

ABSTRACT

DAVIS, JEMILIA SHENIKA. Views from the Top: Vice Presidents of Student Affairs' Perspectives on Prioritizing Students of Color. (Under the direction of Audrey J. Jaeger).

Racial tension across today's college campuses is a product of institutional cultures that perpetuate the historical legacy of excluding People of Color (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012; Rhoads, 2016; Wechsler, 2007). The purpose of this critical qualitative case study was to examine how VPSAs prioritize promoting success for Students of Color (SoCs) and how VPSAs perceive their power to do so. This study was conducted with 10 Vice Presidents of Student Affairs (VPSAs) at 4-year public, historically White institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. The themes represent data collected from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, reflections, mission statements, strategic plans, campus media outlets, enrollment and retention data, and additional documents that provided context for the study. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1995b), critical race theory in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016), and literature on organization theory (Bess & Dee, 2012; Bolman & Deal, 2017) provided the theoretical framework for this study. The participants' experiences and perspectives reveal VPSAs' nuanced efforts in prioritizing SoCs in an institutional climate that continues to center Whiteness.

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Views from the Top: Vice Presidents of Student Affairs' Perspectives on Prioritizing Students of Color

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my dad, Winston St. Valentine Harrison, who even in his earthly absence left a legacy that fueled my persistence in this process. I pray that lessons learned while conducting this research will shape a future beyond our wildest dreams for my dad's namesake and my son, Harrison Asher Davis.

BIOGRAPHY

Jemilia Shenika Davis was born to Icilda “Happi” Harrison and Winston St. Valentine Harrison in White Plains, New York only five years after her parents both migrated to the United States from the beautiful Caribbean island nation of Jamaica. Jemilia and her sisters, Ayesha Safiya Harrison and Sahiyya Sahsha Harrison, were raised in a God-filled home surrounded by love and culture. Jemilia left her hometown after graduating from Woodlands High School in 2002 to attend the University of Miami for her undergraduate degree. In 2006, Jemilia earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Biology with a minor in Leadership. While at Miami, Jemilia was a Resident Assistant in Hecht Residential College and a work-study student in President Donna E. Shalala’s office. After graduation, she joined Citrus Grove Elementary as a first-grade teacher for English Language Learners, teaching over 20 students in a shared trailer. Jemilia enjoyed bringing language arts and science to life for a group of students who had experienced a revolving door of substitute teachers for many months prior to her arrival. Learning alongside these dynamic first-graders remains one of Jemilia’s most memorable experiences as an educator.

Answering the first call to graduate school, Jemilia began her Master of Education in College Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Georgia in 2006. During her time at Georgia, she served as the first graduate assistant for student life at Gainesville State College (now called the University of North Georgia-Gainesville Campus) responsible for developing an orientation leader program. She also spent a year working as a practicum student with Georgia’s International Student Life, assisting with leadership programs and other celebratory events for international students. Upon graduating in 2009, Jemilia joined the Residence Coordinator staff at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) where she also met her husband, Bradley Davis. Jemilia worked at UNCW for over six years serving first,

as a Residence Coordinator and later, as an Academic Advisor and Pre-Professional Programs Coordinator. During her time at UNCW, Jemilia engaged in diversity and leadership initiatives, volunteered as a LeaderShape Cluster Facilitator, served on numerous planning, award selection, and hiring committees, and developed meaningful partnerships. It was after attending LeaderShape and having her son, Harrison, that Jemilia decided to apply and prepare to return to graduate school for her terminal degree.

With unrelenting support from her husband and her mom, Jemilia made the decision to attend North Carolina State University to earn her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development with a focus on Higher Education. Jemilia graduated in three years, despite the four-year, full-time curriculum; however, she left no stone unturned. Jemilia briefly served as a graduate assistant for the Goodnight Scholars Program before she started her role as a Research Associate for the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness in January 2017. As a full-time doctoral student, she joined various higher education faculty members in teaching two courses in the master's program and assisted in online course development for a survey development course. Jemilia also contributed to a recently published text *Culture, Community, and Educational Success: Reimagining the Invisible Knapsack*, submitting a piece that was inspired by an assignment from her Diversity and Equity in Schools and Communities course. Over the three years in her program, she continued to present at various national, regional, and NC State conferences about her work on doctoral student mothers, service learning, and student affairs leadership and professional development. Finally, her commitment to her studies did not deter her from remaining a committed member to NASPA's Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs Knowledge Community where she was elected to a co-chair role in March 2018. Her commitment to the doctoral program was also

graciously and financially supported by the Witherspoon Graduate Scholarship Endowment, the Jim Rhatigan Fellowship, and the SACSA Research Incentive Grant.

In February 2019, Jemilia joined the inaugural staff of the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research as the Program Coordinator. In this role, she will contribute to programs and events that support community college leaders in acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to achieve higher levels of student success at their colleges. In her free time, she looks forward to spending more quality time with Bradley, Harrison, extended family, and friends. Jemilia is especially excited about continuing her involvement in the Children's Ministry at Baptist Grove Church and being Dr. Mom when Harrison begins kindergarten in the fall.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Today's campus climate and institutional culture send a strong message of who does and does not belong. College students are explicitly and implicitly reminded of the extent to which their institution values their presence and contribution to the campus community. The events that took place at the University of Missouri in 2015 are an example of how students called attention to the racial biases embedded in their institutional culture and fuels this study's focus on administrators' responsibilities to shift the culture. In 2015, the University of Missouri's Concerned Student 1950 student group took center stage across national media outlets when a graduate student, Jonathan Butler, began a hunger strike calling for the resignation of the university's president Tim Wolfe (Dietrich, Bajaj, & Marvin, 2016). The strike was initiated in response to the deafening silence from administrators regarding a string of racially biased incidents on campus (Dietrich et al.). While the nation watched the University of Missouri community confront the racial hostility that afflicted this institution, other campuses felt the tension rise at home. High-profile protests shortly followed across 60 institutions within the 2015-2016 academic year (Wong & Green, 2016). All over the country, student activists brought racially biased incidents into the public eye and sparked concern for how college administrators chose to or chose not to respond. The battle cries of these student activists inspire this study's focus on how campus administrators prioritize Students of Color (SoCs) in promoting and supporting the SoCs' pursuit of postsecondary success.

Consistently across the education system in the United States, SoCs have been excluded from equitably participating and benefiting from education's promise of upward mobility. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) retort, beyond gender and class, "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States" emphasizing how racism perpetuates the education pipeline in the U.S (p. 48). In a subset of this system, postsecondary

education is characterized by institutional cultures that perpetuate institutionalized racism and oppression that sustain barriers that prevent communities and generations from racial and ethnic minoritized backgrounds from attaining postsecondary success (Patton, 2016). Even in times of apparent progress and broadly celebrated policy measures, our campuses continue to fall short of providing a space where SoCs feel like they belong and can succeed (Bell, 1980; Brayboy, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). SoCs' negative experiences on campus have been elevated in academia and the larger society in sync with the uptick in college student activism around racial inequities.

Racial tension felt across the nation and on campus has incited students to participate in protests in an effort to demonstrate their frustration with the college environment (Eagan et. al, 2017; Rhoads, 2016). College students protest under the premise that institutions do not improve campus climates; people do. When demands are issued to administrators, students recognize that the positional power administrators have can be used to perpetuate or challenge the status quo of exclusion and silence (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This positional power is defined as the ability to hold organizations accountable for aligning actions with goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017). However, even positional power with good intent does not result in administrators successfully supporting SoCs on campus.

In recent years, college administrators have scurried to respond to racially-charged incidents that occur on campus and around the nation. Some college administrators acknowledge that these incidents impact the lives of their students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds while others tout a placid rhetoric that avoids acknowledging the racism that plagues the campus culture (Cole & Harper, 2017). On many campuses, institutions issue colorblind responses or avoid responding to racially biased incidents (Cole & Harper, 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Iverson, 2007). Campus culture informs the strategies administrators

employ to address racial climate on campus (Bensimon, 2005; Kezar, 2012; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Patton, 2105). As students and society hold administrators accountable for action, we must take a step back to critically examine the complexities of campus culture and its shared values, beliefs, and perceptions that inform the programs, policies, and procedures that shape racial climate on campus under the guidance and direction of campus administrators (Griffin, 2017; Kezar, 2012; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Museus et al., 2012; Patton, 2016; Tierney, 2008).

While many students are answering the call to challenge racially-biased cultural norms through their protests, a group of particular campus administrators emerge as student advocates with esteemed values that align with social justice and inclusion (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). This group of campus administrators are student affairs professionals. During the University of Missouri protests, two leading student affairs professional associations re-affirmed their commitment to the social justice and inclusion values that guide student affairs practice (ACPA & NASPA) ACPA-College Student Educators International and NASPA-Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education released statements supporting students like Jonathan Butler for “doing what Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, suffragettes and hundreds of thousands of people around the world have done when no relief comes for them” (Love, 2015). ACPA’s former president Love later calls her student affairs professional peers to action by saying, “Nothing will change the trajectory of the social movement expressed by Jonathan’s protest except meaningful and measurable change that improves life for those who are suffering most” (Love). NASPA’s President Kruger encouraged college student educators to “be diligent in designing environments that support students in challenging conventional thought, fighting against institutional and systemic oppression, and developing communities that value every person’s contribution” (Kruger, 2015).

Student affairs professionals stand as an intercessory between students and administrators, wrestling the role as an advocate for students and a political agent with positional power on campus. Practitioners, like student affairs professionals, serve an integral role in fostering culturally engaging campuses thus signaling a need for research to conduct deep analyses on this subset of institutional agents when examining campus racial climate and institutional culture (Bensimon, 2005; Museus, 2014). Although student affairs professionals have been socialized to value and develop social justice attitudes to best meet the needs of college students, transforming attitudes into action on today's college campuses is "messy" and the same professional values that inform how they utilize their political power are rooted in racial idealism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper & Patton, 2007; Pasque & Harris, 2013; Reason & Broido, 2017).

Racial idealism, first critiqued by critical legal scholar Derrick Bell, is characterized that racial equality is a goal that can be achieved (Bell, 1992). This perspective is juxtaposed by racial realism which, rephrased from Bell, Delgado and Stefancic describe as the recognition that the underlying values and systems that inform our actions is the means by which "society allocates privilege and status" (p. 21). Viewing a college campus as a microcosm of society, a unique view of the spectrum between racial idealism and realism is captured by student affairs professionals who stand in the crossfires of institutional contexts built on the culture of exclusion and the diversifying student population. Few researchers have conducted a deep analysis on the role student affairs professionals play as institutional agents charged with promoting student success and enacting social justice and inclusion values in their positions (for example: Harper & Patton, 2007; Means, 2016).

To fill this void, this study examined how student affairs professionals, specifically Vice Presidents of Student Affairs (VPSAs), prioritized promoting success for SoCs within their

institutional cultures that have historically and perpetually center Whiteness (Patton, 2015). Qualitative interviews were conducted with ten VPSAs who represent diverse institutional types across the southeastern region of the United States. Documents from their institutions were collected and analyzed to describe their institutional context and more specifically, the student affairs divisions that they lead.

Research Problem

When SoCs arrive at a historically White institutionsⁱ (HWIs), they are more likely to face racial harassment and microaggressions than their peers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). SoCs are fatigued from the racial microaggressions experienced throughout their college careers and this fatigue negatively impacts their academic achievement (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue et al., 2007). These racialized experiences felt by SoCs influence overall student success outcomes of enrollment, persistence, and graduation across college campuses (Chang, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Healthy and inclusive environments lead to postsecondary student success (Kuh et al., 2005; Museus, 2011). In an environment characterized by racial tension, the inequitable postsecondary outcomes and experiences for SoCs are reflective of a campus culture of exclusion, dismissal, and silence around matters of racialized experiences (Harper, 2017; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Patton, 2016). Broad definitions of racial climate and campus culture, postsecondary achievement, and student affairs are necessary to introduce the research problem this study seeks to address.

Racial climate and campus culture. Campus climate is defined as attitudes, behaviors, and standards that campus community members engage in to promote respect for student needs

(Griffin, 2017; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Solórzano et al. (2000) define racial climate as the “overall racial environment of the college campus” (p. 62). A healthy racial climate is characterized by increased access and enrollment for students from racially minoritized backgrounds, acknowledgment of historically racialized experiences, culturally relevant and sustaining programs that promote academic achievement, and institutional commitment to pluralism (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 62). The current racial climate on campus exists in a context where SoCs are awarded disproportionately less financial aid that limits access and enrollment in college (Goldrick-Rab, 2016); SoCs experience compounding microaggressions that signal a lack of awareness and acknowledgement around the national legacy of racism (Cole & Harper, 2016); there is dwindling support for culturally relevant and sustaining programs and institutions like Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs; Gasman & Hilton, 2012; Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2014); and the harassment that SoCs experience at a higher rate than their White peers is often overlooked by their institutions (Harper, 2017; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Campus climate exists within the context of a campus culture built on a legacy of exclusion (Patton, 2016; Wechsler, 2007). While racial climate describes a specific time and place, culture references the behaviors that stem from embedded values, beliefs, and assumptions that have disregarded SoCs and their experiences (Bensimon, 2005; Harper, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1999; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Patton, 2016; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). From a race realist perspective, these values, beliefs, and assumptions perpetuate inequitable outcomes for SoCs because they are the standard by which decisions are made (Bensimon, 2005; Delgado. & Stefancic, 2017; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Patton, 2016). The call for campus administrators to challenge this faulty standard in an effort to reinforce strategies that close the achievement gap between our SoCs and their White peers is urgent (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016).

