AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR WITH WHITE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

Since the 1960s, the majority of students enrolled in colleges across the United States have been predominantly white (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). However, since the 1970s, the student population started to shift towards becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (Gayles & Kelly, 2007). Currently, students of color represent one of the fastest growing populations enrolled in college today (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). The majority of these students are currently enrolled at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) across the United States (Fischer, 2007). Despite this fact, the student affairs profession has not changed to reflect the current population of students as there are more students of color enrolled in colleges today. (Kayes, 2006; Komives & Kuh, 1988; Phelps Tobin, 1998; Rapp, 1997; Talbot, 1996). A lack of diversity among student affairs professionals is an issue for students of color because it negatively impacts their experiences in college (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997). Thus, this study utilizes an interpretative phenomenological approach which seeks to understand the lived experiences of students of color enrolled in a PWI. The research question guiding this study is as follows: “how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?” This particular study seeks to make sense of how students of color make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals in a PWI. Understanding how students of color make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals can create a much deeper understanding of how to create a more friendly environment for students of color where they feel more welcomed as a student at a PWI.

Keywords: Students of color, white student affairs professionals, predominantly white institution, Relationship
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my brother, Tyson Lawrence (August 10, 1976 - October 15, 2017),
who has passed away so suddenly. You will be forever missed.

Rest in Peace, Bro…
# Table of Contents

## Chapter One: Introduction
- Context and Background .................................................. 8
- Rationale and Significance .................................................... 9
- Research Problem and Question ........................................... 12
- Definition of Key Terminology ............................................. 14
- Theoretical Framework ....................................................... 15

## Chapter Two: Literature Review
- Students of Color Culture .................................................. 24
- White Student Affairs Professionals ....................................... 31
- Academic Performance of Students of Color at PWI .................. 39
- Conclusion ........................................................................... 48

## Chapter Three: Research Design
- Qualitative Research Approach ............................................ 49
- Site and Participants ............................................................ 52
- Procedures ......................................................................... 54
- Data Analysis ...................................................................... 55
- IRB - Ethical Considerations ................................................ 56
- Trustworthiness .................................................................. 56
- Credibility .......................................................................... 57
- Prolonged Engagement ....................................................... 57
- Persistent Observation ......................................................... 57
- Triangulation ...................................................................... 58
- Peer debriefing .................................................................... 58
- Negative or Deviant Case Analysis ....................................... 58
- Referential Adequacy .......................................................... 58
- Member Checks ................................................................... 59
- Transferability ..................................................................... 59
- Dependability ..................................................................... 59
- Confirmability ..................................................................... 60
- Potential Research Bias ....................................................... 60
- Limitations ......................................................................... 62

## Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis
- Making Sense of Different Types of Relationships .................. 65
- Lack of Connection with White Student Affairs Professionals .... 66
- Connecting with Student Affairs Professionals of Color .......... 69
- Making Meaning of Diversity and Inclusion ......................... 73
- Lack of Diversity among Student Affairs Professionals .......... 74
- Benefiting from on Campus Diversity .................................... 78
- Reflecting on Cultural Barriers ............................................. 83
- Facing Challenges as a Student of Color at PWI .................... 84
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Almost 30 years ago, in 1988, two student affairs associations, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) developed a task force report that highlighted an “extremely low” number of student affairs professionals of color in graduate degree programs, and called for an increase in recruiting minority student affairs professionals (Linder & Simmons, 2015). Within the last 10 years, many predominantly white higher education institutions have created programs, initiatives, and strategies in which they tried to increase the number of minority staff working in their institutions. However, 80-90% of faculty and staff in most higher education institutions are still Caucasians (Kayes, 2006).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of students of color as they work with student affairs professionals who are predominantly white. The problem of practice is that students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. At this stage in the research, students of color will generally be defined as individuals who are not white. Students of color self-identify as African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latino and Native American/Alaska Native. Knowledge generated from this study is expected to inform hiring practices and recruiting student affairs professionals of color at a university level.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals of color in predominantly white institutions (PWIs), and how this has negatively impacted student of color, which will provide the context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study are discussed next, drawing connections to
potential beneficiaries of the work such as higher education administrators, student affairs professionals and student affairs associations. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to provide a foundation for the present study. Finally the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

**Context and Background**

Since the 1960s, the typical students aged 18 to 24 enrolled in college across the United States have been predominantly white (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). However, starting in the 1970s, the student population has increasingly become much more diverse in terms of students’ race and ethnicity (Gayles & Kelly, 2007). Currently, students of color represent one of the fastest growing populations enrolled in college today, which includes African American, Asian American, Latino/a American and Native American (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). The majority of students of color are currently enrolled at predominantly white institutions (Fischer, 2007). For example, according to the *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)*, from fall 1976 to fall 2014, the number of Hispanic students rose from 4% to 17%, the number of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 7%, the number of African American students rose from 10% to 14%, and the number of American Indian/Alaska Native students rose from 0.7% to 0.8%. These groups of students are expected to increase in the upcoming years (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). However, despite the changing demographics of the student body, the demographics of student affairs professionals who are currently employed within colleges and universities has not changed substantially (Kayes, 2006; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; NCES, 2006; Taub & McEwen, 2006). For example, in the year 1993 and in 2003, white individuals were overrepresented in faculty and executive, administrative, and managerial positions, whereas individuals of color were
underrepresented in those types of positions (NCES, 2006). Similarly, the Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) Executive Summary reported that the majority of the CSAO were white (NASPA, 2014). Additionally, based on the data from the Chronicle of Higher Education 2016 Almanac survey, only 21.4% of higher education professionals were individuals of color employed in colleges, whereas minorities who were in executive, administrative, managerial positions constituted only 20.6%. These figures are considered to be problematic because according to Jackson and Terrell (2003), student affairs professionals of color play an important role in fostering the learning and development of students of color and white students.

Despite the significance of the role that student affairs professionals of color play for students’ college experiences, there is a scarce amount of literature on this topic (Jackson & Terrell, 2003; Linder & Simmons, 2015). This issue has spanned for more than twenty years. For example, according to seminal and current scholars, (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; Rapp, 1997; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Taub & McEwen, 2006), there is widespread concern about the student affairs profession. Researchers found that there is a lack of diversity among both student affairs professionals and graduate students enrolled in master’s degree programs in student affairs. A lack of diversity among student affairs professionals is problematic because it negatively impacts students of color (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997). By increasing the minority presence in different student affairs offices, these offices can cultivate a more racially and culturally diverse college environment, which can in turn enhance the achievement of students of color (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991). Notwithstanding, students of color who are enrolled in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) tend to perceive the campus climate differently than their white peers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). PWIs have done relatively little to change the campus climate of their
institutions (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). For example, students of color, particularly Black students, do not feel integrated into PWIs because they tend to feel alienated and also they encountered hostility and racial discrimination (Allen, 1992). Students of color have experienced racism at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). In addition, the overall campus environments such as in classrooms and in student support offices, have not yet evolved to reflect the changes in student diversity (Taylor, 1989).

PWIs are considered to be unwelcoming and unsupportive for minority students because these students have experienced the following outcomes: greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008). These problems arose because of the relationship/interaction between students of color and white student affairs professionals in PWIs. For example, students of color felt white student affairs professionals were not fair nor consistent and they could not relate well to minority students (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). Therefore, a lack of diversity among student affairs professionals is an issue for students of color because it negatively impacts their experiences in college (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997).

Because of the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals in PWIs, the student affairs profession has not changed to reflect the current population of students in higher education (Kayes, 2006; Komives & Kuh, 1988; Rapp, 1997; Talbot, 1996). For example, Taub and McEwen (2006) reported that 89% of students who were enrolled in their master’s degree program were white. Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012) found a similar result in their study. In addition, Turrentine and Conley (2001) found that African Americans accounted for 12-15%, Hispanics accounted for 4-5%, Asian Americans accounted for 2-3%, and Native Americans
accounted for 0-1% of individuals employed in entry-level student affairs positions within different colleges. Thus, more research is needed to understand how this issue has negatively impacted students of color in PWIs. In terms of the student affairs profession, there is not enough research discussing possible differences in race, gender, and age among student affairs professionals and its impact among students (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Thus, the findings of this study may inform and support the student affairs profession.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study is to investigate this problem of practice: students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. This study will expand research on understanding how students of color are impacted when working with white student affairs professionals in a PWI. Morrison (2010) explains how minority students must be able to see their own cultures reflected in the leadership and the power structures of the colleges they are enrolled in. Students of color may benefit a diverse student affairs professionals working in PWIs, which students of color will be able to have a better academic performance.

To further discuss the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals and how this problem has become an issue for students of color, both Taub and McEwen (2006) and Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012) studied graduate students who were in their master’s degree program in student affairs. Neither group of researchers were able to recruit a diverse pool of participants in their studies because the majority of the respondents who were already enrolled in their master’s degree program were white. While researchers were doing their studies, they noticed graduate students wasn’t diverse. This raised questions among researchers who were trying to understand why there is a lack of diversity among students enrolled in their master’s
degree programs. The student affairs profession is not changing to reflect the change of the student body in higher education (Talbot, 1996). This still holds true today. For example, the lack of diversity among students who was enrolled in their student affairs graduate degree programs noted by Taub and McEwen (2006), who reported that 89% of students in these programs were caucasians, was also evident in Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012)'s study. Both Taub and McEwen (2006) and Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012) suggested that more research is needed to comprehend why student affairs professionals of color are largely absent from the field of student affairs. According to Taub and McEwen (2006), there are not many studies explaining why student affairs professionals of color are underrepresented in colleges and universities, and more research is needed to understand how this problem affects students of color in a PWI.

It is essential for students of color to find minority role models and mentors with whom they can identify when they need assistance because these role models and mentors can improve their well-being on campus such as through boosting their self-esteem, educational aspirations, and retention (Dahlvig, 2010; Rapp, 1997). Therefore, higher education administrators may need to do a better job with their recruitment strategies to recruit more student affairs professionals of color within their institutions to better serve their current student population.

This study is significant at the local, state and global level to inform a number of different groups and organizations such as higher education administrators, faculty, researchers, student affairs professionals, student affairs associations, policy makers, politicians, school boards, including charter schools and private schools and governing boards of universities and colleges. This study will explore and provide strategies or important tools that could be used among higher education administrators to effectively recruit a diverse pool of candidates and increase the
number of student affairs professionals of color employed at their college.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

For the 21st century, there is a diverse student body on college campuses (Loh, 2016; Hu & Kuh, 2003). It is important for higher education institutions to address and meet the needs of their student population including recruiting and increasing the number of student affairs professionals of color on their campuses. Thus far higher education institutions have failed to address this need on their campuses (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997). For example, many educators are concerned with the field of student affairs because the profession is known to be predominantly white (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Postsecondary institutions may need to diversify their staff in order to better serve and support their student population on their campuses today. Students’ academic and social experiences can positively be affected by racial diversity (Pascarella, 2006). Therefore, this study intends to comprehend the lived experiences of students of color enrolled in a predominantly white institution. The research question guiding this study is as follows: “how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?”

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Students of Color** - Students of color are defined as individuals who are not white or of European parentage. Students of color self-identify as African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latino/a American and Native American/Alaska Native (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018).

**Predominantly White Institution** - Predominantly white institution (PWI) is a term used to describe the majority of PWIs are historically white institutions in which whites account for 50%
or greater of the student population (Lomotey, 2010).

**Student Affairs** - “Student affairs” is used interchangeably with “student services” by scholars (Helfgot, 2005; Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). For this study, the term “student affairs” will be used. Student affairs is housed in an administrative division in a college or university, providing all kinds of support services to college students and the general public (Helfgot, 2005; Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). Depending on the college or university, the division of student affairs may be integrated with the division of academic affairs (Gulley & Mullendore, 2014; Ozaki & Hornak, 2014). In most cases, the types of support services that are provided within the division of student affairs are counseling, academic advising, career services, disability services, health services, registrar/records, residence and student life, financial aid, recruitment and enrollment services (Helfgot, 2005; Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). In addition, there may be other types of support services that are provided specifically for international and minority students (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). For example, in most cases, student affairs only focuses on all things that are related to the students and their college life but outside the classroom (Helfgot, 2005).

**Student Affairs Professional** - An individual is working in any type of position within the division of student affairs who is responsible for providing the support and services to individuals who need them (Helfgot, 2005; Pomrenke & Morris, 2010).

**Student Affairs Profession** - This term is best described as a collaboration of student affairs professionals who are diverse in terms of their position and specialize in various disciplines such as providing different programs and services to their student population and to the general public (Hornak, 2009).

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory is the theoretical framework for this study, which is a lens to examine
the lived experience of students of color relationship/interaction with white student affairs professionals in a predominantly white institution. CRT serves as an analytical lens to comprehend the campus environment of PWIs among students of color who are enrolled in these types of institutions. In addition, CRT also serves as an examination of the existing power structures, which are based on white privilege and white supremacy and perpetuates the social exclusion of individuals who are non-white (UCLA School of Public Affairs/Critical Race Studies, 2009).

Law activists and scholars started the CRT movement in the 1970s because they wanted to study and transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (UCLA School of Public Affairs/Critical Race Studies, 2009) According to Parker and Lynn (2002), CRT is a legal theory, which focuses on the issues of race and racism. Both of these issues are designed to uncover how they operate in the law and in society. CRT can be utilized as a tool to define, expose, and address educational problems. Throughout the American history, racism has been perceived as an individual’s act of immoral behavior against a person because of their skin color and appearance. Notwithstanding, scholars of CRT wanted to look at racism differently and not just solely perceive racism as an individual’s act of willful aggression against another person. Scholars of CRT have decided to move the discussion of racism from individuals’ actions against another person to an ideological comprehending of racism, which allows for discussion and research into how racism and prejudice are deeply rooted into American culture as a society of oppression (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

**Critics of Critical Race Theory**

In the reading, *Some Critical Thoughts on Critical Race Theory*, Douglas E. Litowitz addresses the five problems with critical race theory. There are other critics (Gey, 1996;
Kennedy, 1989; Kozinski, 1997; Pyle, 1999) who have addressed similar issues Litowitz has brought up in his writing.

**Problem 1: Liberalism** - Critical race theorists are against liberalism because it failed to bring equality between the races (Litowitz, 1997; Pyle, 1999). Notwithstanding, liberalism is known as a system of liberty and faith (Litowitz, 1997). It is also known as a system of civil rights litigation and activism for improving equality among people (Litowitz, 1997). This concept of liberalism raises the question as to whether critical race theorists are critiquing the term “liberalism” correctly (Litowitz, 1997). Since the early 1960’s, liberals have taken action to support minorities and their rights (Litowitz, 1997). According to the majority of thinkers, the foundation of liberalism is to protect individuals from harm by others, which includes the government and its agents, so that American citizens can be free to follow their own plans in free agreement with other citizens (Litowitz, 1997). In order to get state protection, citizens agree to comply with the law and not harm other citizens (Litowitz, 1997). This type of position is known as a classical liberal position. Therefore, it is puzzling to learn that critical race theorists have created a movement against liberalism because it is characterized by committing to fairness such as equal rights, freedom, and due process (Litowitz, 1997). In addition, Pyle (1999) has mentioned critical race theorists have failed to provide a replacement for liberalism's core values. Rather, their postmodern rejection of all principles leaves them entirely "critical" (Pyle, 1999). Also, Gey (1996) argues critical race theorists are activists for suppressing hate speech.

**Problem 2: Narcissism** - Sigmund Freud has used the expression “narcissism of minor differences” to indicate how different ethnic groups declare their uniqueness and superiority over each other based upon their idiosyncratic traits, when in fact they are not very different from each other (Litowitz, 1997). Freud’s expression of “narcissism of minor differences” seems to fit
in much of the scholarly work that has been done in critical race theory (Litowitz, 1997). Critical race theorists tend to write about themselves by using their personal experiences, which they think is unique and there is something special about it that they can offer because of their race as being non-white (Litowitz, 1997). Litowitz (1997) thinks this is a problem because critical race theorists tend to not write about why a particular law is unconstitutional, instead they tend to write about a raced or situated analysis along the line such as: The Asian View of Case X. Inevitably, critical race theorists write about the perspective of those who share the same ethnic group as themselves (Litowitz, 1997).

**Problem 3: Storytelling** - critical race theory consists of personal stories that are drawn from the experiences (both positive and negative) among law professors of color (Litowitz, 1997). Storytelling may be interesting and/or fascinating. However, Kozinski (1997) and Litowitz (1997) think storytelling can also be dangerous. For example, critical race theorists tend to use narrative instead of using objective analysis (Kozinski, 1997). What distinguishes lawyers from the general public is that they seek for doctrinal solutions to problems (Litowitz, 1997). The general public is free to view a criminal trial as a narrative about the good and evil (Litowitz, 1997). On the other hand, lawyers must view the criminal case differently from the general public. Lawyers should see it in the eye of the law (Litowitz, 1997). While stories may be useful to report in a criminal case or any types of cases, lawyers are held accountable to look and go beyond stories (Litowitz, 1997).

**Problem 4: Interest-Convergence Theory** - critical race theorists have used this theory when applying it to their CRT scholarship. According to Derrick Bell, a critical race theory scholar, has mentioned whites will only advance the cause of racial justice if only it coincides with their own self-interest (Litowitz, 1997). For example, some critical race theorists think the
civil rights law was never designed to support blacks and their interests but instead decisions like *Brown* were decided not on the basis of racial equality, but as a mechanism for white individuals to win the Cold War (Litowitz, 1997). Litowitz (1997) finds the interest-convergence theory to be a strange claim because he thinks the hard fought cases like desegregation cases, the Voting Rights Act, Title VII and so forth were addressed to eradicate racism, which should be the interests of blacks. In addition, Litowitz (1997) has also argued that the court’s decision with the *Brown v. Board of Education* case did not mention anything about the Cold War or the interests of whites and their dominant culture in desegregation. Furthermore, Litowitz (1997) finds that there is not much evidence to prove the court’s decision that the *Brown v. Board of Education* case was meant to support whites more than blacks. If critical race theory scholars think desegregation has benefitted whites more than blacks, then why were whites so resistant to it? (Litowitz, 1997; Stone et al, 1986 cited in Litowitz, 1997). In addition, Kennedy (1989) argues critical race theory scholars have not yet provided evidence of racism in the legal academy.

