to socialize) or remove any of the bricks, or the nails, paint, or polish. Most people will hide behind their wall. They have to develop their interdepartmental and development skills and they have to be able to program and keep people in a good community space. Team building is important. (Reba)

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the qualitative results of the data analysis of my six participants’ responses to my two interview questions examining how black and African-American student affairs professionals experience race in the workplace. With the assistance of Atlas TI qualitative data analysis software, I was able to develop six primary themes to describe the experiences with race and gain participants insight on possible methods of improving the conditions and developing a more inclusive work environment.

The participants’ experience with race in the workplace indicate that black and African American professionals in the field of Student Affairs experience racial challenges that do cause extra levels of stress and discomfort in the work environment. While overt racism is limited, participants’ experiences demonstrate
various forms of subtle racism and microaggressions that occur on a continual basis. These experiences left participants feeling demoralized, unappreciated, isolated, and silenced.

While all participants had varying levels of racial experiences in the workplace, participants felt that with concerted senior administrator support and buy in, institutions can improve race relations and open doors for true cross-racial dialogue and greater levels of education and awareness around difference.
Chapter 5

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how black and African American Student Affairs administrators experience race in predominantly white institutions. The analysis indicates that there are significant challenges that black and African-American administrators endure in the workplace but, there is hope that some of these challenges can be remedied with continued education and support. In this chapter, the results of the study are revisited.

In this study, I had one primary research question; what are the experiences of black or African-American administrators in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution? The following two interview questions allowed me to examine my primary research question.

1. As a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what are your experiences with race in the workplace?

2. Based on your experiences with race in the workplace as a black or African-American administrator in Student Affairs at a predominantly white institution, what suggestions can you provide to improve it?

As a reminder, Critical Race Theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study and there are five major tenets to CRT.

- Racism is ordinary- Racism happens every day.
- The challenge to dominant ideology.
- A commitment to social justice and praxis.
Of these five tenets of CRT, two of them primarily manifested themselves in my study and those were; (a) racism is ordinary, and (b), unique voice of color. As the reader reads chapter four, CRT’s concept that *racism is ordinary* is interwoven amongst the many responses from participants. Racism played an active role in how the participants experienced their time at the university on a continual basis.

Additionally, CRT’s concept of the unique voice of color is used as the basis of my study because I only sought participants who identified as a person of color for this very reason.

**Implications and Recommendations for Interview Question #1**

Interview question #1 resulted in three themes; (a) Relationships; (b) Emotional Well-being and Coping Mechanisms; and (c) Microaggressions. In the sections below, the themes are further discussed.

**Theme One: Relationships with Other Staff of Color**

Relationships were crucial for participants. Human beings are social creatures. Many depend on relationships with others to provide social interactions, friendship, support, and positive emotional connections (Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Calvó-Armengol, 2004; Fernandez & Fernandez-Mateo, 2006). Within the work environment, the same applies. With such small numbers of black and African-American Student Affairs administrators in the division, those relationships were
relationships that provided them with the emotional support they needed to feel like they were valued members of the workplace and that their racial identity mattered.

Due to the small numbers of black and African-American administrators of color, staff longed for closer relationships with other black and African American administrators because there was this notion that they could share common experiences with each other that, perhaps, white colleagues would not understand or have experienced. It is crucial to note that black and African-American administrators did not want to exclude other races from the relationships. However, there was a shared experience around people of the same racial identity and that was one of the factors that staff wanted to be able to bring them closer together. In my own experience, relationships with all staff are important to me; however, it is equally important for me to have close relationships with other staff of color because by the very nature of us being racial minorities in a predominantly white workspace, there is a connection that is made. There have been many examples in my work experiences when I have dealt with microaggressions and racist statements. In those instances, it was very important for me to be able to go to my colleagues of color to share, vent, and get the support to move forward.

One of the significant barriers to being able to build relationships with each other was the fact that there were individuals spread throughout various departments within the division. One of the recommendations that I would make is for management to develop a diversity enhancement committee. There currently is not a committee such as this established, and one of the functions of this committee could
be to bring people together and help build relationships with the diverse staff across the division.

