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The Experiences of Professionals of Color at a Predominantly White Institution

Brandy Matthews

Eastern Illinois University

Abstract

This qualitative study looks at the experience's professionals of color face in a Predominately White institution. More specifically, this study showed that professional of color still face many challenges due to the barriers they face on, and off campus compared to their White counterparts. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to help explore professionals of colors experiences at a rural mid-sized university in the Midwest.

Key terms: Professionals of color, challenges, White colleagues, and administrators

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to all the professionals of color who have faced challenges and barriers working at a PWI. I hope you find the support you are looking for.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Dr. Jon Coleman for being a great advisor and being a supportive listening ear to my thoughts and frustrations as I went on this journey of completing my master thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Catherine Polypore and Mark Hudson, for giving me advice, insightful comments, and suggestions about professionals of color. I could not have done this without your three and your guidance.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my participants for being brave and allowing me to listen and share their stories. Just know that I look up to and admire you all and the challenges you face and continue to face while working in higher education. I appreciate all that you do to make higher education more inclusive to all students.

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CHAPTER I

College and university campuses, although dedicated to the pursuit of greater knowledge and awareness, are not immune to the influences of racism. (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 49)

The last two decades have seen an increase in the diversity of students that arrive on college campuses. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), from 2000 to 2018, college enrollment rates increased among Black 18- to 24-year-olds from 31% to 37% and Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds from 22% to 36%. While White 18- to 24-year-olds saw a 3% increase from 39% to 42%. The enrollment rates for those who identified as Asian and American Indian/Alaska Native were not measurably different during this same period. This increase in student diversity has led many institutions to consider the diversity, or lack thereof, among their faculty and staff (Johnson et al., 2018; Louis et al., 2016; Torres, 2019).

During the Fall 2018 academic term, full-time faculty and staff at postsecondary institutions were 40% White males; 35% White females; 7% Asian/Pacific Islander males; 5% Asian/Pacific Islander females; and 3% each Black males, Black females, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females (NCES, 2020). Those who were American Indian/Alaska Native, and those of two or more races, each made up 1% or less of full-time faculty. This data from the NCES shows that there is a disproportionately low number of faculty and staff of color on college campuses. Furthermore, the data reveals that the diversity of the students on campus is not reflected in the faculty and staff.

This lack of professionals of color on campus has been a focus of many institutions as they try their best to meet the needs of their diversifying student body (Johnson et al., 2018). Universities' slow progress on gaining more faculty and staff of color can be a problem for the current faculty and staff of color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) because they are subjected to many racial inequalities and discrimination (Louis et al., 2016). Due to the racial inequality's faculty and staff of color face on college campuses, they tend to meet many challenges in their pursuit of getting promotions, tenure, recognition, and retention (Louis et al., 2016).

When universities attempt to address the underrepresentation of faculty and staff of color, it is often inconsistent (Torres, 2019). Without a university's active support for them to succeed and feel valued, faculty and staff of color are more likely to leave their positions (Johnson et al., 2018). This exit of professionals of color from colleges and universities can be a concern because they tend to offer different and unique perspectives that can benefit universities (Johnson et al., 2018). The result is that those that choose to remain in the higher education profession often find themselves as the only one, or one of the few people of color in their department, office, school, or college (Stanly, 2006). This coupled with the increased interest in diversity and inclusion means that they are often called upon to sit on the search and hiring committees, program committees (etc.) leading to what has been termed the minority tax, the brown tax, or Black tax. *Minority tax* "refers to the burden of extra responsibilities placed on minority faculty in the name of diversity" (Rodriguez et al., 2015).

Researcher Reflection

As a person of color, I can count on one hand how many times I have had a teacher or a staff member of color around me in my whole academic journey since I was in elementary school almost 18 years ago. Looking back at my undergraduate experience in a PWI, I noticed that not many people in administrative positions looked like me. Everywhere I turned, there were only White faculty and staff around campus, but I wondered why there was no representation of people of color in the back of my mind. It concerned me because this lack of representation was not right. Therefore, I realized that not having the norm of people of color in professional or leadership roles could reflect poorly on me as a student of color when I entered college because I had no one that looked like me and could understand my needs. So, when it came to applying for leadership positions on campus or getting help with classes, or plans for after graduating, I tended to hold back and not ask because I had this mentality that White faculty and staff were not going to want to work with me. After all, I was not White. I looked at myself as less worthy and qualified to be in those leadership positions or even go on to graduate school because I did not represent what I thought the school saw as worthy or successful enough to continue my education. I did not have anyone to turn to and ask for help or advice on how to navigate the Whiteness on campus because I believe like most White faculty and staff would not understand my position as a Black female trying to gain new experiences during my undergraduate career. I was subconsciously putting myself down because of what I saw around me. I knew that if I think this way, I know that many students of color may also feel like they have no one in a professional position on campus that gets or understands them as a person of color. This study aims to understand why

there is such a lack of representation of faculty and staff of color compared to the students of color on campus.

With my experiences in mind, I know that I have natural biases related to this study because I am a person of color. Therefore, I will use the bracketing method to help try to ease those biases. Bracketing can help researchers work through any prejudice or preferences related to the research, which can increase the study's accuracy (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of professionals of color who are working at a PWI. More specifically, this study aims to gain insight into the experiences of members of an under-represented group as they navigate the institutional culture in a PWI. The following research questions will be used to meet the objectives of the study.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How have professionals of colors' personal experiences in higher education impacted their success at PWIs?

RQ 2: What are the challenges that professionals of color experience on a PWI that can be attributed to racial identity?

RQ3: What resources and supports contributed to the success of professionals of color in higher education?

Significance of Study

University campuses are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse as students of varying cultures pursue higher education. Universities can risk losing out on

opportunities for having a diverse and creative faculty and staff that, in turn, can better serve a diverse student body (Kwon, 2016). Therefore, the diversity of the student population on a university campus needs to be reflected in the faculty and staff (Steele, 2016). When students of color fail to see professionals on campus that look like them, it can hinder them in finding mentors that can help them in their college journey (Steele, 2016). Further having a more diverse faculty and staff on campus can help keep the retention rate up for students of color at PWI's (Steele, 2016). However, professionals of color tend to experience a range of racial challenges from their supervisors and their workspaces which may impact their continued presence in those campus environments (Farris, 2018). Professionals of color can benefit from telling their stories because their experiences can be a source for change on and off-campus. Further, this study will provide an opportunity for PWI's to gather information into professionals of color's experiences that can help administrators find a way to better support and retain these individuals on their own campus.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the low number of participants that work at the institution being studied which may amplify the issues raised by the participants compared to PWIs with larger professionals of color working there. Therefore, it is important to note that professionals of color in institutions with a larger representation may experience these issues in different ways than those that have a less significant representation. Another limitation is that the results and adaptability of the study may not be generalizable or pertinent to some other institutions based on factors such as institutional size, geographic location, programs, and history with underrepresented

populations. Finally, the geographic location and community surrounding of the institution may impact the social and external support of the participants that can result in them having different experiences in similar institutions in other settings.

Definition of Terms

Critical race theory- an approach that offers a radical lens through which to make sense of, deconstruct and challenge racial inequality in society (Rollock, & Gillborn 2011, p.1)

Professional of color- for this study, professional of color will refer to any person, not a faculty member, who does not consider themselves White in a professional position at the institution.

Tokenism - is "an intergroup context in which very few members of a disadvantaged group are accepted into positions reserved for members of the advantaged group, while access is systematically denied for the majority of qualified disadvantaged group members" (Wright & Taylor, 1998, p. 648).

Whiteness- "as a system of privilege based on race whereby White ideology is viewed as a reference point from which all other identities are compared" (Fine, 1993)

Summary

Professionals of color face many obstacles on and off campus that deal that stem from racism and feelings of being unwanted and underutilized to their best ability in their careers. Whites and professionals of color on campus have different experiences and how they are valued and viewed on campus when it comes to the students, the local commonality, and their supervisors. These differences in experiences show how White people are seen as better and more professional in a college setting than their colleagues

of color. Therefore, it shows the many difficulties professionals of color face internally and externally as they try to navigate toward being accepted in their workplace. Chapter 2 presents the review of literature that was done on professionals of color on campus, along with the theoretical framework used for this study.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

In recent years, diversity has become a major focus of higher education administration. The importance of having a diverse campus is the opportunity to have more diverse viewpoints, thoughts, and perspectives for students to learn and grow from. But faculty and staff of color, who can offer those diversifying viewpoints, thoughts, and perspectives only represent a small fraction of higher education employees, especially at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Having such a small number of professionals of color can have significant implications for not only these individuals but for the students as well.

The following is a literature review describing how race has been perceived in higher education, the Whiteness that is seen across campus, the difficulties professionals of color have in navigating PWIs, the impact a diverse staff can have on students, and the recruitment and hiring process can affect professionals of color. This chapter also reviews critical race theory as the theoretical framework and explains how it pertains to professionals of color in a PWI. Additionally, this chapter describes leadership theory and organizational leadership to further explain how leaders can take initiative and address racial inequities in the campus environment.

Race and Higher Education

Studies have shown that America has a history of racism that has manifested in its higher education institutions at the student, faculty and staff levels, which have negatively affected people of color (Espinosa et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2009; Hutcheson et al., 2011; Litolff, 2007; Minor, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). During the last 20 years, U.S

society has become more educated by having more people completing postsecondary education. However, despite the rise in educational enrollment, racial and ethnic inequalities remain high (Espinosa et al., 2019). Higher education, until after the Civil War, was practically unavailable to students of color (Litolff, 2007). The ending of the Civil War led to an increase in educational opportunities for Black students. A growing number of colleges and universities were established to help educate Black students interested in higher education including graduate and professional colleges (Haynes, 2006). These universities would serve as an opportunity and hope for Black students seeking higher education and have a way into the American educational system (Haynes, 2006).

World War II was where many African American males fought but came home to the same inequalities and wanted to see change. This drew attention to the importance of the civil rights movement, as they fought for better equality in the right to vote, purchase a house, and attend desegregated schools (Hutcheson et al., 2011). For African Americans, participation in the Second World War was a major influence in their attitudes towards education because many young men who fought for the ideals of the United States returned from fighting for their country only to encounter laws and a culture of segregation and discrimination that acted as barriers that prevented them from participating in full American citizenship (Wynn, 1971). The war efforts for equality for other were just the beginning of social change as Black veterans returned home and begun fighting for their civil rights efforts and for fairness in their own country (Highan, 2015). The ending of World War II also brought many Black troops back to the United States where they sought the college education promised to veterans through the funding

provided by the Serviceman's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) (Haynes, 2006). The G.I. Bill offered federal support to veterans to attend any choice of college or university of their choosing. However, with the segregation at PWI's in the south and the north, many Black troops could only go to college Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which were not equipped to support the large number of Black students attending those institution (Haynes, 2006).

Before desegregation, schools were segregated based on race. *Segregation* "signifies the legal separation of individuals, their rights, and the services provided to them on the basis of race" (Minor, 2008, p. 862). *Desegregation* is "considered the act of removing barriers or disparities in public education based on race" (Minor, 2008, p.863). That is, dismantling the whole foundation in public institutions that purposefully separates individuals based on their race, ethnicity, sex, religion, or national origin to guarantee fair and equal treatment for all citizens (Minor, 2008).

In the early twentieth century, higher education institutions in the north and south took different routes in how they treated students of color wanting to go to their institution (Smith et al., 2012). Southern states operated a dual system of higher education with institutions for only White students and ones for Black students(Hinrichs, 2016). More superficially, in southern states, the government resisted people of color attaining education (Smith et al., 2012). The states in the south used legally mandated barriers like Jim crow laws making access to higher education unattainable for people of color (Smith et al., 2012). While in the north, people of color tended to experience institutional racism (Smith et al., 2012). People of color in the North in the 20th century were denied access to public institutions of higher education and were subjected to

institutionalized discrimination which is a social practice that was viewed in the cultural values and social norms of the northern society (Smith et al., 2012). In fact, universities enrolled a limited number of students of color (Hinrichs, 2016).

These barriers to attain higher education soon changed as people of color started to demand equal rights for education, to have a better life, and better opportunities (Hutcheson et al., 2011). Legal cases like the historic Supreme Court Decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954 overturned the policy of separate but equal and set a legal standard that racial discrimination in public education violates the United States constitution (Litolf, 2007). According to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), “the plaintiffs argued that segregated public schools are not equal and cannot be made equal and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws” (p.488). The *Brown* decision in 1954 legally banned segregation in public education. Unfortunately, it did not effectively eliminate segregation because there was a lack of enforcement of the court’s ruling from government and institutions in higher education for many years (Minor, 2008).

With the help of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s, African Americans organized to help protest segregated schooling and many other forms of civil and political inequality in US institutions of higher education (Smith et al., 2012). The Civil Rights movement gained much attention, and the government and educational systems were met with the choice of increasing social turmoil or changing the longstanding policies and laws that kept certain groups of color from attaining a college degree at public institutions (Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, the Civil Rights Act was a historic moment in higher education when it stated that if institutions violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it would

jeopardize federal funding to the institution (Litolff,2007). The Act included the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Department of Justice to enforce Title VI and established a legal basis to help enforce and provided sanctions if institutions did not comply (Litolff,2007).