**Problem 5: “Outsiders” and “Insiders”** - critical race theorists argue that outsiders such as women and people of color have their own unique way to view the legal system which cannot be fully understood among white male insiders. A critical race theory scholar named Mari Matsuda has mentioned people of color have their own voice. Further along with this statement, another critical race theory scholar named Richard Delgado stated that it is time for women and people of color to become writers and commentators, which will include their own voice rather than the majority of liberal white authors to discuss issue of equality or civil rights pertaining to non-white individuals. Despite Mari Matsuda and Richard Delgado’s arguments on inclusion of the voice of women and people of color in the leading law journals, Litowitz (1997) finds their arguments to be somewhat ironic. For example, Litowitz (1997) thinks that it is
somewhat ironic that there are many outsiders who are currently working at top law schools and publishing in the best law journals. Litowitz (1997) also states if 75% of the articles on civil rights are written by women and people of color who are considered to be "outsiders," then this term is no longer meaningfully applied. The term “outsider” has been misused among critical race theory scholars (Litowitz, 1997). The outsider perspective is valuable because it provides check and balance against the insider perspective; so this indicates a balanced view between the insider and outsider (Litowitz, 1997).

Rationale

The critical race theory has originated in the field of law and, from a legal point of view, the CRT provides a critical analysis of race and racism (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009). The CRT is known as a “movement” among law scholars and activists who started this theory in law schools within the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). They wanted to study the issue of race, racism, and power that exists in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Although much of the critics of the critical race theory focus on the law aspect of this theory, the CRT has since spread to many other disciplines such as in the field of education. Since CRT focuses on issues centered around culture, race, racism, and power within the American society, the CRT was chosen as the lens for this particular study.

Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were the founders of the critical race theory wanted to see a change with the American legal system because they were frustrated with the slow progress of racial reform (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009). They have criticized the liberal and positivists’ viewpoint of the laws as being both colorblind and ignorant to racism (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009). America is known to have a long history of racism, which is why the CRT was founded. Critical race
Theorists wanted to improve the well-being of minorities living in America (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009). The main goal of this study is to also improve the well-being of students of color because they experience greater stress, poor academic performance and poor mental health problems in predominantly white institutions (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

These types of issues (greater stress, poor academic performance and poor mental health problems) cannot continue to be ignored among students of color who have experienced them. The CRT serves as an important lens to examine why students of color are experiencing these types of issues in PWIs. The concept of CRT, which focuses on the issue of culture, race, racism, power, white privilege, and white supremacy also cannot be ignored as this study is about the relationship/interaction between students of color and white student affairs professionals in a predominantly white institution.

**Applying the Critical Race Theory**

The critical race theory applies to this study because the topic of this study focuses on the issue of students of color relationships/interactions with white student affairs professionals in a predominantly white institution. Culture, race, racism, and power all play an important factor when looking at the relationship between students of color and white student affairs professionals. According to multiple reports, racism exists in PWIs, which affects students of color who are enrolled in these types of institutions (Harper et al., 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). For example, students of color felt white student affairs professionals were either not fair or consistent and they could not relate well to minority students (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). Students of color found PWIs to be unwelcoming and unsupportive for them because they have experienced the following
outcomes: greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). These problems occurred because of the racial differences between the two groups - students of color and white student affairs professionals in PWIs.

If the critical race theory recognizes that racism is deeply rooted within the American society (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009) then the CRT is considered to be applicable for this current study. This is because students of color have experienced racism at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). The CRT will assist us to understand why the campus environment of PWIs is considered to be unwelcoming and unsupportive for students of color. In addition, the CRT will also assist us in understanding why there is a lack of diversity among student affairs professionals of color employed in PWIs, and why this is considered to be a problem for students of color (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997).

To conclude, scholars who support the critical race theory are committed to social justice. Critical race theorists have taken an active role in trying to eliminate racial oppression in America (UCLA School of Public Affairs/ Critical Race Studies, 2009). It is important to listen to the voices of students of color who have been marginalized and oppressed at PWIs. While this study may not eliminate racism entirely in PWIs, this study will educate important groups of people such as white student affairs professionals, faculty members and higher education administrators on this crucial topic that needs to be discussed.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

For more than a decade, colleges and universities in the United States have noticed a shift in their student population due to changing demographics and educational policies, which forced higher education institutions to increase the number of students of color on their campuses (Baber, 2012; Harwood et al., 2012; Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996). This study will focus on understanding the experiences of students of color as they relate to and interact with white student affairs professionals at a predominantly white institution.

Students of color, which includes African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans and Native Americans are currently one of the fastest growing populations enrolled in college today (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). More of these students are expected to enroll in upcoming years (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). Students of color have experienced greater access to higher education compared to many years ago (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996; Keels, 2013; Harwood et al., 2012). However, despite minority students gaining greater access to higher education, these students have continued to experience racism at predominantly white institutions, which deeply affects their academic performance as well as their social and emotional well-being (Brewster & Rusche, 2012; Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2013).

Students of color may have better academic performances if they see their own cultures reflected in the leadership and the power structures of the colleges they are enrolled in (Morrison, 2010). Students of color can find minority role models and mentors with whom they can identify when they need assistance. These role models and mentors can improve their well-being on campus through improving their self-esteem, educational aspirations, and retention (Dahlvig, 2010; Rapp, 1997). Despite the changing demographics of the student population
across the United States on college campuses, the demographics of student affairs professionals who are currently employed within colleges and universities has not changed substantially (Kayes, 2006; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; NCES, 2006; Taub & McEwen, 2006). This creates the following problem of practice: students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students.

This literature review is organized in the following way: the first part of the literature review will focus on students of color culture. The second part of the literature review will focus on white student affairs professionals, and finally, the third part of the literature review will focus on academic performance of students of color at predominantly white institutions.

**Students of Color Culture**

For many students of color, becoming a student at a predominantly white institution can be a new and challenging experience. Students of color may be forced to assimilate into the white culture (Bourassa, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2010; Morrison, 2010; Nieto, 2004) such as learning different forms of communication. There are two separate cultures. White students and students of color do not share the same type of culture but instead students of color have their own culture. Students of color bring a different culture to predominantly white institutions. In addition, students of color do not share the same types of needs as white students. It is important to support their needs by providing the necessary resources for them such as providing culture centers through which students can connect with others who share their culture (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). A better understanding of students’ of color culture can provide us with valuable insights on ways to comprehend how to improve the academic performance of minority students who are enrolled in predominantly white
institutions. Culture itself is known to be very powerful and pervasive in the operation of any organization (Museus & Quaye, 2009), and in this case, higher education institutions. More specifically, in terms of higher education, culture can influence almost everything that occurs on college campuses (Kuh, 2001/2002; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, it is important to contemplate how the culture of an institution will differentially shape the experiences of students of color (Kuh, 2005; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

**Cultural Background in Higher Education**

Historically, throughout the American educational system, students of color have been neglected and underrepresented in colleges and universities for many years (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Higher education institutions have been exclusive to and reserved for white students who came from affluent families (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002. However, since the desegregation between students of color and whites in colleges and universities (Jackson & Terrell, 2003), higher education institutions have noticed a great increase in the number of students of color enrolled (Pope, Mueller & Reynolds, 2009; Roscoe, 2015). This means students of color are now going to college more than ever before compared to previous generations due to educational policies/reforms (e.g. *Brown v. Board of Education* & affirmative action policies). These policies/reforms were put in place for students of color to experience an equal opportunity to obtain a college education (Baber, 2012; Fischer, 2008) like their white counterparts.

While this may be a good sign for the United States, unfortunately, students of color are met with additional challenges such as their minority status (Morrison, 2010; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989; Smedley et al., 1993; Wei et al., 2010) along with other problems (e.g. socioeconomic and first-generation statuses) they bring to college (Means et al., 2016; Aud, Fox
In addition, often times, students of color are making transitions from racially segregated neighborhoods and high schools to predominantly white institutions (Keels, 2013; Wei et al., 2010). Therefore, the following information below will focus on the additional challenges students of color have encountered in predominantly white institutions and how these challenges make it difficult for them to take advantage of the college’s resources for their learning and personal development in college.

**Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions**

While the United States is becoming one of the most diverse nations on earth, it is a country that is known to be divided by class, privilege, discrimination, and power (Banks & Banks, 2010; Nieto, 2004; Morrison, 2010). This situation is pertaining to the division of the American society particularly at predominantly white institutions. According to Harwood et al. (2012), predominantly white institutions have not done much to change the culture of their institutions even though they acknowledge the changing demographics of the student body on their campuses.

The dominant norms and values of an institution can influence how students think and decide to spend their time at a college/university (NEPC, 2006). In this case, it is safe to assume that predominantly white institutions can influence and shape how students of color think and/or feel about the type of college they are enrolled in. For example, in a study conducted by Harwood et al. (2012), a Latina student at a PWI explained how her white roommate complained about her speaking Spanish which offended the Latina student. This is an example of a microassault because instead of embracing the language or the culture of the bilingual Latina student, the student faced discrimination against her own culture for speaking the Spanish language in her dormitory room. This could explain why the Latina student felt alienated in her
own dorm room. This situation also demonstrates conflict of cultures between the two college students.

Higher education institutions can also shape the level of student satisfaction (NEPC, 2006). Predominantly white institutions can also heavily influence the student satisfaction among students of color (Johnson, 2003). Predominantly white institutions still need to work on changing the culture of their institutions because colleges’ administrative actions, college staff, and policies are a key factor of how minority students experience the overall campus culture of their institutions (Harwood et al., 2012). For example, when describing the college experience of minority students, Turner (1994) argues students of color perceived themselves as guests more than students at their college, they never felt a sense of belonging or felt like full members of the college community. Students of color felt isolated and they also felt college faculty, staff, and higher education administrators were not interested in their well-being and academic success as students (NEPC, 2006; Turner, 1994). Also, Harwood’s et al. (2012) study is congruent with Turner’s (1994) study. These studies show how students of color were experiencing alienation at the college they were enrolled in due to the low level of student satisfaction and the negative experiences they went through at these types of institutions (Boysen, 2012; Worthington et al., 2008). For many students, a negative college experience could lead to many unwanted outcomes such as greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Turner’s (1994) argument still applies in today’s society as racism continues to be a social problem for minority individuals living in America (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2013; Brewster & Rusche 2012; Morrison, 2010). The ongoing issue of racism makes students of color a target to be picked on or to be mistreated at predominantly white institutions because of their
differences (e.g. race-ethnicity) they bring to these types of institutions (Harwood et al., 2012). Typically, predominantly white institutions maintain culturally biased policies and practices, which causes cultural alienation for students of color (NEPC, 2006; Torres, 2003; Swail, 2003). For example, in general, students of color will abandon their own culture and adopt a different culture, assimilating into white culture, which is deeply rooted into predominantly white institutions (Banks & Banks, 2010; Morrison, 2010; Nieto, 2004). Members of minority groups notice how students of color attempt to assimilate into the dominant white culture through abandoning their own culture in order for them to gain success in society (Banks & Banks, 2010; Morrison, 2010; Nieto, 2004). If students of color do not assimilate into mainstream white culture, then they are perceived to be at-risk of failing in society (Morrison, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Museus and Quaye (2009) utilize Van Gennep’s (1960) three stages of cultural transition to discuss how students of color go through the process of cultural transition at predominantly white institutions. The three stages of cultural transition are: separation, liminality, and incorporation (Museus & Quaye, 2009). To further explain the three cultural transitions, separation means an individual is detaching his/her former self, liminality means the transition from changing one status to a different status, and finally, incorporation means an individual is adopting the cultural values and norms that are associated with his/her new status. The concept of cultural transition applies to the situation that students of color face at predominantly white institutions. For example, if students of color want to succeed at campus life, particularly at predominantly white institutions, then they may detach themselves from their own cultures and associate themselves with the values and the norms of the dominant campus culture at predominantly white institutions (Museus & Quaye, 2009;).
Museus and Quaye (2009) utilize Tierney’s (1999) argument on cultural integrity. They explained that higher education institutions should focus on developing programs and effective teaching strategies that include students of color to be part of a learning experience that they can relate to. Also, expecting college students to detach themselves from their own culture in order to assimilate into their campus culture places an unnecessary burden on them (Museus & Quaye, 2009; ). Students of color benefit from being secure and they are more comfortable in being in their own culture (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Also, students of color not only face the challenge of dealing with their minority status on campus, but also they face additional challenges stemming from personal characteristics such as their socioeconomic status and as first-generation individuals in America (Fischer, 2007; Keels, 2013; Laird et al., 2007). With all of these challenges, it is important for colleges to recognize that they are held accountable to facilitate students’ of color socialization on their college campuses (Museus & Quaye, 2009). For example, Museus (2008b) conducted a qualitative study on twenty-four Asian American and African American students to learn more about their experiences; found that ethnic student organizations serve an important need for students of color because these organizations provide cultural familiarity and advocacy and serve as their main sources for cultural validation (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

To further discuss more about ethnic student organizations on college campuses, Museus and Quaye (2009) utilize Bourdieu’s (1986) and Stanton-Salazar’s (1997) concept of cultural agents. The concept of cultural agents states that it is important for students of color be able to establish connections with cultural agents who are faculty members, college staff or peers. Ethnic studies departments on college campuses could also serve this function for students (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Cultural agents can either be
a collective group or an individual (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For example, collective cultural agents could refer to groups such as academic programs, cultural centers, and student organizations with whom students can connect with on their college campus (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Collective cultural agents such as ethnic student organizations are beneficial for students of color because they provide a space for minority students to express their racial/ethnic identity on campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009). In addition, collective cultural agents are much smaller and more manageable for students of color to handle the type of environment they are in within the larger campus, which offers a channel for socialization within the much larger campus community (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

An individual cultural agent refers to faculty members, administrators, staff, and other students who can either function as cultural translators, mediators, and role models (Museus & Quaye, 2009). These types of individuals can help students of color navigate their own culture and campus cultures concurrently while they are on campus (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Cultural translators, mediators, and role models serve a different role for minority students. For example, translators can share their own experiences about the socialization process when offering their advice to minority students (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Mediators are part of the dominant campus culture and who inform students of color how they can navigate the dominant cultural norms and practices successfully on campus (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Role models can either be from the minority or from the dominant culture and they can expose minority students to specific behaviors they can imitate to promote their socialization (Museus & Quaye, 2009). A small group of scholars (Museus & Quaye, 2009) think collective and individual agents are important in the experiences of students of color on campus because these students are more
likely to be successful academically, socially and emotionally (Kuh and Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Conclusion

An increased understanding of students’ of color culture can provide us with valuable insights on ways to understand how we can improve the academic performance of minority students enrolled in predominantly white institutions. The role of individual and collective cultural agents has proven to serve an important role for students of color on campus because they can assist minority students to become academically successful in PWIs (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Higher education educators/professionals are held accountable to comprehend the cultural challenges that students of color face in finding membership on their college campus if they wish to serve those students effectively (Museus & Quaye, 2009). More information on white student affairs professionals including the history of white student affairs professionals, their demographics and their relationship with students of color will be explored further in the next segments.

White Student Affairs Professionals

The vast majority of white student affairs professionals were college student themselves during their undergraduate years in college (Cutler, 2003; Love, 2012; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Many of the respondents in Taub and McEwen (2006) study were white women who were attracted to a career in student affairs because of their experience working on college campuses as former college students. White women personally found student affairs profession rewarding for a number of reasons. They enjoyed providing programs and services, and having the opportunity to nurture the development of students. They also enjoyed facing the challenges of student affairs work and
learning in an educational environment, and they liked the opportunity to work in a variety of student affairs offices. A similar report was also found in three retrospective studies, which align with Taub and McEwen (2006) study and they are - Forney (1994), Hunter (1992), Richmond and Sherman (1991), and one recent study in Pomrenke and Morris (2010). While many white student affairs professionals enjoyed having the opportunity to nurture the development of students (Pomrenke and Morris, 2010; Taub & McEwen, 2006), many students of color do not see the support and encouragement coming from white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008). Thus, more details on the history of student affairs professionals and demographics and white student affairs professionals relationship with students of color will be explored in depth in the next two segments.

**History of Student Affairs Professionals and Demographics**

To understand the history of student affairs professionals, it is important to first understand the history of the student affairs profession, which makes up a collective group of student affairs professionals, and the purpose they serve in higher education. The student affairs profession began during the colonial years, making it one of the oldest fields in the United States (Mann, 2010; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). During those years up until today, student affairs professionals were known as helpers to assist college students with their needs by providing support services within higher education to help them achieve their goals in college (Cutler, 2003; Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Reynolds, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). For instance, during the colonial years, student affairs professionals played an important role working for the colonial residential colleges because they worked with students on their behavioral issues while they were pursuing a college education (Mann, 2010; Schuh,
Jones & Harper, 2011). Even though student affairs professionals existed during that time period, the student affairs profession was not formally created until the late 1800’s (Mann, 2010; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). The student affairs profession was created at Harvard College by LeBaron Russell Briggs in 1890. He was appointed as the Dean of Men to support men because the faculty was very focused on their academic responsibilities and they were not able to counsel and assist those male students at Harvard (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011).

Later on, during the early 20th century, the student affairs profession expanded especially after the first World War as many more individuals gained employment in many different student services areas within a growing number of colleges and universities (Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). As the expansion of the field of student affairs continued, student affairs leaders in the field wanted to seek greater appreciation and recognition for their work in student affairs (Sandeen, 2011). A group of student affairs leaders decided to form a committee in the year 1937. During that same year, they submitted a document called *The Student Personnel Point of View (Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1937)* to the American Council on Education, which is a higher education organization in the United States (Helfgot, 2005; Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). *The Student Personnel Point of View (Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1937)* emphasized educating the “whole student” as the basis for their work in student affairs (Helfgot, 2005; Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). The document “became the most influential publication in the [field of] student affairs” (Sandeen, 2011). From that moment, the field of student affairs evolved rapidly and became much more complex (Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). After the Second World War, college
enrollments exploded (Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). As a result, the student affairs division emerged as a cluster of student services offices such as the admissions, academic advising, registrar/records, financial aid, recruitment and enrollment services (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010; Sandeen, 2011). These related offices were regulated under one administrative division, which was the student affairs division within a college providing a wide range of student services and programs for college students (NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011).