Achievement gap. By 2050, Americans from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds are expected to become the majority demographic in a country that has historically excluded them from public education (Espinosa, Gaertner, & Orfield, 2015; Wechsler, 2007). However, White students graduate from postsecondary institutions at rates three times higher than SoCs (Perna & Finney, 2014). For example, the 22.3 percent gap between the graduation rate for Black students (40.9%) and their White peers (63.2%; Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017) illustrates the magnitude of postsecondary attainment disparities for one segment of the racially marginalized population. Nationally, postsecondary outcomes including higher household incomes, lower healthcare costs, and financial independence, see disparities along racial lines (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Campus cultures that perpetuate inequitable support for SoCs hinder postsecondary degree attainment. Barriers to postsecondary success have lingering effects evidenced by higher unemployment rates and lower household incomes among People of Color (Baum et al., 2013). If the attainment gap continues to widen or remains stagnant, much of the country will be left behind and held back from contributing to the nation's economy. College administrators are stewards of higher education's promise and play a direct role in supporting all students to succeed and become engaged citizens (Bensimon, 2007; Griffin, 2017; Smith, 2009; Villalpando, 2004).

Role of college administrators. Senior college administrators, including VPSAs, are positioned with power in an institution's organizational hierarchy to create a campus environment that equitably promotes student success for all students (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Harper & Patton, 2007; Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). When college students protest, they challenge their campus administrators to address concerns that have been silenced, ignored, or perpetuated on their campuses. The intended audience for racial climate protests is college administrators with the power, through their position and authority, to

perpetuate or challenge a climate that is plagued with racial bias. Currently, administrators use their power to issue statements using non-committal rhetoric without action plans and reallocate the responsibility to address racial climate issues by asking the targeted students to suggest appropriate action plans (Cole & Harper, 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). A critical analysis of how administrators use their power to perpetuate or improve the racial climate on their campuses is needed (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016; Pasque, Khader, & Still, 2017; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Student affairs administrators are of unique interest because of their primary responsibility to advocate for their increasingly diverse student body amidst a predominately White leadership (Harper & Patton, 2007; Jackson, 2004; Reason & Broido, 2017).

In the field of student affairs, the value of social justice and inclusion is reflective of a historical commitment to holistic student development. As postsecondary institutions became more diverse, the need for professionals to tend to the needs of the increasingly diverse student population was filled by the earliest student affairs professionals—Deans of Women and later, Deans of Men (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). At key moments in social movements, student affairs professionals represent the voice for students amidst other administrators. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, Deans of Students served as senior leaders reporting to the president in an effort to keep the president informed of student experiences and perspectives (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2005). Today, as evidenced in the public support given to student activists, student affairs professionals are institutional agents who publicly acknowledge race permanence in their campus environments. Although their public recognition of racism inspires student affairs professionals to hold institutions accountable for enacting social justice values, work around developing critical consciousness and translating this consciousness to action is still needed within the student affairs professional community to begin

addressing the disparities across postsecondary outcomes for SoCs (Harper & Patton, 2007; Patton, et al., 2007).

Deficiencies in Literature

In a presidential address to the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Estela Bensimon emphasized the significance of practitioner knowledge when studying equity in student outcomes (Bensimon, 2007). Institutional agents play a direct role in transforming racial climate regardless of the position title or leadership rank (Bensimon, 2007; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1999; Kezar, 2001; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Few analyses of how college administrators' decisions, values, and beliefs influence racial climate exist in higher education research (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005; Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, Allen, & Milem, 1998; Kezar, 2008). For example, scholars chronicled senior student affairs administrators' experiences during the Civil Rights Movement focusing primarily on how their active roles in addressing racial climate advocated for students among other senior leaders rather than what they experienced or perceived their power was to make change (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). Informed by a breadth of campus climate literature highlighting experiences of students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, Hurtado et al. (1998) created a framework for policy makers and administrators to use in an effort to understand and describe the campus climate. This framework did not capture challenges policy makers and administrators face when addressing racial climate or campus culture. Kezar's (2008) research on leadership strategies used by university presidents to promote a diversity agenda is the closest in exploring the experiences of college administrators in addressing racial climate concerns; however, the presidents' perceptions were captured without supporting evidence that the diversity agenda positively influenced the experiences and outcomes of their marginalized students. López (2003) calls attention to the racially neutral research and dialogue around educational politics while Parker and Villalpando (2007)

encourage a more racialized view of educational leadership. Both confront the deficiencies within education politics and leadership and encourage studies to fill the void.

Much of the research around racial climate supports the counter narratives of college students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (see reviews by Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Smith, 2009). Shifting attention to campus culture, educational leadership, and educational politics aims to reveal embedded patterns and behaviors that may challenge or perpetuate inequitable experiences and outcomes on campus. Research on the environment and patterns are important; however, the institutional agents who contribute to this environment are equally so. This study focused on how campus administrators, particularly VPSAs, prioritized promoting postsecondary success for SoCs and how the institutional context mitigated each participant's political power to prioritize SoC success on campus.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical race theory (CRT) is one of the most valuable theoretical frameworks used as an analytic tool to dissect the racial underpinnings of inequity in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016). This theory emerged from critical legal scholars during the civil rights era who recognized the persistence of race as an integral factor in determining law and policy outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Derrick Bell considered the father of CRT by scholars, (Ladson-Billings, 1998), challenged the liberal perspective that deemed race as a social construct and the collection of biased perspectives (Bell, 1992). Bell argues that racism not only exists since the birth of this nation, but also as a tool to disperse privilege and success (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In education, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) apply CRT to the education context, McCoy and Rodricks (2015) reviews the use of CRT in higher education research, and Patton (2016) homes in on how the CRT lens can be used to disrupt the institutionalized racism in postsecondary institutions. Utilizing CRT as an

analytical framework helped me to critically evaluate the efforts made by VPSAs in prioritizing SoCs and how they perceived their political power to promote SoC success at their institutions. While CRT guides the analysis and interpretation of the data, this study will also utilize Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

Ladson-Billings' (1995) groundbreaking contribution of CRP applies a CRT analysis to education research with a unique focus on the values and beliefs of educators in elementary and secondary settings. Research on college administrators' influence on postsecondary success among SoCs is not exempt from CRP's utility. CRP offers a way to operationalize the values and beliefs that influence administrators' efforts to transform racial climate and promote postsecondary success more broadly among other racially minoritized student groups (Flores, Knauth, & Stegemoller, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Museus, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). In this study, CRP was used to guide the interview protocol and organizing the findings that captured descriptions of programs, policies, initiatives that VPSAs believed to prioritize SoC success in their student affairs divisions.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

VPSAs hold institutions accountable for considering student concerns and interests, while also navigating the political environment formed by other internal and external competing needs (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Wilson, 2017). VPSAs are positioned to address the needs of racial minorities on campus in alignment with their profession's philosophies and values (Hurtado et al., 1999; Reason & Broido, 2017). Additionally, VPSAs have the positional power to transform their campus environments through policies, allocation of resources, and advocacy measures within the realms of their job responsibilities (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). The purpose of this critical qualitative case study is to explore how VPSAs prioritize promoting postsecondary

success for SoCs and how they perceive their power to prioritize SoCs at their institution by asking two research questions:

Research Question #1: How do Vice Presidents of Student Affairs (VPSAs) at public institutions prioritize promoting equitable postsecondary outcomes and experiences for Students of Color (SoCs) at historically White institutions (HWIs)?

Research Question #2: How do VPSAs perceive their power to prioritize promoting equitable postsecondary outcomes and experiences for SoCs at HWIs?

Research Method

Critical qualitative inquiry will inform the research design for this study, as it centers experiences of marginalized and underrepresented groups and challenges the power structures that sustain systemic oppression (Pasque et al., 2017). To best explore VPSA experiences, a qualitative case study was conducted to gather rich and holistic descriptions that investigate the phenomenon in close proximity to the context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary source of data collection is from semi-structured interviews although artifacts collected contribute to an in-depth description of the context that informs the VPSAs' professional practice. Participants were introduced to the study at the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) during a closed meeting for VPSAs and recruited using network sampling.

The initial research design included three phases of data collection where participants (a) completed a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix A) that inquired about institutional culture, racial climate, and how each participant makes sense of inequitable outcomes and experiences among SoCs, (b) engaged in a semi-structured interview where participants shared examples of how their divisions promoted SoC success, their personal and professional experiences with race, and their perceptions of power to make change, and (c) responded to a reflection prompt after the interview that provided an opportunity for participants to share any additional thoughts that were

sparked post-interview (Appendix C). The semi-structured interviews provided the most depth and reflection across the three phases and thus became the primary source of analysis for findings utilizing the pre-interview questionnaire and reflection responses as confirmatory data that emerged in the interviews. Various documents were collected and analyzed to provide institutional context. Each institution's organizational chart, enrollment demographics, retention and graduation demographics, missions and visions of their student affairs divisions were collected. These were supplemented by articles in student-run newspapers, diversity strategic plans, and websites as these were available and relevant. Together, these instruments provided in-depth descriptions of VPSA experiences in prioritizing SoCs on their campuses.

Significance of Proposed Research

Systemic oppression is the root of racialized inequity in the American education system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state, "...these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized (p. 47)." Racial tension on campus did not evolve on its own; rather, it has evolved from racially biased values and beliefs sustained by systems of power. Faculty, staff, and administrators hold a great deal of power to disrupt, develop, or sustain systems that directly impact racial climate and student success. VPSAs are amongst an elite leadership team who are positioned to transform a campus environment that best serves its SoCs.

For this reason, this research extends the discussion on race and racism to VPSAs who are positioned to perform as change agents, student advocates, and senior-level leaders equipped to disrupt the status quo. The study's findings also provide a practitioner perspective on how SoCs are and are not prioritized in higher education. Critical race theorists call scholars to extend their scholarship into activism (Chapman & DeCuir-Gunby, 2019). This study, financially supported by SACSA, reflects the student affairs profession's interest in this work informing

current practice among student affairs professionals and my hope that this contributes to a growing relationship between scholarship and practice that moves from racial idealism to racial realism.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The racial climate on college campuses reflects the tension between America's historical legacy of excluding racially minoritized groups from education and the increased presence of racially diverse student populations on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998; Rhoads, 2016; Wechsler, 2007). Despite broadly celebrated policy measures that promote equal access to education, progress towards equitable postsecondary outcomes for SoCs remains difficult (Griffin, 2017; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). While increased access may attempt to improve equity, close achievement gaps, and pay education debts, providing students with acceptance letters and scholarships does not address a racial climate and campus culture that is not conducive to learning and success for SoCs (Hurtado et al., 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017; Museus, 2014). Work towards creating a culturally relevant experience for SoCs has the potential of translating into equitable postsecondary achievement (Bensimon, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1999; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017; Museus, 2014; Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2014). College administrators are stewards for ensuring that the college environment is supporting students from marginalized groups (Griffin, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1999; Kezar, 2012; King & Hamilton, 2003; Patton et al., 2007; Pope & Mueller, 2017).

The proposed critical qualitative case study is grounded in racial climate literature that supports the counternarratives of SoCs in higher education. This literature review describes racial climate on campus and the institutional culture in which it exists. Next, it discusses the role of senior-level administrators in addressing racial tension and reviews the emergence of student affairs as a profession with values and beliefs grounded in social justice and inclusion. Race continues to be a significant factor for identifying educational inequity in the United States signaling there is more work to be done (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016); however,

frameworks effective in dismantling systemic racism like CRT remains underutilized in educational leadership and politics in the context of higher education (Harper, 2017; López, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Patton, 2016). Critically examining the campus environment and the influence administrators have to foster an inclusive environment is crucial to creating a space that fosters success amongst SoCs.

Campus Climate

Research that focuses on college students' experiences utilizes various terms to describe the college environment (Museus et al., 2012; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Campus climate and campus culture are the terms most often used to describe campus environments. Campus climate is defined as the attitudes, behaviors, and standards that campus community members engage in to promote respect for student needs (Griffin, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1999; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Campus climate literature supports counternarratives of SoCs and provides empirical evidence that describes their perceptions of the environment as it pertains to the individual attitudes, behaviors, and standards of others around them. A subset of campus climate is campus racial climate that refers specifically to the racial environment on campus (Solórzano, et al. 2000). Meanwhile, campus culture refers to a broader view of campus environment with a focus on collective patterns. Kuh & Whitt (1988) define campus culture as “persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus” (p. iv). These said patterns directly inform the mission, traditions, artifacts, and other elements of campus culture that support or hinder the postsecondary success for historically excluded populations (Museus et al., 2012; Renn & Patton, 2017).