Both the *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act made many gains to increase the access to education and the participation in higher education for people of color because it required states to give access that was previously not available (Harper et al.,2009). Unfortunately, even with the mandate to allow people of color to attend public institutions, White institutions were not accepting of people of color, regardless of whether they were students, faculty, or staff (Harper et al.,2009). With people of color being met with such resistance, these institutions only confirmed that people of color were not welcomed or worthy of being educated at public intuitions (Harper et al.,2009).

Despite many social advances, skin color still plays a significant role in race relations in society today (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2020). For instance, international students of color are often considered members of existing racial minorities in the United States based on their skin color rather than their international status (Mitchell et al., 2017). Harris (2008) states, ‘color is a long-standing trigger for discrimination along the Black-White color line’ (p. 62). Like the color White, the color Black does not take into account skin color variations that exist among people that are considered to be of African descent including those with lighter skin tones still being identified as members of the Black racial community. Regardless of skin color differences, these individuals are commonly

classified as Black by a society that defines identity by skin color over all other elements of their identity (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2020).

Whiteness on Campuses

Research has shown that Whiteness on campus is superior, often causing challenges for people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Farris, 2018; Steele, 2016; Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). According to Fine (1993), *Whiteness* is a system of privilege based on race whereby White ideology is viewed as a reference point from which all other identities are compared” (p.856). Bonilla-Silva (2015) argued that PWI’s tend to reproduce Whiteness through every aspect of their curriculum, culture, traditions, demography, and symbols throughout college. White people receive daily messages that they are deemed better, more valued, and more meaningful than people of color when operating in a White dominant context (Derman-Sparks et.al 2006). Therefore, in predominantly White environments, Whiteness can become embedded more deeply in society because there are few, if any, people of color in White people’s immediate environments to change that perspective (Derman-Sparks et.al, 2006). With Whiteness so deeply embedded, White employees and students on campus tend to accept and stay silent when it comes to microaggressions they may witness, and they miss the opportunity to participate in actions that help disrupt racism on campus (Farris, 2018). This acceptance can continue to normalize Whiteness by having some representation of faculty and staff of color, but not too much to threaten the White supremacy on campus (Gusa, 2010).

Sensory and DiAngelo (2017) argued that White people assume that merely being near other races of color, having fond or caring regard for other races, experiencing some

marginalization in another form can result in their way of showing that they do not contribute to the oppression professionals of color face. In reality, with the help of White spaces, White people can go through society without really having to deal with race. Therefore, White people will interact with people of color in two ways, either White people never thinking about race or when White people dismiss or disregard racial issues as non-important because it does not affect them negatively (Hines, 2016). In fact, the reality of what makes colleges historically White is how these institutions center on White ways of being, speaking, thinking, and learning (Gusa, 2010). *Colorblindness* is the belief that “racial group membership and race-based differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted” (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, pg.205). Without challenging the colorblindness. White people have, they are then able to not confront the lived experiences of racism that people of color have dealt with on campus. More specifically, White students, faculty, and staff can move through campus in racial bliss (Cabrera et al., 2017).

Therefore, White higher education professionals may find it hard to respond to race constructively as they have not had to work or build on the cognitive and affective skills necessary to acquire constructive engagement between racial divides (DiAngelo, 2011). More specifically, White faculty and staff members perceive campus climate differently than faculty and staff of color, which perpetuates an unfavorable campus climate due to dismissive behavior (Steele, 2016).

Thus, White individuals may experience a phenomenon known as ‘White fragility’ when having to deal with their privilege and its relations to racism. DiAngelo

(2011) defined *White fragility* as a state in which White people experience a hint of racial stress and tend to act out and become highly defensive regarding their personal responsibility for supporting, intentionally or not, systems of oppression. When White people cannot listen to, or try to understand people of color's perspectives, they cannot close the racial divide gap that exists in their environment. In fact, for decades White people have remained unaware or intentionally chosen to not acknowledge the advantages and privileges that come with being White (Hines, 2016). They continue to ascribe overall Whiteness as universal and non-Whiteness as 'other' (DiAngelo, 2011). Therefore, White people can benefit from being White without recognizing the power, dominance, and authority they have had over other racial groups that have given them those benefits (Hines,2016). DiAngelo argued,

When people challenge the White identity, White people become highly stressed and even intolerable. Not often encountering these challenges, we withdraw, defend, cry, argue, minimize, ignore, and in other ways, push back to regain our racial position and equilibrium (p. 57).

For many faculties and staff of color, they must compact the lack of diversity on campus with the obstacles of navigating White fragility.

Difficulties Faced by Staff and Faculty of Color

Research has shown that faculty and staff of color face multiple challenges at institutions of higher learning compared to their White counterparts (Gomez et al., 2015; Farris, 2018; Ross & Edwards, 2016; Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017; Steele, 2016; Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). These challenges can be related to low job satisfaction, which can cause high turnover for faculty and staff of color (Steele, 2016). Other

challenges can be workplace racism, such as underrepresentation, lack of multicultural expertise, intersectionality, and racism from a supervisor (Farris, 2018). Additionally, White students, supervisors, and peers continuously question faculty and staff of color's abilities, qualifications, and judgments (Gomez et al., 2015).

Although professionals of color are present in the faculty and administrative ranks, they continue to face barriers to the inclusive environment that their White colleagues enjoy, and instead experience countless microaggressions, including implicit and explicit racism and discrimination, a sense of isolation, and a devaluing of their research (Zambrana et al., 2017). These burdens for faculty and staff of color can result in emotions filled with stress, anger, frustration, doubt, guilt, or sadness when they encounter microaggressions, as well as feelings of distress when relaying their stories to their supervisors or other colleagues (Zambrana et al., 2017).

In addition to the burdens of their job that professionals of color face, they are often required to take on extra labor or activities while on campus as a result of their racial identity. In a study conducted by Farris (2018), faculty and staff of color on campus described needing to take on additional responsibilities related to the inclusion and diversity efforts on their campus. Additionally, faculty and staff of color spend time supporting students of color while taking on these extra responsibilities, which could lead a staff person of color to feel less valued, which can sometimes lead to silence and overall feelings of "why bother" and a sense of isolation, stress, a lack of support, and a sense of stereotype threat (Steele, 2016, p. 38). In a study conducted by Ross and Edwards (2016) of 46 African American faculty from 43 predominantly White doctoral

universities, 13 major concerns were uncovered. When placed in ranking order from most significant to the least significant, the top five were:

(1) Lack of mentor. (2) The behind-the-scenes politics make it difficult for African American faculty to feel secure in their ability to attain tenure at predominantly White universities. (3) Little guidance about the tenure and promotion process. (4) Social isolation and lack of collegiality. (5) The ability to speak up against those (e.g., deans, department heads, colleagues, etc.) who may mistreat you and risk not receiving tenure as a result (P. 476).

These concerns highlight the hardships that professionals of color can potentially go through when dealing with an environment that upholds White identity over all other races in the workings of the campus.

Steele (2016) examined the challenges that the geographical location adds to the discrimination professionals of color face while working on campus. More specifically the off-campus community towards professionals of color tends to create an oppressive atmosphere that can be replicated overtime on the university's campus. The lack of communities of color off campus is a factor that makes attracting professionals of color to the institution more difficult (Steele, 2016).

Over time, ongoing threats from being stereotyped may lead to decreased performance and heightened anxiety levels that can affect professionals of color (Farris, 2018). There are instances when people of color are expected to speak on behalf of or for their race during discussions of diversity, race, or ethnicity (Steele, 2016). In fact, staff and faculty of color expressed experiences with tokenism within their department that affect them in negative ways. *Tokenism* is "an intergroup context in which very few

members of a disadvantaged group are accepted into positions reserved for members of the advantaged group, while access is systematically denied for the majority of qualified disadvantaged group members" (Wright & Taylor, 1998, p. 648) For example, if a token member has some conflict in terms of racial perspective, it is often dismissed if it conflicts with the wants and needs of their White counterparts (Henry et al., 2017). More specifically, when that token member starts to refuse to endure accept such a role or participate in any more of the committees that deal with diversity, they are often viewed as being difficult (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). Having such a lack of sufficient number of professionals of color on campus compared to their White colleagues often results in an increase and the number of responsibilities for these minoritized staff to as a way to help compensate for the lack of professionals of color (Steele, 2016). In fact, Additionally, both Black and Latinx faculty will have reported feeling that they have to prove that they are academically knowledgeable and competent in ways that most their White faculty peers do not to justify their position (Sotto-Santiago, 2020). This creates a double standard that can be held against minoritized staff that can also create increases the pressure to be "the perfect employee?" (Steele, 2016, p. 41).

Impact of Diverse Faculty and Staff on Students

Studies have shown that a diverse faculty and staff can affect students in many ways (Kelly et al., 2017; Kwon, 2016; Harper, 2012; Luedke, 2017; Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017; Steele, 2016). In fact, students who are exposed to a diverse faculty and staff are more likely to exchange information and build relationships that allow them to see diverse knowledge in skills which can give them a better advantage while in higher education (Luedke, 2017). However, when crucial decisions are being made, students of

color fear their side will not be heard when there is a lack of color on campus (Steele, 2016).

Many students of color had the overwhelming feeling that their White faculty and staff did not want to build a genuine relationship with them (Luedke, 2017). White faculty and staff continue to be overrepresented compared to White student enrollment on campus, while faculty and staff of color are generally underrepresented compared to the proportion of students of color on the campus (Kwon, 2016).

Not feeling able to build a relationship with their White faculty and staff, students of color gravitate towards the professionals of color that are on the campus. The commitment of faculty and staff members of color can sometimes go beyond the call of duty, especially in working with minoritized students, because they feel an obligation to support students of color (Steele, 2016). Most faculty and staff of color tend to nurture these students by making them a priority as a person and not just a student. In doing so, professionals of color built a relationship where students could be themselves and put their guard down (Luedke, 2017). More specifically, professionals of color feel like their experiences and the cultural backgrounds they brought with them to college matter (Luedke, 2017). When mentoring students of color or helping them navigate White-dominated institutions, it is essential to support student activist organizations and community groups (e.g., Muslim Students Association, Black Lives Matter chapter) as well. That way, students can get the resources and recognition they deserve while on campus (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017).

In general, faculty and staff of color tend to avoid politics and political discussions and they ask students of color to remain politically correct to avoid

difficulties with majority peers to focus on students' academics. Professionals of color are willing to share their knowledge of cultural capital, the unspoken norms people of color tend to face when dealing with White people (Luedke, 2017). Sharing their cultural capital, professionals of color are able to refer students of color to campus resources, like tutoring and scholarships while giving both positive and constructive feedback that students can utilize to be successful in college. Staff and faculty of color help students learn to read between the lines of these unspoken norms used by White people which enables students to be more successful as undergraduates (Luedke, 2017).

When faculty and staff are viewed as more diverse, students of all races receive the type of education that prepares students for effective leadership and citizenship in a diverse democracy and overall society (Bollinger, 2007). Luedke (2017) asserted that White staff and administrators do not support students of color as much as staff of color. When meeting with students, White staff and administrators primarily shows attention to the students' academic experiences and tend to gloss over the other factors that affect a student's life, such as personal or familial concerns (Luedke, 2017). That is why it is essential to understand the Black faculty's experience as it can be a factor that contributes to a poor campus climate for marginalized students (Kelly et al., 2017). Staff and faculty of color maintain honesty, openness, and supportiveness by setting aside academic thought.

Interacting with a more diverse campus can positively impact White students as much as, or even more than students of color (Harper, 2012). Most White students come to college having little interaction with people of color (Harper, 2012) while students of color are more accustomed to interacting with people outside their race because they are a

part of a culture minority (Hu & Kuh, 2003). In fact, White students tend to have minimal interaction with people of color before they enter college (Jayakumar, 2008). Therefore, White students can gain much by engaging with people of color, such as faculty and staff on campus who are unlike themselves to better prepare them for the future (Harper, 2012).