As important as it was to have quality peer relationships with other colleagues, it was also important for black and African-American staff to have strong relationships with their supervisors, or for staff to feel that their supervisors had the capacity to handle some of the unique situations that staff of color experienced. For staff that had a good relationship with their supervisor, there was a level of comfort they experienced that allowed them to go to their supervisor and obtain the support they needed. This is supported in the literature by Byrd, (2007), and Cornelius, (2002). Supervisors need to be able to establish a working relationship and positive environment where staff of color can come to them for support. When staff feel valued and appreciated, that can create a stronger positive energy within the workforce and can improve employee satisfaction, performance, and retention (Bagati, 2007; Brooks & Clunis, 2007; Carnevale & Stone, 1994).

With regard to relationships in the workplace, it was important to understand the special relationship that black and African-American Student Affairs administrators had with their students of color. Being a minority in a predominantly white institution not only presented challenges for staff, but also for students of color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Black and African American Student Affairs professionals felt a sense of responsibility to make sure they were supporting their students and being responsive to their students’ unique experiences at the university. For students of color, having that administrator of color they could go to when they needed that extra support, mentorship, and encouragement was crucial. I find myself
often filling this role for many of my students of color. To be clear, I fill this role for my white students as well, but I often have my students of color coming to my office just to…be…to breathe, and matter. I have several conversations with them about issues and challenges that they face. It was also crucial to note that the experiences that students of color had at the university directly impacted the experience that black and African American staff had at the university. Staff were able to recognize the challenge and wanted to do what they could to make the student experience at the institution a successful one. When students of color came to black and African American staff to share various racial incidents that they had experienced on campus, black and African-American staff were able to relate to the experience and support the students through the incident. From my experience, I completely agree with the results of my study in that I do take on some of my students of color’s challenges with race as my own, because what affects them also affects me. This is another example of CRT because as CRT asserts, racism is ordinary, not only for staff of color, but it is a lived experience for students of color as well. A further implication is that this is evidence of how important it is to have a diverse staff who also represents the diversity of the student body. Students need to have an administrator to go to who reflects their identity.

Theme Two: Emotional Well-being and Coping Mechanisms

Being a minority in a majority workplace proved to have its share of complications. Black and African-American administrators realized that they needed a different level of support. The crucial concept to understand is that most people want to be able to share a connection with others, regardless of their social identity.
However, it is also crucial to understand that minorities in any majority environment find a way to connect on different levels *because* of their identities. We witness this phenomenon when international students come to study abroad; they tend to group themselves together. We witness this phenomenon on our college campuses around the country when we walk into certain spaces on campus and see groups of Italian students together, groups of Asian students together, groups of African-American students together, etc. This is all part of Kanter’s (1977) theory of homosocial reproduction. We as humans primarily associate ourselves around people who are familiar to us. This is not a bad thing. Affinity groups can provide humans with different levels of support than those individuals external to that identity. The problem comes when groups exclude others and *only* associate with their affinity groups and adopt superiority behaviors. For black and African-American Student Affairs administrators, the concept is no different. They longed for that extra support and, at times, struggled to find it. As a recommendation to assist with this lack of support, developing some form of workplace affinity group could prove beneficial. Management may also see this group as an effective means to increase recruitment and retention efforts. However, I caution that this group should not become so exclusionary that black and African-American administrators completely isolate themselves from their other colleagues. Currently, there are no affinity groups within the Division of Student Affairs at this institution.

**Theme Three: Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism and prejudice that still take place, but may not be as overt or easily detectable (Sue, et. al, 2009; Sue, 2010). For black
and African-American Student Affairs professionals at predominantly white institutions, microaggressions occur on a continual basis. This is further proof of CRT’s tenant that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, D. G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L., 2005). Microaggressions show up in small ways. Black and African-American administrators have experienced isolation, such as not being invited to certain functions. Others have experienced inappropriate comments and asked offensive or culturally insensitive questions. Others have been made to feel like they did not matter and that their contributions to the workplace were irrelevant, thus making staff feel as if they had been silenced.