While prominent studies describe campus racial climate (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Harper, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000), there is a steady movement towards examining campus culture as it relates to creating more inclusive environments for SoCs (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Kezar, 2012; Museus et al., 2012; Renn & Patton, 2017; Witham & Bensimon, 2012). Museus, Ravello, & Vega (2012) suggest that campus culture emphasizes the responsibility of the institution to transform the experiences for SoCs. When exploring the role administrators play in transforming racial climate, both campus climate and campus culture are relevant to this study as administrators often address racial climate in the context of their campus culture. For the purpose of this study, campus racial climate will refer specifically to how SoCs perceive and experience their environment. Campus culture will refer to an institution's broader organizational system that perpetuates or challenges a culture of exclusion and racism that leads to differing experiences among students based on their racial identity.

Amidst a tense racial climate, there is power in supporting, validating, and exposing the counternarratives of students who experience the overt and covert questioning of their presence in higher education. Hurtado et al. (1998) identify four dimensions of racial climate on campus – historical legacy, structural diversity, psychological dimension, and behavioral dimension. These dimensions work in tandem and capture how SoCs experience their college environments. Each dimension in this literature review is intentionally discussed as it reflects the tenets of CRT and informs the programs, policies, and practices that VPSAs who participated in this study referenced as addressing each component of campus climate. Specifically, the historical legacy section exemplifies CRT's race permanence tenet and provides a "revisionist history" of how SoCs have historically experienced their campus environments that precede the challenges faced today (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The structural, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of campus climate provide examples of higher education problems that

VPSAs make an effort to address as they describe their culturally relevant practices. This framework is used to describe the campus climate for SoCs using current events, literature, and research.

Historical legacy. Higher education is grounded in a culture of exclusion (Hurtado, et. al, 1998; Rhoads, 2016; Wechsler, 2007). This historical context informs policy and practice on national, state, and institutional levels. In the early stages of higher education, narrow access was only granted to White protestant men from wealthy backgrounds (Wechsler, 2007). When campuses opened their doors to clergymen from less affluent backgrounds, wealthy students began to ostracize new students further stratifying collegiate experiences by socioeconomic class (Wechsler, 2007). Women and religious minorities shortly followed and faced adverse environments upon arrival (Wechsler, 2007). Last to enter collegiate environments were students from racially minoritized backgrounds. At that time, racial diversity posed a challenge for college campuses as a nation grappled with progress that moved away from viewing slaves as criminals for demonstrating intellectual ability to acknowledging their descendants as intellectual peers (Gasman & Hilton, 2012). Despite the recent increase in racially and gender diverse student populations, White and wealthy men who were first given access to higher education, continue to experience the benefits of postsecondary education at a higher rate than their peers—evidence that the lingering culture of exclusion impacts the equity gap in achievement we observe today (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017; Ross, et al., 2012; Wechsler, 2007).

Each racially diverse group has had unique, yet similarly racist, experiences with access to higher education. For example, federal funding for educating Native students began in the early years of colonialization (Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2014); however, the intent was to colonize, or Americanize, Native peoples thus stripping Native peoples of their

culture (Lundberg, 2014). Individuals from Asian backgrounds experienced a unique entry to the education system tempered by the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that prohibited their migration to the country (Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2014). Today, Asian and Asian-American students continue to face unique circumstances that hinder their holistic development on today's college campuses in the shadow of "model minority" stereotypes (Museus & Truong, 2009). Meanwhile, the uncertainty around the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has limited access and hindered persistence for Latinx students (ACE, 2018).

The history of Black students entering postsecondary institutions is uniquely characteristic of the American education system as it reflects the historical legacy of racism demonstrated during the 400 years of enslaving persons of African-descent (Gasman & Hilton, 2012; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). When slavery was no longer law, persons of African-descent attempted to pursue the constitutional rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; however, racism that plagued the crevices of American society hindered this pursuit. When *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) allowed for separate but equal facilities for People of Color, legislation followed that issued state and federal mandates to provide funding and access to higher education for SoCs. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) expanded greatly in an effort to educate Black students, both on an undergraduate and graduate level, because Black students were not given access to other public institutions. When *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) determined that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional, HBCUs were forced to compete with well-resourced public institutions for Black students and their enrollments declined. Consequently, the federal and state governments divested from HBCUs despite their success in producing 13.1 percent of Black graduates while representing less than 3 percent of colleges and universities (Gasman & Hilton, 2012).

Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), including HBCUs, face similar challenges with funding and support for their success in serving this growing population (Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2014; Renn & Patton, 2017). The decision for national and state governments to divest reflects a false assumption that access to HWIs would result in SoCs demonstrating the same level of achievement at public HWIs as many SoCs did at an MSI. In contrast, even with minimal resources, SoCs succeed at MSIs at a higher rate than HWIs (Gasman & Hilton, 2012; Nichols, & Evans-Bell, 2017).

Historical evidence signals how common it is that the postsecondary achievement for SoCs remains in the balance of sweeping decisions regarding policies and practices. Even after over 50 years of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the convoluted progress and history of exclusion lingers on today's campuses in the form of building names and historic monuments. Students have called attention to these symbols in recent protests. For example, students at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill demanded administrators remove the Silent Sam monument honoring a Confederate soldier because it simultaneously represented those who fought for the enslavement of Black people (Reilly, 2017). In November 2016, students at Princeton University occupied the president's office to demand trustees remove Woodrow Wilson's name from the public policy school because he represented stark opinions in support of slavery (Wong & Green, 2016). Counter-protests also call attention to the historical legacy of exclusion. In 2017, members of a White nationalist group marched in Charlottesville and on the University of Virginia's campus with torches making racist and neo-Nazi outcries (Heim, 2017). Events like these, at some of the oldest colleges in American history, are reminding college students of this historical legacy of exclusion.

Structural diversity. Later named compositional diversity, structural diversity refers to the racial composition of an institution (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). Overall enrollment in postsecondary education is expected to increase 15 percent between fall 2012 and 2023 (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). For Black and Latinx students, postsecondary enrollment is expected to increase 25 percent and 34 percent, respectively, touting the most gains seen across racial and ethnic identities (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). Meanwhile, Native American students are disproportionately underrepresented in all postsecondary environments (Ross, et al., 2012). These projections inform the programs, policies, and practices that directly influence how we support our SoCs to succeed in their environments; however, these projections are also used to provide a rationale for resource allocation to support SoCs as a levying tool by administrators in positions of power.

In the legal arena, affirmative action has been a long-standing tool to encourage more diverse environments by increasing compositional diversity on postsecondary campuses (Jayakumar, 2015). The Supreme Court's dissenting and affirming responses supported the importance of diverse environments in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) case questioning affirmative action. Judges with varying opinions agreed that a critical mass is necessary to create a productive learning experience believing that such environment seeks to embrace differences and challenge stereotypes. However, even in the affirming responses, the perpetual impact of historical exclusion was overlooked when Justice O'Connor suggested that using race in admissions would not be relevant in 25 years (Milem et al., 2005). Although upholding affirmative action supports structural diversity as necessary for today's college environment, affirmative action remains a source of contention. Varying perspectives shape opinions on the Harvard lawsuit that questions whether race should be utilized in admissions policies if a subset of SoCs, Asian Americans, can experience bias (Jaschik, 2018). This recent case highlights the

complexities that exist in an institution's attempt to take multiple factors into consideration in an effort to accept a racially diverse student population.

Structural diversity is also shaped by conversations around college access to postsecondary secondary institutions. As discussed in the historical legacy overview, despite the increases observed over the last few years, a deficit and diversity rationales is used to explain how SoCs gain access to colleges and universities (Bensimon, 2005; Patton, 2016). Bensimon's research suggests that individuals who demonstrate a deficit cognitive frame are likely to attribute inequity to a SoCs' life choices or chance, thus reflecting a colorblind mindset and those with a diversity frame reflect on how diversity positively influences White students' experiences, most reflecting CRT's critique of liberalism with interest convergence. Patton elaborates that "Access, cloaked in the myth of hard work, without acknowledging racism in the college admissions, recruitment, and admissions policies is irresponsible" (p. 327).

Psychological dimension. Although judicial support urges colleges and universities to strengthen admission policies regarding access to education for those historically excluded based on racial identity (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Jayakumar, 2015), a resounding perception is that institutions recruit and admit students of diverse backgrounds, but do not foster an environment where the diverse groups critically engage with each other. This environment perpetuates differing experiences on the same campus (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jayakumar, 2015; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000). The increased enrollment of students from underrepresented populations does not directly result in improving racial climate. Even with legal strides to increase representation, colleges and universities, and those who lead them, are called to do more to address campus cultures that do not minimize the exclusionary feelings of underrepresented students. Hurtado et al. (1998) stated that the psychological dimension "involves individuals' views of group relations, institutional responses to diversity,

perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict, and attitudes toward those from other racial/ethnic backgrounds than one's own" (p. 289).

Research captures how Asian American, Black, Latinx, and Native American students experience racial conflict and perceive their racial environment differently from their White peers (see reviews by Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Smith 2009). Hurtado's (1992) prominent study on institutional context reveals three relevant findings to this dimension: (1) students perceive that increasing racial diversity was not a clear institutional goal or priority; (2) SoCs are more critical of their environment than other students, suggesting a stronger perception of discrimination or racial conflict; and (3) students report that there is a lack of trust between minority student groups and administrators. Additionally, racial and ethnic minorities perceive their campuses to be less accepting and more racist than their White counterparts (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Although the research was conducted over a decade ago, we see this truth resonating in today's racial climate as SoCs remain more likely to protest and challenge institutional ignorance towards racialized experiences (Eagan et al., 2017; Rhoads, 2016).

One example of institutional ignorance is the belief that espoused missions inevitably translate into actionable steps (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). The espoused missions intend to promote diversity initiatives that respond to inequitable experiences across minority groups; however, these strategic plans are often situated in a deficit perspective and paint SoCs as outsiders (Iverson, 2007). Thus, the resounding perception is that institutions recruit and admit students of diverse backgrounds but do not foster an environment where a diverse group of individuals are welcomed and interact across groups (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jayakumar, 2015). Harper and Hurtado (2007) captured student perspectives in their multi-campus qualitative study of campus climates at HWIs that had recently responded to racially-biased incidents. In this study, student participants from all races shared frustration with the

“incongruence of espoused and enacted values concerning diversity” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 16). The students concluded that the institutions were not doing enough to create opportunities to promote meaningful cross-racial engagement and rather talked about diversity as a priority without enacting the value (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

This literature sheds light on SoCs’ experiences on campus; however, little research solely focuses on the influence of campus administrators who facilitate group interactions, assist with developing the strategic plans, or publicly discuss racially biased incidents with the campus community (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Wilson, 2017). For example, while Hurtado (1992) concluded that micro and macro level policies and statements play a role in student perceptions, the study did not delve further into the individuals who create the policies and write the statements nor the campus culture that may unconsciously support racially-biased experiences for SoCs. In Iverson’s (2007) critical analysis of diversity policies, she found that policies are not doing as they intend regardless of the intent of those who help create it. Generally speaking, Harper (2017) presents a construct for racially responsive leadership that centers race on college and university campuses emphasizing the collaborative nature of critically evaluating the historical, structural, and cultural features of their campus environments that institutionalize racism. The leaders he references is to faculty, staff, and administrators. Meanwhile Patton (2015) and Patton et al. (2007) call specific attention to the absence of critical race perspectives and research on student affairs administrators. This study fills a gap in the literature by capturing administrators’ experiences prioritizing SoCs on their campuses through the critical analysis of artifacts, programs, practices, and policies.

Behavioral dimension. The final dimension of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) four dimensions of campus racial climate addresses meaningful cross-racial engagement and whether cross-racial interaction occurs formally or informally. Jayakumar’s (2015) research to inform the *Fisher v*

University of Texas (2013) case, findings support that a critical mass, or same-race representation, decreases the chances that Black and Latinx students feel isolated or stereotyped based on race and all students are more likely to engage in quality cross-race interactions. In a review of numerous studies, Hurtado et al. (2003) conclude that diverse college environments are most likely to increase the likelihood of individuals living in more racially heterogeneous communities and demonstrate preparedness for success in a more complex and diverse society. These educational outcomes are catalyzed by the cross-racial engagement that occurs informally and formally on college campuses. However, Solórzano et al. (2000) found that racial microaggressions, or subtle insults, inundated academic and social spaces for African-American students at an HWI. These findings challenge the notion that all cross-racial engagement is meaningful and positive. Unfortunately, the prevalence of cross-racial behaviors is slim and positive outcomes are not guaranteed (Jayakumar, 2015; Solórzano, 2000).