Recruitment and Hiring of Professionals Color

Research has shown that recruiting and hiring processes have a significant impact on professionals of color (Essed, 2000; Henry et al., 2017; Kayes, 2006; Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017; Steele, 2016; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). The lack of diversity in the application pool or the failure to consider staff and faculty of color for promotions in different departments within a college setting, all stems from the college's hiring practices (Steele, 2016). From this perspective, when a person of color meets the requirements or is seen as a perfect candidate fit, it indicates their ability to keep White people racially comfortable and their likelihood of leaving Whiteness (or the status quo) undisturbed (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). PWI's hire people of color to help implement diversity initiatives or teach the importance of diversity to their White peers and students (Essed, 2000). In fact, faculty and staff of color tend to become the presentation for diversity, and they will then go on to fulfill other tasks that promote diversity on campus. Being the keeper of diversity takes time away from other activities that can help promote faculty and staff of color skills that will help them get tenure or a promotion in their field (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

Every question asked by a hiring committee conveys information to a candidate of color about the department's racial consciousness or lack thereof. In a White-dominated

institution, a candidate who is of color but does not challenge racism and Whiteness will more likely be an asset and viewed as unbiased and relatable (Henry et al., 2017). A hiring committee will assume that such a candidate can help with diversity initiatives and do so as a team player, not pushing race or seeing racism everywhere (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). Not pushing racism will help make sure all White colleagues are comfortable and unchallenged in sustaining the systemic problems. Sensory and DiAngelo (2017) examined how a majority White hiring committee works by saying:

A predominantly White hiring committee with a White person as chair hires a White person. The next hire is a White person. The next hire is a White person. The next hire is a White person. It could go on for years this way, and the people who might raise a red flag are most likely only faculty of color or others working from a critical social justice framework. One of us taught in a department that went seventeen years without hiring a single person of color. Now imagine that a Black person is chair of the committee, and two or more members are Black. The committee hires a Black person. Most (White) people might not raise the red flag right there, but certainly, they would do so if the second hire and the third and fourth hires were also Black. But when a red flag is raised on White hires' continual pattern, justifications often surface (p.573).

However, diverse candidate pools do not mean the results will be diverse in its hires because institutional, departmental, and search committee cultures can openly undermine the goal of hiring and retaining faculty and staff of color (Kayes, 2006). It is important to look at the hiring process when it comes to hiring professionals of color because it can have a good look at the discriminations and the flaws in place in the hiring committee.

Having these flaws in the hiring process just reinforces that White people are seen as better equipped in higher education than people of color. Therefore, professionals of color will continue to be unrepresented in Higher Education.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This research will be guided by critical race theory (CRT) and leadership theory and organizational leadership theory. In fact, CRT explores the reasons there is a lack of retention when it comes to faculty and staff of color, while leadership theory and organizational leadership theory will discuss how people in authoritative roles on campus can lead those in their charge to help address the inequality on campus.

Critical Race Theory

Derrick Bell (1995) coined the term critical race theory (CRT) to uncover the racism carried over and embedded in the laws and the overall legal system. Aspects of the theory were brought up in the 1970s when the civil rights movement's advances began to stall. Derrick Bell and other writers realized that new theories and strategies were needed to combat the forms of racism in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory was a way to challenge how power and privilege are shown in the legal system (Hernández, 2016). Further, CRT is a theory that examines the legal system and the collective unconscious of most individuals that shows there is a discriminatory attitude towards people of color (Litowitz, 1997). It also challenges the norms of color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Gusa, 2010). Even though CRT started in the legal system, it has since expanded and is now used in many other disciplines. In the education field, CRT helps in understanding school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Delgado & Stefancic,

2001). It can also show a great perspective to help recognize that racism can be a big part of explaining many minority individuals' experiences while in higher education (Brook et al., 2015). According to West (1995),

Critical race theory aims to reexamine the terms by which race, and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness and to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race consciousness among African Americans and other peoples of color- a tradition that was discarded when integration, assimilation, and the idea of color blindness became the official norms of racial enlightenment (p. xiv)

Critical race theory can be a beneficial resource to express how faculty and staff of color have significant differences in their college experiences from their White colleagues due to inequalities, racism, and marginalization. Using CRT is an excellent framework to "understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" (West, 1995, p.xiii).

CRT uses an activist mindset to understand the social situation and help change it. CRT aims to discover how society tries to organize itself in society's racial lines and hierarchies and change it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory can show how racism is still a consistent experience for many staff and faculty of color on campus. The result is the lack of diversity on campus, which can affect students of color in how they may feel accepted and valued on campus. The CRT method is beneficial for allowing oppressed people to tell their stories and fight the silence of the Whiteness on campus (Brook et al., 2015).

CRT can be better explained by exploring the five principles of social inequalities that can even be used to describe aspects of what happens on campus to people of color. These five tenets consist of counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Hirald, 2010).

Counter-storytelling in higher education's climate can analyze and provide faculty, staff, and students of color a way to tell their narratives involving their experiences with racism and discrimination (Hirald, 2010). Without the use of CRT's counter-storytelling, the true stories of people of color would never be publicly announced or shared, making society come to believe and perceive that all was fine when it comes to racism (Hartlep, 2009). The second tenet of CRT, the permanence of racism, indicates that racism can control the political, social, and economic areas of U.S. society (Hirald, 2010). In CRT, racism is seen as a part of the American culture, in that it privileges White individuals over people of color in most parts of life, including education (Hirald, 2010). Therefore, the diversity plans in higher education become ineffective when they ignore the existence of racism (Iverson, 2007).

The third tenet of CRT is Whiteness as property, which argues that White people tend to be the only ones who benefit from Whiteness and are the only ones who can possess the privilege that comes with being White (Hirald, 2019). More specifically, CRT challenges the unearned advantages of White people in society because they ignore the difficult circumstances and everyday racism that people of color have experienced (Savas, 2014). Interest convergence is the fourth tenet of CRT. Interest convergence is the notion that "Whites will allow and support racial justice/progress to the extent that there is something positive in it for them, or a convergence between the interests of Whites and

non-Whites” (Hartlep, 2009, 7). In fact, interest convergence has been used as a tool to help analyze educational issues and is beneficial for examining the core presumptions and reasoning behind policies and decision-making (Teranishi et al., 2009). The fifth and final tenet of CRT, critique of liberalism, recognizes that there is no equality in the American society when it comes to the legislation or policies in the U.S. (Hiraldo, 2019).

Leadership Theory

Effective leadership at higher education institutions requires that those in leadership positions have a clear understanding of their campus issues and the steps they should take to help lead those in their charge to be and do better. According to Spendlove (2007), Leadership theory deals with how one individual's behavior in a leadership position can have a significant influence on others' behavior. It is expected that an effective leader can influence others to accomplish a different perspective in the case of the attitude to faculty and staff of color across campus; leaders can help change the negative narrative on campuses against the unrepresented group.

Burns proposed the most influential leadership model (1978) and characterized that leader behavior can be either transactional or transformational. In transactional leadership, leaders and followers discuss and try to trade their needs and services to accomplish goals and other tasks, and positive reinforcement is given for good work (Sergiovanni, 1991). Transformational leadership theory relates that a leader's consideration comes from the charismatic and intellectual motivation a leader can bring to an organization (Bass, 1985). Leaders need the behavior and personality to help change their organization, so everyone is included in the policies and campus.

To understand the success of an organization is to first look at its leaders. Leadership skills are made to influence the followers under that leader in an organization to help work towards goals that are for the common good (Barrow, 1977). Better leaders can create a perfect vision for an organization; then, they can show this vision to their followers. Together they can build on this shared vision to create a path to help guide their organization to new and improved directions ((Banutu-Gomez & Banutu-Gomez 2007). There is an assumption that leadership can be more effective with individual leaders' development and how that leadership can improve social and operational effectiveness in organizations (Spendlove, 2007). Leaders' effectiveness depends on the success of the economic, political, and organizational systems (Barrow, 1977).

Organizational Leadership

According to Zaccaro and Klimoski (2002). Organizational leadership is "processes or proximal outcomes (such as worker commitment) that contribute to the development and achievement of organizational purpose" (p. 6). When organizational studies are dismissed as unnecessary and not contributing to campus issues, the overall organization's aspects can miss the chance to examine how developing leaders can step in and help question the norms of these old organizational practices. Seeing how outdated these organizational practices are can help an organization start the process of building new ones (Phelps Moultrie et al., 2017). Kruse et al. (2019) stated that:

When organizational knowledge is built in practice and through practice, it puts a premium on the usefulness of alternative frames of reference, flexibility, adaptability of response, sensitivity to routinized activity, and corporate events as fodder for the organizational problem-solving enterprise (p.93).

Organizational systems pay close attention to the importance of the leadership process and how it makes a difference in an organization's effectiveness (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2002).

According to Spendlove (2007), universities can be tricky in how they operate; Campuses can offer unique challenges based on the multiple departments on a college campus that can have unclear goals and attitudes towards race. Viewing organizations as a vassal to promote change suggests that change is an ongoing and regular part of organizational leadership work (Spendlove, 2007). As such, finding a way to provoke change in how a university operates can show how faculty and staff interact with each other in the university climate and how their differences can expose deeply buried assumptions and beliefs. These beliefs and assumptions can promote change that includes an environment where faculty and staff of color feel a sense of equality and feel valued in all aspects on campus.

Summary

This chapter focused on the current literature surrounding professionals of color working in higher education. Starting with an overview of the history surrounding race in higher education and how it affected people of color. Next, there was a focus on the overall Whiteness on campus and how it can affect people of color. Then, there was a look into the difficulties that professionals of color face that can affect them negatively on campus. After that, the impact of professionals of color on students while on campus was reviewed. In addition, the recruitment and hiring process for professionals of color were also discussed. Lastly, the theoretical framework that will help guide the findings for this study was accessed by looking into critical race theory, leadership theory, and

organizational leadership theory. Chapter Three will review the methodology that will be used in this study.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This qualitative study's primary purpose was to document the experiences of professionals of color that are working in a predominantly White institution (PWI's). This chapter includes a description of the study design, sample (participants), research site, instrument, and the collection, analysis, and treatment of the data.

Design of Study

This study utilized a phenomenological research design. A phenomenological study describes a shared meaning for individuals through their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p.57). Therefore, this study looked at the phenomenon of the challenges professionals of color encounter while working at a PWI. For this study, seven professionals of color were interviewed with an approved set of semi-structured interview questions using a virtual conferencing program known as Zoom. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher to ask consistent questions while also allowing for follow-up with participants to provide additional information if needed. Semi-structured interviews are beneficial when the research can utilize a more open framework (Pathak & Intrat, 2012). In fact, more information can be gained when the research can have focused and conversational communication with their participants (Pathak & Intrat, 2012). More specifically, the researcher can have both flexibility and freedom in choosing what needs to be described and how much detail should be used (Pathak & Intrat, 2012).

Participants

There was a total of seven participants in this study. To be included in the study, participants met the following criteria: (1) identified as a professional of color; (2) had lived in, and attended their undergraduate institution in the U.S. This was to make sure participants had lived in the U.S. ensured that all participants had sufficient opportunity to be embedded in the American culture and be exposed to live in a predominantly White society as a person of color. Participants were identified who had experience with the American educational system and understood the role that the American educational system had influenced their identity, socioemotional and cognitive development as a person of color. Lastly, (3) all participants needed to have at least one year of professional experience working at the research site. The researcher identified the professionals of color on campus through personal awareness and recommendations of the thesis committee. Once potential participants had been identified they received a recruitment email.

Participants' professional experience working in higher education ranged from 2-30 years and included the following individuals in the following *table 3.1*:

Table 3.1

Participant's Demographics

Name	Race	Gender (Male, Female)	Level of position
Celia	Asian	Female	Middle
Barbara	African American	Female	Director
Jade	African American	Female	Director

Ashley	African American	Female	Middle
Megan	Latina	Female	Middle
Leo	African American	Male	Middle
Ken	African American	Male	Entry

Research Site

The study was conducted at a rural mid-sized four-year state institution located in the Midwest with approximately 8,000 students. The institution offers various undergraduate and masters graduate degree programs along with post-baccalaureate programs. The institution is in a city of about, 20,000. Of the city's population, 87% identified as White, 7% identified as Black or African American, 2% identified as Asian, 1% identified as two or more races, 0.36% identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.20% identified as some other race, and 0.06% identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (City Information, 2021). The institution has approximately 1,235 university employees. Of the staff population as of fall 2020, 87% identified as White, 4% identified as Black or African American, 3% identified as Asian, 0.1% identified as two or more races, 0.2% identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.1% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 1.8% identified as international, and 3% identified as unclassified (Institutional Data, 2020).

The research site has been engaged in efforts to diversify the institution's faculty and staff through a strategic initiative to improve diversity among the employees to have a direct impact on improving student success. This initiative (Institution, 2021) focused on the areas of recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse faculty and staff. This

initiative is indicative of the institution's dedication and efforts to improving the work environment for its non-majority faculty and staff.

Instrument

Semi-Structured Interviews

The data was collected using a semi-structured approach to gather information on participants' demographics and experiences. The semi-structured interviews offered flexibility that provided a loose structure for the researcher to ask open-ended questions to explore their participants' experiences and attitudes (Al-Busaidi, 2008). The list of questions for the interviews is provided in Appendix A that helped guide a more in-depth discussion of participant's feelings and experiences. Semi-structured interviews provoke people to uncover issues or concerns that enable the researcher to enter a whole new area to produce richer data (Al-Busaidi, 2008). Each interview was between 30-90 minutes long and was conducted through Zoom, a virtual conferencing program.