Even though the field of student affairs has grown and has been around for more than a century, educators including two student affairs associations, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have questioned the field of student affairs due to not understanding why there is an “extremely low” number of student affairs professionals of color in graduate degree programs across the United States (Hunter, 1992; Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn, 2012; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Taub and McEwen, 2006; Williams, McEwen and Engstrom, 1990). For example, in Taub and McEwen (2006) study, they recruited 300 participants from 24 master’s degree programs in student affairs/higher education, which was listed in the Directory of Graduate Preparation Programs in College Student Personnel. The majority of the participants were white women, 26 years old or younger, and most of them were enrolled as full-time students. A similar report was found in Williams, McEwen and Engstrom (1990), Hunter (1992), Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012), Taub and McEwen (2006) studies regarding white women outnumbering student affairs professionals of color in graduate degree programs in student affairs/higher education. The majority of the respondents in Taub and McEwen (2006) study did not have any children and they all had a wide range of majors and types of degrees they possessed from their undergraduate program. A similar report was also found in Hunter
(1992) and Pomrenke and Morris (2010) studies regarding student affairs professionals not sharing similar academic backgrounds at the undergraduate level. Only a few of the respondents in Taub and McEwen (2006) study were already student affairs professionals themselves.

To further discuss the demographics of student affairs professionals, the majority of them who are currently employed in higher education institutions still remain white compared to student affairs professionals of color who continue to remain the minority employed in colleges and universities (Kayes, 2006; Mertz, Eckman & Strayhorn, 2012; NCES, 2006; Taub & McEwen, 2006). For example, in the year 1993 and in 2003, white individuals overrepresented in faculty and executive, administrative, and managerial positions, whereas individuals of color were underrepresented in those types of positions (NCES, 2006). Another example of similar statistics were reported in the Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) Executive Summary, which states that the majority of CSAO were more likely to be white compared to individuals of color (NASPA, 2014). Also, based on the data from the Chronicle of Higher Education 2016 Almanac survey, only 21.4% of higher education professionals were individuals of color employed in colleges, whereas minorities who were in executive, administrative, managerial positions constituted only 20.6%.

These statistics are considered to be problematic for a number of reasons. A lack of diversity among student affairs professionals can impact students of color (Kayes, 2006; Rapp, 1997) in many different ways such as their academic performance (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). According to Jackson and Terrell (2003), student affairs professionals of color play an important role in fostering the learning and development of students of color and white students. Notwithstanding, many predominantly white institutions failed to address the issue of diversity among their college staff (Kayes, 2006;
Rapp, 1997). According to Sagaria and Johnsrud (1991), an increase in the minority presence in different student affairs offices can cultivate a more racially and culturally diverse college environment, which can in turn enhance the achievement of students of color. Therefore, according to Pascarella (2006), it is significant for postsecondary institutions to diversify their college staff in order to better serve and support their student population on their campuses today because students’ academic and social experiences can be affected positively by racial diversity.

**Relationships with Students of Color**

Students of color have experienced greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems in predominantly white institutions because these types of institutions do not provide them with the support they need (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Also, students of color do not feel welcome in these types of institutions (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Many of these problems are based on the relationship/interaction between students of color and white student affairs professionals in PWIs. For example, students of color felt white student affairs professionals were not fair nor consistent and they could not relate well to minority students (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). According to Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall and Lewis (2012), who conducted research focusing on students’ of color experience in residence halls at a predominantly white institution, students of color reported to have negative experiences with white student affairs professionals which they perceived as race-related. For example, when students of color reported problematic behaviors or incidents against them, white student affairs professionals tend to disregard the role of race or give answers in such a way that did not acknowledge the issue students of color were facing as minority students (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). This is called “racial microinvalidation” (Harwood, Huntt,
Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012) in terms of how white student affairs professionals responded to problematic behaviors or incidents students of color have experienced on campus.

To further discuss Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall and Lewis (2012) research on students’ of color experiences in residence halls at a predominantly white institution, residential life is known for the following benefits that are often emphasized by universities: supportive staff such as student affairs professionals in residence halls, a community that is welcoming and friendly, a community that is safe and secure, and a community that is vibrant. In addition, residential life is supposed to enhance students’ abilities to live on their own for the first time when making the transition to live on campus. Ironically, these benefits are not benefiting students of color at all. Often times, students of color do not find white students affairs professionals supportive. Students of color do not find their institution (PWI) to be welcoming or friendly. Also, they do not find the community (PWI) they are in to be safe or secured, and they do not find their own community (PWI) to be vibrant due to the negative experiences they encounter at PWI. For example, when students of color tried to engage white student affairs professionals on racial issues, students of color felt their concerns with racism on campus were either invalidated or ignored by them (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012).

Not only the issue of racism appears in Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis (2012) study, the relationship between students of color and white student affairs professionals is also evident in Makomenaw (2012) and Yosso et al., (2009) studies. For example, according to Makomenaw (2012), racism makes Native American students feel isolated, singled out due to their race, and/or stereotyped by white student affairs professionals on campus. Native American students cope with the ongoing racial stereotypes against them such being asked if they live in teepees (Makomenaw, 2012). Racial incidents like this one can be very stressful and
overwhelming for Native American students (Makomenaw, 2012). The majority of Native Americans have experienced discrimination on a regular basis (Jones & Galliher, 2015; Makomenaw, 2012), which is also common for other ethnic/racial groups who have experienced microaggressions (Boysen, 2012; Sue et al., 2007; Yosso et al., 2009). Also, according to Yosso et al., (2009), interpersonal microaggressions refer to spoken or nonspoken racial insults directed at (in this case) Latino/a American students from different individuals on campus such as white students affairs professionals in academic and social spaces. An example of interpersonal microaggressions against Latino/a American students is having their intelligence called into question as to if they are capable of doing college work. This notion causes Latino/a American students to feel discriminated against and insulted due to this racial assault (Robertson, Bravo & Chaney, 2016; Yosso et al., 2009).

**Conclusion**

Many studies have shown how the experience of racial microaggressions are common for the daily lives of students of color such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans and Native Americans who encountered them at predominantly white institutions (Boysen, 2012; Makomenaw, 2012; Sue et al., 2009; Yosso et al., 2009). The experience of racial microaggressions can cause major problems for students of color such as causing mental health problems and academic concerns (Boysen, 2012; Clark et al., 1999; Sue et al. 2007). The discussion of racial microaggression was first introduced in 1969 by Chester Pierce due to the horrifying experience of racism African Americans had underwent in their daily lives (Yosso et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the issue of racial microaggressions and racial microinvalidation according to how white student affairs professionals respond to problematic behaviors or incidents students of color have experienced on campus continue to affect students of color
deeply at predominantly white institutions today.

**Academic Performance of Students of Color at PWI**

Minikel-Lacocque (2013) argues educators mainly tend to focus on measurable outcomes such as students’ grades and graduation rates with regards to underrepresented students (students of color) at predominantly white institutions. However, Minikel-Lacocque (2013) pointed out while students’ grades and graduation rates are certainly important to focus on, these numbers alone do not give us enough information about the students’ experiences in college. For example, if educators only look at students’ grades and graduation rates, then the discussion on college experience for underrepresented students could either be a success or failure (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). If a student graduates, then this is considered to be a success among educators (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). However, according to Minikel-Lacocque (2013), this is not always true. There is a possibility students may be unhappy throughout college and much of the story to be told is missing if educators deem students’ college experience as a straightforward success without deeply looking into their stories (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013).

Minikel-Lacocque (2013) feels we can learn important lessons from the lived experiences of college students particularly those who face isolation and racial discrimination at predominantly white institutions, which affect their academic performance. Minikel-Lacocque (2013) also feels it is crucial for predominantly white institutions to learn from these important lessons to assist them in improving the campus culture for all students. Therefore, this section of the literature will mainly focus on the relationship of performance to culture and the relationship of performance to student affairs professionals.

**Relationship of Performance to Culture**

To understand the relationship of performance to culture is significant. If a PWI
comprehends students’ of color culture, then students of color will have a better academic performance and be more successful. It is safe to say that either the lack of knowledge or ignorance of the culture of students of color has deeply affected their academics and their well being. Many white college campuses are historically known to establish policies and practices that benefit them including white students and not students of color (Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). In addition, many predominantly white institutions have already established their own culture (Harwood et al., 2012), which conflicts with the culture of minority students who are largely enrolling in these types of institutions.

The majority of colleges and universities in the United States is still predominantly Caucasians (Kayes, 2006). This is mainly because, historically, students of color have been excluded from attending college in the United States for many years since the colonial period to its racial segregationist-era and into part of the twenty century (Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). Due to the exclusion of students of color for many years, the arrival of this particular racial and ethnic group has created a unique dilemma for both higher education leaders who are currently in power and students of color who have been traditionally marginalized (Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). Despite the arrival of minority students in predominantly white institutions, bureaucratic structures and policies are still not yet more open or more accessible for students of color (Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). The history of excluding students of color in colleges and universities strongly reflect the current institutional policies, culture, and practices that impact the experiences (mostly negative student outcomes such as academic performance) of minority students in predominantly white institutions today (Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010).

Morrison (2010) explains how minority students must be able to see their own cultures
reflected in the leadership and the power structures of the colleges and universities they are enrolled in. This notion could enhance students of color to have a better academic performance in predominantly white institutions today if higher education leaders adjust their policies, culture, and practices to reflect the inclusion of students of color on their campuses. By taking this necessary action, this will assist minority students in feeling more comfortable at the type of college they are in. In addition, minority students can also find minority role models and mentors with whom they can identify with when they need assistance. These role models and mentors can improve their well-being on campus such as improving their self-esteem, educational aspirations, and retention (Dahlvig, 2010; Rapp, 1997).

According to Harwood et al. (2012), predominantly white institutions have done relatively little to change the culture of their institutions even though they have acknowledged the changing demographics of the student body on their campuses. Many students of color are attending predominantly white higher education institutions today. Higher education administrators in predominantly white institutions still need to work on changing the culture of their institutions because their actions within their college administration, college staff, and policies are a key factor of how minority students experience the overall campus culture of an institution (Harwood et al., 2012). Currently, students of color are performing poorly with their academics due to the current existing culture of predominantly white institutions (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). This is considered to be problematic because the institutional culture including its policies and practices are not helping students of color but instead hurting them to a large extent exemplified through their experiences of greater stress and mental health problems (Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Therefore, it is important for higher education administrators to
address the culture differences of students of color and promote a new culture, policies such as creating cultural competence policies and practices, which will make students of color to feel included in predominantly white institutions.

One of the ways to address the issue of higher education leaders not addressing the culture differences of minority students in predominantly white institutions is using a particular approach called culturally responsive advising. With this approach, students’ of color culture, history and experiences are all taken into consideration by student affairs professionals including higher education leaders, which requires student affairs professionals to use their comprehensive knowledge to be actively engaged with students of color across cultural differences (Carnaje, 2016; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2005; Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). By using this approach, culturally responsive advising, students of color may value student affairs professionals more because simply not only do they provide academic support but also they understand the ethnic and racial implications of being a minority student at an institution that is predominantly white (Carnaje, 2016).

It is vital for student affairs professionals including higher education leaders to acknowledge and address the issues of race and racism because it is important for student affairs professionals to establish close rapport with students of color (Carnaje, 2016). Student affairs professionals who utilize this approach, culturally responsive advising or engage in this advising style may find themselves having a better relationship with students of color and may see positive outcomes such as students of color experiencing higher levels of student satisfaction, trust, and feelings of empowerment (Carnaje, 2016). In addition, student affairs professionals may also see an improvement of students’ of color academic performance due to them experiencing less stress and less mental health problems. Overall, using culturally responsive
advising creates a better relationship between the two parties (student affairs professionals and students of color) because this exemplifies how student affairs professionals are bringing an awareness and understanding of the culture of students of color.

Understanding the culture of students of color including other types of issues is important to these students. For example, in Museus & Ravello (2010) study, several students of color participants explained the importance of student affairs professionals understanding the different issues (academics, mental and social issues) minority students struggle with and how these issues are not isolated from each other. In other words, academics, mental and social issues affect one another. It is also important for student affairs professionals to look at and understand the cultural background of students of color and the types of issues (academic and nonacademic problems) they have in predominantly white institutions when working with these students. Increasing the knowledge of understanding the cultural background of students of color can be done by training student affairs professionals at predominantly white institutions. Student affairs professionals will be more prepared and have a better understanding how to work with students of color. In addition, student affairs professionals should be able to provide the comfort of students of color with cross-cultural advisement. However, according to Harper and Patton (2007) and Mitchell, Wood and Witherspoon (2010), the lack of providing the comfort in cross-cultural advising relationships is one way to explain the overall alienation of students of color, which often times occur in predominantly white institutions.

Understanding the limitations of institutional racial diversity in predominantly white institutions is crucial in understanding how this impacts students of color in many ways such as their academic performances. Higher education institutions need to change how they operate so that they can value and support culturally diverse students on their campuses. Addressing this
issue does not only mean higher education institutions will simply need to increase the number of student affairs professionals of color in student services offices; rather higher education leaders should possess critical understanding of race and cultural differences among students of color. It is important for educators in higher learning to familiarize themselves with students’ of color communal insights and resources that are useful to marginalized communities.

**Relationship of Performance to Student Affairs Professionals**

The problem of practice is that students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. Students of color felt white student affairs professionals were either not fair or consistent and they could not relate well to minority students (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012). In addition, many students of color felt uncomfortable when working with white advisors (Mitchell, Wood & Witherspoon, 2010). Therefore, it is essential for institutions of higher learning to maximize the effectiveness of academic advising such as the relationship between the advisors (also known as student affairs professionals) and advisee (students of color) on their college campuses. A better relationship between the advisor and the advisee is associated with a positive outcome between the two parties involved (Barbuto, Jr; Story; Fritz; & Schinstock, 2011). The quality of how an advisor advises their advisees is linked to student satisfaction (Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Fielstein & Lammers, 1992; Trombley, 1984; Waggenspack & Hensley, 1992). For example, according to Harrison (2009), who did her analysis on a survey of pre-nursing and nursing students, learned that academic advisors who have the characteristics of being approachable, available, communicative, organized, fostering, and nurturing were perceived as effective advisors to college students. If white student affairs professionals are “effective” in terms of who they are
professionally such as what they stand for and their purpose in higher education and how well they work with students; then students of color will most likely experience success in college such as having a better academic performance in predominantly white institutions.

Having a better academic performance and experiencing success at predominantly white institutions has a lot to do with many things such as the administration of an institution. For example, according to (Museus & Ravello, 2010), it is important for higher education administrators and other key players to have a better understanding of the characteristics of advisors and their relationship among students of color that either foster or hinder their success in college. White student affairs professionals are held accountable for students’ of color success in college, which means students of color could either perform poorly or not academically depending on their relationship with their advisor. Thus, student affairs professionals can have a major impact on students’ of color experience in college (Carnaje, 2016; Museus & Ravello, 2010).

To discuss further about the characteristics of white student affairs professionals advising students of color, in Museus & Ravello’s (2010) study, they learned the importance of advisement. They learned students of color stress the importance of wanting to see student affairs professionals as individuals who care about them and are committed to their success in college. In addition, students of color also want to see student affairs professionals as authentic “human beings” such as being a mentor or even a friend to them (creating informal relationships and friendships) and not just as regular staff at the college or university where they work. These findings align with Dahlvig (2010) and Rapp (1997) literature. The finding in Museus & Ravello’s (2010) study is also congruent with Winston and Sandor’s (1984) literature. In Winston and Sandor’s (1984) study they found college students preferred developmental
advising over prescriptive advising. In addition, in Mitchell & Rosiek (2005) and Mitchell, Wood & Witherspoon (2010) literature, both researchers discussed how students of color more specifically Black students shy away from advisors who adopt a prescriptive advising style in their roles because this type of advising style is limited and does not provide more deep interaction between the two parties (students of color and student affairs professionals) involved in the meeting. Instead, for a deeper interaction, students of color prefer developmental advising.

According to Smith (2002), developmental advising is a type of style where advisors develop a stronger relationship and connection with their advisees and it is up to the advisors to decide their roles within this relationship with their advisees. On the other hand, prescriptive advising is a type of style where advisors do not develop a stronger relationship and connection with their advisees but instead they tell their advisees what to do such as telling them what courses they will need to take to satisfy their educational requirements. In Barbuto, Jr., Story, Fritz, and Schinstock (2011) study, they learned it is important for advisors to foster a relationship with their advisees that is productive and engaging. It is important for advisors to foster this type of relationship because students of color expect more from their advisors often because these students are first-generation. A first-generation college student means that he or she is the first person in their family to attend college. Unlike the majority of white students, students of color do not have anyone in their family to guide them or share their experience about college life. This largely explains why students of color prefer advisors to utilize developmental advising over prescriptive advising when interacting with them.

In developmental advising, academic advisors should share their own personal stories and struggles with their advisees (Museus & Ravello, 2010) because it improves the relationship between the two parties involved in the meeting. Students of color may be more comfortable
expressing their thoughts with their advisors to build trust and to develop a greater sense of comfort and belonging if they notice the type of relationship they are having with their advisors (Castillo & Kalionzes, 2008; Mitchell, Wood & Witherspoon, 2010). In addition, students of color may be able to relate to their advisors’ personal stories or struggles and may feel more comfortable having an open discussion with their advisor. Students of color want student affairs professionals to humanize the academic advising experience through being accessible or approachable and helpful (Museus & Ravello, 2010). According to one of the student affairs associations - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), student affairs leaders emphasized on educating the “whole student” as the basis for their work in student affairs (Helfgot, 2005; Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). This principle aligns with Castillo & Kalionzes (2008), Mitchell, Wood and Witherspoon (2010), and Museus and Ravello (2010) literature. In the literature, the participants (students of color) discussed the importance of their advisors making concerted efforts to provide holistic advising and serve the student as a whole (Castillo & Kalionzes, 2008; Mitchell, Wood & Witherspoon, 2010; Museus & Ravello, 2010). To address the number of issues students of color face such as with their academics or having psychological or social problems, providing holistic advising and serving them as a whole to the student is strongly encouraged.