When looking at how microaggressions affect black and African-American staff, it is important to examine the role that white privilege plays in causing microaggressions. Staff indicated that, occasionally, white colleagues failed to understand how their privilege impacted staff of color. What I have found challenging is that there are some white individuals within the workplace who will become very angry and defensive when the conversation on white privilege is broached. There are many white individuals who will not acknowledge their white privilege. From my own experience, I have discovered that as a black male, I do not have privilege to talk about white privilege. Because of my race, when I speak about white privilege, there is a different message that is received than if one of my white colleagues speaks about white privilege. When I speak about white privilege, it may be received as an accusation or that I want to take it away. When someone white speaks about white privilege, the defenses are typically not as up and white individuals are typically more susceptible to hearing the discussion. There are several
respected authors who have contributed significantly to the literature on white privilege such as Tim Wise, Peggy McIntosh, and Alan Johnson. There is one common denominator here. These are all white authors. In order to get white staff to understand their privilege, I argue that there must be a strong white voice that has the awareness, knowledge, and skill to connect with other white staff on this topic. If this white ally is not readily available, I offer another suggestion. What I have done in the past is talk about identity privilege for my own dominant identities, i.e. male, Christian, education level. When I can get the individuals to connect with me on those levels, I may mention white privilege because I have set the stage for them to make comparisons from their other areas of identity privilege.

For example, in my study, black and African-American staff felt that, at times, they could not speak up or speak out against an injustice or a microaggression that occurred for fear of being isolated or looked at as being overly sensitive or a trouble maker. However, if their white colleagues spoke up and voiced a concern, their voice would be heard. Additionally, some white staff believed that the way in which they experienced the university was the way that everyone experienced the university, otherwise known as having a hegemonic view of the workplace (Adams et al., 2007). It is important for white staff to think about the various needs of different members of the workplace and how to do their part to make the university a place for all staff to have their needs met as much as possible.

**Implications and Recommendations for Interview Question #2.**

Interview question #2 resulted in three themes. (a) senior administrator support and buy-in; (b) training and development, and (c) increased social
opportunities. An unintended outcome of my second interview question is that, by the very essence of the question, staff were making recommendations as to how the climate can be improved in the workplace.

**Theme One: Senior Administrator Support and Buy-In**

To make significant advances and impactful change for diversity efforts in the workplace, senior administrators need to support them (Byrd, 2007; Cornelius, 2002). If efforts are not supported by senior administrators, they will likely fail or have minimal impact (Byrd, 2007; Carnevale & Stone, 1994). Senior administrators need to go further than just having a diversity tag line in their strategic plan or simply speaking the rhetoric of diversity. They need to put forth a solid effort and make a commitment to doing what they can to make the work environment inclusive for all staff.

At the particular institution where this study took place, the university has developed a thorough diversity strategic plan that covers all facets of the university. Considerable time and resources are spent in developing this diversity plan and all senior level administrators are expected to have a plan for their units. These plans are published on the university’s website and the university is considered to be a leader in diversity strategic planning. However, despite the efforts, staff feel that these grand diversity strategic plans are not the reality. The perception amongst staff is that the institution is failing in this regard. One participant noted that this diversity plan is another example of the diversity rhetoric of the university. This is also supported in the literature (Cornelius, 2002; The Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007). As a recommendation, to turn these plans from rhetoric to action, there needs to be a cadre
of individuals per department who can find ways to implement the diversity strategic plan at each level of the organization. These individuals need to be given the appropriate time and resources to make these diversity plans a reality. However, more importantly, they need to have senior level buy in and support. Senior administrators need to take responsibility to not allow their diversity strategic plans to simply become rhetoric.