Researcher-as-Instrument

When doing qualitative research, the researcher and their experiences are considered to be part of the research instrument. With the researcher as the instrument in a semi-structured or unstructured qualitative study, they offer unique attributes that can have the potential to influence the collection of materials in the study (Pezalla et al., 2012). As such, the researcher must be aware that their ongoing relationships with participants might influence the study's outcomes (Watt, 2007). With the researcher an instrument in the semi-structured qualitative interviews, it offers a unique view and has the ability to influence the study and materials (Pezalla et al., 2012). Being very much

involved in the study; the researcher was aware that they are being observed as part of the process and had an influence on it (Watt, 2007).

Data Collection

Data was collected through a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix A). Interviews were recorded through the Zoom videoconferencing software. Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features including online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). The interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Participants confirmed that they have read the informed consent (Appendix B) sent before the interview at the beginning of the interview process. The interview began, after permission was given and the participant had picked a pseudonym.

Data Analysis

Responses to the interview questions were transcribed and analyzed to provide insight into the research questions through the information provided by participants. Once the transcripts were coded and put into categories, the researcher identified any patterns or themes that emerged. Coding is the process of “analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way” (Creswell, 2015, p. 156) and is a fundamental part of qualitative research because it allows the researcher to break down the data to learn something new about their study (Elliott, 2018). The researcher then conducted member checks by providing the transcripts to their participants to ensure that the credibility for the data that was transcribed. Effective member checks guarantee the trustworthiness of the finding

and offers an opportunity for participants to reflect on their contributions to the research being done (López-Zerón et al., 2021). In addition, the researcher worked with the committee chair to review codes and themes for accuracy.

Treatment of Data

The data collected and transcribed from the semi-structured interviews were kept secured in a file folder in a protected password-encrypted computer that only the researcher can access. Data remained anonymous by keeping identifiable information separate from recordings and transcripts. Once analysis was completed, all data will remain on a secure password-protected USB drive in a locked drawer or cabinet and then be destroyed after three years, following Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was used to conduct this qualitative study. The chapter identified the procedures that will locate participants and the steps to preserve their anonymity. The research site was identified and the relation to the study was provided to frame the study in the context of professionals of color working at a PWI's. Finally, the chapter detailed the process for collecting data from participants as well as how the data will be managed and analyzed as well as the treatment of the data during the study. Chapter IV will discuss the findings from the participant interviews.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter contains the findings from the seven semi-structured interviews conducted with participants in this qualitative study. In response to the questions, participants gave examples and shared stories based on their experiences working in higher education. Themes were organized around the research questions to understand the challenges professionals of color face at a predominantly White institution (PWI).

Research Question #1: How have professionals of colors' personal experiences in higher education impacted their success at PWIs?

There were four common themes that were identified from the stories told by the professionals of color as they shared their experiences on how higher education impacted their success at PWI's. The participants described their success at PWI's and how it influenced how they saw their journey when becoming a professional of color and as they work at a PWI. These themes included the impact of their undergraduate experiences at PWI's, the pressure they put on themselves to be better, the impact of friends and colleagues, and finally their ability to work with students of color.

Undergraduate experiences at a PWI

All of the participants in this study attended a PWI during for their undergraduate education. While each experience was unique many of the participants described the culture shock and cultural differences they experienced when coming to a PWI from their pre-college communities. When talking about attending a PWI, Ashley explained how coming to her college as a transfer student, she experienced a different atmosphere then

what she was used to. “When I transferred here as a student, it was a big difference because [of where] I was living and going to school for undergrad. My associate degree is from the south side of Chicago”.

Ashley shared that in addition to attending her two-year school in Chicago, she also attended elementary, middle school, and her high school years there as well. And then coming into a PWI after that was a real culture shock. As a professional at the school, she graduated from, Ashley has seen the changes on her campus.

The Black students when I was here the population was probably smaller, it was definitely smaller than what it is now. So, I was very involved and very engaged in engulfed in the Black community when I came to [institution] I know we dealt with the same thing that students deal with today. Like I said, being the only one in class, being the only one on the floor, having to find your niche, dealing with racist attitudes on campus and off in in the city.

Ashley went on to discuss how she felt that things still have not changed and that it still seems to be the same experiences from the stories that she hears from the students that she works with as a professional today.

Barbara also shared some of the challenges of being one of very few Black students attending a PWI.

My schools were 98 99% African American, growing up. And so, it was a cultural shock for me to step foot on campus, and then be sometimes the only Black person in my class. So that was a little bit of a challenge for me, because it was uncomfortable and unfamiliar at the same time.

Barbara further discussed how having these experiences did not hinder her in getting her degree, but it was different learning experiences with different backgrounds and different cultures than what she was accustomed to.

Celia talked about the importance of having friends and joining organizations like TRIO that helped her be successful while attending her PWI

I think a lot of my friends were minorities, because I was involved with TRIO a lot. And so, I will say there weren't a lot of White people there in our TRIO program. There were a few but not a lot. And so, I kind of felt welcome because I found people who are happy, who looked like me who probably have the same stories as me and have the same goals as me. And so, I found my community of friends.

Ken expressed feelings of isolation and often being overlooked while being a student of color,

I guess personal experiences, I would say kind of relate to possibly similar stories, maybe feeling overlooked in regard to certain classroom settings, which may lead to the popular imposter syndrome, you know.

Ken went on to discuss that same feeling of imposter syndrome coming on him when going through the job search because he still felt the feelings of not being adequate or equipped for the position one is looking to pursue. All of the participants shared that their experiences during their undergraduate studies helped them to be prepared for working at PWIs as they had already understood what it would be like for them, as well as for the students that they would be working with and so they were somewhat prepared.

Pressure on themselves to be better

The participants discussed how they put a significant amount of pressure on themselves to work harder and be there for the students of color and help make a difference in their lives and on campus. Jade shared how she feels that she has to save every student of color on campus. She did recognize that she was the source of the pressure that she was feeling to improve things for her students.

But I want to be very honest with you, one of the things that people assume is that it is the institution that puts that pressure on, but I really think I put that pressure on. So, I know that every job that I have, because of what I do, my job is to work with students of color, you know, and really underrepresented first generation, low income and ethnic minorities. I think I put a lot more pressure on [myself] because I know, that [they]are going to need additional assistance, right? And I think that for whatever reason, probably prior to me starting to do this work. I just felt that the institution wasn't fair, that they didn't do what they had to do. And now I just know that we just have to work harder, because we have to change the mindset.

Jade added how she feels that it will take more of her to help the students of color because she wants to be that resource for them.

Similarly, Celia experienced the feeling of having to prove herself to those around campus sharing,

Yeah, I think that's why like sometimes I just have to prove myself and I'm a lot harder on myself because I'm always just like I want to prove to them [White

colleagues and administrators] that I am qualified for this job, right, and I can do a good job.

She clarified that she pushes herself more to prove that to others

I think it goes back to the whole thing of, I volunteer at these things because I feel like I have to find a community, I have to do a little bit more to prove myself.

Sometimes, I feel like I just have to do something extra to put myself on the same level as somebody who's White, you know?

Finally, Ken discussed why he believes that individuals of color feel the need to do and be more around campus. He stated,

I think there is a certain pressure or internal pressure that colleagues, with my similar complexion feel whenever they are at a job that they do need to succeed, not at the same rate as some of the counterparts but higher possibly Just to kind of solidify their position wherever they are. Outside of that, I will just add maybe the feeling to be utilized,

He added that he felt a responsibility to prove himself in the eyes of the people he worked with, "I personally feel the need to do more, and to maybe feel like I need to go above and beyond during a meeting, or an interview to kind of, save face or give their best foot forward." This pressure to continuously prove themselves and their 'right to be in their positions on the campus was shared by all of the participants.

Friends and Colleagues

The participants shared the importance that they felt regarding having friends and colleagues that made their time on campus a great experience. They had built connections and relationships across campus in order to foster a sense of being valued and belonging

by their other counterparts who understood the challenges and struggles that they were facing.

Barbara went into depth talking about how being connected with her colleagues helped her de-stress and that having a chance to talk about her experiences both good and bad, in a safe and supportive environment amongst friends and close colleagues really helped her,

I think the thing that has helped is other colleagues. Connecting with other colleagues, other people of color, and mainly females of color. And just fostering those relationships. And having those relationships even outside of work, I think has helped a lot because again, you got to have that time to de-stress, wind down, helped a lot because again, you got to have that time to de-stress, wind down.”

She shared how having colleagues to talk to in a safe setting allowed her to process situations by using her support system as a sounding board.

You’ve got to have a sounding board sometimes because of something that happened. And sometimes it's just, you know, that you need the laughter. You need somebody else to say, ‘you know, I understand what you're what you're talking about.’ So, I think that's something that has helped me is just having those connections, having friends that work at the institution, but also being able to work, and to be with them outside of the institution. I think that has helped a lot.

Jade also mentioned how she values having colleagues on campus that she connected with stating,

I also have a network of colleagues that we work with on a regular basis. And so, we vent, we talk we do ...you know what I mean? Just the interactions that I have

with other colleagues, we hang out, we do stuff together. So again, it's probably just like in undergrad, because we all just kick it and have fun.

Similarly, Celia shared the experiences she has with her other colleagues and how she works with good people that seem to truly care even if they have a difficulty understanding her,

With other professionals I feel like I've been very lucky with other professionals because they're good people. They're good people, and they, will respect me when they get to know me and stuff. I feel like the people understand who I am, where I come from and things like that. I feel like. I work with great people who truly care.

She added that understanding when things are important to herself, and others helps them to support each other. Celia finds it easier to be there for them when it is “a topic that they are passionate about or they want to be passionate about, but because we don't have the same experiences, it's a little hard for them to understand. But at the same time, I know they care.” This passion for their work, even if they do not all share it, they understand why it is important to them, so they are there for each other. The participants all valued having colleagues that they can talk to, and even relate to, across campus and that it affects them in positive ways and made their experiences working at the PWI better and made them more successful in their personal and professional endeavors .

Working with students of color

For many of the participants, working with students, especially students of color, was an important aspect of their jobs. Participants enjoyed engaging with students and there was a passion they shared to want to be there for the students of color and help them

succeed on campus. The majority of participants talked about the importance of being present across campus for students of color to know that they are there to offer resources and support them.

During her interview, Barbara talked extensively about making sure that she is seen as a role model for the students of color on campus and making sure that she is visibly present on the campus saying,

I want students of color to know that I'm on campus, because I truly believe that being on a PWI, that the students [of color] do want to see individuals that look like them. Now, that doesn't mean that every student, is only going to thrive if they can connect with a person of color. I don't think that's the case. But I do believe that it helps. And I think that I want them to know that there's a person here that they can come to when I interact with students of color.

She goes on to provide examples on how she interacts with students of color and how some [White] colleagues, may not understand how and why she interacts the way she does with students of color:

I think sometimes individuals, when you say that expectation, I think sometimes maybe they may not always understand the interaction, and why is it that we maybe interact the way that we do. Even with some of our female individuals, when I advise students on campus, I was around them all the time. So, I might have interacted with them a little bit differently.

Barbara pointed out that it was different for these students when she was more available to them as someone that they could not only see but, connect with. "So, they will come in my office, and sit and chat, you know, or sit between classes. They come in and grab

some candy and, they stay and sit for a little bit, not distracting [me] from work”. Seeing the students visiting and talking with her had a definite impression on her colleagues and how they saw her interactions with the students. Her colleagues told her “You know they love you. They [are] always coming in.” She didn’t really think about it but, looking back, she understood why her colleagues were surprised.

‘Oh my gosh, did you did you have five people in there at one time?’ The door was closed, we're talking about some things. But when five girls start walking out, it's like, ‘Oh, my goodness’, so I think they saw the connection. I think they saw it and thought it was a great thing. Because they trust you. They come in here and they chat or whatever. Whereas sometimes I think people don't really see the personable piece that’s there and sometimes probably look at it and say, ‘oh, that's a little bit more personable than I would be.’

Ashley also talked about the aspect of being more personable with their students of color and about correcting her students of color when they do wrong. But she also stressed that she makes a point of celebrating with them as well,

I'm very personable with my students. I'm very transparent with my students so they know when they come to me, and I can give them realness all day, right? So, you're gonna come tell me if you do wrong, you don't catch it, but then I'm gonna help you figure it out. Also, with the positive things you come, and you've done something great, I'm going to support you. I am going to celebrate you, because our students need that.

She went on to talk about how they [White colleagues] are not taxed with the same responsibilities with students in general, sharing,

They [White colleagues] are not tasked with being at events and other places, that's right. Because Black and Brown students, if they feel that the faculty and staff is genuine, then they're gonna rock with you. But if you don't feel genuine to them, they not gonna rock with you at all.

Megan shared an example from her experience with a student that wanted to work with her just because she was similar in race and cultural experience to the student:

I have had a student, for instance, want to change from a White advisor to me because they were Hispanic. So, I think there's expectations maybe on the student about what a person of color staff member is like, and, of course, there's nothing to say.

She added that she expected that the student felt that because of the way she looked, she would share the student's viewpoint without realizing that since they shared a heritage the student thought that she would 'get' the student better than a White advisor.