In addition to providing holistic advising, students of color also would like for their academic advisors to espouse proactive philosophies during advising sessions (Museus & Ravello, 2010). For example, students of color discussed the importance of having academic advisors who proactively connect them with the necessary resources such as giving them the information, opportunities, and the support they need in order for them to succeed in college life (Museus & Ravello, 2010). Academic advisors who incorporate proactive advising in their work
underscore their proactive philosophy to academic advising (Museus & Ravello, 2010). Several participants (students of color) discussed the importance of adopting systematic proactive-advising practices such as through intrusive academic advising like regular required meetings for advisors to adopt on their campuses (Museus & Ravello, 2010). The perception of proactive academic advising practices are associated with student success such as student retention and graduation rates and academic performance (Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Vander Schee, 2007).

**Conclusion**

Higher education leaders at predominantly white institutions are held accountable to invest their time and energy in providing additional resources in academic advising services to meet the needs of minority students on their campuses. This necessary support includes offering more humanized, holistic and proactive advising (Carnaje, 2016; Museus & Ravello, 2010). The main purpose of providing additional resources or resource allocation, such as providing cultural centers with whom students can connect with on their college campus, is to assist students of color with their unique needs that are not shared with their white counterparts (Bourdieu, 1986; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). White student affairs professionals are most likely to have a better relationship with students of color if they provide humane, holistic, and proactive advising because these communicate that they are interested and invested in the success of students of color and equip them to be more successful with their academics in predominantly white institutions.
Chapter 3: Research Design

This study will focus on understanding the lived experiences of students of color as they relate to and interact with white student affairs professionals at a PWI. The problem of practice is that students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in PWIs, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. Therefore, the research question guiding this study is as follows: “how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?” The purpose of this research question is to understand the relationship between students’ of color and white student affairs professionals at a PWI.

Qualitative Research Approach

The qualitative research method is used to collect and analyze data. With qualitative research, participants - students of color will be asked to give detailed responses and provide examples from their own educational and social experiences with white student affairs professionals in a PWI. For example, when doing a qualitative study, a researcher is seeking facts, information, or knowledge about topics as how individuals are experiencing an event, a series of events, and/or a condition (Agee, 2009). The qualitative research method will allow the researcher of this study to invite participants to learn from their personal experiences of how a PWI has impacted their relationship with white student affairs professionals. In addition, a qualitative research method will assist the researcher of this study in studying about a particular group and situation. For example, generally, in most qualitative studies, they need to be focused on the particularities of the local and on the thick description of interactions between humans in that context (Agree, 2009). Therefore, doing a qualitative study will allow the researcher to comprehend human behaviors or interactions in a particular setting. Along with using a
qualitative research method, this study will be using the critical race theory to further understand the problem of practice of this research project.

**Constructivism-Interpretivism Paradigm**

Along with the qualitative research approach, the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm will be used for this study. With this paradigm, interpretivists are not trying to find the right answer to their research problem (Ponterotto, 2005). Instead, they perceive multiple realities as each of their participant’s experience and viewpoint of reality is different (Ponterotto, 2005). Interpretivists are learning from their participants’ experiences and analyzing them through their research (Ponterotto, 2005). In addition, they are also known to interpret meanings as they use the hermeneutical approach (Ponterotto, 2005). This approach is used for interpretivists to dig in further and unveil meanings that diverse people experience. The only way researchers can do this is by interacting with their participants. For example, with this type of interaction, deeper meaning can be uncovered by the researcher. The researcher and his/her participants come together to create (co-construct) findings from their interactive conversation and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005). This means interpretivists do not solely perform their research independently. They require participants who can assist them to interpret meanings. Researchers depend on their participants to collect data in regards to understanding their research problem and question(s). Participants serve as an important component for a qualitative study. Therefore, interpretivists cannot exclude participants from their research. Without the participants, there is actually no research to conduct. It is necessary for interpretivists to learn from the participants’ past experiences for their research and to develop a conclusion or report results of what they have learned from their participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

By using qualitative research and the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm for this
research project, this study will also be an interpretative phenomenological analysis study, which will study how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), an interpretative phenomenological analysis is concerned with exploring individuals’ experience in its own terms. In terms of conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis study, researchers are interested to know what happens when the daily flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for individuals. Usually, this happens if something significant occurs in peoples’ lives. When individuals are engaged with “an experience” of something major that happened in their lives, they begin to think and reflect on the significance of what is happening and researchers try to engage with participants’ reflections (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Some individuals’ experience may either be positive or negative depending on how they explain their experience.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is an appropriate research methodology for this study because it is commonly used among researchers in the field of humanities, human sciences and arts (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is also an appropriate strategy because the purpose of this study is to understand how students of color make meaning of their experience of “being in” a PWI and understand their interaction with white student affairs professionals. The decision to choose interpretative phenomenological analysis also aligns with the research question of this study, which asks: how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?” The research question including the research problem were created to do an interpretative phenomenological analysis to study what individuals have in common or what they have shared as they experience a phenomenon, which is the goal and outcome for this research. The research question that was created for this study is similar to what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) have asked, which is:
“how do people who have complained about their medical treatment make sense of being angry? (p. 52). This open-ended question was created in attempt to focus on gathering data that will focus on personal meaning and sense-making in a particular context and ultimately provide an understanding of the shared experiences of individuals who are involved in the study. It is important to comprehend individuals’ shared or common experiences in order to develop a much deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In terms of data collection, a qualitative researcher then collects data from his/her participants who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops an explanation of the experience for all of the participants who participated in the study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

**Site and Participants**

A small sample of eight students of color who are currently enrolled in a private, four-year, predominantly white institution in Boston, Massachusetts will be hand-picked and purposive sampling will be used to recruit students to participate in this study. This study is looking for students of color who are college-aged traditional undergraduate students anywhere between 18-24. Also, students of color can either be in their sophomore, junior or senior year and both females and males are welcome to participate in this study. Transfer students can also participate in this study as long as they have completed at least one year or two semesters of academic work. Students of color will be invited to participate in this study and they will be interviewed with a list of open-ended questions. The participants will be requested to provide detailed responses as their answers are an important aspect for this study. By using the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, the ultimate goal of this study is to learn from each participant’s social experience/interaction with white student affairs professionals in a PWI and to interpret his/her responses individually. This study is interested in discovering hidden
meanings when interacting and learning from the participants. When gathering data and learning about the results, an on how students of color feel about being a student and their interaction with white student affairs professionals in a PWI will be provided.

Along with using the qualitative research method, constructivism-interpretivism paradigm and interpretative phenomenological analysis for this study, purposeful homogenous sampling is the type of sampling procedure will be used to select a small group of individuals to participate in this study for examination and analysis (Qualitative Research Guidelines Project, n.d.). In addition, this sampling is also being used to comprehend and describe a particular group, in this case, students of color, in depth (Qualitative Research Guidelines Project, n.d.). For an interpretative phenomenological analysis, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest choosing 3 to 6 participants as a small sample for a student project. Overall, there is no right or wrong answer in terms of choosing a sample size (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It all depends on how much a researcher is committed to his/her study and how much time and effort the researcher is willing to put in when analyzing and reporting what he/she has learned from his/her study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is important to focus on the quality of the study and not the quantity. Usually, interpretative phenomenological analysis studies benefit from a concentrated focus on small sample sizes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Due to the researcher’s inexperience with conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis study, only a small number of participants will be chosen for this study. Therefore, the goal for this research is to interview at least 8-12 participants, which will be a small sample of students of color who are currently enrolled in a PWI. Data collection will consist of in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with the same 8-12 participants who have shared the same experience or situation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In addition, conducting an
observation is also included in the data collection. The researcher of this study will spend more
time in the field taking notes while observing her participants. Because the qualitative research
method will be used to collect and analyze data for this study, the participants will be asked
open-ended questions. Participants’ responses will then be recorded and transcribed.
Conducting an interview will allow the researcher of this study to fully grasp the participants’
responses about their experience to a phenomenon. However, the mechanics of conducting an
interview may have its own weaknesses such as dealing with unexpected participant behaviors
and emotions (Creswell, 2012). Also, an observation will allow the researcher to fully observe
what is happening in the field. However, like interviews, doing an observation has its own
weaknesses as well, such as a researcher may miss writing down some notes and record some
quotes inaccurately in her field notes (Creswell, 2012; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Procedures

In order to conduct this study such as collecting and interpreting data from the
participants who will be interviewed, an approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at
Northeastern University and the administrators from the university where students of color will
be recruited will be required before this study can proceed. Upon receiving approval from these
two parties, the participants for this study will be identified and recruited. A formal letter will be
sent out to the participants most likely by e-mail to explain details about the study such as the
purpose of this study. In addition, according to the guidelines established by the IRB, a letter
will also include their rights as a participant in the study such as how information gathered will
be used, where it will be used and why. After the participants read and sign and date the letter in
regards to this study, interviews will be scheduled through e-mail and the interview confirmation
will be sent out through e-mail as well. All interviews will be conducted individually, with in-
depth, semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. Between 9-11 interview questions are expected to be asked in order to gather data about the relationship between students of color with white student affairs professionals in a PWI. Each interview will last about 45-90 minutes and include written notes, observations, and recorded interviews. Google Word document will be used to keep track of the data collected from each of the participants in the study.

**Data Analysis**

After the completion of the data collection, the researcher of this study will need to perform data analysis in steps. **Step 1:** The researcher of this study will need to read and re-read the written data transcript (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In addition, if the written transcript is from an interview, it will be helpful to also listen to the audio-recording while reading the transcript. This will assist the researcher of this study with providing a more complete analysis of the data collected. **Step 2:** The researcher of this study will need to go through her data such as the interview transcriptions and highlight significant explanatory statements, or quotes that provide an understanding of how individuals who participated in the study have explained an issue. She will also need to take notes or make comments while reading the data such as the transcript. Some transcripts may be richer than others which will require more comments. It is important to provide comprehensive and detailed sets of notes and comments on the transcripts she is reading to explain why she thinks it is important. In addition, she will need to look for languages used by her participants, think about their context of their concerns, and identify more abstract concepts which will assist her in making sense of the patterns of meaning in her participants’ accounts. **Step 3:** After this procedure, she will need to look for the emergent themes from the exploratory comments they made when reading the transcript. She will also need to create a set of themes and order them chronologically. **Step 4:** The next step to this is
searching for patterns and connections across emergent themes which involve the development of either a charting or mapping of how she thinks the themes fit together. **Step 5:** The next step is to work on the next participant’s transcript and repeat the process from steps 1-4. **Step 6:** The last step is to look for patterns and connections across different cases. Sometimes, researchers in general will need to reconfigure and relabel themes. It is important to analyze the whole transcript and move into a deeper, more detailed level of when reading the transcript.

**IRB - Ethical Considerations**

This study has adapted the code of ethics from the *Code of Ethics of the American Educational Research Association (AERA)* by the AERA Council. Adapting the code of ethics for this study is extremely important because the researcher of this study would like to establish her own values that pertain both to her professional and academic worlds. The AERA Council (2011) stated:

> It has as its primary goal the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom education researchers work. It also serves to educate education researchers, their students, and others who would benefit from understanding the ethical principles and standards that guide education researchers in their professional work. It is the individual responsibility of each education researcher to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct in research, teaching, practice, and service (p. 146).

The researcher of this study will be responsible for adapting the code of ethics from the AERA Council and will be committed to producing a high quality of study by strictly following the ethical principles and standards (AERA Council, 2011).

**Trustworthiness**

This study will focus on understanding the lived experiences of students of color as they
relate to and interact with white student affairs professionals at a PWI. The focus of this study will not be biased and will be completely honest and also will represent the whole truth.

According to the AERA Council (2011), researchers in the field of education are honest with their research, teaching, practice, and service. In addition, researchers in the education field perform or conduct their professional activities in a way that is worthy of trust and confidence (AERA Council, 2011). It is vital for this research project to be conducted in a professional manner with a lot of trust involved. This study should be trusted because this research project will remain anonymous and the documents will remain in a secure place. By doing this, the researcher of this study will be responsible to not jeopardize the welfare of others.

**Credibility** - researchers will need to develop a level of confidence in the “truth” of their findings or study. The following seven different areas - prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking, are all different techniques for creating credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Prolonged Engagement** - a researcher spends a great amount of time in the field to learn about his/her study of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, spending sufficient time in the field is one way for researchers to build trust with their participants. Once the participants see a level of trust in them, they are more likely to have an open communication with the researchers. In addition, researchers who spend enough time observing different aspects of a setting, interviewing and engaging with the participants, and developing a relationship with the participants are building trust.

**Persistent Observation** - the purpose of persistent observation is to identify different characteristics and elements in a situation that are most pertinent to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in great detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, if a
researcher observes his/her study persistently then he/she is more likely to develop a better understanding about his/her study if he/she decides to focus on it in great detail.

**Triangulation** - multiple data sources are used in an investigation to produce a high level of understanding. For example, using multiple data sources can strengthen a researcher’s level of understanding when producing a high quality of study that is rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Peer debriefing** - it is a technique used by qualitative researchers to work with one or several researchers who ensure that the collection of data provides valid information when they provide impartial advice to the main researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, to ensure the validity of the data or research gathered for this study before it gets published, a peer reviewer will scrutinize the data when giving the researcher impartial advice about his/her research.

**Negative or Deviant Case Analysis** - if something does not support or appears to contradict patterns or explanations from the data analysis, then the analysis will need to be refined until it can be explained. For example, if a researcher notices there is something contradicting the patterns or explanations of his/her study, then he/she will need to investigate and refine his/her analysis.

**Referential Adequacy** - this process involves identifying but not analyzing a portion of data to be stored in an archive. With the remaining data, the researcher conducts the data analysis and also develops preliminary findings. After this procedure, the researcher returns to the archived data and then, he/she will analyze it in order to test the validity of their findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, this is a two-step process. A portion of the researcher’s data will be archived to be used later on. With the other portion of the data (or the remaining data), a researcher will conduct the data analysis and, also develop preliminary findings with the
remaining data. After this first step process is completed, the second process will be for the researcher to return to the archived data and then analyze it to test the validity of his/her findings.

**Member Checks** - this procedure involves members of a group to formally and informally test and scrutinize data. Member checking is a way for establishing validity of an account. For example, member checking can be done after the researcher’s collection of data and findings are completed. Members of the researcher’s own group can formally and informally test and scrutinize the findings to his/her study.

**Transferability** - data shows that the findings are relevant in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the techniques for establishing transferability in this study is thick description. The definition of “thick description” as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a way to attain a type of external validity. In sufficient details when describing a phenomenon, an individual can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions of the study are drawn, and are transferable such as other times, settings, situations, and people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Dependability** - data shows that the findings are consistent and could be performed again or repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the techniques for dependability is internal audit. Internal auditing is performed on an internal basis in which a group of researchers or team members provide a system of checks and balances for each other (Given, 2008). This type of process can be useful in providing consistency in the research process and can also decrease biases among researchers involved in the study (Given, 2008). For example, an audit trail can be used during the process of conducting an analysis in regards to this study. An audit trail records different procedures carried out during the analysis of a research project. The purpose of using an audit trail is for outsiders who were not involved in this study to look at this study and be able to see what was done in the investigation (Forrester, 2010).
Confirmability - researchers become neutral in terms of the findings of how their studies are shaped by the participants and not by their biases, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, peer scrutiny of a research project by colleagues, peers and educators should be welcomed because they can provide feedback about this study when doing an oral defense about this research project. This will allow the researcher of this study to take in new perspectives and address new challenges she could face by her peers (Shenton, 2004).

Potential Research Bias

“Bias is any trend or deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication which can cause false conclusions. Bias can occur either intentionally or unintentionally. Intention to introduce bias into someone’s research is “immoral” (Šimundić, 2013, p. 12). The definition of bias in research will assist the researcher of this study to comprehend how she can identify her biases prior to doing this study. The problem of practice is that students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in PWIs, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. With this problem of practice, I may be biased towards using my own potential ideas and opinions about this problem in my research due to my experience working in PWIs for three years. For example, “researchers have opinions about the problems in their field and often have preferred answers to which they are committed” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 36). I may have preferred answers as to why I think students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in PWIs, which leads to poor academic performance among them. However, I cannot let my experience alone to take control of my study. Instead, it is important to conduct an honest research by interviewing students of color to understand the lived experiences of them being a student in a PWI. In addition, I should welcome and accept any ideas to my research and
not just solely think about what I personally think is right or wrong.

It is not always about what I think is right or wrong nor is it not always about what I expect my research outcome to be. Interviewing students of color and learning about their experience with white student affairs professionals in PWIs will determine the outcome of my research. I think my duty as a scholar-practitioner is to include other researchers who have done a similar study and build from it. In addition, “studies that either omit outcomes entirely or do not fully report on important outcomes can lead to biased and incomplete inferences” (Pigott, Valentine, Polanin, Williams & Canada, 2013, p. 425). Therefore, it is important to provide a full report on the outcomes of the study because this is what makes it a good study to read. Also, I am interested to learn about the pros and cons from my interviewers (if there are any pros) and not just only focusing on the cons and ignoring the pros. I would like to report both pros and cons in my research because I want to fully report the outcomes of what I learned from both sides. Knowing both the pros and cons can help me to understand how to improve the student affairs profession after all.

To conclude, “who should research and represent the experiences of the other in scholarly discourse?” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 23). To answer this question, I think my background and experience in student affairs has allowed me to do a study on this topic. I think it is a privilege to be in the position to represent the experiences of students of color with white student affairs professionals in a PWI. I strongly think students of color will accept my input for voicing my concern regarding the problem of practice of this study due to my thorough background in student affairs. Understanding the definition of bias in research and identifying my biases will help me to control them. For example, “while bias and opinion can never be removed completely, they must be controlled” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 37). Therefore, my question
is, “how can I control them?” I found Machi & McEvoy’s (2012) answer to be extremely helpful and they stated:

First, careful introspection can bring these personal views forward, where they can be identified as what they are. By rationally identifying and confronting these views, the researcher can control personal bias and opinion, committing to being open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data (p. 37).

I have identified and confronted my biases earlier. I think it is important for me to limit or control my biases and not let them interfere with my research by not only thinking about my own personal interest of how I think the outcome of my research should be. For example, “researchers often have personal attachments to, and views about, their personal interests” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, I should always keep an open mind as a researcher and not be close-minded otherwise it could potentially hurt my research. If I do not control them, the quality of my research will suffer. My goal is to produce high-quality research work that will be honored by the educational community and this is something all researchers should be striving for.