Student affairs divisions are home to student organizations that create an intentional structure for student involvement and meaningful engagement (Dunkel & Chrystal-Green, 2017). Student organizations are directly reflective of students' interests and demographics. To create a student organization, students drive the process by approaching student activities offices within student affairs for the tools and guidance to develop a mission statement, define goals, and fulfill administrative tasks to request funding. Although student organizations are created by the students, for the students, SoC have mixed experiences when engaging in student organizations. For SoCs, student organizations that prioritize their identity development support adjustment and membership to predominantly White institutions (Museus, 2008; Quaye, Griffin, & Harper, 2014). Characterized as ethnic student organizations, Museus found that these organizations provided an affirming space for students to demonstrate cultural authenticity. These organizations are often one way in which an institution tried to address the behavioral dimension

(Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1998). However, Quaye, Griffin, and Harper (2014) summarize studies that highlight lower rates of engagement for SoCs due to “mainstream organizations not reflecting their cultural interests” (p. 19).

Hurtado, et al.’s (1998) campus racial climate model is informed by earlier campus climate studies that provide insight into the experiences of SoCs on campus and the culture in which they exist. If higher education is to take any note of the challenges faced in elementary and secondary settings with regard to social, economic and racial disparities across the rising generations, college educators and administrators would predict that the complexities of their student demographics will continue to change, and leadership will continue to be held accountable for creating environments that support the success of a more diverse student body. College campuses function as an environment where students are encouraged to challenge perceptions and engage with activities that help them define who they are (Kuh et al., 2005). The historical, structural, psychological, and behavioral dimensions for racial climate directly impact a student’s ability to succeed and exists within a campus culture that sustains the current racial climate as the standard (Hurtado, et al., 1998).

Campus Culture

Racial climate refers to dimensions that describe an environment within a context of time and space. Meanwhile, climate can be viewed as a product of the broader context of campus culture. To further dissect campus culture and its influence on racial climate, it is necessary to understand how culture and climate are related. The delineation between campus climate and culture can be illustrated through the events surrounding the protests at the University of Missouri in 2015. During the Concerned Student of 1950 student group’s protest at the University of Missouri, students expressed their discontent with how the institution repeatedly ignored complaints regarding racially biased incidents on campus (Dietrich et al., 2016). The

racial climate was tense as racially-biased incidents occurred without a brow-raise from campus administrators. The University of Missouri's patterned behaviors demonstrated a recurring avoidance of addressing racially biased incidents. These patterned behaviors revealed a campus culture that did not demonstrate an ethic of care for the SoCs on campus. Racially-biased incidents can occur anywhere; however, the culture of an institution is revealed in how the institution reacts to such incidents.

Critical race theorists offer a strong argument for disrupting the status quo of dismissing or minimizing race from conversations around organizational culture in higher education. For example, from a critical race lens, Patton (2016) extends Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) propositions on racism and White supremacy that exists in higher education. Patton provides three propositions (a) the establishment of the U.S. higher education system is deeply rooted in racism and remains palatable, (b) how higher education systems in the U.S. is tied to values of imperialism and capitalism that fuels the intersection of race, property, and oppression, and (c) U.S. higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated (p. 317). Accepting these propositions to be true reveals the racial idealism of meritocracy where students make it to postsecondary environments as a testament of their hard work, thus dismissing the systems that disproportionately create barriers for SoCs to access and persist postsecondary goals. These propositions also implicate the organizational culture for subscribing to incremental change and interest convergence that rationalize slow progress at a palatable pace for the predominately White participants in higher education environments and the implementation of exclusive strategies that promote postsecondary success for SoCs that simultaneously benefits the perception of the HWI (Patton).

On college campuses, the embedded values of exclusion in higher education has fueled a culture that perpetuates inequitable experiences among SoCs. University of Missouri's SoCs are

not alone in these experiences (for example, Chavous, Richardson, Webb, Fonseca-Bolorin, & Leath, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lundberg, 2014; Museus & Truong, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000; Wong & Green, 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). The University of Missouri example demonstrates how campus culture can impede progress with improving racial climate; however, there are examples of how campus culture can become a catalyst for transforming climate (for example, Hurtado et al, 1998; Kuh et al., 2005; Museus, 2011). The following sections will define and discuss organizational culture, learning, and change to illustrate the complexities of campus culture and its relationship to power. This discussion frames the case study by describing the context in which VPSAs attempt to prioritize the SoCs on their campuses.

Organizational culture. An iceberg is a common image used to describe culture. Above water, we can see a small portion of the iceberg while the majority of the iceberg exists below and not easily observed to the naked eye. Like the surface of an iceberg, the visible portion of campus culture is observed through the behaviors that are taught, learned, and repeated (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Schein & Schein, 2016; Tierney, 2008). Behaviors can include what we find in artifacts, programs, and public statements. Upon closer look, below the water, we can examine the most formative aspects of the iceberg. The formative aspects of culture include the values, assumptions, and beliefs of an institution (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Schein & Schein, 2016; Tierney, 2008).

Amidst the numerous definitions of organizational culture, each definition emphasizes the relationship between the essence of culture exhibited through patterned behaviors and the guiding values that inform the perpetual acceptance of certain behaviors as the norm. Kuh and Whitt (1988) define campus culture as the determined standard by which decisions are made at an institution. Renn and Patton (2017) affirm that culture is a product of the values, assumptions,

and beliefs that undergird the patterned behaviors that characterize a campus culture. Culture can also be viewed as the essential element to consider when examining why institutions may fail or thrive in reaching their goals (Thornton & Jaeger, 2008). Tierney (2008) defines culture simply by stating “an organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it (Tierney, 2008, p. 24)”. In describing the critical perspective of organizational culture, Bess and Dee (2012) suggest the emphasis is placed on “how the more powerful actors in an organization are able to shape the values and priorities (p. 385)”. This critical qualitative case study seeks to explore the powerful actors that influence campus culture under the premise that institutional agents, in addition to institutional characteristics, play a significant role in perpetuating or challenging the culture of exclusion within postsecondary institutions (Bess & Dee, 2012; Renn & Patton, 2017; Tierney, 2008).

The collective values, assumptions, and beliefs of institutional agents, or members of the campus community, shape campus culture (Tierney, 2008). Individual values, assumptions, and beliefs stem from personal life experiences. When discussing racial climate, Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller’s (2004) multicultural competence model illustrates the similarity between competence on an individual level and culture on an organizational level. Multicultural competence consists of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Pope et al., 2004). Prior to building knowledge and skills, campus administrators must first develop multicultural awareness that involves an exploration of personal attitudes, values, biases, and assumptions about themselves, others, and the broader community (Pope et al., 2004). As institutional agents, campus administrators navigate how their multicultural awareness aligns or disrupts the shared assumptions that ground their institution’s culture. Individual values and organizational values influence each other simultaneously (Tierney, 2008). As administrators contribute to these

shared values that shape the culture, the administrator's institution endorses specific values, beliefs, and assumptions through organizational learning.

Organizational learning. Organizational culture is reflective of the shared learning experience of accepted behaviors—organizational learning. Schein and Schein (2016) suggest that a culture is learned and that it reflects behavior that has “worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems (p. 6)”. In spite of the influx and outflux of people at an institution, institutional culture remains relatively unchanged because learned behaviors are passed on through training and transition practices (Bess & Dee, 2012). Bess and Dee (2012) suggest there are two approaches in which to understand organizational learning: cognitive conceptualizations and cultural conceptualizations.

Agyris and Schön's (1978) theory best describes the relationship between organizational culture and learning by differentiating single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning occurs in a cycle of individuals' actions leading to outcomes and those outcomes informing future actions. Double-loop learning extends the cycle to include an organization's structure and culture as a source of feedback to guide future action and outcomes. Amidst a tense racial climate on today's campuses, institutions have attempted to disrupt the learning cycle in an effort to change repeated actions that result in inequitable outcomes for SoCs. Institutions are reevaluating their structures and cultures and creating an opportunity for administrators to engage in double-loop learning.

Bensimon (2005) proposes that a focus on organizational learning is an effective strategy to uncover the structural and cultural obstacles that impede progress towards producing equitable outcomes for SoCs. If campus culture is the product of a shared learning experience by an organization's members (Schein & Schein, 2016), the individuals who participate in this shared

learning experience are of key interest. Bensimon (2005) elaborates on the role individuals play in organizational learning at an institution stating (1) university and college community members all participate in the learning process, (2) individuals represent the organization when addressing problems, and (3) an institution's culture promotes or inhibits learning (p. 101). Thus, to critically analyze campus culture, distinctive attention should be given to campus administrators and the way in which they view and learn about diversity.

Using Pope & Reynolds' (1997) definition of multicultural competence, King and Hamilton (2003) conducted a study on the perception of multicultural competence across graduate students in a college student affairs program, their internship supervisors, and diversity educators. The study provided an assessment to these three groups that measured their personal perception of their multicultural knowledge, skills, and awareness. Essentially, King and Hamilton uniquely examines organizational learning within student affairs and found that all participants ranked themselves highest on multicultural awareness and lowest on multicultural knowledge. Additionally, People of Color and diversity educators revealed a perception that they are more knowledgeable than their White peers indicating that organizational learning occurs differently not only based on the cultural context of an organization, but also varying based on personal experiences and racial identities.

Organizational change. Bess and Dee (2012) draw on other scholars to offer a definition of organizational change as any adjustment made to a process, structure, or behavior in a system. On today's campuses, change is inevitable as campuses prepare for the increasingly diverse populations to join their campus communities (Kezar, 2001; Kezar, 2017). A thorough understanding of the institutional culture is crucial to guiding the change process (Kezar, 2001). Kezar (2001) identifies unique characteristics of higher education institutions that signal the features that should be considered when implementing change. The features most relevant to this

study include the multiple power and authority structures, organized anarchical decision-making, professional and administrative values, image and success. These features can inform effective strategies VPSAs can implement to influence cultural change on their respective campuses (Kezar, 2001).

Higher education is often criticized for being slow to change (Bess & Dee, 2012). CRT challenges the liberal ideology that consents to incremental change because a slow pace is only effective for individuals in power who do not experience the daily challenge that hinders their progress (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Patton, 2015). Schein and Schein's (2016) levels of culture include artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Each level of culture requires different levels of effort to change. The basic underlying assumptions are hardest to change because of the repeated success of learned behaviors. The basic underlying assumptions in higher education are rooted in exclusion (Wechsler, 2007) and continues to leave residual effects seen in the inequitable access and postsecondary success for SoCs. Change is necessary, although daunting, and can produce positive outcomes.

Bolman and Deal (2017) acknowledge that change in complex organizations is difficult unless a multi-frame strategy that addresses the structural, human resources, symbolic, and political components of an organization is utilized. Critical case studies in higher education organization research are necessary to begin to investigate how leaders implement multi-frame approaches that spark organizational change (Pasque et al., 2017). Critical case studies, like this study, can begin to expose the best practices in influencing change that challenges the underlying assumption of exclusion. This study examined the role powerful institutional agents play in challenging or perpetuating an exclusionary culture that fosters inequitable outcomes for SoCs on campus.

Power to change. On a college campus, senior-level administrators are individuals who make decisions that influence the campus culture every day (Kezar, 2008; Reason & Broido, 2017; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Power and position are intricately connected to informing change on campus as confirmed by organizational theory frameworks (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Bolman and Deal (2017) define power as the means in which an organization accomplishes its goals. Although leaders can view how to distribute or exercise power differently, regardless of the organizational frame of reference, power is present when resources are scarce and multiple perspectives collide (Bolman & Deal, 2017). An institution's distribution of power may be exemplified in an organizational chart. Each VPSA who participated in this study reported directly to the president or chancellor of their institution alongside other senior-level leaders including, but not limited to, senior financial officers and provosts. Their positions on the president's cabinet implies their anticipated challenges with advocating for resources and their espoused power and ability to shift campus culture.

Campus administrators who report directly to the president makes a clear statement about who and what is valued at an institution. In the wake of increased racial tension on college campuses, diversity officers emerged as individuals that could be positioned to address racialized experiences on campus (Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014). Chief diversity officers were added to the presidential cabinets to provide insight on how to address concerns regarding diverse issues across the nation (Worthington et al., 2014). However, power emerges in organizations because organizations are a conglomerate of coalitions rather than a chart of hierarchies (Bolman & Deal 2017). Thus, the organization chart does not capture the full story. For this reason, this study also focuses on how VPSAs utilize their power and influence to change their institutions for the better.

Linking Campus Climate and Culture to Student Achievement

Student engagement on campus directly correlates with the academic achievement across all racial groups (Kuh et al., 2005). In a study conducted across institutions that demonstrated relatively higher levels of student engagement and achievement, a supportive campus environment emerged as a common attribute across the institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). Programs, services, and practices were affirming to students' academic success and cultivated intergroup relationships across campus. According to Kuh et al. (2005), "the properties of a supportive campus environment are situated in a complex network of cultural assumptions, beliefs, values, norms, and perceptions" (p. 242). Thus, illuminating the relationship between an institution's climate and culture with student achievement.