Lastly, Leo shared an example from his work of being a supporter for student's rights and organizations and how he demonstrated that through showing up to events to be present and offer assistance.

I remember there was a march and I participated in the march with a colleague of mine during the murder of Trayvon Martin, and back when that was happening, our students had a march on campus. And I always been a supporter and advocate for our students in terms of being an advisor for organizations and things of that nature.

The participants shared that being seen by their students of color as being approachable, personable, and present were key factors in helping them feel that they had a place on the

campus and was also a source of pride for the participants who felt that by doing so, they made the campus better for those individuals.

RQ 2: What are the challenges that professionals of color experience on a PWI that can be attributed to racial identity?

Participants in this study were asked about the challenges they faced working at a PWI as a professional. There were many challenges that the participants faced, and the challenges that they identified resulted in five shared themes that appeared from the interviews and the stories that they shared.

Microaggressions/ Implicit Bias

For many participants, microaggressions and implicit biases have been a constant part of their workplace environment. When Megan was asked if she had experienced any microaggressions on campus her response was, “unfortunately, yes, I have had several experiences with that on campus”. She went on to describe one experience she had when she was participating on a committee,

There was a case on campus not too long ago, where a VP, he's no longer on campus, had said something to the effect about diversity. And it was a White male. Because there was a question about the lack of diversity on this committee, and he was on this committee. So, he said something to the effect of ‘oh, well, maybe if this is a year where I was in Florida, I'd be a little darker or something. So, it would count if maybe, I had my tan from Florida.’

Megan and others on the committee were understandably unhappy with the man's comment.

Like, that's not right. And he should be held accountable. Just to say that if you were to have a tan, you are diverse. Right? That so? I doubt that's the reason he's no longer here. But he's no longer here. And I think there were several of us that were just like, 'No, I'm going to file something with civil rights, because that needs to be looked at a little bit closer. And if he's holding those views comfortable enough to say something publicly, what else is he kind of saying or doing?'

One participant, Celia, discussed times when she did not live up to another person's expectations or assumptions about their identity or culture. After these encounters, she felt feelings of frustration and being disrespected. Celia shared how people often make false assumptions about her. She has often been asked if she speaks Spanish and feels that people assume that because of how she looks despite the fact that she is not Hispanic, and it is something that happens to her often. She shared a story of being in a group of professionals as a university event with four other staff members when a person came up and singled her out. She focused on Celia, trying to be polite since they were having a conversation, but she finally spoke with the group, but very obviously directing her question to Celia.

She was like doing like a little tiptoe thing too, because we were having a conversation. And she did a little thing like, 'Hi. Hello. Excuse me', like she was trying to interrupt us and we're like, 'Yeah?', but then you can tell she was walking towards me, and she was looking at me in the eye and she goes, 'I was wondering if you know anyone who speaks Spanish?'

She let the person know that she did not speak Spanish but shared that “It's kind of like one of those things where people kind of just make assumptions about me.” Celia shared that it made her uncomfortable in how people placed assumptions like that on her and made her feel that not meeting them was somehow a failing on her part.

So, like I feel like they're all their eyes are always on me, and they just make assumptions. Like yes, maybe my facial features look like I'm Hispanic, but you know I'm Asian, so it's just like one of those things.

It is something she deals with, and while she doesn't feel that person means anything harmful, “at the same time I feel it, you know? When somebody just makes assumptions or they just look at me especially when I'm like, new to the group.” Celia shared how she has the feeling that everyone is always watching her and making these false assumptions.

Barbara shared a story of an encounter she had with a parent and her supervisor's response to the situation,

I was talking to a parent, whose daughter had a Black roommate, and her comment was, ‘are you going to protect my daughter?’ And I was like, ‘Well, no, that's not my responsibility.’ Of course, we're going to try to deescalate the situation. She clearly didn't know that I was African American. And I said, she made the comment that ‘you know, that the roommate was probably on financial aid because all the Black students’, get financial aid.’ So, I said, ‘you know what, I am not going to speak to that, however, if you would like to speak with me, please contact the office, they will know how to get in touch with me.’

Afterwards she talked with her supervisor, who was White, to inform them about the situation and the conversation. And he said “Well, it sounds like you handled that very

well. Won't she be surprised if she does come down here and see that you're African American? Because you don't sound Black on the phone.” Which is something that really stuck with her that he would say that and that he meant it as a compliment somehow.

And so, at the time, I just went with it, because I'm like, ‘Okay’. Well, fast forward in my career, I realized that that was a microaggression. Because what is sounding Black, you know, what is Black sounding on the phone?

With these microaggressions also comes implicit bias from people across campus, which many participants had experiences with. Ken talked about his own experience with these kinds of implicit biases:

Yeah, I would say it's just subtle, subtle looks, or maybe gestures. Maybe a family doesn't feel as comfortable wanting to speak with the counselor with other demographics that I share, or maybe the information that that I'm saying it doesn't come off as maybe if another counterpart may have said it. So, I think all that plays, a role. So, we have subtle microaggressions, or yeah, sort of subtle facial features that kind of give the comfortability away.

Dealing with White administrators/ White colleagues

One theme that emerged during interviews that participants discussed was around the roles that White administrators and colleagues take when they engage with students and how they are different compared to professionals of color. Leo opened up about how he feels that White administrators and colleagues need to show up and be present more when it comes to things that are important to students of color and other diversity related events and activities. He stated,

I think we need to really not just walk the walk but talk the talk. I really feel like if we engage with the students of color, and our allies and our non-professionals of color [do too], if we actually see you present on the campus, I feel like not only will the students want to engage with you, but you will also encourage more professionals of color to really get involved on the campus and to advise student organizations or go to campus events, go to basketball games, go to step shows, things of that nature. I feel like, it's one of my biggest pet peeves is that you only see certain professionals of color at every single event. But that's all you see. And I get frustrated with that.

Leo felt that the burden of supporting the students of color on the campus wasn't solely the responsibility of the small number of professionals of color, but that all staff needed to step up and make an impact.

Because it shouldn't just be 123[professionals of color], because we're putting so much on our plate when there's 12345678 [White administrator/colleagues], all the way over here not doing anything. But you see them [White administrators/colleagues] in class, you complain when they're not meeting certain criteria, you complain with it, I do this, but you're not walking the walk and talk to talk with these students, you know?

He pointed out that his White colleagues did not seem to feel that they needed to show up and take on some of the responsibility for supporting these students and the programs that were important to them, but he strongly believed that the students wanted that from all professionals, not just the staff of color,

You're not going to a BSA meeting, you're not going to a step show, you're not going to a social event. Bring your family with you, they want to see you... you have to engage, I think that's my biggest thing. You have to engage in order to educate yourself. You might even be entertained. And at the end of the day, you're going to enroll yourself into the university even more.

Ashley echoed what Leo shared about being present to students of color and showing interest and engaging with students of color outside of the classroom stating,

My students see me. 'We can talk to Ashley we can do this right.' But that's not that many of us. There's not that many of us on campus and so I can't always be the one to be at the student's events. Because I don't want to. I don't want to always just be there to fuss and fight with them to get them across the graduation stage. I want to also celebrate them when they are in the fashion show. I want to be there when they sing in the gospel choir, I want to be there, right? The White faculty and staff, I don't think [they do]. The White faculty and staff, they don't really celebrate our students outside of academics.

The fact is that White professionals are not expected to show support at student events in the same way as the professionals of color, and it is noticed by the students. When students of color feel that the staff is genuine in their care and interest in the students' lives, they respond positively, "they're gonna rock with you" Ashley confirmed.

Knowing When to Pick Your Battles

Knowing when and how to speak up when dealing with biased attitudes was a tool that participants shared that they used when they felt it was necessary to be heard when encountering microaggressions and other biased attitudes on campus. Barbara shared that she has to decide when she feels like it's an appropriate time to speak up and when not to waste one's time when dealing with people's biases and sometimes, she feels that having that fight isn't worth it.

I've done a little bit of both. You know, it's kind like of my mother taught me some years ago, when she was here with me. Pick your battles. And I understand it's always good to speak up. But I will say that there are times where I've said, 'you know, what? I'm not giving that any energy. I'm not doing that today.' And I have not. I've chalked it up as that person's ignorance. You know, it's kind of like you work around people for so long. You're like, 'yeah, that's how they're going to be, okay?'

But she doesn't always feel that it should be ignored and there have been occasions where she decides to call out the actions of her colleagues.

And then there's other times that I have spoken up to say, 'well what do you mean by that?' And then it catches them off guard because they don't expect anybody to say anything, or they double back a little bit. So, I have, in certain instances, spoken up to say, 'okay, what do you mean by that? Well, not all of our students are xx or not.' I have jumped into kind of call them out on it.

Celia shared that there are reasons why she may not choose to speak up in certain settings when people make assumptions about her. She explained,

Yeah, when people make assumptions, I do correct them. I do get a lot of ‘oh, like where's India?’ and I'm just like, ‘I have like no idea, because I'm not Indian.’

That's another facial feature that, people think I am. So, I do correct them because I'm just like, that's not who I am, I'm not from there.’ Because if I don't, they make assumptions about me that I don't know the current, the culture, that they think I'm supposed to.

She struggles with how to address it without coming off as confrontational or to be judged as being ‘difficult’, but it is a struggle sometimes.

I'm not Spanish. I'm Asian you know, and so I do correct people because I don't want the misconception of what they think of me. When it's in a bigger setting, I tend to just let it go because I don't want to draw attention to myself. I should be better at it but at the same time, I already get a lot of the spotlight and so sometimes it's just, I just don't want to make it a big deal. I don't want to do anything about it.

She struggles with balancing standing up for who she is and being seen as highlighting her differences. “It's one of those things that there's a lot of people, there's only one of me, you know, and so it's a little harder for me to want to sometimes voice my opinion when I feel little.”

Three of the African American participants brought up the concept of being portrayed as the ‘angry Black person’ when they sought to speak up against the racism and microaggressions they encounter with others or even themselves. Leo discussed how he felt that sometimes it was just best to move on stating,

Sometimes you chalk it up, you just realize, okay, you just keep moving. You've got to remain professional. And it's sad, because sometimes you have got to remain professional at the end of the day, because the last thing you want to resort to is to be that angry Black person.

Ashley discussed not being silent and how she is ok with being portrayed as being the angry Black women. She explained,

If I'm angry, be the angry Black woman. I am going to speak out when it's BSs and it's racist or sexist, and I made that decision very early and I wasn't going to change because I was a professional. And I realized early on that I wanted to work at a place that values that, appreciates it that [it is] right. Not silence [her voice] or is not threatened by it. And so, having that voice, having my voice speaking up or speaking out on things.

She was okay with making others uncomfortable or having that perception of her, she was not going to give in to pressure to 'go along'.

And those are the questions that I asked, but that's what makes me the angry one right back. So, it's important when you ask those questions and I may be saying it in a very good mood, but I'm asking right? But in some people's eyes, and it depends because White supremacy is set up where I'm not even supposed to be asking. I'm not even supposed to be here.

Deciding when and how to challenge problems of bias and microaggressions requires thought, consideration, and energy that the participants struggled with on a regular basis.

Institution's Failure to Retain Professionals of Color

Participants often talked about the lack of professionals of color across campus and how the university was failing in their efforts to recruit and retain professionals of color. Megan shared her frustration over being one of few Latinas professional staff members on the campus. She explained,

I don't see people like me here. And even in the professional realm, I can maybe just name a couple of professional Latina staff and faculty on campus that I feel like I can have, like a rapport or relationship with, because we have a similar background.

Ken shared some of his feeling about what it feels like being one of few professionals of color on campus or in the workplace,

Oftentimes, you may feel isolated. And in group settings or department functions, just stuff like that. I feel that once you feel isolated, and you kind of feel alone, that may affect your mental health a little bit. So yeah, I think that goes back to that, you know, imposter syndrome that I kind of spoke about earlier. You don't feel like you should be in the position that you're in due to lack of connectivity with your peers, or just feeling like, you're literally by yourself, because you're the only one that can relate, or you're the [only] person that looks like you due to lack of representation, you know?

Ashley stressed that there was the need for the institution to have more professionals of color not only for other faculty and staff to connect with, but also stressing the importance for students of color to recognize that professionals of color can look like themselves.

I think [the institution], in some ways, they need to acknowledge that they are lacking in Black and brown faculty and staff. And they need to figure it out, because it's not the oppressed job to figure out the oppressor's problems, and how to fix that, right? So, they need to figure out, not only how to get Black and brown faculty and staff to [town], and [campus], but how to retain them. They need to figure that out whatever that is they need to figure that out. Invest in whatever that is, to keep Black and brown people here. Because if not, you're going to be where your Black and brown student numbers are increasing, but your faculty and staff numbers are decreasing, and that's what's happening here.

She stressed the importance of having people working at the college that looked like the students that they were enrolling. “Where other students see themselves right, they [Black and brown students] need to see themselves in every area of this campus.”