When situations occurred in the workplace and senior administrators showed a true commitment, black and African-American staff were able to feel the positive impact. They felt as if they were validated and that their presence in the workplace meant something. It is the responsibility of the senior administration to make sure that they are setting the appropriate example and holding individuals responsible for creating inclusive environments. As a resource for further reading, I offer the work of Damon Williams, Strategic Diversity Leadership: Activating Change and Transformation in Higher Education (Williams, 2013), and Daryl Smith, Diversity’s promise for higher education: Making it work (Smith, 2009).

**Theme Two: Training and Development**

Proper training and development is essential in the workplace for any type of workplace success effort. Diversity education is crucial. Organizations need continuous training and development around issues of diversity. It is through training and development that intercultural competence can increase (Adams et al., 2007; Carnevale & Stone, 1994).

To increase levels of competence, management needs to mandate ongoing training for their staff. There should be general training around diversity, but there
should also be targeted training or more specific training for the various aspects of diversity. For example, there could be a general training that all staff attend. There can also be a diversity curriculum established where staff can choose to attend three out of five sessions to be offered over the course of a year. This way, management can mandate training, but staff are also having a say on the type of training they attend. Topics can range from race, gender, age, or any other social identity or diversity topic. The most important fact is that the training is happening and that staff are learning and/or being exposed to diversity education. Many times, it comes down to a matter of listening to the voices of others and simply opening oneself up to learning about difference. Training does not have to be expensive, nor does it need to take eight hours. However, management needs to allot the appropriate amount of time to training so that the organization can move past the diversity 101 topics and begin engaging in more meaningful and impactful conversations.

In addition to the ongoing training and development for staff, senior administrators need to take an active role in the training. As mentioned earlier, if senior administration does not support the training efforts, change will be minimal (Byrd, 2007; Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Cornelius, 2002). Senior administrators cannot simply mandate training for their staff and not attend themselves. Senior management should also take part in the trainings that are offered in the workplace, and they should have additional training dealing with topics such as how to lead change and diversity efforts. I would also recommend that depending on the training topic, senior management have their own session because staff may feel
uncomfortable sharing in a session where their supervisor or senior administrator is in attendance, and their presence can inhibit learning.

**Theme Three: Increased Social Opportunities**

The opportunity to come together and build community in the workplace is important. It is through social opportunities that staff have the chance to mingle, break the ice, and begin forming strong interpersonal relationships with one another (Calvó-Armengol, 2004; McGuire, 2000). When thinking about the experience of black and African-American staff in the workplace, this need to come together is even more important. Because there are typically so few of them in number, these social opportunities allow them to build relationships and support systems amongst each other. Additionally, coming together with others of the same identity can allow them to let down their guard and be in a space where they feel they can truly be themselves.

**Summary and Conclusion**

This qualitative study explored how black and African-American Student Affairs administrators experienced race in the workplace and recommendations as to how they would improve the racial climate. From the data gathered from the research question, six overall themes were developed. The data showed that there are significant challenges that black and African-American administrators face in the workplace. It is clear that there is further work that can be done to create work environments where black and African-American administrators feel that they are visible and valued members of the workforce. With persistence, education, and tenacity, administration can create work spaces where all staff can express their identities and build inclusive environments for all members of the workforce. From
this study, I would like workplace leaders (managers, supervisors, administrators, etc.) to be able to recognize the intricacies that staff of color experience in their work environment. This study should increase awareness, provide a basis for open dialogue, enhance the way that workplace leaders deal with racial situations, create and enact policy, and build inclusive working environments where all staff can freely thrive.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

There is further research that can be done around the topic of race in higher education administration and looking at the experiences of administrators in the field. While my study focused on the experiences of black and African-American Student Affairs administrators, it would be interesting for a similar study to be conducted on how white Student Affairs administrators experience race in the workplace, and how they have (if they have) thought about their racial identity as it relates to the work environment. Research can also be done exploring more of the intersection of identities in the workplace. The intersection of identities is a part of Critical Race Theory, but it did not come up much in my study. Lastly, more work can be done looking at the role of supervision and how supervisors’ racial identity impacts staff of color. For one of my participants in this study, having a supervisor who was also of color meant a lot to her and significantly impacted her experience in a positive way. It could prove interesting to see further research in this area.
References


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