With keen attention given to SoC experiences, campus climate research informs how the environment shapes this group's experiences and contributes to postsecondary achievement among SoCs. Chang's (1999) seminal work examines the relationship between racial diversity and student success using nationally representative data. The study indicated that a racially diverse environment, previously described as the structural dimension (Hurtado et al., 1998), has a positive impact on cross-racial engagement that aligns with positive educational outcomes. Commissioned by the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AACU), scholars strengthened the argument that there is a positive relationship between diverse environments and achieving equitable outcomes for higher education among SoCs (Milem et al., 2005). In another nationally representative study, Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) identified a positive correlation between diversity experiences, defined as classroom and informal interactions with diversity, and educational outcomes. These diversity experiences with the behavioral dimension as described by Hurtado et al. (1998).

While these studies suggest a positive impact of racial diversity on educational outcomes, each study indicated that the impact is felt more for White students. From a CRT lens, utilizing this data in solidarity to motivate the transformation of today's climate would reflect interest convergence. Interest convergence suggests that diversity is only important when relevant to the success of Whites in the same environment (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Thus, it is important to complement this information with the benefits that SoCs gain from environments that intentionally support the success of students from racially diverse backgrounds. Neglecting the role racial climate plays in postsecondary achievement for SoCs does not lead to effective practice in supporting SoCs (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Literature describes racially affirming campuses and how certain characteristics align with SoCs achieving equitable outcomes (Hurtado et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 2003; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2011). A primary characteristic of racially affirming campuses is the shared value and regard for SoCs and their experiences on campus (Hurtado, et al., 1999). Across research reviewed by Hurtado, et al. (1999), institutions that demonstrate an authentic value and regard by addressing the institution's historical legacy, structural diversity, behavioral, and psychological dimensions of campus climate, can begin improving their campus climate by assessing the racial climate and developing action plans that address these dimensions. These actions signal an institutional commitment to improving racial climate and fosters an environment where SoCs can achieve increased success.

Museus (2011) also captures characteristics of racially affirming campus environments and names them culturally engaging campus environments. In this study, institutions that demonstrated high levels of success among ethnic minorities shared four institutional characteristics. The participants in this study described their institution as collective and committed, familial, and convicted of the institution's responsibility to success across racial and

ethnic groups. These findings call attention to how campus culture can positively influence the experiences for SoCs. Unfortunately, the absence of these characteristics is more common. Museus' (2011) findings are crucial to this proposed study as it strongly illuminates the importance of institutional culture and the role institutional agents play in promoting student success among SoCs.

The summary of campus climate and culture paints a grim picture of the context in which SoCs are intended to succeed. SoCs who attend HWIs have a significantly less positive experience than their peers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Museus et al., 2012; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000). Despite theories that suggest that suggest an oppositional stance to education may be the source of the differential experiences, studies confirm that SoCs are more likely to desire to achieve in academic environments (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). The concerns and barriers to their success reflect systemic concerns that emerge from “material conditions” (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998, p. 551). Clearly stated, Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey (1998) explain “...the best way to reduce the gap in educational performance is to implement policies that reduce economic inequality and racial segregation” (p. 551). Although their study focused primarily on secondary school students, the same proposed solution can apply to postsecondary institutions where we see the achievement gaps persist.

Postsecondary Achievement Among SoCs

When promoting postsecondary achievement among SoCs, climate matters. Scholars have long noted that the college environment influences the student success (Chang, 1999; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2003; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2011). A campus climate that invokes a sense of belonging for students from racially diverse student backgrounds will see the triumphs of their success through academic achievement (Gurin et. al,

2002; Museus, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2000). Having explored the deficiencies of our current campus climate for SoCs through Hurtado et al.'s (1998) four dimensions of racial climate on campus in the previous section, we can further explore the outcome of these deficiencies – the postsecondary achievement gap between SoCs and their peers.

The achievement gap has been reframed by Ladson-Billings (2006) as an education debt signaling the historical neglect of providing equitable resources in education for children. This term recognizes the historical legacy of exclusion for diverse student populations in which an expected outcome would be none other than disparities in postsecondary attainment along racial, socioeconomic, and gender lines. Despite their population growth, SoCs are less likely to attain postsecondary degrees (Perna & Finney, 2014). From a broader view, Perna and Finney (2014) suggested that the U.S. postsecondary degree attainment rate has stalled, as other nations seem to place more emphasis on funding and encouraging postsecondary achievement. Within the context of shifting national demographics, increasing attainment for Black and Latinx students is critical to addressing the completion agenda.

Postsecondary degree attainment among individuals between 25 and 34 has stalled in the United States as a result of a divestment in education for the younger generations (Perna & Finney, 2014). Once competitive with developed countries, the nation now lags behind as countries, like Korea, demonstrate significant gains in degree attainment among young adults (Perna & Finney, 2014). In the United States, there is a specifically large attainment gap between underrepresented groups which continues to grow specifically for Black and Latinx groups in comparison to their White and some Asian American peers (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017; Perna & Finney, 2014). Research in higher education points to the completion rates for the latter group to be more than three times higher than the underrepresented groups (Perna & Finney, 2014). According to Nichols & Evans-Bell (2017), the National Center of Education Statistics provides

data that shows the overall six-year graduation rate stands at 59.6 percent at four-year institutions in 2014. This postsecondary graduation rate differs greatly between Black students and their White peers with 40.9 percent of Black students graduating within six years compared to 63.2 percent of White students (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). Important to note is that attainment gaps begin to surface within college readiness factors prior to enrollment (Rodríguez, 2015). The inequity across postsecondary success is a barrier for the individuals it directly impacts and the nation.

Policy-makers often define student achievement in terms of graduation rates. For example, the Southeastern Accreditation of Colleges and Schools Commission of Colleges (SACSCOC) suggests institutions provide graduation rates as evidence for student achievement on their campuses. Among schools in the SACSCOC region, there is an average seven percent divide between graduation rates for Black and White students (The Education Trust, 2017). Among the institutions that report 6-year graduation rates, there is a postsecondary degree attainment gap between Black and White students ranging between 0.4 and 18.4 percent within the institutions that report the ten highest graduation rates (The Education Trust, 2017). Should this gap continue to widen, the growing minority-majority of the country will not experience the profitable outcomes of postsecondary degree attainment.

Today's college student activists demand a response from their administrators to address campus climate issues that directly impact individuals from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Cole & Harper, 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Fueling these demands is a disappointment and outrage in institutions that have not fulfilled espoused values to foster diverse learning environments and promote cross-cultural engagement (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). A natural next step is to identify the campus administrators who influence racial climate on campus and explore their effectiveness in improving their campuses

for students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. Little research has interrogated the institutional agents who are responsible for holding an institution accountable for these best practices (Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2012). A critical discussion on the role campus administrators have traditionally played in creating culturally engaging campus environments.

Senior-level Administrators Address Racial Climate

Senior-level administrators are defined as individuals who report to an institution's president and/or lead divisions of the organization on campus. Across numerous protests in recent years, student concerns have been listed as demands and submitted to senior-level administrators. Many student protest demands have called for administrator resignations in an effort to hold administrators accountable for not addressing racial climate on campus (Dietrich et al., 2016; Wong & Green, 2016). The unfavorable racial climate hinders racial and ethnic minoritized students from achieving academic and personal success (Museus, 2014; Hurtado, 1992; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Rhoads, 2016). Unfortunately, examples of failed attempts to make lasting change outnumber examples of progress (Cole & Harper, 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Iverson, 2007). Identifying who these leaders are and how they perceive their role in campus climate helps to describe the role they play in addressing racial climate.

Campus leader demographics. Jackson (2004) declared a crisis at the top with executive-level leadership not representing the demographics that make up an increasingly diverse student body. For example, the American College President Study in 2017 found that over 80 percent of these leaders are White, 70 percent are male, and close to 60 percent are in their 60s (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017). Findings from this study also state that a majority of those serving in these roles have professional backgrounds in academic content areas outside of education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Even today, Jackson's sentiments remain timely as he acknowledged that few People of Color serve in leadership roles with governing power and

many individuals from underrepresented backgrounds are not in positions that are traditionally routed towards senior-leadership. The prominence of White males in these roles perpetuates a climate of exclusion whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The average age of college presidents is also of particular interest. The average 60-year-old in America was born during the Civil Rights Movement on the heels of the Jim Crow era. During their childhood, they may have experienced long rides to school due to forced busing initiatives meant to effectively desegregate schools. It is likely that this demographic of leaders was also trained with colorblind standards that permitted implicit biases in the name of rejecting explicit racist behavior and unconsciously overlooking implicit racism. Davis, Gooden, and Micheaux (2015) conducted a study on the standards for school leadership and discovered that the standards, although touted to address diversity, did not consider race to help leaders begin addressing achievement gaps. Given the permanence of racism in our culture through a critical race lens, absence of a discussion of race in the training ground for any educational leader signals a grave limitation in their ability to address any campus climate (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Davis et al., 2015; Harper, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016).

Although campus leader demographics do not reflect the increasingly diverse student population, this observation is expected. To serve in senior-level positions, experience and graduate degrees are preferred, if not required for these positions. The historical legacy of exclusion casts a dark shadow on what we see today in campus leader demographics. The generation that holds the senior-level positions on campus are more likely to have earned their qualifications during a time where access was still slim for People of Color. As the tides have shifted to increase access for SoCs in recent years, we should expect to see a more diverse leadership emerge. In continued progress towards increasing access for SoCs, administrators will

always be less representative of their students. Although this signals progress, senior-level administrators should engage in professional development and daily practice that keeps them in touch with their evolving student population. Attendance and participation in critical reflection is only part of the work, effort must be made in challenging their personal values and beliefs that can positively or negatively influence their decisions regarding students with whom they do not share an identity (Day,1993).

Intervention attempts. Senior-level administrators face challenging situations when they decide to challenge or uphold the campus culture. Regardless of the level of responsibility, administrators may propose interventions that aim to address racial climate concerns. In response to racial climate concerns and student demands for improvement, it became commonplace for administrators to create a diversity strategic plan in response to student demands (Iverson, 2007). In doing so, college presidents indicate that politics largely influences whether they move a diversity agenda forward (Kezar, 2008). Politics, in this sense, refers to the use of power within a social setting for organizational gain (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Important to note is that each president involved with this study perceived that they had the power to address climate concerns. Conversely, while the strategies suggested were successful for them in their leadership roles, less focus was given to whether students from diverse backgrounds felt the difference.

Iverson (2007) counters the argument of promising strategies through an analysis of diversity policies that actually exude power and privilege of dominant groups. In Iverson's study, she dissected diversity statements and strategic plans to find that these statements and plans prioritize diversity to become more competitive. Cole and Harper (2016) found similar findings when analyzing presidential statements in response to racial incidents on their campuses. As evidenced by their findings (Cole & Harper, 2016; Iverson, 2007), statements embody a political rhetoric by providing "empty promises and non-committal responses" (Cole & Harper, 2016).

Overall, administrators' well-intended responses are not influencing racial climate as powerfully as they hoped.

Perceptions of campus administrator effectiveness. Students across racial groups shared frustration with the “incongruence of espoused and enacted values concerning diversity” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 16). Students believe that institutions are not doing enough to create opportunities to promote meaningful cross-racial engagement and talked about diversity as a priority without enacting the value. In Hoffman and Mitchell's (2016) case study of a student activist group at a public university, researchers found that students were disappointed with the statements released in response to their protest. Students perceived that administrators' responses were politically safe. The various communication analyzed perpetuated the power dynamic and privilege of the administration, diffusing the core concerns of the student organization. Students shared how the non-conformative responses had negative impacts on the activist group and the lived realities of each student from an underrepresented group. Hoffman and Mitchell's (2016) research sends a clear message that administrative responses or actions are often perceived as empty words without an action plan.

College administrators who have direct impact on creating policy and modeling practices of inclusion and equity on campus can be change agents to the current status-quo; however, these administrators need guidance. Research shows that popular responses to racially charged incidents or proactive initiatives to improve the campus climate have fallen short (Cole & Harper, 2016; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Providing opportunities where leaders can learn more about these practices is difficult as it requires vulnerability and awareness of power and privilege, practices that elite leadership shy away from (Bensimon, 2005; Bensimon, 2007; Daudelin, 1996; Day, 1993; Kezar, 2012).

The Vice Presidents of Student Affairs Role

Practitioner knowledge is significant when studying equity in student outcomes (Bensimon, 2007). Unlike K-12 research that centers a classroom teacher's influence on a school's environment, postsecondary research does not center practitioners in our conversations about campus culture and the influence they have on a students' environment. Furthermore, the research that grounds campus climate and culture research is conducted from a constructivist and post-positivist lens that acknowledges difference through a narrow lens of cause and effect. This is an immense oversight because institutions, as organizations, do not change racial climate, people do, and people and culture are "messy" (Pasque & Harris, 2014; Pasque, Kader, & Still, 2017).