Three participants discussed how the off-campus community plays a factor in the lack of professionals of color at the institution and how it is one of the reasons why it is hard to retain them. Barbara described how the institution can work with the local community to make it more inclusive to professionals of color. She explained,

I think administrators are understanding and putting forth the initiative to get more people of color on campus. And then once here, while they can't change the community that the university is in but can still provide some other opportunities for professionals of color. And sometimes it might be talking to the local Chamber of Commerce or talking to the mayor or talking to the city council, or someone to say, as an institution, we are a diverse institution.

Because when the community isn't welcoming to them, then staff of color will seek out connections elsewhere and the institution needs to work to change that.

And so, some of our professionals are finding themselves going to other communities, to shop, to just have a social life, or whatever. The university is a large part of the community, so there could be some conversations with those entities to say, 'what can we do that will not only help the university, but it could help the community, it could help the surrounding area?'

Barbara highlighted the importance of the institution taking on this role of driving change in the surrounding community on behalf of professionals of color.

There are other employers here, I don't know what their diverse population is, I think, really, that the university brings the diversity. So, what can we do to try to talk to other local businesses to make sure that they have things that are of the things that is a big thing for specifically a female of color. Because I will say that going to attract individuals of color? I know we've had a Hair Salon here on campus, that is one every time we have another female of color come on campus, and I meet them, the first thing they asked me, 'where do you get your hair done?' And that that is a big thing.

Celia stressed how the university becomes a home for those working there and it is important to want to feel safe at a place you call home. She felt that if she was White or had blonde hair, she would be treated differently and not looked at like she did not know what she was doing.

If my hair was blonde or something, would you still look at me like I have no idea? There are many times that I consider going blonde just because of that. And

so, I feel like they might not notice that they're doing it, especially if you're in a community like [town]. Make your university your home. You need to make it your safe space.

It is important to Celia because she wants all professionals of color to feel safe, and she doesn't always feel that way. "God forbid they will attack you, but at the same time, you know you're getting a whole lot more than just looks, it's more of a stare down."

Token Representation

All participants discussed the impact of working in environments where they are often burdened with task of being the spokesperson for all things related to diversity or students of color on campus. Participants described being expected to participate in all diversity related projects, events, and committees because others assumed they were interested in all diversity matters or there was no one else around to participate because of the low number of professionals of color on campus.

Leo explained in depth the concept of how, as a professional of color, he is often being put in a box of only being a representation of diversity. He stated,

I definitely feel like anything that is anything related to diversity or inclusion, you're automatically getting that conversation, even if it's not even your full specialty or you're not knowledgeable of a certain region. If it clicks that box, you're included into that situation. You know that expectation is placed on you, but also the expectation of what's happening on campus, and I feel like sometimes that's added pressure, because I shouldn't be the only person that talks to Black students, or Brown students.

He stressed that he also understood some of the reasoning for his inclusion or participation in some of these issues.

I think sometimes the challenges you go through, opportunities where you'll be placed in a situation where they expect you to deliver to a certain audience, because that audience represents who you are. And although you might be passionate about that audience, you also can be more, so you don't want to be pigeonholed into one avenue, like a multicultural recruiter or a multicultural presenter and things of that nature.

And while he struggled with being put in that position, he recognized that it was not always the result of intentional thought on the part of his leadership.

And I feel like sometimes that's one of the biggest challenges is, it's not like they mean it. They don't mean harm; they just don't know. And the only reason why they don't know, it's because they don't ask questions. And I feel like sometimes it's not intimidation, but they just don't ask questions to know what you want to do.

Megan went over the expectations put on her as a Spanish speaking individual and how she is often asked to help those on campus, even when it is not directly related to her job

Because I speak Spanish, I've been asked to kind of go above and beyond. For instance, when I was asked by admissions to talk to this Mexican mom, because we don't have that same orientation information in Spanish. So, for one day, I followed this woman around to the different sessions and translated for her. I know no one else got asked to do that. Oh, no, no. And so, I think that usually is

kind of where it is, or if there's a certain issue for Latinos or Hispanics, and I'm probably put on that, maybe more so than anyone else. So, yeah, but the Spanish I think has come up a couple of times. And I mean, I don't have a problem doing that. I enjoy doing that. You know, people need information. But yeah, it's just like, 'No, that's a little extra.' And that's not extra in my pay. That's a skill set.

Ashley also discussed being tokenized in White spaces on campus, stating

So, in White spaces, I'm tasked with being the Black spokesperson so I know if I'm being tokenized, I know what I'm entering and my mind is, 'what can I get my Black and Brown students for this task that I'm taking on' right? Because I know what you're using me for.

Barbara talked about the notion of being the spokesperson as if she was the only person of color being on campus stating,

I think there's still a little bit of that. 'Be the spokesperson.' Know all things diversity, know all things. And when it comes to people of color, I think there's still some of that. And it is like 'Barbara, so how did the Black students feel about [topic]?' Okay, so be the spokesperson. And I think some of that still happens. Even at the professional level, it's 'well, you're probably more of an expert than me, you know, because you're Black. And so how should we handle this? Or how should we approach this?' I think there's still a little bit of that.

And while she recognizes that both her race and gender play a role in what she is asked to do or take on, she knows that others are not called on in the same way when it comes to talking about issues.

That goes beyond experience, that goes beyond knowledge and yes, I may know a little bit more, but you can kind of tell sometimes it's because I'm a person of color. A female of color too, especially if it deals with female students of color that are female...because you never turn to anybody and say, 'well, you know, everybody else around the table, what do you think about how this affects our White students?', or 'how this affects our, you know.' It's usually related to a person of color. And especially if it's with me being African American, it's the African American students, or I've noticed that it's someone who's Latinx if you're talking about Latinx students.

While reflecting on their challenges of being sometimes the only person of color a few participants mentioned the burnout and stress they have faced along with the pressure to succeed and be present on campus for students of color and the university. Ashley shared some of the struggles she faced in finding ways to make sure she is organized and taken care of,

Before COVID, I was killing myself. I was going to everything. Yeah, I was going to everything, and early nights wasn't something [I got to have]. I need to take care of myself. So yeah, I just had to. I'm very organized and my time management is on point, but I had to really kind of tighten it up because my one of my beliefs is people make time for the things they want to do. But I had to tighten that up.

Jade went into depth about the pressure she dealt with being a professional of color and having a seat at every table when it deals with diversity and the discussion of students of color. She explained,

I put a lot more pressure on [myself] because of that, you know? They want to make sure that I have a voice on everything that deals with people of color. So, I think that's good, right? Because I want to go over and find out that they do on such and such. I want to sit at that table to be like 'hell to the naw', right?

Because of that, and because of the lack of people of color, I find myself overworked and I didn't realize about burnout, or you know, just being exhausted until COVID. You know what I mean? So, now everybody's talking about 'Jade, how you are doing? How's your mental state? And I do feel more pressure now after COVID. Let's do this, but burnout is real. But I think it's the stamina that I have or the determination that continues and I will never leave higher ED.

All of the participants shared a variety of problems and challenges that they faced, both those that they placed on themselves, as well as those that arose as a result of the nature of being a professional of color at a PWI. They recognized the responsibility they had as a visible presence on the campus but struggled with always having to be the one to 'step up' and address these issues, an expectation that was not placed on their White colleagues. And while many of them also recognized the importance of their actions, they all expressed a desire for greater support and participation by others on the campus to help support the students they served.

RQ3: What resources and supports contributed to the success of professionals of color in higher education?

Participants in this study discussed a variety of different ways that they received support, resources, and opportunities both on- campus and off campus that contributed to their success as professionals of color. There were four common themes emerged that

were shared amongst from the participants' stories around how they were able to be successful in their roles: in terms of the personal support they received, their ability to connect with professional mentors, and the resources they have that were been provided to them from the institution.

Support/ Supervisor Support

All of the participants discussed that having support offered them the chance for individual and professional development and growth. Barbara shared her thoughts on how the institution can better provide opportunities for support for professionals like her,

For support, there's a lot of institutions that have what they call affinity groups.

And those affinity groups, are not there to be the separation, but to allow for connection, and professional development that would be geared toward a professional who is of color because there are some things that are different. You know, regardless of if people want to own that or not, there is there's some differences there and there's some different support that's needed. And even if you're a female of color, there are some other supports that are needed. I think, just offering up those opportunities, those opportunities for support, but I also think, just offering up more professional development and opportunities to get involved in associations and groups that will allow for some of that support outside [off campus], I think that's something that we could do better.

Barbara went on to share her experiences on how the institution has shown that they are open to supporting professionals of color. "Listening is one. And not, just doing that, I hear you'; I think it's been more. Okay, let's talk about it. Let's talk through it. And I think they'd been open to it." She also shared that the institution was open to discussing

ways on increasing diversity and what things they can put in place for professionals of color on campus.

Barbara also discussed how her supervisor's support of her knowledge and goals on increasing diversity made a positive impact on her,

My supervisor talking about 'what are your goals?' And then if I bring something of what I want to try or do, she's all for it, she embraces it. It doesn't mean that she doesn't ask questions or, you know, kind of talk through it. She supports it. And I think the senior administration has done that as well. But at the same time, of course, there's always the budget issue, or there's always some other thing that, doesn't take away from the fact that they support and understand we need to increase diversity. But what are some things that [we can do] how can we think outside the box, when we're dealing with budget situations? Things that don't necessarily cost money or something like that. But I think they've been very supportive of the fact that need to definitely increase diversity and being open to different ways that we can do that.

Leo shared the importance of how support and buy-in from the institution can help improve experiences for professionals of color, "I think the biggest thing that that you could ask for number one, is support. I really feel like professionals of color, we really want to grow, we really want to push ourselves."

Leo went on to discuss his metaphor of how institutions can redirect their views about their professionals of color,

But we also, at the same time, we don't want to be in that box. At the end of the day, we want to be the person that makes the box. And we want to open that box

up for those all around us to grow. If you get a box from Amazon, you're so excited to get to see what's in the box. But you already know what's ordered, right?

Leo went on to further explain that institution should realize that professionals of color don't all want to be seen as the stereotypical diversity person and he talked about how the institution can benefit from taking a chance to see and learn about what other different skills and competencies a professional of color can offer to the institution,

We don't want to be a preorder box. And I feel like if sometimes, they see us as a pre order box, like we're just stuck in that one box. I feel like for professionals, going forward at the leadership when they're working with young professionals of color to take a mystery box, see if you're gonna take the chance on that professional color, give him every opportunity, you know, read the instructions for once. But also understand that every instruction might not be the same.

Lastly, Leo shared his thoughts on how institution can work towards being active listeners to professionals of color,

I just think listening, being an active listener understanding that everyone's walks of life are different. If you can listen and be empathetic while you listen, you're not going to change your world overnight. Nobody expects you to be the strong, the ally of all allies. But we can just actually be yourself at the end of the day and take that as an opportunity to grow to learn and to pay it forward.

The participants also discussed the importance of having the support of their supervisor and recognizing that professionals of color have unique experiences. Barbara

discussed her supervisor and how she is often very supportive and model that towards and others in workplace setting.

I will say that I believe my supervisor, has shown and models a positive behavior, because my supervisor definitely gives me autonomy. She values my opinion; she valued my thoughts. You know, she'll do the well, what do you think? kind of thing not to just give the answer, but to say, 'Well, what do you think? I support whatever you say, I support whatever you go with? I'm supportive of that, you know', I think she gives me a lot of that. And so, I think in any setting, she also does that as well. She loves me and still supports me. And I think that behavior shows others. She's the real deal.

Leo discussed his relationship with his supervisor and how they do a great job of just asking questions when dealing with concerns and issues,

My associate director, I think does an amazing job of asking, those questions of the conversation and really engaging especially with the professionals of color on our staff, like, 'what can I do? What can I learn more? What can I participate in?' My director does a great job too. She comes from a housing background, so, she has that experience. I mean, the true definition of ally she is so she came here, and she was guns blazing, you know? Trying to get involved with various organizations and asking questions and change what needed to be changed to break down barriers.

Ken shared how he thinks supervisors can be better supportive of their professionals of color by getting to know them on a personal level,

I think getting to know all of your employees on a personal level is definitely a starting point outside of the initial interview. That is initially a front to put on your best face forward, so that's not really seeing that person behind the veil. So, I think certain events maybe a dinner, so could be a start. So outside of that, just having a conversation and being able to relate to your employees is another good skill to have to be an effective leader.

The participants shared that having support and different opportunities and resources from the institution could also offer ways for professionals to grow and feel like a valued member to the institution.

Institution Hiring Process

Participants shared that when they were going through the hiring process, they felt that the overall institution was inclusive to professionals of color. Leo discussed his thoughts on his hiring process with the institution and believed that the overall process was good,

I felt the process was fair. I actually have no issues about the hiring process. I think they did an amazing job in terms of being engaged, being inclusive, answering questions, getting me involved, not only with the staff, but also other departments and things of that nature.

Leo went on to share that he felt that the institution both challenged him and answered all his questions. While he did mention that the institution could find ways to improve, he felt the hiring process did a good job of being inclusive and engaging for professionals of color.