**Limitations**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) approach for data analysis in interpretative phenomenological analysis helps provide a structured approach for beginners who are new to research. However, this type of approach may be too structured for some researchers. With that being said, as novice researchers become more experienced with using interpretative phenomenological analysis for their studies then they can choose to do a more unstructured approach when conducting unstructured interviews for their research project (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is important for researchers to have at least some understanding of the
philosophical assumptions being made about interpretative phenomenological analysis and identify them in their studies. In addition, the participants in the study need to be selected carefully because researchers who conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis study are looking to recruit participants who all experienced the phenomenon in question, in which the researcher can develop a common understanding among the participants (Creswell, 2012). It may be difficult to find and recruit participants who all experienced the phenomenon, in which this needs to be conducted due to the nature of this study (Creswell, 2012). Researchers will need to decide how and in what ways they could include their personal understanding into their studies. Including personal experiences may be challenging for any researchers to implement because interpretations of the data always include the assumptions that researchers bring to their topic (Van Manen, 1990).

Along with these challenges, a researcher may experience more limitations in terms of trying to go into the field. Gaining access to an organization and studying individuals from that organization may have its own challenges such as trying to convince individuals to participate in the study and building trust and credibility on the field site (Creswell, 2012). It is important to consider which field site seems to be more appropriate to conduct this research project because not all field sites are treated equally (Weis & Fine, 2000). Ethical issues may also be a challenge for researchers when they interview their participants. For example, if a researcher’s study is on a sensitive topic and he/she explains to their participants how they are protected in the study, it is possible participants may still decline to participate in their research project (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, all of these challenges/limitations may occur when trying to conduct this study.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of the study was to learn in-depth about students’ of color relationships with white student affairs professionals at a PWI. Three superordinate themes and six sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts. The three superordinate themes were: 1) making sense of different types of relationships, 2) making meaning of diversity and inclusion and 3) reflecting on cultural barriers. The six sub-themes were: 1) lack of connection with white student affairs professionals, 2) connecting with student affairs professional of color, 3) lack of diversity among student affairs professionals, 4) benefiting from on campus diversity, 5) facing challenges as a student of color at PWI and 6) identifying with others from shared experiences. The themes emerged from the majority of the interviews that were taken. The themes are listed by each participant in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Jen</th>
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Collectively, these themes address the ways in which students of color make sense of their lived experiences as they relate to and interact with white student affairs professionals at a PWI.

**Making Sense of Different Types of Relationships**

The first superordinate theme that emerged in this study was making sense of different types of relationships. The participants all spoke about the different types of relationships they had with student affairs professionals at PWI. They also shared what these types of relationships meant to them. For some relationships with student affairs professionals, the participants felt there was a sense of comfort and for other relationships, they felt uncomfortable. The participants also explained in great detail how their relationship with student affairs professionals was more welcoming than others or they felt there was no relationship at all with them. The
majority of the participants expressed how race played an important factor with the different types of relationships they had with student affairs professionals. Students also expressed how they noticed a tremendous difference with race and how it shaped their perception about student services staff. They felt as a student of color they could easily connect with professionals who were nonwhite compared to those who were not on a campus that was predominantly white. In the next two segments, two sub-themes will be discussed with supporting evidence from the interviews and there are: 1) lack of connect with white student affairs professionals and 2) connecting with student affairs professionals of color.

**Lack of connection with white student affairs professionals**

Most of the participants expressed how they sense a lack of connection when they tried to connect with white student affairs professionals on a predominantly white campus. There were a few participants who expressed no interest in having a relationship with them. In general, the lack of connection between the two parties became a problem especially for students of color. Often times, students found themselves connecting with someone who they shared a common ground such as nonwhite professionals. Most of the participants did not bother to put much effort in strengthening their relationship with white student affairs professionals. Instead they preferred to place themselves in a more welcoming place like the ethnic student center. For example, one of the participants named Alba strongly expressed why she preferred to go to the Latino Student Center (LSC) instead of anywhere on campus. She stated:

I have a more meaningful relationship with the women at the LSC (Latino Student Center) because we connect through our shared race. We can talk about culture and our families and really know what we are talking about. There is a nice feeling of shared experience. I’ve never tried to connect with white staff or talked to them about my race.
Alba expressed the type of relationship she had with nonwhite staff at the LSC when she stated the relationship was “more meaningful” because she felt more connected to the nonwhite staff. She used the term “shared race” due to their sharing a common ground. In addition, Alba used the term “nice feeling” when her body language expressed a sign of relief and comfort. She felt comfortable to connect with individuals who shared the same experience such as nonwhite staff at the LSC. Alba felt she was able to communicate and have a much better relationship with nonwhite staff whenever she needed the support to get through college. Interestingly, Alba also expressed how she never tried to connect with white student affairs professionals. This exemplifies a lack of interest on her part to connect with them. Like Alba, another student named Jen also shared a similar statement and she stated:

Generally speaking, I feel more comfortable and more welcome to minority people. Generally speaking, I do feel like they would go more out of their way. Like... I’m not sure, let me get back to you and make me feel like I’m important as a person versus a white staff, I feel like… I’ll get back to you, but I don’t really care. I will just get back to you because it is my job.

Here, Jen expressed the type of relationship she had with white and nonwhite staff. Jen used the term “more comfortable” and “more welcome” to describe the type of relationship she felt she was getting from the nonwhite staff. On the other hand, Jen used the term like “I don’t really care” and “because it is my job” to describe the type of attitude or observation she felt that was coming at her from white staff on campus. Jen gave her reasons why she felt that way. She explained how nonwhite staff put more effort on helping her on whatever needed to be done versus white staff who put less effort on helping her which made her felt less important. Like Alba and Jen, another student named Teri expressed the type of relationship she had with white
and nonwhite staff on campus. She stated:

I just feel like the staff of color are more effective in being resources for students of color. Also the women at the center, speak Spanish and I speak Spanish. That's also another big thing. I have a rocky relationship with my academic (white staff) and co-op advisor (white staff). So, it was really frustrating for me that she couldn’t like. One: she didn't know what it was. And Two: she didn't seem to care that much.

Again, here like Alba and Jen, Teri expressed how she had a better relationship with nonwhite staff compared to white staff on campus. Teri felt the relationship with nonwhite staff was better because she used the term “effective” to describe the experience she had with them. She also expressed how she felt comfortable to be able to identify someone who spoke Spanish because she wanted to be able to speak the language as well. She stated “that’s also another big thing” which also means this is a plus for her to be able to connect with someone who speaks the same language she does.

The type of relationship Teri described with white staff was “rocky.” She expressed deeply how much she had a rocky relationship with them and simultaneously, she was very frustrated with the experience she had with them. Like the student Jen, Teri felt they were not putting much effort on helping her situation. She also felt they did not seem to care much about her situation when she shared her issues with them. Teri further explained she went to the LSC instead because she had a feeling they would be able to handle her situation and they were able to do so.

Unlike the other students who had a negative experience with white student affairs professionals on a predominantly white campus, another student named Steph had a mixed reaction about her experience with white staff. She stated:
Granted, there are certain people that I’m partial to just because they are minorities, so they know a bit better what we are going through and how to relate. But there isn’t like a reason why I wouldn’t go to someone because my academic advisor is white and I feel very comfortable talking to her about any issues that I have with classes.

According to Steph’s comment above, she expressed how staff of color are more relatable to her because she felt they are more knowledgeable about the social issues pertaining to minorities today. Even though this may be true for her, she also said she does not have a problem interacting with white student affairs professionals. She stated that her current academic advisor is white and she felt very comfortable when she spoke to her about any issues she had. This exemplifies how Steph did not experience a lack of connection with her academic advisor unlike the other students who stated they did experience a lack of connection with white student affairs professionals on a predominantly white campus.

Connecting with student affairs professionals of color

Unlike the previous section which explains the lack of connection between students of color and white student affairs professionals, most of the participants expressed how they felt connected with student affairs professionals of color on a predominantly white campus. The majority of the participants found themselves going to the LSC or any other student cultural center such as the African American Center and Asian American Center on a regular basis. The students go to these centers either to interact with staff of color, do their homework or interact with other students there. Often times as a researcher, the same students who were part of this study were also going to the student cultural center regularly. The majority of the students described these student cultural centers as “home” due to their having a much deeper relationship with the staff of color there. For example, one of the participants named Maria stated:
I guess, my major advisor, is the one that I have talked to the most, but I’m not close really with any of them. Except, [Valeria], who does [the] front desk. I’m close to her. It is a little more personal being able to speak Spanish, for sure, which is my other language.

Like the student Teri in the previous segment, Maria felt it was important for her to be able to connect with someone on a personal level who could speak her language because she described it as being more “personal” to her. On a more personal level, Maria was able to establish a much deeper relationship with one particular staff named Valeria at the LSC. Like Maria, another student named Sky also found herself going to the LSC on a regular basis. She stated “I don’t really have that much interaction with the staff here at all. Just basically [the] LSC (Latino Student Center) -- You know, Latino and it is like multiracial here.” Outside of the LSC, the interaction between Sky and the white staff is very limited as Sky described not having much interaction with the staff on a predominantly white campus. Instead, Sky preferred to go to the LSC because she described it as being “Latino” which also explains her identity. There, at the LSC, Sky could identify other individuals who shared the same identity as a person of color. She also explained the LSC as “multiracial” which explains how the LSC is a place for diversity on a campus that is predominantly white.

In the previous segment which discusses the lack of connection with white student affairs professionals, Jen expressed how she is not interested in relationships with white student affairs professionals. On the other hand, she expressed how much she deeply preferred to only have a relationship with student affairs professionals of color. She stated “and the only people who are minorities or not white at [Seagrass University], are at the Latino Center where I do have a relationship with them.” Beside the LSC, Jen also has established relationships with student
affairs professionals of color from the other student cultural centers on campus. For example, she stated:

I spend a lot of time at the Latino Center and do activities with Latino Center that are also tied to the Asian American Center and the African American Center where I just talk to the people and are with them.

Jen made a very firm statement when she used the term “only” - the only relationship Jen felt she had was with nonwhite staff. Jen was very unhappy with the way the administration and the whole campus community of Seagrass University was treating minority students in particular. This explains why she made an extreme statement when she said she “only” has a relationship with student affairs professionals of color at the LSC. To further explain Jen’s frustration about the administration and the campus community of Seagrass she stated:

But they are directly talking to students and directly interested in students’ lives whereas all the other white professionals at [Seagrass] are from offices and do administrative tasks. Their job is not to establish face-to-face relationships with students. Their job is to do their best for students, but not necessarily as individuals. Just like what is generally good for people and them move them in and out of the office so the school operates well.

Here, Jen furthered explained her experience about the campus community as a whole. She explained the operation of the campus community and what it meant to her as a student of color. She compared white and nonwhite professionals at a predominantly white institution. She stated how student affairs professionals of color are more interested in engaging with the students whereas white student affairs professionals are not. Unlike student affairs professionals of color, Jen felt white student affairs professionals’ roles do not include establishing face-to-face relationship with students. She felt their job is more about making policies and decisions for the
students but not to face them directly.

There is a reason why this claim has been made. Seagrass University is a type of institution that is known to encourage their students to do things electronically. The majority of the participants in this study including Jen expressed how often they needed to send out an e-mail or perform different tasks themselves online if they wanted something done like getting a paperwork processed. This explains why the majority of the participants of this study preferred to go to the student cultural center because they felt they are more supported as a student of color there versus the campus community as a whole. To give you an example, Jen stated:

Usually it is over e-mail. When I want to study abroad, it was like… which document do I need to fill out to go or can I go, how is it funded, when is the meeting, find out more information. It is just always -- they give you what you need to know and that’s it.

Those are the quick exchanges.

Jen expressed how those quick exchanges were not relationships like she was able to develop with nonwhite staff at the LSC.

Unlike Jen, Maria and Sky’s positive relationships with student affairs professionals of color on campus, another student named Liz expressed how her current advisor who is a person of color did not seem to care about her situation. Liz stated:

Each encounter was pretty brief. So, I can't really say I have established a relationship with any of them because they keep changing. Sometimes when I feel like I’m speaking to my academic advisor, I do have a little feeling like she doesn’t listen clearly to what I say.

Here, Liz expressed how her academic advisor did not listen clearly to what she had said. As a researcher, when questioning the student why, the student stated she was not sure why that had
occurred. Liz knew the academic advisor was not listening clearly to her situation. She explained how the advisor was not giving her more detailed information she needed at the time. As a researcher, when hearing this, it was unclear why this was an issue she was facing with her advisor. This type of situation between the student and the staff says a lot about their relationship. In addition, Liz also expressed her frustration with the ongoing staff changes on campus. For Liz, it was extremely difficult to establish a more long term relationship with any student affairs professionals because she described the experience as a “brief” relationship. Therefore it was not possible for her to fully explain her relationship with white student affairs professionals due to the ongoing staff changes and seeing different faces and names every time she needed to meet with them. The only incident Liz was able to explain fully was with her academic advisor which was not a pleasant experience. Notwithstanding, Liz did say, overall her relationship with any student affairs professionals regardless of race was generally “pretty good.”

As a researcher, it is important to discuss the issue of the ongoing staff changes that was addressed by the student Liz. In general, it can be extremely difficult for any students including Liz to establish a long term relationship with a student affairs professional especially their academic advisors if the ongoing staff changes becomes very common at the college or university. Academic advisors are known to serve an important role in students’ academic years in college or university. Therefore, it is essential for students to see familiar faces and names throughout their college years. Students especially students of color are generally more comfortable seeing familiar faces and names when they are seeking support on a college campus.

**Making Meaning of Diversity and Inclusion**

The second superordinate theme that emerged in this study was making meaning of diversity and inclusion. The participants all spoke about what it meant for them to be able to see
a diverse college campus at Seagrass. In addition, they criticized the student affairs profession such as noticing the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals at Seagrass University, which historically has been a predominantly white institution. The reason for the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals at Seagrass is not clear. However, in general, students expressed how they would like to see more student affairs professionals of color across campus at Seagrass and not only at the student cultural centers. Students of color want to see the inclusion of student affairs professionals of color working at different student services offices on campus. Students do not want to see the student cultural centers being exclusive to nonwhite staff working there only. The students also expressed how it is understandable for them to see a majority of student affairs professionals of color employed at the student cultural centers. According to the participants, they noticed how there is only a very small number of student affairs professionals of color employed at Seagrass across campus such as in the financial aid and advisement offices. The participants of this study felt this was not enough and more work is needed to place more nonwhite staff across a predominantly white campus. In the next two segments, two sub-themes will be discussed with the supporting evidence from the interviews and there are: 1) lack of diversity among student affairs professionals and 2) benefiting from on campus diversity.

Lack of diversity among student affairs professionals

Most of the participants expressed how they experience and sense that there is a lack of diversity among student affairs professionals especially towards nonwhite staff at Seagrass University. The majority of the participants expressed their frustration on this issue. They explained how the majority of Seagrass’ student affairs professionals including professors are white. The participants explained how they noticed that there is certainly a lack of diversity
among student affairs professionals including professors when they were either in their classes or in student service offices. Some of the participants even claimed that they never had the chance to see any nonwhite staff in any other student services offices such as the offices of financial aid and advisement beside the student cultural centers. There was one particular participant who mainly blamed the administration of Seagrass for this ongoing problem. Most students understood that the college they are enrolled in is a predominantly white institution. However, most students expressed their confusion with not understanding why this particular situation is still an issue today. For example, Alba expressed her confusion in regards to not understanding why her financial aid advisor was not Hispanic if this person was in charge of handling all the scholarships for Hispanic students. She stated:

And then my financial aid advisor, he is supposed to be in charge of all the hispanic students and their scholarships and what I didn’t understand was that he wasn’t hispanic at all or didn’t have any connection to that. I felt like if a person were to be in charge of all the hispanic scholarships, that maybe he should be Hispanic as well. Parents always have questions and when you’re dealing with Hispanic students their parents are going to be Hispanic and from personal experience, my parents are always more at ease when they speak to other Hispanic people. There is a reason why we got these scholarships. It was based on our ethnicity and everything. I don’t know, that confused me.

During the interview, Alba expressed her frustration with how the financial aid department of Seagrass lacked a great number of nonwhite staff employed at their department. She did not like the concept of her financial aid advisor not being a Hispanic person and/or he did not have any connection to the Hispanic culture. In addition, Alba also expressed how her parents always had questions about her scholarship and her financial aid package. This was another barrier for them
if they could not communicate with a financial aid advisor who did not know the Spanish language since Alba’s parents were unable to speak the English language very well. To Alba, this became a problem for her and her parents as they were feeling very uneasy with the situation they were facing. Alba knew the scholarship she was getting was based on her ethnicity as a Hispanic student. She understood it was her privilege. However, she was confused with why a nonwhite staff like a Hispanic person was not given the opportunity to take charge of the Hispanic scholarships for Hispanic students. This was what she emphasized during the interview because she stated “there is a reason why we got these scholarships. It was based on our ethnicity and everything. I don’t know, that confused me.”

Alba was not the only student who voiced her concern with the lack of diversity among student affairs professional at Seagrass. Another student Liz had strongly expressed her concern about this issue and she stated:

I feel like -- I feel like every time I walk into a classroom or an office, everybody I see is white. Every advisor I meet with is white. So, it is not surprising to see a white advisor, but it would be nice to see a little more diversity in advisors and other staff.

As a researcher during the interview, the tone of Liz’s voice showed a sign of frustration. She boldly expressed her frustration with the lack of diversity among staff at Seagrass. In the context above, she mentioned the term “classroom or an office” which she pointed out not only there was a lack of diversity among student affairs professionals but also professors as well. Further along, she expressed how she would be more appreciative if more nonwhite staff were visible across campus.

Liz was not the only student who preferred more nonwhite staff including professors working at Seagrass. Another student Steph stated:
But, yes, of course, I would prefer if there were more people of color on staff.

Professors. For certain classes, professor (inaudible name) she is a black engineer, I’m partial towards taking her class because she is a person of color.

Here, Steph shared her preference in regards to seeing a more diverse campus such as seeing more student affairs professionals of color and person of color teaching at Seagrass. Interestingly, Steph pointed out for some of her classes, she would rather have a person of color in this case a black instructor teaching her class.