Practitioners, like student affairs professionals and other administrators, are called to address racial concerns on a daily basis and there are no clear answers or perfect interventions. Scholars acknowledge the importance of institutional agents playing a direct role in transforming racial climate regardless of the position title or leadership rank (Bensimon, 2007; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Institutional agents hired to support student success and advocate for social justice are a missed voice in current scholarship around postsecondary education. VPSAs are institutional agents positioned with power to transform campus cultures that promote the postsecondary success of their SoCs. VPSAs are expected to value social justice and inclusion as they lead the way of their student affairs professionals at their institution. This study sheds light on VPSAs' experiences in fostering a campus culture that supports postsecondary success for SoCs.

There is limited research that focuses specifically on the VPSA position, also referenced to as Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) across literature. Sandeen (1991) provides the most extensive description of the VPSA role

declaring the role the convergence of leader, manager, mediator, and educator responsibilities. He emphasizes that VPSA success is entrenched with one's ability to demonstrate compassion for students and engage with the campus community through building trusting relationships. Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) distributed a survey on behalf of NASPA to the gather an overall description of the nature of the VPSA role. The following key findings provide a general overview of VPSA demographics and responsibilities based on the 33 percent response rate to the survey: (a) VPSAs are more likely to be over 50 years old and identify as White, (b) VPSAs have a fairly equal distribution between those who identify as male and female, (c) a majority of VPSAs have a degree in education and higher education, (d) VPSAs lead student affairs divisions that most often include campus activities, student conduct, counseling services, orientation, assessment, career services, wellness programs, disability centers, on-campus housing, recreational sports, and multicultural services, and (e) VPSAs are spend most of their time on administrative tasks, personnel management, and direct interaction with students.

One of the few studies that focus solely on VPSAs and their role in developing inclusive environments was conducted by Wilson and Volverton (2012) with six VPSAs representing six public and private institutions. The study's results indicated a vast range of VPSA involvement and impact on their campuses in promoting an inclusive environment; however, VPSAs who were committed to diversity had a stronger impact on the campus culture. Conducted to "investigate the level of involvement of the SSAO in building a campus culture that is receptive to diversity" (Wilson & Volverton, p. 15), this study analyzes the institutions characteristics on the regard for diversity which can allude to esteemed values that do not translate into action. This limits the study from identifying the ways in which institutions and participating VPSAs perceived their student affairs divisions were promoting an inclusive environment that benefited and prioritized SoCs.

The proposed critical case study is grounded in campus climate literature and the role campus administrators play in addressing climate, with a central focus on student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals are individuals who work primarily outside the classroom to provide students with support and services that enhance personal, academic, and professional development (Griffin, 2017; Reason & Broido, 2017; Wilson, 2017). These professionals often serve in roles that advise student organizations, supervise student employees, coordinate social and educational programming (Griffin, 2017; Reason & Broido, 2017; Wilson, 2017). College administrators, student affairs professionals included, have the power to set the tone for their institutions to transform racial climate. Their professional values and beliefs are likely aligned with the professional organizations of which they are members and signal a hopeful change agent on our campuses, especially for VPSAs who report directly to an institution's president. This is important because, as Bensimon (2005) suggests, "The problem with unequal outcomes resides within individuals, in the cognitive frames that govern their attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions (p. 100)."

The history of higher education points to VPSAs serving as senior-level administrators whose salient priority is to foster a campus climate where all students can succeed (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005; Reason & Broido, 2017). A majority of VPSAs report directly to the president of their institution, while others report to the provost, signifying their valued insight in institutional decision-making (Wilson, 2017). While VPSAs are rarely named in student demands for resignation, these individuals are often called to mediate between students and other senior-level administrators. How VPSAs navigate their roles in an effort improve racial climate for SoCs has yet to be explored in-depth across research.

VPSAs become of particular interest because social justice and inclusion is a professional value for student affairs professionals and recognized as one of the professional competencies

competency areas central to their practice (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). This competency area refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward “creating learning environments that foster equitable participation” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 14). This competency should guide the decisions VPSAs make that directly impact the campus environment for their students. For example, decisions regarding how much funding is allocated for programs or who is hired to serve as advisors to identity-based student groups, all require VPSAs to keep students and their identities at the forefront of their minds. If abiding by professional competencies, VPSAs are positioned with power to transform racial climate on campus.

Student affairs professionals promote student learning and development (American Council on Education, 1949). Student affairs practice promotes the holistic development of college students taking into consideration identity development that occurs throughout college and thus, contributes a great deal to creating an inclusive environment where all students succeed (Griffin, 2017). The critical role student affairs professionals play complements content-based instruction and provides support for students to learn more about themselves, others, and the larger society. This practice is based on a belief and value system that can be defined as pedagogy. Despite the focused competency on social justice and inclusion, the foundations of student affairs is not exempt from perpetuating White supremacy and racism. For example, Patton et al., (2007) discuss how student development theory minimize or dismiss race completely from the research that informs theoretical foundations of service to students. For example, many of the revered student development theorists did not include SoCs in their data that informed these broad sweeping theories that shape student affairs work.

To address the tendency to omit race in discussions in education leadership and examine how programs, practices, and policies, led by VPSAs, are prioritizing race in their work, CRT and CRP provide key frameworks that supported the development and analysis of this study.

Next, I will discuss these theoretical frameworks and how they supported the process of answering this study's research questions.

Critical Race Theory and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Critical race scholars suggest utilizing CRT as a lens to evaluate higher education policies and practices to identify blind spots in the strategies meant to transform our campuses (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Before reviewing the literature that points to how CRT is utilized in education, it is important to note that CRT emerged from legal scholarship. Derrick Bell, joined by other legal scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Williams were a part of a larger group of critical legal studies when realizing that race was not being centered as much as it should considering the significance it had on legal outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In this study, I focus on the following tenets of CRT: (a) the permanence of racism, (b) Whiteness as property, (c) counter-storytelling, (d) interest convergence, (e) intersectionality, (f) the critique of liberalism, and (g) commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Next, I will provide definitions of each of these CRT tenets.

Race permanence is the belief that racism is a permanent fixture in the U.S. that was socially constructed to distribute power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Whiteness as property submits that being White aligns with privileges and assumptions that one would want to protect (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Counter-storytelling is a tenet that elevates the lived experiences of People of Color in a society where White experiences are centralized (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Interest convergence characterizes the motivations of White people who support racial justice only when they can also benefit (Bell, 1980; DeCuir

& Dixson, 2004). A critique of liberalism refers to the notion of colorblindness, meritocracy, and incremental change where colorblindness refers to a postracial notion of racelessness in the post-Obama era, meritocracy suggests that success is merely tied to hard work, and incremental change suggests that progress towards racial equity only exists at the pace where Whites do not feel threatened (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The concept of intersectionality refers to how racial identity intersects with other oppressed social identities to influence People of Color's experiences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Finally, the commitment to social justice reminds scholar activists of the goal to end racial oppression (DeCuir-Gunby, Chapman, & Schutz, 2019). Although CRT tenets emerged from legal scholarship, critical race scholars have these tenets and reframed them in the context of education, and more specifically, higher education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain the utility of CRT as an analytic tool in American education identifying three propositions: (1) race is central factor in inequity; (2) property rights are central to society; and (3) intersectionality between race and property creates an analytic tool used to understand social and education inequities (p. 48). DeCuir & Dixson (2004) modeled CRT analysis in educational research extending their analysis to include interest convergence and a critique of liberalism. As discussed earlier, Patton (2015) extends Ladson-Billings and Tate's proposition to higher education providing three propositions that recognize the deeply rooted historical legacy of racism that transcends today's institutions, acknowledges how capitalism fuels the intersection of race, property, and oppression, and describe higher education institutions as places where racism is reproduced in society.

Although critical race theorists agree found their beliefs and inform their actions based on these tenets, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) acknowledge the two groups that emerge from among

critical race scholars—the idealists and the realists. Racial idealists believe that racial equity can be achieved through “changing the system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 21). Author Ta-Nehisi Coates references Martin Luther King, Jr. as an idealist, who as a child, Coates could not relate to despite the emphasis his school placed on King’s powerful and idealist inspiration (Coates, 2015). Racial realists, as described earlier, recognize that racial equity is entrenched in societal values of materialism and capitalism, emphasizing the power behind race being used as a mechanism to distribute the scarcity of resources (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Realists believe that while words and attitudes are important, progress towards racial equity can only occur when the very nature of our systems is reconsidered (Bell, 1992). Education is one arena where racial idealists and realists can be found in practice. Instructors, administrators, and staff have embedded values and perspectives around race that inform their practice. Ladson-Billings (1995) operates from the CRT framework when conducting a close analysis on teachers’ pedagogy.

Ladson-Billings’ (1995) analysis of teachers who were successful with teaching African-American students brought about CRP. Pedagogy is defined as a set of values and beliefs that inform practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers in this study exhibited similar values and beliefs that centered the cultures of Black, or African-American, students. CRP’s three propositions, reflective of these similar values and beliefs the teachers exhibited, include: (1) a commitment to Black student achievement, (2) affirming and expanding cultural competence for their Black students, and (3) fostering an environment where students can think critically to challenge status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators subscribe to a pedagogy when they are in traditional settings like classrooms; however, this pedagogy can apply to settings outside the physical classroom as well.

One qualitative study that captures the use of CRP as a theoretical framework is a critical analysis of a student organization's role in impacting the achievement gap at a high school (DeCuir-Gunby, DeVance Taliaferro, & Greenfield, 2010). In this study, researchers investigated teachers' perceptions of the influence membership to the student organization contributed to closing the achievement gap at their school. In the analysis, CRP is used as a theoretical framework that models best practices for serving SoCs, particularly Black students. The way in which researchers utilize CRP as a theoretical framework is a model for this study's data collection and critical analysis. Although CRP is primarily used in research on elementary and secondary education settings, research on college administrators' influence on postsecondary achievement for SoCs can utilize this framework to organize the strategies administrators use to promote success for SoCs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). Student affairs professionals, led by VPSAs, are college student educators whose values and beliefs, or pedagogy, inform their professional practice in an effort to create an educational environment that supports student learning (Reason & Broido, 2017). The programs, policies, and practices that reflect the tenets of CRP in student affairs departments reflects best practices for SoCs on campus.

As institutional cultures and agents are a prime focus for this study, racial realism offers an explanation of how institutional systems that shape campus cultures perpetuate or challenge postsecondary success disparities across racial and ethnic minoritized groups. CRT's framework in higher education, specifically Patton (2016)'s propositions, direct us to recognizing that who has power at an institution and how it is used mitigates the progress for racial equity on campus. VPSAs are senior-level administrators on campus, and in this study, all serve on the presidents' cabinet where overarching decisions are made that influence the postsecondary outcomes for all students. To best evaluate the power and influence of VPSAs in their role within the context of

their organization, an organization theory framework is needed. CRT analysis of educational leadership and politics is limited, and more examinations of power are needed in critical studies on education leadership (Lopez, 2003; Means, 2016; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Patton, 2016). In this study, CRT and Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP provide a comprehensive lens for a critical analysis of campus administrators. Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP framework identifies actions informed by values and beliefs of teachers that support SoCs while the CRT critically evaluates how VPSAs prioritize SoCs in their decisions.

Research that unpacks campus racial climate, dissects practices and policies, and promotes culturally responsive and relevant practices in education is crucial in transforming status quo in education. More focus needs to be placed on centering current issues into a historical context as modeled by scholars who discuss race in society. Theoretical frameworks like CRT provide a lens to view education that challenges deep-seated biases, acknowledging the permanence of racism and providing a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016). To live the promise of higher education, we must all engage in critical reflection for the common goal of strengthening the historically excluded from the American promise of life, liberty, and justice. To make real change, we must not be afraid to start at the top to challenge ineffective practice that supports the few, leaving many behind.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research illustrates that SoCs have significantly less favorable college experiences than their White peers (for example, Hurtado, 1992; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Prominent reviews of research provide an extensive list of supporting evidence that highlights the varying experiences across racial identity groups on college campuses (see reviews by Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Smith, 2009). While this valuable research validates many SoCs' feelings of exclusion and affirm their perceptions of biased experiences, less research explores the institutional agents whose decisions influence racial climate and how the campus culture perpetuates these experiences (Kezar, 2012; LePeau, 2018; Wilson, 2017). This critical qualitative case study fills a void in current literature by contributing a comprehensive description and analysis of a group of campus administrators in a position of power. VPSAs are of particular interest because of their professional standards around equity and inclusion (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) and their position's responsibility to represent and advocate for their increasingly diverse student population alongside other senior-level administrators (Wilson, 2017; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). Closely examining VPSAs' perspectives on campus culture and their roles can signal where our institutions uphold or challenge a culture of exclusion that provokes racially biased experiences and perpetuates inequitable outcomes across postsecondary institutions.