Barbara shared her experiences going through the hiring process through the institution and she also felt that it was open to mostly good for professionals of color, I believe that it was open to individuals of color. I've kind of gone through a couple of different steps here from the institution. And each time I applied for a different position, I've gotten it, and I'm a person of color. So, I think that they were open to it, for sure, or I don't think I would have would have gotten the position. But I do believe that the nature of the position sometime played into that.

Similarly, Jade discussed her good experiences with the hiring process and how familiar she was with that process,

I was familiar with everybody, because when I came here, the first time and then when I came back, everybody was still here. And so again, it was it was more intense, I think. But it wasn't any bad practices or anything like that. I didn't think that there was anybody that felt I wasn't qualified for the job. I've just always had a good experience.

Ken discussed that during his hiring process her enjoyed seeing another professional of color on the committee and that put him at ease,

I would say you do see some representation, keyword some. So, you see another colleague that looks like myself, so that at least lets me know that there is somebody that I can at least relate to. That the environment I was going into was somewhat diversified. So, seeing some representation amongst my colleagues, you know, kind of kind of helped me feel more at ease.

Lastly, Megan discussed that while serving on several search committees there was lot of talk of ensuring that the institution and the search were being inclusive,

I will say yes, for the institution because I have been on several search committees. And I think there is a definite push to see who's at the table, when decisions are made. To get enough different points of view from the student. Who's advocating for the student? Who's advocating for the office? Who's going to be impacted by this position? And so, we want to make sure that's inclusive. I think that is something that we do well.

The participants shared that the overall hiring process at their institution was good experience for them on both sides of the process and they let that it showed that the institution was opened to being inclusive to professionals of color looking to work on the campus.

Mentors

Participants shared the benefits mentors have had on their career and how they helped them to navigate the barriers and pressure of being professionals of color on campus. Jade describes how some of the people she found who supported her, 'there are sponsors that, help you move up, there are mentors that give you that advice'. Megan shared her stories of how the mentor in throughout her career pushed her to be a better professional,

I would probably say for this campus, it was two people. They both kind of gave me assignments; gave me things to do that kind of pushed me outside my comfort zone. And were like, 'I'm giving this to you, because I know you can do it.' And so that was, I think, really important. I think it's important to have, mentors because as a person of color at a PWI you do get that imposter syndrome

sometimes. So, you need someone to be like, 'No, you belong here. You can do this. I know you're capable' So yeah, I think it's important.

Megan went on to describe how institutions can make an effort to help professionals of color connect with mentors,

I think the professional mentor, from the administration to say, 'we're happy you're here' that's connected with a mentor. 'Let's make sure you grow your networking, that you're setting, meeting the goals that you're setting up for yourself for your class, your discipline.' I think that would be a good addition.

Leo shared his experience with having an African American male mentor and how it affected him in such a positive manner throughout his career.

Oh, definitely. I've had so many mentors. But having another African American male that was right next door with similar interests in sport to the music, and he will challenge me, he will push me. But we also have a lot of fun. And he always reminded me on like, what my focus was, and he will always use the Allen Iverson quote, 'I don't need you for practice. It's not a practice, if it's the game turned on, you know, we don't need you for practice'.

Leo went on to share how he learned so much from working with his mentor that it helped his ability to grow as a professional for the students, parents and other colleagues he worked with.

Barbara described her take on mentoring as being someone that can be a friend that helps give you advice on how to maneuver around the system and people on campus,

I can just go to them, and they give me advice. There are a couple people that I am friends with actually. And I think their experiences definitely helped me navigating some of the waters, if you will, or how to approach a situation how to handle it. And again, just kind of being that that sounding board but also having the experiences they've had in maneuvering in different areas of the university than myself. Also, kind of gives me that advice on, XY and Z and it kind of helps you know how to navigate that situation or how to approach a person So just having those individuals to go to and then share is important.

Mentors played a powerful role not only in the participants' connection to the institution, but they provided tools and advice that helped them feel welcomed and that they were able to thrive at the institution.

Resources/Opportunities

Three of the participants shared the importance of having resources and opportunities available for professionals of color to help them feel valued and show that they care for their professional development. Jade, discussed how these resources and opportunities, can open doors for professionals of color to grow with the institution.

I think is just like what I'm going through with the students know that when look to hire people of color that you have resources available for them. I mean, it's just literally trying to be more accommodating of everybody. So, if you are in a predominately White area, make sure you have resources available that you can give them in the packet. Make sure that they can get in contact with all of the faculty and staff of color, if they have any questions, about coming to EIU.

She added that professional of color have different needs so it's up to the institution to make those resources available,

I just think we assume that we are all alike, and we have different needs. Where are some restaurants, what are some places, where they can go to socialize and stuff? And so, I just think if we get more cognizant of resources that are available, I mean, we can't change the town, but we can change the institution. But what are some ways in which we can make it better? I just say, have more resources. make sure when we do the social events that we put in the fabric of the institution.

Ashley went into depth when she was discussing where money is being allocated for professionals of color to help give them opportunities to professionals develop. She explained "Pre COVID, pre budget impasse, there was moneys available. There were just people not giving it to people of color." Ashley decided to invest in herself instead of waiting for the institution,

So, I decided that if I'm going to do conferences, if I'm going to develop myself, I [have to] pay for it myself. And I did bitch and moan in the beginning about the institution not paying for me and all this stuff that I decided I'm not going to let that limit what I want to know, what I want to learn, or limit my growth my development, because this White school not gonna send me, and I didn't know if it was about race or not.

Ashley went on to discuss the state's previous budget impasse and how it contributed to the budgetary issues of the institution not having money to support staff,

Right when the budget impact [happened] when we start having budget issues in Illinois, they go into the budget impasse. Then it was easy to say we don't have

money for this, we don't have money for that. Because you never know at the end of the day we don't know if the university has money, right? We wouldn't know that. At the same time, we see different things happening and moving around us. That takes money, right?

Celia shared how she believed in having those that higher up position show they want to change is great way to show they support giving resources and opportunities to both students and professionals of color.

I don't want it to be not genuine I really want the leadership team to really show vulnerability, how they feel and how they're going to approach. Helping either professionals or students of color, and really work on that. If they want to just for example would be if they really want to make a change. You got to work on it like you gotta drop other things, and focus on it, because if you don't do that, you're not going to give the quality that it needs. You're just going to be like 'yeah we did it' and nothing happens afterwards. You want it to be effective.

Lastly, Celia shared the struggles of getting everyone on the same page, but it all comes down to those at the top of the institution to help make change,

And I feel like when you're working in an institution, there are so many people from different places and colors and of all ages as well and so sometimes it's just hard to get everyone on the same page when you have such a diverse demographic. But I think, to improve higher ed and institutions. I think they just have to. It has to start from the top of portraying that in an effective way so that it trickles down to all the way to the students.

The participants all shared how there is the potential for the institution and those in supervisor and higher up positions to give support, resources, and opportunities to professionals of color to grow professionally and when it does not happen, it also sends a message to those professionals about the care and interest that the institution has for them. The participants want to be seen as valuable and worth the investment by their institution.

Summary

The research in this study was conducted to examine the experiences of professionals of color working at a PWI. The participants were able to identify a number of factors that impacted their experiences as a professional of color. Chapter five will discuss the findings from the interviews, apply the theoretical framework and talk about the implications for the profession as well as provide suggestions for future research.

Chapter V

Discussion, Recommendations, & Conclusion

This research study examined the experiences professionals of color face at predominately White institutions using qualitative semi structured interviews. Seven participants who identified as professionals of color were interviewed and asked questions (Appendix B) around the following research questions: (1) How have professionals of colors' personal experiences in higher education impacted their success at PWIs? (2) What are the challenges that professionals of color experience on a PWI that can be attributed to racial identity? (3) What resources and supports contributed to the success of professionals of color in higher education? This chapter is a discussion of the findings of the study, recommendations for practice, and future research that should be conducted on this topic.

Discussion

Across the research questions and themes found, several conclusions can be drawn from the results. Critical race theory (CRT) and leadership theory were both used to help give context and interpret the findings of this study. Through the lens of CRT, it is clear from the participants this study that professionals of color still face challenges on campus due to many factors related to their personal experiences of being a professional of color at a PWI and the resources and support they seek or have on campus. Professionals of color's personal experiences working at a PWI can impact their success and their dedication to stay at their institution due to the pressure to succeed and be there for the students of color and be present on campus. These professionals encounter challenges on campus related to microaggressions, tokenism, and the stress and pressure

associated with being one of few professionals of color at the institution which can result in mental and emotional stress.

Personal History and Experiences

Participant stories detailing the challenges they faced were used to provide a story of the experiences and history that professionals of color face on predominantly White campuses. Professionals of color have many personal experiences throughout their lives that impact their success at a PWI. These personal experiences can begin as early as their undergrad experiences when attending a PWI and typically continue after becoming a professional and working at a PWI.

All of the participants shared how it was important for them to find ways to engage on campus with individuals that looked like them and could relate to their experiences. Participants were able to find a sense of belonging on campus through these connections as undergrads and they sought them out when they became professionals. This was especially true when they sought to better themselves, find friends and colleagues that they could relate to or who would understand them, and most importantly when working with students of color.

Having friends and colleagues of color can act as a buffer against some of the negative effects and experiences that professionals of color face related to discrimination and bias. Being able to share their experiences and hardships with others that understand them, and the environment they are working in, is an important aspect for participants because those peers not only relate to them, but they offer guidance on how to maneuver racial issues they experience on the campus. Building these connections and having a

supportive sounding board were also positive elements that made their experiences working at PWI's more successful.

This study found that participants felt a greater self-imposed pressure to succeed than their White counterparts in order to justify to themselves and to others, their position on the campus. By working late hours, showing up for students of color, and participating in almost all aspects of campus life relating to diversity and students of color, professionals of color demonstrate that they deserve to be working on the campus and in their position. This drive however causes unrealistic expectations that they put upon themselves to be at all events across campus that are intended for the minority population. Being so committed and driven to support these students on the campus quickly turns into expectations from both students of color and senior administrators for them to be the administrators who always show up, which in turn increases the pressure to maintain a level of engagement that is not expected of their White colleagues. Professionals of color working at a PWI go through a proving process for their right to be present and working on and around campus (Kelly et al., 2017), something that these participants all experienced.

Working with students of color was a big reason why professionals of color enjoy their job and has helped them to stay in their position. In fact, having connections with students of color that were different from their colleagues often manifested as a sense of pride for the professionals of color and brought a sense of purpose for the work and impact that they contribute to the campus. Participants discussed that they were even invested in the students of color's lives outside of their academics. These genuine connections that they built with students of color were ones that their White colleagues

were neither expected to have or weren't looked down on when they didn't have those connections with students of color. This cycle of expectation, from the inside and the outside, just reinforces the belief that professionals of color are the ones who will be showing up on behalf of the institution for students of color in their personal and academic endeavors. Staff and Administrators of Color prioritize students of color and their experiences as a whole individual and when they build these relationships students of color are able to be themselves in an environment that appreciates who they are on campus (Luedke, 2017).

Facing Challenges

The counter story telling tent described in CRT was clearly present in this study. Without the use of counter storytelling, the true stories of people of color would not be brought to the public and the world could still believe that all is fine (Hartlep, 2009). Using counter storytelling can analyze the climate of higher education and helps to provide faculty, staff, and students of color a voice to share their marginalized experiences from their own narrative (Hiraldo, 2010). Participants in this study shared their appreciation for the opportunity to tell their stories of being a professional of color to help provide opportunities for further research so that institutions can become more than diverse in looks but inclusive in how they work with and support people of color. They all expressed a desire to be heard by others at the institution. These stories emphasized the experiences they have had that may not be recognized by the majority of their White peers (Hartlep, 2009), something the participants all alluded to recognizing as an area that needed improvement by the campus leadership.

Professionals of color still face many challenges that hinder their success and commitment to stay at PWI's. Challenges such as microaggressions and implicit bias are still prevalent in the workplace environment which leaves many professionals of color feeling frustrated and experiencing a lack of respect from their White colleagues and administrators. More specifically, participants in this study expressed that they are often tasked with taking on extra responsibilities due to being the token 'diversity person' in their office or on the campus. With encounters and challenges like these, it is no surprise that there are difficulties for PWIs to retain their professionals of color when they do not take steps to prevent these different kinds of treatment for their professionals of color.

In higher education, as with any system, racism may be analyzed through a CRT lens that explores the structural influence of racism (Hiraldo,2010). This study's findings affirm the existing literature that has found that professionals of color experience microaggressions and bias when performing their duties at PWIs, often by well-intentioned senior leaders. Professionals of color can encounter these biases on a daily basis, such as when they receive gestures or subtle looks from colleagues, parents, and other White staff members that can result in difficulties in how professionals experience or perceive their environment working at a PWI. When these subtle microaggressions and biases occur, professionals of color often have to be strategic in when and how they respond when they encounter biased attitudes on the campus.