Like the student Liz who expressed her experience of not seeing any nonwhite staff on campus, Maria had the same experience. She stated “none of my staff members have been of color.” Throughout Maria’s college experience at Seagrass, she has not yet had the opportunity to meet any of the student affairs professional of color except at the LSC. More students shared the same experience like Liz and Maria such as Jen and Teri. For example, Jen stated: “I don’t think I have met anyone that is black at Seagrass. The only advisors I have ever had are white. And when I walk up to the office, I don’t remember seeing anyone else.”

Again, like Liz and Maria, Jen witnessed a lack of diversity across Seagrass campus. Beside the African American Center, Jen expressed how she did not see any black student affairs professionals in other places like in other departments at Seagrass. In terms of the advisement office at Seagrass, Jen mentioned she only saw white advisors and that was it. No other nonwhite staff were employed at that department.

Like the rest of the students who expressed their concern about the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals at Seagrass above, Teri’s concern and frustration was no different. Based on the observation that was witnessed by the researcher of this study, Teri constantly complained about the administration of the college and she also shared her negative
perspective about the university. She stated: “everyone is white. And there need for more administration of color outreach. All administration is white. And that's their problem. That’s something they need to work on.” As you read Teri’s statement, you could tell her frustration and attitude in her tone. Teri claimed she only saw white student affairs professionals across campus and no other nonwhite staff except for the student cultural centers. Teri mainly blamed the current administration of Seagrass for this ongoing problem. She also felt the current administration is biased such as being inclusive to their own people because she mentioned “all administration is white” and she strongly suggested more individuals of color are needed at the current administration at Seagrass. According to Teri, this ongoing problem needs to be addressed to include all types of races employed as staff member at Seagrass University and not just inclusive to white individuals solely. The majority of the participants in this study would have agreed with Teri.

**Benefiting from on campus diversity**

Most of the participants expressed what it would mean to them to experience a campus environment that values diversity. They explained in great details of how they and other students of color on campus would benefit from an on campus diversity at Seagrass. The participants expressed how students of color would feel more supported on campus if they saw more individuals (in terms of race and identity) who look like them. The more students especially students of color feel supported on campus, it is more likely they will go to other student services offices and not just only go to the student cultural centers on a regular basis. If students of color feel more supported from the campus community as a whole at Seagrass, they are more likely to build self-confidence in themselves. They would also feel more comfortable to ask any staff for help and not just only ask for help from individuals who are a non-white staff on campus. In
addition, they would feel more comfortable to do their homework, socialize with friends or even staff anywhere on campus and not just only go to the student cultural centers to do these things. With that being said, the majority of students who participated in this study did not feel comfortable to go anywhere on campus but the student cultural centers. One student Sky expressed why it is important for her and other students of color to experience a diverse campus at Seagrass. She stated:

When it comes to other parts of the school, I can say they are more white. And I think my perspective about it, the more interracial it is, the better. You can target more students or students can feel more supported.

Here, when Sky said “other parts of the school,” she meant the majority of the staff in general are white except for the student cultural centers. Sky was suggesting it would be beneficial to have a more diverse campus because she stated “the more interracial it is, the better.” She also suggested for Seagrass to work on targeting more students of color by helping them to feel more supported from any of the staff members on campus. If Seagrass decides to do this, students of color are more likely to spread across campus to either again, do their homework, socialize with friends including staff and etc. Sky went on to discuss more about this issue and she stated:

I guess more opportunity for different people (individuals of color) and so they get treated a certain way because maybe there are more opportunities. I mean, I guess I would love to have see more equal treatment of everybody at the university. Like I said, I feel like when -- if you have more interracial, you can also have those feelings to connect. Feel more engaged. Maybe they don’t feel that comfortable going to a white -- it really depends. I come here (LSC) maybe for a reason. I feel comfortable. And if it wasn't for this --.
Sky discussed how individuals of color could experience more equal opportunities at Seagrass only if they are willing to be open minded and welcome more minorities. Sky expressed deeply how she “would love to see more equal treatment of everybody” at Seagrass. Right now, to Sky, not everyone is treated equally at Seagrass. Students of color are not getting their fair share like their peers - white students. Benefiting from on campus diversity means seeing more interracial individuals on campus because students of color are more likely to connect with someone with a similar background and/or ethnicity.

Sky brought out an interesting point when she said “feel more engaged.” To Sky, students of color including herself would feel more engaged to be part of the campus community more at Seagrass and not just the student cultural centers. One of the participants like Sky herself expressed how much they do not want to be engaged with the campus community of Seagrass beside the student cultural centers. For example, Jen expressed how much she is involved with the Latino Center and other student cultural centers on campus only. She stated:

I spend a lot of time at the Latino Center and do activities with [the] Latino Center that are also tied to the Asian American Center and the African American Center where I just talk to the people and are with them. I kind of formed this idea of one treats me better than the other.

Like Sky, Jen was more engaged in doing different activities as she spent most of her time at the Latino Center and other student cultural centers. Jen expressed how the student cultural centers treat her better than other student services offices at Seagrass. Like Sky and Jen, Maria stated:

Well, I was first in LASO [Latin-American Student Organization]. And so I would come in and out. And then, once I had work study, I was like… maybe the LSC has
work studies because I asked a previous work study from here and they were like...yes, the work study here is cool. And that’s why I started work studying. I was here more often. It is open. It is accessible.

Maria was engaged in the Latin-American Student Organization (LASO). The majority of the students who were part of this group were minorities. In addition, they also had connection with the LSC because the LSC is in charge of the LASO. The LASO tend to have their weekly meetings at the LSC. Due to the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals, professors and students at Seagrass in general, Maria felt she could benefit more from the LSC compared to anywhere else on campus. Maria expressed how the LSC is more “open” and more “accessible” for her. The LSC provided more opportunities for her to engage with individuals who are like her as a student of color. Although Maria benefits from the LSC for being there at Seagrass, it would be more helpful and beneficial for students of color to feel more engaged in the campus community as a whole if only Seagrass decided to develop initiatives on diversity and inclusion.

Like Maria, Sky did not see how the campus community of Seagrass benefitted her beside the student cultural center. Therefore, she explained how she regularly went to the LSC because she was more comfortable there. In addition, she also said “if it wasn't for this - meaning the LSC, then she would not know what she would have done instead.

Along with Sky, Teri also shared her thoughts on why on campus diversity is needed at Seagrass. She stated: “it is beneficial for everybody, honestly. Having more diversity is beneficial for everybody. Not even just students of color, but the faculty, the staff, the students. Everyone.” Here, Teri thinks campus diversity will benefit everyone and not just students of color.

Teri also thought if all faculty and staff at Seagrass were told to take a cultural competency
training course then students of color would benefit from them taking that course. For example, Teri stated:

And I think that all faculty and staff should go through cultural competency training. How to work with students of color, regardless of whether you have them or you don’t. And I think if they had training in actually how to work with students of color, then there would be less problems. The reasons the centers are here is because students feel like they aren’t heard in other places. And as much as it is amazing to have these centers where people feel comfortable, it shows a problem in a way.

Here, Teri made her argument on why she thought all faculty and student affairs professionals should take a cultural competency training course. Teri expressed how faculty and student affairs professionals do not know how to work or interact with students of color, which to Teri, was problematic. She believed there would be less problems between the white staff including professors with students of color if those employees at Seagrass were told to take a cultural competency training course. Again, students of color would benefit from them becoming more aware with how they should work or interact with a diverse group of students of color on campus which includes: Latino/a Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and so forth.

Teri made a suggestion on how Seagrass could benefit from on campus diversity. She mentioned: “everyone is missing out if there is not diversity at universities. It is like a lose-lose, in my opinion. I think that schools should make more of an effort to enhance minority outreach.” According to Teri, she thought if there were no on campus diversity then the campus community would suffer especially students of color. Thus, like Teri mentioned, if Seagrass decided to “make more of an effort to enhance minority outreach” then everyone would benefit from a campus that was diverse. The reason for this is because it important for students of color
to see more role models who are like them employed at Seagrass. Like Teri, Steph made a similar argument and she stated:

I think just that those who are people of color, they reach out more because they don’t want you to end up like a statistic or just not prevailing through -- they just want to see you through your education. I feel like they put out more of a helping hand opposed to other people.

Steph expressed how student affairs professionals of color tend to reach out more to students of color compared to white student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals of color reached out more because according to Steph, they were more aware with the retention rates pertaining to students of color. On the other hand, white student affairs professionals may be aware with the retention rates pertaining to students of color but they tend to reach out much less. Therefore, it is beneficial for students of color to see more faces like them on campus who will help push them through college.

Reflecting on Cultural Barriers

The third superordinate theme that emerged in this study was reflecting on cultural barriers. Most of the participants shared how they needed to overcome cultural barriers at Seagrass due to them not sharing the same type of culture with white individuals. Many of the students in this study discussed intensively about how they valued their own culture. They also discussed intensively on why it was important for them to meet individuals who understood their culture. They felt if a person understood their culture then it was a lot easier for them to get the support they need in order for them to succeed in college. In general, students of color are known to bring their culture to predominantly white institutions. In this case, their culture is different from the white culture that has been instilled in these institutions. Therefore, many
students in this study discussed how they were bringing their culture to Seagrass and how they needed to overcome cultural barriers.

**Facing challenges as a student of color at PWI**

Most of the students expressed the challenges they faced as a student of color at Seagrass, which is a predominantly white institution. Most of them also discussed how they needed to face cultural barriers and how they were able to handle their situation. Therefore, one of the most common behaviors students in this study did was interact with individuals who knew about their culture. They wanted individuals such as student affairs professionals to share the same values as them in regards to important issues they cared about. For example, one of the participants Teri expressed deeply about how she experienced cultural barrier with her advisor. She also expressed how much she was very frustrated with that experience. She felt very helpless due to the seriousness of her situation. She explained how her advisor did not care about the issue that matters to her the most. For example, Teri stated:

> I would say the biggest difference is almost like a culture barrier. So, things that are really important to me that are not important to them, if that makes sense. I would say that there is definitely a culture barrier in that both of us have different mentalities in the things we care about the most.

Here, Teri used the term “biggest difference” to explain how she and her advisor were two different individuals with two different cultures. Teri -who felt like an outsider felt her culture did not align with her advisor’ culture including the institutional culture of Seagrass in which the advisor was part of. Teri felt the combination of these cultures collided and that was when she knew she needed to seek support from individuals who could understand her situation better and know where she was coming from. Teri expressed how much she explained her situation to her
advisor in regards to her family needing to get legal documents to come to the United States to make it on time for her graduation. However, according to Teri, she felt her advisor was not very helpful in helping her to solve this problem. Due to this incident, Teri decided to go to the LSC to feel heard and be supported. Throughout the interview, Teri repeatedly said the people at Seagrass such as white individuals did not care about the things she cared about or were important to her. She also said she did not care about the things they cared about or were important to them as well. Therefore, Teri expressed how she went to the LSC on a regular basis to prevent the number of cultural barriers she faced on campus.

Along with Teri, Jen explained how often times she dealt with cultural barriers at Seagrass and why that occurred. She stated: “I just assume that a white person’s socioeconomic background would not match my own or their culture or background wouldn’t match my own. They wouldn't know about my Hispanic culture, my traditions, my language.” Here, Jen explained why she dealt with cultural barriers at Seagrass. Jen felt due to the cultural differences between her and white individuals at Seagrass, they would not understand how to develop a better relationship with her. Like Teri, Jen felt her culture along with the institutional culture of Seagrass did not align or they both were not relatable. Again, like Teri, often times, Jen found herself going to the LSC on a regular basis for support due to them sharing the same culture with her. Teri felt the people at the LSC were able to assist her better and they were able to know how to work with her.

Like Teri and Jen, Maria shared why she preferred to identify with a student affairs professional who shared her culture. She stated: “I guess because I identify more -- a little more with her culture. She is more in an informal setting. Whereas, with my honors advisors, I always go for specific things. So, I feel more relatable to [Rita].” Here, Maria expressed how
she was more comfortable to be in an informal setting with a student affairs professional named Rita who was employed at the LSC. The reason why Maria felt more comfortable being at the LSC more often was simple - she shared the same culture with Rita or any other student affairs professionals employed at the LSC. Maria also discussed the differences she had with white student affairs professionals at different student services offices and non-white student affairs professionals at the LSC. Maria explained how she interacted with white student affairs professionals only when she needed to do certain things such as processing paperwork because they were the ones who could process certain type of paperwork depending on what it was. On the other hand, Maria interacted with non-white student affairs professionals at the LSC more frequently because she felt more comfortable sharing things more deeply with them such as discussing about her family and her health. Maria described this as her being “in an informal setting” at the LSC compared to other student services offices on campus.

Along with the other students, Sky shared why it was important for her to identify individuals who shared the same culture as her. She stated: “I mean, both my supervisors are from Puerto Rico and I’m from Puerto Rico. Yes, so we all have that connection. Everything is -- Everything happening on the island, we all understand, we are here for each other.” Here, as an international student and also a student employee at the LSC, Sky expressed how she felt connected with her supervisors due to them sharing the same culture or identity as her. When Sky mentioned “everything happening on the island,” she was discussing the devastation of the hurricane - Hurricane Maria that affected her and her family back home in Puerto Rico. She expressed how the only place she knew she could quickly reach out for support in terms of emotional support in regards to her home country was to go to the LSC unlike other student services offices at Seagrass. There, at the LSC, Sky found comfort in expressing her problems to
the staff at the LSC due to two of the staff members being Puerto Rican. Sky stated the staff at the LSC were able to release her distress about Hurricane Maria affected her home country - Puerto Rico. Sky expressed how she felt more at home and how she were able to quickly bond with the staff at the LSC compared to anywhere on campus. Sky went to the LSC on a regular basis throughout her time at Seagrass, although she did not discuss how she experienced cultural barriers with white student affairs professionals in other student services offices because of the short amount of time they had with each other. Sky expressed how she did not go to the other student services offices as often like she did with the LSC.

While other students expressed how it was important for them to identify someone who shared their culture, this particular student named Liz shared how the term “culture” did not really come into an existence in conversations or situations for her dealing with the issue of cultural barriers like the other students who did in this study. She stated:

I feel like culture never really comes up in the context of my advisor meetings. We never really talk about that. So, it is not like they do demonstrate or don't demonstrate it. It is just not a topic we talk about.

Unlike other students, Liz did not experience any cultural barriers at Seagrass because she never needed to face challenges that were affecting her as a student of color. Liz mentioned how she was able to get the support she needed from any student affairs professionals whether in the student cultural center such as the Asian American Center or any other student services offices.

In regards to cultural differences, during the interview, another student Bianca expressed how she wanted individuals to see her more as a person instead of seeing her as a Latina. For example, Bianca stated:

Um, yes and no. I mean, I think they should know it (Hispanic culture) as much as they
know Asian culture or Black culture. Know [it] in general. I guess it does help because then they understand you a little better, but I don’t think if they don’t know it [won’t] hurts me either.

Like Bianca, the majority of the students expressed the importance of their culture and what it meant to them. For Bianca, knowing the Hispanic culture did help individuals to “understand you a little better” like knowing who you were as a person. However, Bianca also expressed how it did not hurt her if individuals did not know anything about her culture. Unlike the majority of the students in this study, Bianca was more flexible in terms of who she was meeting with because culture did not come into play for her.

**Identifying with others from shared experiences**

Most of the students expressed how they usually liked to identify with others who could share the same experience as them such as putting themselves into their shoes and vice versa. It was the same idea of how white students were able to identify others to connect with such as white student affairs professionals who could also share the same experience as them. For white students, connecting with white student affairs professionals on campus was very accessible for them due to Seagrass being a predominantly white institution. Many white employees are employed at Seagrass campus which gives white students more options to interact and share experiences with many white individuals from many different student services offices. However, on the other hand, this is not the case for students of color. There is a limited number of role models who are student affairs professionals of color employed at Seagrass in other student services offices beside the student cultural centers. This is an issue in which the majority of the students in this study had repeatedly spoken about Seagrass. Students of color rely mostly on the student cultural centers such as the Hispanic Student Center, African American Center and the
Asian American Center to connect with non-white staff serving as their role model. In addition, many students felt their relationship could be more meaningful with individuals such as student affairs professionals of color through shared experiences at these centers and other student services offices if more non-white staff were employed in other offices beside the centers.

Students who participated in this study wanted to be able to relate to someone who had already gone through the experience they were currently experiencing as a student of color on a predominantly white campus. The majority of the students in this study discussed how they wanted to be able to relate to someone from similar background in terms of language, food, race and etc. Therefore, these students admired and looked up to role models who were individuals of color because they could impact them in every single way throughout their college years especially at a predominantly white institution. For example, Alba explained why it was important for her to reach out to individuals with shared experiences. She stated:

I don’t see a difference when it comes to the staffers at the LSC because they are all Hispanic too so they kind of get it. We have shared experiences and similar upbringings. We can speak Spanish to each other and know the same pop culture references. We’re also impacted similarly by current events.

Here, Alba expressed how she and the staffers at the LSC were at the same level compared to any other student affairs professionals on campus. Alba wanted individuals who could understand her as a Latina and help her to get through college and graduate from Seagrass. For Alba, it was not easy to get through college without the necessary support system to push her through college. The staff at the LSC are like her support system where Alba talked to them on a regular basis about all kinds of things. Often times, as Alba expressed, they were much more connected with her through “shared experiences and similar upbringings.” Alba and the staff at
Like Alba who liked to connect with individuals with shared experiences, Sky stated: “I mean there is always some common ground, I guess. I don’t know. I just found it - I don’t know, in some way, easier to connect here because through common language.” Again, like Alba, Sky wanted to be able to connect with individuals who could share the same or similar experiences like her. Sky, an international student, found herself going to the LSC due to the staff knowing her language because Sky mentioned it was easier for her to connect with these people through common language which is Spanish. Although Sky knew the English language, she felt more comfortable speaking the Spanish language because it is her native language. As an international student from Puerto Rico, Sky speaks Spanish on a regular basis with her family and friends so it makes sense for her to connect with staff who could speak her language to assist her through college life.

Like Alba and Sky who shared their thoughts on why they preferred to connect with individuals through shared experiences, Jen also expressed her thoughts on why she felt the same way and she stated:

It is an assumption that we came there a similar place. That you also -- your parents were immigrants or your parents were also lower-economic class. And assuming that we were raised similarly or faced the same issues. When you are a white person, I assume you went to a good school, surrounded by white people, and just come from this place of privilege that I didn't have. I can see myself in them [referring to the staff at the LSC], but I never see myself in white people.