The purpose of this critical qualitative case study is to examine how VPSAs prioritize promoting success for SoCs and how VPSAs perceive their power to enact change on their campuses in an effort to promote equitable postsecondary outcomes among SoCs at HWIs. The following questions will guide this research study:

Research Question #1: How do Vice Presidents of Student Affairs (VPSAs) at public institutions prioritize promoting equitable postsecondary outcomes and experiences for Students of Color (SoCs) at historically White institutions (HWIs)?

Research Question #2: How do VPSAs perceive their power to prioritize promoting equitable postsecondary outcomes and experiences for SoCs at HWIs?

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research methods are best used to capture detailed descriptions of how individuals make sense of their environment and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method illuminates the human experience in natural settings and invites researchers to exude meaning from the data collected from participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify four characteristics of qualitative inquiry: (1) a focus on meaning and understanding, (2) the researcher serves as the primary instrument, (3) data informs the theory, and (4) contains rich descriptions of participants, context, and activities of interest (p. 17). Qualitative research methods serve as an effective tool to answer this study's research question about VPSA's influence on campus culture and their perceptions of power.

Throughout the study, qualitative research methods guided the instruments used to collect data, the role the researcher had in data collection and analysis, and how the findings are presented. Instruments utilized open-ended questions to gather personal insight from participants. Positionality was addressed to identify how my personal experiences and worldviews influenced the collection and analysis process. The data was used to inform theories and concepts discussed in the findings. In an effort to incite change and reflect CRT's commitment to social justice, the data will also be used to inform implications for practice and future directions for research. Finally, the rich descriptions of the participants, context, and activities captured by qualitative inquiry captured a well-rounded illustration of the complexities of the VPSA experience.

A Critical Approach

As noted by scholars in research methodology (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pasque et al., 2017), the research question guides the approach, design, and

method. The primary goal of this study is to provide a detailed description of how VPSAs prioritize promoting equitable outcomes and experiences for SoCs in the context of their institutional culture. Critical research aligns with this study because of the study's focus on institutional agents with positional power and the influence these individuals have on racial climate and campus culture. In critical research, "power dynamics are at the heart" and questions reference "what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61). A majority of VPSAs serve alongside other senior-level administrators who report directly to the president, thus implying the espoused value of the VPSAs' input and ability to exercise influence in decisions that foster an inclusive campus community for SoCs (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014; Wilson, 2017; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). This espoused value suggests VPSAs have the power to spark change across campus culture; however, this study seeks to reveal if this espoused value is enacted through guiding VPSAs through critical reflection.

The primary intent of critical research is to spark change or, at minimum, incite critical reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pasque et al., 2017). Conducting critical research is reflective of the complex nature of the issues it intends to explore (Pasque et al., 2017). The "messy" nature of critical research can seem contradictory to traditional research methods and daunting to pursue, but the revolutionary outcomes outweigh the complexities that accompany the process and approach (Pasque et al., 2017; Pasque & Harris, 2014). The current racial climate, as shaped by campus cultures, requires careful critical analysis and reflection to change a culture that produces disproportionate postsecondary outcomes and inequitable college experiences across racial groups (Patton, 2016). Analysis and reflection on the campus culture begins with recalling the historical legacy of exclusionary practices in our education system, considering the increasingly racially diverse student populations on our campuses,

acknowledging varying perceptions of the institutions' efforts to support students from racial minoritized backgrounds, and exploring the strained relationships between students of varying backgrounds (Hurtado, et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). A critical race approach to this study provided a framework that is privy to acknowledging these cultural and social complexities across institutions with a central focus on the distribution of power to Whites that inform campus administrators' experiences (Pasque et al., 2017; Patton, 2016).

Critical research is also grounded in critical theories that center marginalized groups within identities including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability. As previously discussed, CRT has been utilized as a theoretical framework to examine the inequitable practices in education that directly influence groups based on their race (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016). Specifically, in higher education, CRT is used to ground research that calls attention to programs, practices, and policies that disproportionately hinder success among students, faculty, and Administrators of Color in a postsecondary setting (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016). Utilizing the CRT framework helped to hold the research accountable for asking questions that acknowledge the role race plays in the postsecondary experience for SoCs and how institutional agents utilized their position of power to inform how they attempted to change campus culture.

Case Study Design

Case study designs are widely used in research; however, varying epistemologies inform how to conduct or design a case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). The similarity across definitions distinguish the unique attributes of a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a phenomenon in a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) provide a useful graphical representation of a case study

with a circle containing a heart in the center. *Figure 3.1* illustrates the context and focus of this case study inspired by Miles et al.'s graphical representation.

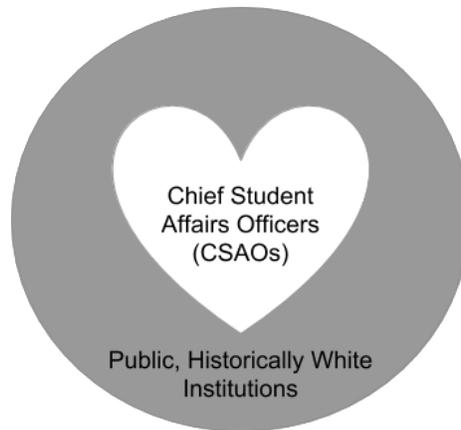


Figure 3.1 Qualitative case study visual representation.

The primary point of contention among research methodology scholars is the concept of bounding a case study (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017). This discussion informs the decisions made throughout this study thus an overview is necessary. Yin (2011) suggests bounding a case study by limiting the variance in variables that describe the context. For example, minimal variation of experiences or perspectives within a group of individuals, presented as the case, would be most favorable according to Yin (2011). Stake (1994) suggests that by bounding the case, a researcher only extends the implications to the specifications of the case. Applying Stake's (1994) lens to this study, the rich description gathered from the participants' studies would only reflect the unique experiences of the participants. This lens underestimates how the findings may resonate more broadly with VPSAs who did not participate. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize the importance of bounding the unit of analysis, explicitly defining the unit's unique characteristics, rather than placing emphasis on strictly defining the context that surrounds the heart of the study. Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) further challenge the concept of bounding a case study by suggesting that a process-oriented approach, or comparative case study (CCS), and an emergent design best

describes a case because it acknowledges the influence of “culture, place, and community” and the necessary variance needed within the heart of the study to reflect the complex nature of critical topics (p. 38).

To an extent, each perspective on case studies informed how this study was conducted; however, an intentional effort was made to implement features of the CCS approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). One feature of the CCS approach is the iterative and emergent nature of describing the case. Bartlett and Vavrus’ (2017) process-oriented approach guide the decisions I made while conducting the research. The process-oriented approach honored the iterative design of conducting research within a complex context. I used this approach to make decisions about recruiting my participants. For example, although selection criteria were used to recruit participants, I made an intentional decision to include a participant in the study who was serving in an interim VPSA role. This participant had over ten years of experience at the participant’s institution and had a history of working closely with the former VPSA before stepping into their role. This decision acknowledged that a VPSAs formal title should not exclude them from sharing their experiences in their interim role.

As intended with a CCS approach, variation across identities, institutional characteristics, and professional experiences is anticipated and sought for to authentically describe the complexity of participant experiences. Focusing on power and inequity, the CCS approach is also reflected in this study by providing the opportunity for participants to consider and discuss the broader cultural and historical context of their institutions and personal identities that shape their experiences. The participants’ racial and ethnic identities were representative of the VPSA demographic in the southeastern region according to the VPSA Census conducted by Wesaw and Sponsler (2015). Seven White VPSAs and 3 VPSAs of Color participated in this study, mirroring the 30 percent of VPSAs of Color represented in the VPSA Census. Participating VPSAs also

represented varying institution types represented in the Carnegie Classification system as well as a wide range of experience in years serving in a student affairs leadership role. The participant diversity lends itself to conducting a horizontal, vertical, and transversal analysis across the data that is beyond the scope of this study but signals future extensions of this research. Nonetheless, the CCS approach guides the horizontal analysis of VPSAs' personal and professional experiences that inform how their work across racial identities.

Critical Qualitative Case Study Design

Qualitative inquiry, critical theory, and case study design are integral components to this study's research methods. In tandem, these characteristics are chosen and utilized to answer the research question. Critical qualitative inquiry assumes the general characteristics of qualitative inquiry and is imperative to transforming the landscape of higher education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pasque et al., 2017). This type of inquiry is a conscientious effort to address the needs of our increasingly diverse nation (Pasque et al., 2017). As discussed, the emergent design can appear to be an unconventional approach, but its intent is to reflect the complexity of the human experience and our educational systems. The components of critical qualitative case studies push the limits of conventional bounds as the case study evolves to challenge the dominant narrative that centers Whiteness and hold the researcher accountable for analyzing through a critical lens. Each decision made while conducting the study was at the mercy of the data collected from participants. As the study evolved, a conscientious effort was made to remain in the context of the research questions while capturing the rich descriptions of the context, participants, and activities VPSA engage in to promote equitable outcomes and experiences among SoCs.

The strength of this study is illustrated by the checks and balances created by all components. This case study engages in critical inquiry regarding the organizational system within a public institution with the intent to delineate the espoused values from the enacted

behaviors (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The qualitative case study does so by gaining insight from VPSAs with the espoused power to represent and advocate for the increasingly diverse student population among other senior-level administrators also poised to make decisions that influence postsecondary outcomes for SoCs. In asking VPSAs directed questions about their practice and their perceived power through a critical lens, this study fills a void in current research as it steps away from learning more about the well-intended values and beliefs and focuses on what is actually practiced. The study also contributes to the limited scholarship that utilizes CRT in educational leadership and politics research.

The strength of this study is also reflective in the choice to pursue qualitative inquiry. This method is most often used in critical race methodologies in an effort to capture counterstories and deep analysis of the lived experiences of People of Color; however, an emerging QuantCrit and critical mixed methods seeks to complement the conversation and fill gaps that qualitative inquiry cannot (DeCuir, Chapman, and Schutz, 2019). As discussed previously, qualitative inquiry that critically examines individuals in positions of power are limited (Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). This study's qualitative inquiry provides rich and in-depth descriptions that reflect the complexities of the human experience and reveal the nuances that shape student affairs leadership. The rich descriptions gained from the participants align with the emergent case study design that aims to capture authentic and meaningful experiences from participants through multiple forms of data sources. Together, each component informs the rich descriptions the study intends to provide about VPSAs influence on campus culture and the context in which they operate.

Conceptual Framework

Miles et al. (2014) suggest creating a conceptual framework to graphically explain the assumptions made regarding a study. *Figure 3.2* illustrates this study's conceptual framework,

explained as follows. Prior to conducting the study, VPSAs are viewed as institutional agents who espouse to create systems that support student success. VPSAs prioritize SoC success through a lens shaped by their personal and professional experiences around race. The study assumes that VPSAs are successful in promoting equitable outcomes among SoCs when upholding aspects of campus culture that empower their peers and supervisees to serve their students effectively or challenging the aspects that hinder campus cultures from supporting SoCs. Aspects of campus culture that empower employees to support SoCs are those that give students the space to practice critical consciousness, demonstrate a strengths-based approach to academic success, and inform program and practice with cultural understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This study is grounded on the premise that VPSAs are limited or supported by the ability to prioritize SoCs in their decision-making. Exploring power dynamics is at the core of critical research (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), thus the extent of power afforded to VPSAs intersects with their racial identity and negotiation with Whites to transform campus cultures.

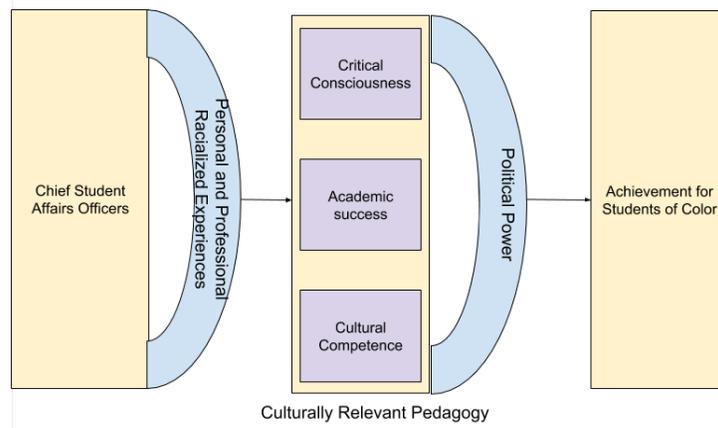


Figure 3.2 Conceptual framework for critical qualitative case study about VPSA role.

Illustrated in the conceptual framework (Figure 3.2), is the process by which VPSAs can influence equitable postsecondary outcomes for SoCs. VPSAs perform their job responsibilities informed by their personal and professional experiences around race, or how they interpret the

existence of inequities on the campuses. This informs how they foster an environment that supports SoCs as defined by Ladson-Billings’ (1995) CRP tenets that include developing critical consciousness, expecting academic success, and promoting cultural competence for SoCs. VPSAs’ efforts to foster this environment for SoCs are mitigated by their effectiveness in utilizing and demonstrating power behaviors that redistribute power equitably across races to make a difference in the lives of their racially diverse student groups.