White colleagues and other individuals can place false and often unrealistic assumptions regarding professionals of color based on how they look and act, which can, in turn, create an unpleasant and uncomformable environment for professionals of color when they don't fit or meet those expectations placed on upon them. CRT examines how

color blindness can help mask White privilege and power (Sleeter, 2017). With this claims of colorblindness, White people are cleared from getting blame for the racial inequalities or assumptions they may have towards people of color (Evatt, 2019) Therefore, when professionals of color encounter these assumptions made about their race or personality, they tend to carefully choose when to speak up when people make assumptions or share their biases, but at the same time, professionals of color also do not want to come off as being difficult or giving into the stereotype of the ‘angry minority’ when they do choose to speak out against the racism and microaggressions that they encounter. It was an important skill for professionals of color to learn and develop: to know when to call out others for their prejudicial actions and attitudes.

Participants in this study discussed experiences of tokenism and often being expected to take on extra responsibilities including projects, events, and committee work outside of their work duties. This expectation, to be the spokesperson for diversity related concerns and to provide the ‘minority’ view is something that their White counterparts are never tasked with doing. These expectations and demands tend to fall on the same small group of professionals due to the low number of professionals of color on the campus which can often be an emotional and mental toll on them as everyone expects them to be present at events across the campus. This toll on these professionals of color weigh on them because even if they are interested in working with diversity and inclusion concerns, they can be quickly pigeonholed into only being considered for those roles and it hinders them in making other contributions to their institutions. According to the participants in this study, their White colleagues were not expected to be present to actively support their students of color or expected to do more diversity related

obligations on campus and instead were able to consider a wider variety of professional opportunities.

Finally, this study found that participants feel that there is no real effort being made to retain professionals of color from the institution and they are feeling real consequences from this. This lack of effort to retain professionals of color has made the few professionals of color on campus feel often isolated and frustrated because there are not a lot of people they can relate to or have a similar rapport with. Having a lack of professionals of color on campus created extra burdens for those professionals of color that are there to pick up the slack and take on the 'unwritten' expectations that is placed on them by both themselves and the institution. Many participants recognized that one difficulty to retain professionals of color is connected to the local community, which can be seen as unwelcoming or having a lack of diverse options and opportunities for professionals to connect with off-campus. Therefore, professionals tend to seek those connections and options elsewhere. There is a huge need for PWI's to be the driving force in bringing change to make sure professionals feel at home on campus and give them both resources and opportunities to experience the surrounding community in a positive way.

Resources and Support

Using the lens of leadership theory, the institution's administrators, and supervisors' positive and supporting behavior towards professionals of color is shown and assessed in how it can influence others by effectively creating an inclusive environment for all on the campus. Professionals of color look towards their institution's supervisors and administrators to invest in them and provide opportunities for growth

personally and professionally. In order to provide the support and resources professionals of color need, it is important that their supervisors and other administrators be active listeners. Being heard by senior leadership was a common desire expressed by these professionals. White administrators and supervisors have a responsibility to their professionals of color to understand the existing structures of racism and work to undo them (Evatt, 2019). Institutional leadership needs to learn that using different ways to support professionals of color can result in them successfully thriving on the campus.

Having a mentor for professionals of color was a huge benefit and resource for them to find advice and support both on and off the campus. These mentors were there to give career advice and push them to new paths across campus to be more successful. Finding a mentor helped professionals gain new ways to network, accomplish goals, and be an overall better professional that helped them thrive. More specifically, professionals of color benefitted more when they had a mentor of color because they were able to understand them better personally and some of the unique challenges that they face in addition to being a professional. However, with limited numbers of professionals of color on the campus, the obligation to be a mentor to new professionals of color was yet another unacknowledged responsibility that, while positive personally, was challenging to manage with all the other expectations placed on them.

Professionals of color want and need their institution to invest in their growth as professionals in higher education. Having access to more opportunities on the campus and off can help develop professionals of color and allow them to grow with the institution. Having access to these opportunities is great way for professionals of color to feel valued by the institution because it shows that their growth is seen as important to the

leadership. Leaders that are considered the most skillful tend to listen more than they speak (Banutu-Gomez & Banutu-Gomez 2007). In fact, professionals of color feel valued and listened to when their supervisors support their ideas and thoughts.

Professional of color have unique and different needs from their White counterparts, so it is important that those in senior positions can provide them with the resources and professional development that will help them to be successful at their institution.

Allocating resources and funds to professionals of color to give them access to more opportunities, which can give professionals of color a chance to develop, shows to professionals of color that their institution cares and is interested in them as people.

Finally, having a hiring process that felt inclusive for professionals of color was another important aspect that improved how they viewed the institution and its hiring practices. In this study participants valued that their institution was open to their questions and engaged with them throughout the interview process, which informed them that the institution was remaining inclusive to all in the process. Prospective professionals of color, as well as current staff, felt more comfortable about the hiring process when they were able to see a diverse representation of professionals on the hiring committee that they related to, and it helped them to visualize what the campus culture may be like.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are shared to help administrators make a more inclusive environment for their professionals of color. Administrators working at PWI's can enact real change when they are being mindful of the experiences professionals of color go through and how they can better support them. Administrators can focus on offering more opportunities for professionals of color to explore their experiences, share

their stories, and support each other. Having opportunities like affinity groups or socials just for professionals of color can give professionals of color more opportunities to debrief with one another and a way for them to connect and build relationships. These institutions can provide a source of support for professionals of color and have chance to network and build a community on campus or off for development opportunities directed and focused on their particular needs.

Administrators can also work on addressing the racial challenges both professionals and students of color face on the campus. Making sure to protect their professionals of color against from serving as the spokesperson for any racial group they are a part of on committees and other institution functions helping professionals of color avoid being channeled into diversity related roles if that is not their preference. Supervisors and other administrators need to ensure that their staff of color are being offered opportunities to serve in other roles as well so that they have control over their professional development. If they are needed to serve on committees and events, it is the institution and supervisors, and other administrators, who are responsible for ensuring that they are giving them accommodations from their other work duties rather than simply adding additional work. Addressing issues of microaggressions is one way to ensure that the environment across campus is a more inclusive environment for members of all marginalized communities.

Finally, administrators need to be committed to recruiting and retaining more professionals of color. They should recognize that when they are recruiting professionals of color, the work is not over once they are hired. In fact, administrators will need to work on and develop ways to retain their professionals of color. Strategies like offering

mentorship opportunities to new professionals of color should be incorporated into job responsibilities of senior staff. Allocating funds and other resources to ensure that professionals of color are getting chances to professional develop can also help get them to stay. These strategies provide ways for professional development, mentoring, and other opportunities for support and resources to these professionals to feel valued and wanted as part of the institution and the campus community.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommendations for further research on this topic that would add to the literature on this topic and further develop ways to improve the experiences of professionals of color at Predominantly White Institutions

- This study was dominated by African American professionals. Additional research focusing other professionals of color and their experience working at a PWI would help describe their experiences more fully.
- The research site for this study has a small number of professionals of color compared to the total staff of the institution. Similar studies at institutions with larger percentages of professionals of color could help institutions see how increased diversity on staff impacts this population.
- The research site for this study was in a rural small size area. A similar study with different institution types and in different parts of the country could give insight on related or different challenges professionals of color face. Based on the findings of this study, there is an untapped opportunity to look at how PWI's and other institutions are successful at retaining their professionals of color. More research can look to see how other institutions are providing a

positive environment for their professionals of color and how that has allowed them to retain and build an inclusive workplace.

Research in this area can help institutions create a more supportive work environment and see the value in making the necessary changes to invest in their professionals of color. With student population changing and growing more diverse, it is more important than ever that institutions retain professionals of color. This ensures that institutions are being effective in how they function as an institution and shows how they support and value a diverse and inclusive environment for all.

Conclusion

This study identifies some of the challenges professionals of colors face at PWIs. The findings reveal that professionals of color still face racial challenges like microaggressions and being cast in the role of the token representative of diversity for the institutions. Professionals of color want more support and resources from their institutions in order to be successful and find new opportunities to grow and when they do not get it, they will look elsewhere. This study indicated that identifying the challenges and experiences of professionals of color can benefit many people at the University. Administrators can gather information about their professionals of color's experiences so that they can better support the success of professionals of color on their campus.

Without this support from administrators, professionals of color will still face challenges on the campus which reduces the benefits of having a diversity staff to support a changing student population. When dealing with these challenges, professionals of color may leave their positions when they do not feel supported, reinforcing the cycle that

results in the lack of representation on the campus of faculty and staff of color. This lack of representation on campus in turn can affect individuals of color in how they see the university's appreciation of their own diversity. Senior administrators must strive to create a positive working environment for faculty and staff of color, making them want to stay on campus because they feel heard, and wanted for their contributions. By providing this kind of support, hiring professionals of color on campus can lead to higher retention which in turn leads to positive student outcomes for all students on campus.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Hello, for purposes of confidentiality I will use an alias, not your real name, to refer to you in this interview. Do you have a preference in how you are identified in this study? If not, I can assign you a pseudonym.

I am going to ask some demographic questions to get us started:

1. How do you identify your gender identity?
2. How do you identify your racial identity?
3. How would you define your current position? Entry level, Middle Management, Director level, or something else?
4. How many years have you worked in higher education as a professional?
5. During your undergrad years, did you attend a PWI?
6. Did you attend the same school for your masters as you did undergrad? If not, was it also a PWI?
7. If you attended a PWI as a student, can you tell me about any challenges that you faced during your studies that you feel were impacted by your identity as a person of color?
8. You are currently working at a PWI, are the challenges that you faced while getting your education still present?
9. Are there different challenges as a professional?

- a. If yes, what are they?
10. Have you ever experienced any racial microaggressions or challenges in the workplace on campus?
 - a. And if so, how have you dealt with them?
11. Now, I would like you to think back to when you were going through your hiring process; What was your impression of whether the institution and position was inclusive for people of color?
12. What types of support or resources are available to help you become successful as a professional of color at your institution?
13. Can you tell me about any mentors or persons of color on this or previous campuses who were inspirational to you or helped mentor you?
14. What expectations do you feel are placed on you as a professional of color that are different compared to your White counterparts?
 - a. In your interactions with students?
 - b. In your interactions with other professionals?
 - c. In your work on committees, projects, or other tasks?
15. What are some ways that you feel that the Institution can improve the working environment for professionals of color?
16. How has your supervisor or other senior administrators set the tone to role model how your White colleagues act towards you?
17. How has your supervisor or other senior administrators demonstrated commitment to adding in diversity matters?

18. What strategies have you seen senior administrators use to address challenges of diversity, and how successful were those strategies?
19. Are there any other thoughts or feelings you wish to share to help better inform leaders about how to support and effectively to make change for professionals of color?

Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Experiences of Professionals of Color at a Predominantly White Institution

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brandy Matthews and faculty sponsor Dr. Jon Coleman from the Department of Counseling and Higher Education departmental at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a staff member of color working at [*Institution*].

• **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of professionals of color who are working at a predominantly White institution. More specifically, this study aims to gain insight into the experiences of members of an under-represented group as they navigate the institutional culture in a PWI. Further, the study will provide an opportunity for staff working at Predominantly White Institutions to gather information into professionals of color's experiences that can help administrators find a way to better support these individuals on their own campus.

• **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Provide demographic information (race and gender) and how many years you have worked in higher education
- Discuss your experiences thus far as a professional staff member of color at [*Institution*]

Participants will be recorded via video conferencing software (Zoom). The participant will receive an invitation through their [*Institution*] email to accept and have access to the meeting. The meeting will be adjusted to where only certain individuals have access to the meeting with a special code to enter before joining the meeting. When participants log on to the meeting, the principal investigators will again confirm with the participant if recording, ask them to change their name in the program, and to confirm using their interview is okay for data. The investigators will also state how the data will be destroyed when the data collection process is completed.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

When going through the interview process, you may be asked a question that you find unpleasant, upsetting, or uncomfortable. For instance, a few questions may cause you to think about negative emotional states or experiences.

- a) You will be asked to provide some confidential information about yourself
- b) If there is a moment during the interview process where you would like to withdraw and stop the interview, please let the researcher know immediately. The video recording will be stopped and terminated immediately to uphold confidentiality of the participant.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By participating in this study, you will contribute to existing research underlining the challenges professionals of colors have to face while working in a PWI. Participants can also benefit from knowing that their challenges were acknowledged, and that they provided a voice to add to understanding of others.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of only sharing the information with the investigators stated in this study. Each interview will be recorded on a secure network, on one single personal issued computer, and will be uploaded on a password protected USB drive instead of a public shared platform to ensure confidentiality. The video recording and all transcripts will be destroyed by the investigators three years after completion of the study in accordance with IRB protocols.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. Your participation may be terminated if it is determined that you do not meet the qualifications for being a participant in this study (e.g., you are not considered a person of color, or you have not had at least one year of work experience at a PWI).

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Brandy R Matthews (Investigator)- brmatthews@eiu.edu

Jon K Coleman (faculty Sponsor) - jkcoleman@eiu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 581-8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.