Here, Jen stated her reasons on why she preferred to connect with individuals through shared
experiences. She expressed how she and the LSC staff came from a similar place such as they were able to share stories that were either similar or the same and sounded familiar to them. Jen wanted to be able to connect with individuals who were able to share stories that she could relate to due to their similar background, as she stated “raised similarly or faced the same issues.” In terms of similar background, Jen expressed how students of color and non-white staff background were often times similar such as they experienced similar stories of having parents who were either immigrants or came from a lower-economic class. For example, she stated “your parents were immigrants or your parents were also from a lower-economic class.” Lastly, Jen also mentioned, unlike individuals of color, she could never put herself in white people’s shoes because she was not able to share similar types of experiences with them. Jen argued how white individuals enjoyed being part of the “white privilege,” which to Jen, meant white individuals went to a better school and interacted with other individuals who were like them. Jen also argued when she was growing up, she was not part of the “white privilege” because of her skin color which her identity was not the same as white individuals. Therefore, Jen would appreciate more role models serving in higher education for students of color to look up to.

In speaking of role models in higher education, another student Teri expressed her frustration with her academic advisor and how she was able to reach out for assistance at the LSC instead to deal with her issues she had with her advisor. She stated:

I said I have family coming in from Ecuador and I need to figure out the [visa process]. I was like…well, can you help me figure it out. And she (white academic advisor) directed me to two other places that I could call. And then I came here (LSC), I asked, and immediately someone helped me [with the] visas.

Here, Teri expressed her experiences interacting with two different individuals from two
different places on campus. Teri expressed how her advisor was not able to assist her with understanding the visa process and how to get it for her family who lives in another country. Teri wanted more hands-on assistance and more interaction from her advisor instead of the advisor giving her phone numbers to make phone calls. Teri felt this was not enough and she was frustrated with this experience. Teri thought the LSC could provide a much better assistance by making her understand the visa process. Teri explained how the staff at the LSC were able to assist her right away and she was very delighted with the results. This explains how Teri were able to get assistance from the LSC staff who had gone through this experience before. This is another example of how two parties are sharing similar experiences to assist one another with the process of getting it done. Therefore, in Teri’s case, it is easier for one party to assist the other party only if they had been through it before.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research question guiding this study is as follows: how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals? By looking at the first superordinate theme: 1) making sense of different types of relationships, all of the participants expressed the different types of relationships they had with student affairs professionals regardless of race. The majority of the participants expressed how they were able to develop a better connection with student affairs professionals of color compared to white staff. In regards to having a relationship with white student affairs professionals, some of the participants described their relationship with them as a “business transaction” or a “quick exchange” or not having a relationship with them at all. On the other hand, most participants described their relationship with student affairs professionals of color as more meaningful.

By looking at the second superordinate theme: 2) making meaning of diversity and
inclusion, most of the participants expressed their frustration with lack of diversity among student affairs professionals of color at Seagrass. Most of the participants wanted to see more role models such as student affairs professionals of color employed in many different student services offices and not just the student cultural centers. This is a change most participants were longing to see happening at Seagrass. Lastly, by looking at the final superordinate theme: 3) reflecting on cultural barriers, most of the participants in this study shared their experience on how they overcame cultural barriers at Seagrass. Most of them said it was easier for them to connect with individuals who shared similar background and upbringings like them. This was because student affairs professionals could assist them better with the type of support they needed to get through college.

Overall, these findings are valid and trustworthy due to the interpretations of individuals’ quotes and categorizing them with similar quotes. In the next chapter, both discussion and implications for practice will be discussed based on the analysis that was made in this chapter.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The research question guiding this study is as follows: “how do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?” Each student in this study shared about their experience in regards to what it was like for them to be a student of color at a predominantly white college. During each interview that took place including conducting the analysis of each transcript, the researcher of this study learned about the three superordinate themes that were revealed from the study and there are: 1) making sense of different types of relationships, 2) making meaning of diversity and inclusion, and 3) reflecting on cultural barriers. This chapter will discuss specifically about each of the superordinate theme and how they are embodied within the current literature. The researcher of this study will also discuss the implications of these findings for each audience of stakeholders for current practice in student affairs. The researcher will then discuss the implications for herself as a scholar practitioner who is currently working in student affairs and what her practice might look like after this work. Lastly, the researcher will provide suggestions on future research that will further the conversation on how to improve the relationship between students of color and white student affairs professionals at a predominantly white institution.

Making Sense of Different Types of Relationships

The researcher of this study learned how the majority of the students had negative experience with white student affairs professionals at their college. Throughout each interview that was conducted, many students expressed the different types of relationships they had with student affairs professionals based on race. In general, students of color felt more connected with student affairs professionals of color compared to those who were white. The reason for
this varied. Students of color felt more connected with student affairs professionals of color because they felt they were able to connect with them more on a personal level. Students of color did not feel the same way with white student affairs professionals. Instead, the majority of them felt there was a disconnection between them with white student affairs professionals. Students mentioned they felt they were not cared for or not supported enough in college. One student Jen even described her relationship with white student affairs professionals as a “business transaction.” Jen elaborated on why she felt her relationship with white student affairs professionals was solely a business transaction. She described her relationship with them as if she was in a fast food restaurant or in a grocery store. She saw herself more like a customer to them and not a student. Jen also described her relationship with white student affairs professionals as a “fast exchange.” Unlike student affairs professionals of color, she felt her relationship with white student affairs professionals was never on a personal level and she never had a relationship with them where she felt comfortable.

Like Jen in this study, there were also a few students who were not interesting in having a relationship with them. As a researcher for this study, their comments in regards to not wanting to develop a relationship with them seemed to be extreme. However, the researcher of this study also learned why they would feel this way. They were tired and frustrated with the type of environment they were in. They wanted to be in a better environment where they feel more supported and could be heard. There were also students who felt white student affairs professionals were either not friendly or they did not feel welcome into their space such as their personal office in an advisement office. The students repeatedly expressed how much they preferred to go to the student cultural center such as the Latino Student Center instead of going anywhere else on campus. To the students, the student cultural center was more like their
“home” or where they would find a place that was more comfortable for them to study, relax and interact with others. Students of color were more at ease when going to the student cultural center such as the Latino Student Center and the African American Center because they mentioned they felt more supported in these places. They felt their voices could be heard more at these centers in order for them to get through college life.

**Making Meaning of Diversity and Inclusion**

The researcher of this study learned how the majority of the students expressed the importance of diversity and inclusion at Seagrass. Many students wanted to see the administration of Seagrass to take initiatives on diversifying and including more individuals of color to be employed at their institution. The majority of the students in this study complained about the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals. Many students mentioned they either did not see or they rarely saw student affairs professionals of color working in other student services offices such as the advisement and financial aid office beside the student cultural center. Students of color wanted to see more student affairs professionals of color working in different offices/departments at Seagrass and not only working at the student cultural centers.

To further expand the perception of what students felt about being in a predominantly white institution, a student named Teri used terms like “scary” and “terrifying” to describe her perception about her college being predominantly white. White student affairs professionals greatly outnumbered student affairs professionals of color in terms of being employed at Seagrass. Including more student affairs professionals of color at Seagrass could make a big difference for students of color due to a number of reasons. Increasing the number of role models is one of the main reasons why a campus should be diverse. Students of color would be able to see more faces like them and more role models in different places on campus and not
only the ones who are currently working at the student cultural centers. In addition, if Seagrass University decides to diversify its staff then it is most likely that students of color would feel more comfortable with the type of environment they are in. Unfortunately, in this particular study, it was reported among students that they were not comfortable with the type of environment they were in at Seagrass due to the campus not being diverse. A predominantly white campus at Seagrass is the type of environment the majority of the students in this study would like to see changed. They wanted to change a predominantly white campus to a more diverse campus that includes all races and ethnicities. A diverse campus would make students of color feel more comfortable and feel more welcomed to go to other student services offices and not solely depend on the student cultural centers for guidance and support. The majority of the students in this study expressed how much they spent most of their time at the student cultural center compared to anywhere else on campus. When hearing this, as a researcher of this study, this explained how students of color were more comfortable with connecting with individuals of color at these student cultural centers. Students felt they were able to get the necessary resources they needed in order for them to succeed college life. However, this should not be the case. Students of color should be able to feel there is a sense of comfort anywhere they go on a college campus. Therefore, more work is needed to change the atmosphere of a predominantly white campus to a more diverse campus.

Reflecting on Cultural Barriers

The researcher of this study learned how the majority of the students reflected on cultural barriers they had experienced at Seagrass. Many students shared how they were able to overcome cultural barriers when facing these barriers on campus. The dominant white culture situated at Seagrass is known to be historically white for centuries. Because Seagrass is a
predominantly white institution, it is not surprising to know if their culture does not include and reflect other types of cultures such as the Black, Hispanic and Asian cultures. Many students in this study thought their culture was not part of the campus culture due to the dominant white culture that already existed more than a century ago. It was reported through research that students of color may be forced to assimilate into the white culture (Bourassa, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007; Morrison, 2010; Nieto, 2004). In this particular study, the researcher of this study learned that the students did not feel they were being forced to blend into the white culture. Instead, most of them continued to stay within their culture.

While the dominant white culture exists at Seagrass, many students of color also bought their own culture to Seagrass. Students realized this when they were experiencing cultural barriers due to the cultural differences among them with white student affairs professionals. This is a perfect example of why a diverse campus is needed. While white students could easily benefit from a predominantly white institution due to the dominant white culture, students of color would certainly benefit from a diverse campus due to them not sharing the same culture with their white counterparts. Students expressed how they needed to go to the student cultural centers on a regular basis because they felt they were able to share their culture with staff members who were working at these centers. This was how students were able to overcome cultural barriers at Seagrass. It became the norm for them to frequently go to the student cultural centers on a regular basis.

In order to have a deeper understanding about what was reported in this study, it is also essential to look at the theoretical framework of this study. Critical race theory is the theoretical framework for this study, which is a lens to examine the lived experience of students of color relationship/interaction with white student affairs professionals in a predominantly white
institution. CRT serves as an analytical lens to comprehend the campus environment of PWIs among students of color who are enrolled in these types of institutions. In addition, CRT also serves as an examination of the existing power structures, which are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the social exclusion of individuals who are non-white (UCLA School of Public Affairs/Critical Race Studies, n.d.).

The CRT supports my analysis in chapter 4 because this theoretical framework focuses on how the current existing power structures of Seagrass shape the perception of how students of color view their college they are enrolled in. The current existing power structures of Seagrass negatively affect how students of color perceived the college they were in. For example, one student named Teri pointed out how the current administration of Seagrass is overwhelmingly white individuals employed at the top level of the college. The CRT uses the term “white supremacy” to describe the type of people who feel they are superior than others in terms of having the power to dominate and make decisions. This explains the current existing power structures of Seagrass and the lack of diversity among individuals who are non-white. The top administration has more power with how they decide to shape their institution. How they decide to shape their institution is how students of color perceived them to be. They also have the power to bring who they would like to see working at their college. In addition, they also have the power to place or move employees around within the college. The researcher of this study strongly believes that their power and how they make decisions for the college has long been put in place for centuries and even today. This explains why Seagrass has not yet been a diverse campus for students of color to experience.

Like how the CRT uses the term “white supremacy,” to describe how one race is more superior than the other race, the CRT also uses the term “white privilege” to describe the kind of
benefits that are granted to white people. People of color do not always experience the same type of benefits like white individuals. For example, unlike student affairs professionals of color, research shows that the majority of white student affairs professionals are employed within different colleges across the United States. (NCES, 2006; NASPA, 2014; Chronicle of Higher Education 2016 Almanac survey). White individuals enjoy the benefits of having the “white privilege” status because they have more chances to advance in society whether they are in an educational, professional or social contexts. In addition, white individuals also enjoy the benefits of the white privilege status because they have more chances to experience a better life in terms of if it is either social, political or economical. For example, in a social context, white students have a better chance of having a better college experience than students of color because they are enrolled in a predominantly white institution. If this is the case then it is most likely, they will have a better relationship with staff members working at the college and it is most likely their experience will be more positive and not negative unlike students of color. This is because of the existing white culture that has been put in placed at Seagrass for centuries. In addition, white students are free to go anywhere on campus when seeking for guidance and support. On the other hand, students of color did not feel comfortable to go anywhere on campus like their white counterparts but instead they found themselves going to the student cultural centers on a regular basis for guidance and support. This could explain why the student cultural centers were established at Seagrass. To provide comfort and mainly support those who are a student of color and provide the necessary support they would need to succeed at a PWI.

Because of the current existing power structures of Seagrass, students of color expressed their frustration on this issue and why it bothered them. It is not surprising to learn if the majority of the low to mid-level student affairs professionals who are working at Seagrass is
white if the current administration of Seagrass is also predominantly white or fully white. This observation has been reported by most students in this study. The majority of the students in this study expressed how there is a need for a change at Seagrass. They wanted to be able to see more student affairs professionals of color across campus and not just those hired to work only at the student cultural centers.

The CRT strongly supports how race and ethnicity come into play among different groups of people such as African Americans, Latino/a American, Asian Americans and White Americans. In this study, it focuses on three different groups, students of color, white student affairs professionals and student affairs professionals of color. This study explains how students of color were able to interact or not interact with student affairs professionals based on race. For instance, students of color expressed the lack of connection with white student affairs professionals due to them not caring about them or they felt they were not supporting them as a student. On the other hand, students of color felt students affairs professionals of color were more caring and supportive. This was the observation and experience students of color had at Seagrass. It is unclear why one particular group, white student affairs professionals were not supportive or did not care about students of color compared to the other group, student affairs professionals of color who did. One assumption could be that, as one student in this study mentioned, they do not know how to work with students of color. Understanding how to work with students of color such as providing a cultural competency training course as part of one’s professional development is very much needed. This is because many students of color are either going to enroll or are currently enrolled in a predominantly white institutions across the United States. It is imperative to know how to work with these incoming students. These types of students require additional attention, support and have different needs in order for them to
succeed in college due to them being first-generation college student.

**Recommendations for Practice**

After gathering and interpreting the data that was reported among students of color in this study, it is important to provide recommendations for each audience of stakeholders for those who are either in or cared about the student affairs profession. Individuals who are employed within the field of student affairs acknowledged that their main focus is the student. Their main job is to assist and see students succeed in college. How students succeed in college all depends on how well they perform on the job. If student affairs professionals perform well on the job then it is most likely students will succeed versus if student affairs professionals do not perform well. Students of color mainly depend on student affairs professionals for guidance and support.

For example, *the Student Personnel Point of View (Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1937)* emphasized educating the “whole student” as the basis for their work in student affairs (Helfgot, 2005; Mann, 2010; NASPA, 1987; Sandeen, 2011; Schuh, Jones & Harper, 2011). This document “became the most influential publication in the [field of] student affairs” (Sandeen, 2011). Thus, the representation of this document values student success and outcomes. One of student affairs professionals’ goals is to meet the needs of students who are enrolled as a continuing or returning student. If students’ needs are not being met then this is when it becomes a problem for student affairs professionals including the students themselves. Therefore, student affairs professionals are held accountable for their work performance such as making sure that students are getting the necessary support they need in college. Students especially students of color rely heavily on student affairs professionals for their support. With that being said, students in this study were not well supported at Seagrass except at the student cultural centers.
Based on what was reported in this study, the following recommendations for practice are provided: 1) to make cultural competency training available for student affairs professionals to take as part of their professional development courses. This particular training should be mandatory and be available for all non-profit higher education institutions within the United States. All lower-level, mid-level and upper-level student affairs professionals would certainly benefit from a training course like cultural competency because they would be able to know how to work or interact with students of color. As a researcher for this study, based on what has been observed or been heard in interviews, white student affairs professionals do not know how to work or interact with students of color. It is most likely they would know how to work with this particular population once they are trained to know more about the types of students such as students of color who are coming to learn and play at their college. Upper-level student affairs professionals may not necessarily have a direct contact with students who are enrolling at their institutions. However, they would be able to learn about the types of students they have at their institution. The more they know about their students such as students of color and their culture the more they would be able to set up policies that are more friendly and more welcoming towards them. A welcoming space is like a space where students of color can find individuals who have the characteristics of being approachable, available, communicative, organized, fostering, and nurturing. Students of color would certainly benefit from these characteristics and policies that would be more friendly and more welcoming because they would be able to feel more comfortable to go to any students services offices anywhere on campus and not just the student cultural centers. Students of color did not want to feel restricted to go to only to the student cultural centers only because they were enrolled in a predominantly white college. Instead, these students should be able to also enjoy the same types of benefits that are also
provided for white students.

In order for students of color to enjoy the same types of benefits like their white counterparts, it is best to learn more about these students such as knowing what types of support or service they would like or need. Again, the best way to learn about students of color and their culture would be to take the cultural competency training courses.

In addition, these courses should be taken seriously such as providing rigid training for current and future employees. It is urgent for student affairs associations such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) to hold conferences, meetings and workshops regarding this serious matter. Both associations have the power to change the mindset of higher education administrators especially those who are also in power and are currently working in a PWI and especially those who hold higher positions such as the deans, vice presidents, presidents including the president’s cabinet. Hopefully, these cultural competency training courses would teach and provide the necessary tools for white student affairs professionals on understanding how they can better assist and develop a better relationship with students of color in their work spaces further.

The second recommendation is to increase the number of student affairs professionals of color on campus especially at PWIs across the United States. Since 1988, two student affairs associations, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) created a report that discussed the issue of “extremely low” number of student affairs professionals of color in graduate degree programs, and called for an increase in recruiting student affairs professionals of color (Linder & Simmons, 2015). Within the last 10 years, many PWIs have created all sorts of programs, initiatives, and
strategies in which they tried to increase the number of non-white staff working in their institutions. However, statistically, 80-90% of the faculty and staff in most higher education institutions are still Caucasians (Kayes, 2006). Two important issues remain unclear. First, it is unclear why many PWIs failed to increase the number of non-white staff working in their institutions if they have created all sorts of programs, initiatives, and strategies within the past 10 years. Secondly, it is unclear why these figures - 80-90% of the faculty and the staff who are currently working in higher education institutions are still predominantly white despite if they are working in a PWI or not. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) would need to revisit these two important issues because they would need to be addressed and discussed urgently.

The third recommendation is to increase the number of students of color working in part-time student positions such as a peer advisor or any type of peer positions in student affairs such as in the academic advising, financial aid, the registrar, the admissions office and so forth. A separate funding should be created by the college to create and increase the number of part-time student positions along with using work-study workers who are funded directly by the federal government. This becomes like a win-win situation for students of color and for the college. Increasing the number of students of color working in a part-time student position across campus especially at a PWI will most likely create a better atmosphere for other students of color in general. For example, students of color would be able to see more faces and people like them who are like their peers working in different student services offices. The more students of color see more faces and people who are like them as their peer in these offices then it is mostly likely students of color will feel more comfortable to go to these offices for support and guidance and not just depend on the student cultural center.
In general, peers like students like to support and help one another. Increasing the
number of students of color working in a part-time student position as a peer would benefit other
students of color including those who are working in a part-time student position in many ways
at a PWI. Students of color who are working in a part-time student position would be able to
interact and develop a better relationship with white student affairs professionals. While the
majority of the students in this study reported to not have a well solid relationship with white
student affairs professionals, it might be helpful to have students of color working with them in a
student position. Each party would be able to learn about one another and also white student
affairs professionals would learn about the different cultures they are exposed to at work. In
addition, white student affairs professionals and students of color who are working in a student
position could further improve the relationship with white student affairs professionals and other
students of color. White student affairs professionals would have a better understanding on how
to work or interact with other students of color if they would already have the experience with
working with students of color at their workplace. Students of color who are working in a
student position could also offer their insights and input on how to create a better environment
for other students of color including themselves at a PWI.

Increasing the number of students of color working in part-time student positions such as
a peer advisor or any type of peer positions in student affairs might increase the number of
student of color entering the field of student affairs. For example, according to seminal and
current scholars, (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Mertz, Eckman &
Strayhorn, 2012; Rapp, 1997; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Taub & McEwen, 2006),
there have been a number of concerns in regards to the student affairs profession and one of them
is the lack of diversity among graduate students. It was reported among scholars that there is an
ongoing lack of diversity among graduate students enrolled in master’s degree programs in
student affairs. For example, Taub and McEwen (2006) reported that 89% of students who were
enrolled in their master’s degree program were white. Mertz, Eckman and Strayhorn (2012) also
found a similar result in their study. In addition, Turrentine and Conley (2001) found that
African Americans accounted for 12-15%, Hispanics accounted for 4-5%, Asian Americans
accounted for 2-3%, and Native Americans accounted for 0-1% of people of color employed in
entry-level positions in student affairs within different colleges across the United States.
Therefore, creating part-time student positions may change these statistics. Instead these type of
positions may increase the number of students of color to eventually enroll in a degree program
in student affairs once they show interest in learning more about the field of student affairs.

**Implications for myself as a Scholar Practitioner**

After gathering and interpreting the data that was reported among students of color in this
study, it is important to provide implications for myself as a scholar practitioner. Based on what
was reported in this study, the following implications are provided: 1) doing more research on
the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals of color in higher education within the
United States. Despite the significance of how student affairs professionals of color play an
important role with students of color including non-minority students, there is a scarce amount of
literature that addresses this issue (Jackson & Terrell, 2003; Linder & Simmons, 2015). Thus,
more studies would need to be conducted in order for us to have a better understanding on the
importance of this issue. The researcher of this study is interested in conducting future studies
on this matter. The researcher of this study would also like to address and discuss the issue of
the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals in future journals in student
affairs/higher education and in conferences that discuss student affairs work and issues.
Understanding this issue would better assist the researcher of this study to know what solutions or tools could be used in addressing the issue of diversity among student affairs professionals.

The second implication is to conduct more studies on understanding the relationship between white student affairs professionals and students of color at a PWI. While the researcher of this study was limited to conducting only one study for her dissertation, the researcher of this study is interested in studying more about this topic in the future. Conducting more studies on this topic at different PWIs may provide a deeper look into understanding the relationship between white student affairs professionals and students of color. Many seminal and current studies have been conducted on this issue due to the ongoing problem students of color have with white student affairs professionals within higher education institutions especially at PWIs.

For example, in Allen (1992) seminal study, students of color did not feel welcome as a student in PWIs because it was reported that they felt alienated. In addition, they encountered hostility and racial discrimination. Also, in Smith, Allen, & Danley (2007) and Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart (2008) studies, it was reported students of color experienced greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems at PWIs due to these type of schools considered to be unwelcoming and unsupportive for them. This study could somewhat align with Allen (1992) study because the majority of the students who participated in this study expressed how they did not feel welcome or they felt alienated at Seagrass. While the students of color in Allen (1992) study encountered hostility and racial discrimination, none of the students in this study had experienced this. While the students of color in Smith, Allen, & Danley (2007) and Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart (2008) studies had experienced greater stress, poor academic performance and mental health problems, only one student in this study had experienced this. Thus each study either produced the same result, a different result or
somewhat the same or different result on this topic. Therefore, the researcher of this study is interested in conducting an analysis on more studies like this topic because there may be issues that have not yet been revealed or discussed in the literature.

More studies and written literature is needed on this topic. As a scholar practitioner, the goal is to conduct more studies on this topic. The goal is to also discuss the issue of understanding the relationship between white student affairs professionals and students of color in student affairs conferences, workshops, sessions and etc. Addressing and discussing this issue to each audience of stakeholders for those who are either in or care about the student affairs profession will hopefully incite discussion and debates on how to improve the lives of students of color who are enrolling in predominantly white colleges and universities.

The third implication is to conduct studies to learn more about students affairs professionals of color perception and attitudes about students of color relationship with white student affairs professionals at a PWI. In addition, more studies would be conducted to learn about students affairs professionals of color relationship with white student affairs professionals. More studies would also be conducted to learn more about student affairs professionals of color perception and attitudes in regards to the student cultural centers and why they were established, the lack of diversity among student affairs professionals of color at a PWI and their experience or if they had any past struggles with trying to enter the field of student affairs and any past or current struggles advancing their career within a PWI. Conducting studies and learning more about student affairs professionals of color perception and attitudes on these topics could also bring a whole new perspective and discussion to the table. The researcher of this study is interested to hear a different side to the story from different group of individuals and this case, it will be student affairs professionals of color. Hearing and learning more stories to be told from
student affairs professionals of color who are employed within a PWI would be the goal for the researcher of this study to do future research on. Overall, student affairs professionals of color could tell stories on what they have learned or what they were told from students of color or from their colleagues at their institution.

The fourth implication is to conduct a future study to learn more about white student affairs professionals and their relationship with students of color at predominantly white colleges and universities. While this study focuses on students of color and their relationship with white student affairs professionals at a PWI, the researcher of this study would also like to obtain data on understanding the experience of white student affairs professionals and their relationship with students of color at a PWI. It is important to hear both sides to the story in order to fully comprehend the issue even deeper. Understanding the issue even deeper would assist the researcher of this study to fully grasp how white student affairs professionals make sense of their experience with students of color at their institution. Understanding the issue even deeper would also assist the researcher of this study to fully grasp the bigger picture and make recommendations and implement changes that need to be made in order for both parties - white student affairs professionals and students of color to fully benefit these changes that would help them in having a better relationship.

The researcher of this study would like to conduct more than one study on this topic if needed and most likely, more than one study will need to be conducted. Conducting this type of study needs to be ongoing such as conducting more than one study on this topic because one study does not always align with the second, third or fourth study. In addition, the researcher of this study is interested to hear more stories to learn more about the different themes that will be revealed in different studies. Conducting more than one study will assist the researcher of this
study to continue to make recommendations and implement changes/improvements on how to better connect white student affairs professionals with students of color.

The fifth and last implication is meeting with different groups of students of color in terms of understanding more about what they would like to see changed at PWIs across the United States. Interviewing different groups of students of color including students of color who are a graduate student in student affairs from different PWIs would be the goal for future studies. In addition, hearing and using their input would assist the researcher of this study to continue to implement changes to improve the lives of students of color at predominantly white colleges and universities throughout her career. The researcher of this study would like to focus on making a change which will assist her with addressing the ongoing issue of students of color relationship with white student affairs professionals and the unfriendly and unwelcoming environment at PWIs. The change plan the researcher of this study is planning to implement is to create a work program for students of color to become an assistant for other students of color at the university. In this work program, students of color would work with other individuals such as with white student affairs professionals at different student services offices. The goal of this work program is for students of color to become more visible on campus and not just solely place themselves in the student cultural centers. Also, hopefully, students of color would develop a better relationship with white student affairs professionals when working with them and both parties could learn about each other’s culture. If more students of color are visible on campus, it is more likely other students of color would feel there is a sense of comfort on campus and hopefully the relationship between them with white student affairs professionals would eventually improve.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, overall for the most part, this study did answer the literature review that was
written in chapter 2. Three different topics were addressed in chapter 2 and they are: 1) Students of Color Culture, 2) White Student Affairs Professionals and, lastly 3) Academic Performance of Students of Color at PWI. In chapter 4, it focused a lot on students of color culture and white student affairs professionals. Chapter 4 did not address the academic performance of students of color at PWI due to the lack of receiving much data about this topic.

The problem of practice of this research study states: students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. While one of the interview questions asked “how have your relationships with student affairs professionals impacted your academics? Have these impacts been a result of a difference in race of the student affairs professionals? Can you give examples? Most of the students in this study expressed how they were performing academically well at Seagrass. Despite racial groups among student affairs professionals, students of color relationship with student affairs professionals did not impact their academics. Only one student in this study reported experiencing a major impact with her academics due to her rocky relationship with a white student affairs professional at Seagrass. This particular student Teri mentioned how she was feeling anxious and helpless due to her not having a well solid relationship with her advisor. For example, she stated:

I feel like she is not a responsive counselor, and I feel like that is something that has caused a lot of anxiety for me as a student where I feel like I don’t know if I’m doing things right because I dont get her response in time.

Here, Teri explained the reason why she was not performing well academically was due to her feeling anxious about her advisor not responding to her on time. According to Barbuto, Jr, Story, Fritz; & Schinstock (2011), if there is a strong relationship between the two parties involved, in
this case, the advisor and Teri, then this is associated with a positive outcome for both parties. The quality of how the advisor advised Teri is linked to student satisfaction (Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Fielstein & Lammers, 1992; Trombley, 1984; Waggenspack & Hensley, 1992). In this case, Teri was not satisfied with her relationship with her advisor which is why she decided to go to the student cultural center in hoping they would support her in a way she wanted to be supported. According to Harrison (2009), who did her study on pre-nursing and nursing students, it was reported that academic advisors who have the characteristics of being approachable, available, communicative, organized, fostering, and nurturing were perceived as effective advisors to college students. In this case, Teri felt her advisor was not approachable, available, or communicative which explained why she felt anxious and could not focus on her academics. If Teri’s advisor was an effective advisor in terms of who she was professionally such as what she stood for and her purpose in higher education and how well she worked with Teri, then Teri could have had a better experience in college and better academic performance at Seagrass. Despite what was already reported in other studies, for this particular study, most students were not affected academically by any student affairs professionals at Seagrass.

Although this study addresses many issues in regards to students of color at PWI, there is much work to be done. There have been many seminal and new studies that address the different issues in regards to students of color at PWIs but yet according to Harwood et al. (2012), predominantly white colleges and universities have not done much to change the culture of their institutions even though they acknowledge the changing demographics of the student body on their campuses. Historically, throughout the American educational system, students of color have been neglected and underrepresented in colleges and universities for many years (Farmer-
Hinton, 2008; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). While this continues to be true, despite being in the 21st century, the goal of the researcher of this study is to continue to fight for students of color and this is just the beginning.
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Appendix A

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: July 21, 2017  IRB #: CPS17-05-20
Principal Investigator(s): Kim Nolan
                                                Keesha Taylor
Department: Doctor of Education Program
                        College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
                   Northeastern University
Title of Project: An Exploration of the Perceptions and Experience of
                     Students of Color with White Student Affairs
                     Professionals: An Interpretative Phenomenological
                     Analysis
Participating Sites: N/A
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JULY 20, 2018

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

[Signatures]
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B

Keesha Taylor

An e-mail to administrators at each ethnic student office

Dear (Name of the person),

My name is Keesha Taylor and I am currently a doctoral student in Education at Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies, and I am working on my dissertation. I am writing to let you know about my research and am asking you for help with the recruitment process. My research focuses on students of color and their relationship with white student affairs professionals at a predominately White institution. I am hoping to focus on students of color who are currently enrolled at Northeastern University.

I am currently seeking to recruit volunteers who are an undergraduate, student of color, between the ages of 18-24, males and females will be recruited. In addition, students of color need to have completed at least one year of academic work at Northeastern University in order to participate in this study. They will have the choice whether to participate or not.

With that being said, would you be able to help me with the recruitment process by informing students about this study?

Please email me at Taylor.Kee@husky.neu.edu if you are willing to assist me in this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Keesha Taylor
Doctoral Student
College of Professional Studies
Keesha Taylor

Recruitment E-mail

Dear (Name of the person),
My name is Keesha Taylor and I am currently a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I was given your contact information by a higher education administrator at Northeastern University. I am conducting a research study about students of color and their relationships with white student affairs professionals at a predominately White institution.
I am currently seeking to recruit volunteers who are undergraduate students of color, between the ages of 18-24, either female or male. In addition, students of color need to have completed at least one year of academic work at Northeastern University in order to participate in this study.
I am e-mailing to ask you if you would like to volunteer to participate in an interview, which should last about 45-90 minutes of your time. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be confidential.
Please email me at Taylor.Kee@husky.neu.edu if you would like to volunteer or would like more information regarding this study.

Thank you for your time.
Keesha Taylor

Talking to an individual student or a group of students

Hello,

My name is Keesha Taylor and I am currently a doctoral student in Education at Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies, and I am working on my dissertation. My research focuses on students of color and their relationship with white student affairs professionals at a predominately White institution. My research will also focus on students of color who are currently enrolled at Northeastern University. I am currently looking for volunteers to participate in my study. You will need to be an undergraduate, student of color, and between the ages of 18-24. You can be either a male or female. In addition, you will need to complete at least one year of academic work at Northeastern University in order to participate in my study. You will have the choice whether to participate or not. If you do decide to participate in my study, you will have the choice to leave the study at any time you wish to do so. With that being said, would you be interested to be part of my study?

Keesha Taylor
Doctoral Student
College of Professional Studies

IRB# CPS17-05-20
Approved: 8/30/17
Expiration Date: 7/20/18
INFORMED CONSENT

Northeastern University, Department of College of Professional Studies

Study Title: An Exploration of the Perceptions and Experience of Students of Color with White Student Affairs Professionals: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kimberly Nolan

Student Researcher: Keesha Taylor

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➢ PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between students of color with white student affairs professionals at a predominately white institution. You are being asked to participate because you are an undergraduate student of color between the ages of 18 and 24.

➢ PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:

- One 45-90-minute interview about your relationship with White student affairs professionals at your university.

We will set up a time for you to meet the student researcher, Keesha Taylor, in Northeastern University Snell Library Building. You will participate in the interview for a total of 45-90 minutes of participation. Your answers may be recorded.

➢ RISKS

Keesha Taylor, the student researcher of this study will make every effort to protect participants’ confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any interview questions, you may inform the researcher.

In the unlikely event that some of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Northeastern University student, you may contact the University Health and Counseling Services at (617) 373-2772. They are located on campus in the Forsyth Building, Suite 135, on Forsyth Street.

IRB# CPS17-05-20
Approved: 7/21/17
Expiration Date: 7/20/18
Appendix D

Interview Protocol Form

Institution: Seagrass University (pseudonym)

Interviewee: 8-12 participants will be involved in this study and each of them will be assigned a number and an 8-12 pseudonyms

Interviewer: Keesha B. Taylor

Overarching Research Question

➢ How do students of color explain or make sense of their experience with white student affairs professionals?

Part I: Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to participate in this interview because you have identified as someone who has a great deal to share about my problem of practice which is: Students of color do not culturally connect with white student affairs professionals in predominantly white institutions, which leads to poor academic performance among those students. My research project focuses on the experiences of students of color in a predominantly white institution setting. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into your experiences about being a student in a predominantly white institution. Hopefully this will allow me to identify ways in which I can understand more and improve the relationship between an individual who is a student of color with white student affairs professionals.

Because your responses are important for this research, please be honest with your answers. A total of 9 interview questions will be asked during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a number and a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The transcripts will eventually be destroyed after they are being used to explain data for this research. To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I will submit to you before this interview can begin. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?

Please note that the interview should last you about 45-90 minutes. Please answer each question carefully. If you don’t understand a question, we can skip it and return back to it later. It is possible for me to ask for clarification in case I may not understand your response/s. Again, do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Part II: Interview

One of the things I am interested in learning is your experience interacting or your relationship working with white student affairs professionals at a predominantly white institution. I would
like to hear about your perspective/experience about being a student at a predominantly white institution in your own words such as your relationship with staff members at the university you are currently enrolled in. To do this, I will ask you 9 questions for you to answer. If you mention other people, please do not mention their names but instead use a number or pseudonym.

**Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me about your relationships with student affairs professionals at your university?

2. Did you feel you had different relationships with student affairs professionals based on race? Can you provide examples of this?

3. Can you discuss the differences and similarities in relationships with student affairs professionals of color and those who are white?

4. Can you give me examples of times you felt unconnected to student affairs professionals?

5. Can you explain how white student affairs professionals were supportive or not supportive of you as a student?

6. How have your relationships with student affairs professionals impacted your academics? Have these impacts been a result of a difference in race of the student affairs professionals? Can you give examples?

7. Can you give me some examples of what you would like to see change in your relationship with white student affairs professionals?

8. From your perspective as a student of color, can you provide an example of when white student affairs professionals demonstrated or did not demonstrate awareness of your culture?

9. As a student of color, what is your perspective on white student affairs professionals overall?

**Potential Prompts**

➔ For each of those interview questions above, I am expecting the participant to provide deep explanations. If not, there will be follow-up questions for clarification in order to get a deeper response.

➔ If I do not understand what has been stated, I will ask for clarification such as what do you mean by that or give me an example.

*Thank each participant for their participation*