Study Participants

For the purpose of this study, VPSAs are defined as senior-level administrators who lead an institution’s student affairs division and report to the institution’s president. This role has varying titles including, but not limited to, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO); however, the choice to use VPSA was reflective of the common title for the study’s participants. The following criteria was used to identify participants: (a) a minimum of two years’ experience in a VPSA role at their current institution; (b) employed by an HWI; and (c) earned their most recent degree in education at an accredited institution. These criteria guided purposeful and network sampling to gather information for this case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study included 10 participants. Participant demographics that are relevant to this study’s analysis are presented in Table 3.1 with their affiliated institution’s pseudonym. Careful consideration was made in choosing what information to report in aggregate form to maintain confidentiality.

Table 3.1 Participant and Institution Descriptions

Institution Pseudonym	Carnegie Classification	Participant	Race & Gender
University of Plain Ridge	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	Andrew	White man
South River University	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	Ann	Woman of Color
College of Southern Shore	Master’s Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	Catherine	White woman

Table 3.1 (continued).

Atlantic University	Master’s Colleges & Universities: Medium Programs	Charles	White man
Southern State University	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activities	Elizabeth	White woman
University of Blue Ridge	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	James	Man of Color
Mountain Ridge University	Master’s Colleges & Universities: Small Programs	Louise	Woman of Color
Piedmont State University	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	Mary	White woman
Chesapeake State University	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	Milton	White man
Mountainside University	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activities	Thomas	White man

Using the VPSA Census Data available on the NASPA website, I found the demographic breakdown of VPSAs who serve in 4-year, public, institutions in the southeastern region of the United States and used these measures as a guidepost for recruiting participants that were representative of the demographics of their region. According to the Census data, 72% of VPSAs in NASPA’s Region III identify as White and 23% identify as a Person of Color (Black or African-American/Hispanic). Representative of this reported demographic, there are seven White participants and three People of Color. According to the Census data, 63% of VPSAs in NASPA’s Region III identify as male and 34% identify as female. The participants in this study overrepresent women based on this reported data with five participants identifying as female and five identifying as male. Participants collectively represent ten baccalaureate, master’s level, and doctoral level institutions across Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Intersectional identities will not be shared in an effort to protect the

confidentiality of each participant who, as the sole VPSA for each institution, could be easily identified with combined information about the institution type, location, and racial identity.

Context. This study primarily focused on VPSAs at public institutions in the southeastern region of the United States because of the close proximity to the researcher and professional familiarity with the region. Suitably, the concentration of varying institution types in the southeast and its rich history of overt exclusionary practices that impact SoCs in the public collegiate system also makes the region a fitting context for this study. For the purposes of this study, the southeastern region aligns with NASPA's Region III. NASPA organizes its membership into seven regions in an effort to create smaller communities that connect and cater to the unique professional development needs pertinent in that region (NASPA, 2018). This region is nationally recognized for providing robust professional development opportunities on a state level, independent institutes for entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level positions, and a rich culture of working across various institution types (NASPA, 2018). The culture of Region III and their comparable partner SACSA reflects a value of continuous learning and comradery across the profession (NASPA, 2018). Conversations around social justice advocacy on campus is commonplace in Region III environments, thus providing an ideal intellectual space to introduce this study. For example, one of SACSA newest initiatives, Communities of Engagement, provide members with the opportunity to “dialogue, support, problem solve, and generate ideas” (SACSA, 2018) about topics including social justice and inclusion. This initiative is one of many that reflect SACSA's intent to support professional development that aligns with core values and competencies for student affairs professionals (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

SACSA is a regional association that is committed to providing professional development for student affairs educators in the southeastern region (SACSA, 2018). This organization serves as a professional association home to student affairs professionals, graduate students enrolled in

programs specializing in student affairs, and undergraduates interested in pursuing student affairs careers who currently reside and work in the southeastern region of the United States (SACSA, 2018). Through annual conferences, workshops, and various professional development mediums, this organization plays an important role in socializing the values of the profession and provides a space where colleagues across and within similar professional levels can discuss best practices (SACSA, 2018).

Each year, SACSA collaborates with NASPA's Region III to host a conference providing an opportunity for higher education professionals and college students to engage in learning experiences around pertinent topics relevant to the student affairs profession. SACSA serves student affairs professionals in the southeastern region which includes Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas, and Mississippi of the continental United States. NASPA Region III coincides with SACSA's delegation and also has the highest number of VPSA NASPA members. As of April 2018, there were 363 VPSAs within NASPA's Region III. Participants were recruited at the 2018 SACSA conference.

Purposeful sampling. The selection of participants emerged from the current research on racial climate, campus cultures, and senior-level administrators. Selection criteria also highlight the unique characteristics of participating in graduate programs with similar professional values within the field of education. Specifically, VPSAs with graduate degrees in education are likely familiar with professional competencies around equity and inclusion (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Additionally, individuals working at a public institution with a mission of public service are held accountable for serving their community's constituents. With historical underpinnings in the Morrill Act of 1862, public institutions present a unique context as these institutions are missioned to serve their state and its increasingly diverse constituents (Thelin & Gasman, 2017).

The federal and state funding, although dwindling, infers public accountability that can directly influence a campus administrator's decisions and perceptions of postsecondary success among their diverse constituents. Thus, VPSAs at public institutions were of key interest.

Necessary for qualitative case studies is "two-tier" sampling that requires the selection of the case followed by the sampling within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the case in focus is VPSAs working at public institutions. The previously discussed criteria guide the selection of participants. An effort was made to capture a demographically representative group of VPSAs in the southeastern region, with keen attention to gender and race demographics. To do so, this case study utilized network sampling. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), this strategy involves a few key participants whom you can ask to refer others who fit the criteria. Through my connection with SACSA and NASPA's Region III, I identified a gatekeeper who helped refer me to a number of colleagues who met the selection criteria. The study also received public attention at the annual SACSA conference when I was awarded with a research grant to support the transcription fees. This award was presented in a public meeting during the conference where all attendees, including VPSAs in the audience, heard the title and purpose of this study.

Participant recruitment. Participants from this study were recruited from the Southern Association of College Administrators (SACSA). Prior to the annual SACSA conference, I was invited to share my study with VPSAs in a closed meeting that occurred prior to the start of the conference. I presented my proposal and invited individuals to contact me during the conference or through email if they were interested in participating. Utilizing the gatekeepers who invited me to the closed meeting, I sent a recruitment email and flyer electronically to all VPSA members who were in attendance from the closed meeting as a follow-up to my presentation.

Additionally, I reached out to individuals within my professional network to help me connect to the diverse pool of VPSAs who participated in the study.

Recruitment materials included eligibility requirements and emphasized the importance of recruiting a diverse group of participants to encourage representation from varying institution types, identities, and years of experience. The recruitment email also included a hyperlink to an interest form that requested demographic information about institution types, identities, and years of experience. To determine the appropriate demographic questions, I referred to the demographic questions included in campus climate surveys like the Personal Assessment of Campus Environments (PACE) instrument (NILIE, 2018). This survey is nationally distributed to employees, thus, determined an appropriate model for gathering demographic information from college and university faculty, staff, and administrators who participate (NILIE, 2018). When an interest form was completed, I reviewed the interested participants and choose individuals who represented diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Those who were selected for inclusion of the study were contacted via email and those who are not selected were contacted via email thanking them for their interest.

Instrumentation

This study utilized qualitative instruments to gather a combination of loosely and tightly structured data (Miles et al., 2014). All instruments were specifically designed to gather institutional context, personal reflections, division artifacts (Appendix D), and rich descriptions of VPSA experiences. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled with each participant upon confirmation of their interest. Prior to the interview, a three-part questionnaire (Appendix A) was distributed to collect contextual and demographic information. Gathering three sources of data (personal reflections, division artifacts, and interview transcripts), along with demographic information, strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Pre-interview questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections to gather information about institutional context and VPSA observations of the racial climate on campus. Nine out of ten participants completed the pre-interview questionnaire although the breadth varied across their responses. The first section focused on the institutional context inquiring about campus-wide events or concerns around race, in addition to the perceived postsecondary outcomes/experiences for SoCs. The next section focused on their student affairs division and its departments. This section inquired about student affairs culture under their leadership and efforts made to prioritize promoting SoC success on their campuses. The final section of the questionnaire will request participants to submit any documents that describe their campus and/or division culture. Renn & Patton (2017) describe artifacts as symbols and tangible evidence of how culture is practiced. Artifacts submitted included diversity strategic plans, retention initiatives, campus-wide programs for SoCs, and information about multicultural services within their divisions. This information helped to set the context for the case study and provides an opportunity to compare and contrast within the case.

Interview protocols. Semi-structured interviews are the primary source of data because critical qualitative inquiry views words as action that helps explore beyond what is observed through formal documents like mission statements or strategic plans (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pasque et al., 2017). The interview protocol included nine main questions with probing questions for each. The questions were developed and grounded in the CRP framework (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to inquire about programs, initiatives, and strategies that prioritize SoCs in their work, raised reflective questions around personal and professional experiences around race, and asked about the perception of power and agency to prioritize SoCs on a president's cabinet. Prior to conducting the interview, a preliminary draft of the interview protocol was shared with my

dissertation committee to gather feedback on asking questions that center race clearly and concisely. The final protocols represent the edits made based on this feedback.

Post-interview reflection. Reflexive practice is integral in professional practice (Arminio & Ortiz, 2017; Daudelin, 1996; Day, 1993). Reflection is defined as “the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences,” and *learning* as an outgrowth of reflection is “the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behavior” (Daudelin, 1996, p. 39). With increased responsibility, senior-level administrators are often pressed for time and have limited time to reflect on their practices (Arminio & Ortiz, 2017). The intent of the personal reflection prior to the interview protocol was to provide a space where administrators could engage in critical reflection. A few days after the formal interview, a follow-up questionnaire was distributed prompting participants to complete critical reflection prompt. Despite the intentionality of the personal reflection, only six out of ten participants completed their reflection prompts. The content provided varied on breadth and depth and instead of providing new content, verified the data already collected in the semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection

Data collected for this study included interview transcripts and artifacts. The pre-interview questionnaire was distributed using a secure Qualtrics form. Interviews were conducted using Zoom or FaceTime technology for nine out of ten participants. One interview was conducted over the phone to provide flexibility for the participant. All interviews were audio recorded, but not video recorded, for accuracy in transcription. Transcription was submitted to Rev.com using the research grant awarded for this project by SACSA. Post-interview reflections were distributed using a secure Qualtrics Form.

Due to the nature of the leadership position centered in this study, elite interviewing strategies were fitting for conducting the semi-structured interviews (Harvey, 2011). Drawn from experiences of interviewing individuals in senior administrator positions across disciplines and settings, Harvey (2011) described elites as individuals “who occupy senior management or Board positions within organizations” (p. 433). As in any interview, best practices suggest researchers build rapport with their participants (Harvey, 2011). When working with elites, best practices include providing information to their respective assistants prior to the interview including, but not limited to, the researcher’s personal and professional background, the nature of the research, how the data will be used, and explicit methods to be used to maintain confidentiality (Harvey, 2011). These considerations directly informed the extent of preparation done prior to connecting with VPSAs. In conducting interviews using a video platform, I was able to build a personable rapport with them prior and after the formal interview. Eight out of ten participants conducted their interviews in their office while others connected with me from home or another location on campus. Interviews were conducted with limited interruptions as all indicated that they participated in the interview in a private location with a closed door. This self-chosen setting encouraged them to share detailed insight at their own comfort level (Harvey, 2011).

In addition to artifacts that were provided by participants, I retrieved information publicly available for all institutions. These artifacts are listed in Appendix D. During the interviews, I also made a list of artifacts that would be useful in providing context for each participant’s experiences that would support the information provided in the interview. This final list included an organizations chart, the mission and vision of the division they led, student organizations lists, enrollment for SoCs, and the retention and graduation rates. These were mentioned in each interview. While campus climate data was somewhat made public on their websites including

NSSE data, none of the data was disaggregated by race or ethnicity. Student organizations lists were also typically under the “cultural” tab which included groups that were dedicated to the “study of” certain cultures. These organizations were removed from the list as the organizations mission statements did not reflect an explicit commitment to supporting students within those racial and ethnic groups. Other artifacts were also gathered based on each institution. For example, some participants referenced diversity offices across campus so information about their offices were collected as well. I also collected some student newspaper articles and event descriptions for events that were mentioned in the interviews. I maintained a method audit during data collection that helped me to consider the artifacts that could provide more context to what VPSAs were sharing in their interviews.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analysis began while reading the first pre-interview questionnaire, reviewing the first artifacts submitted, and conducting the first interview. Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process that cycles in and out of data collection and analysis setting expectations for fluidity with refining and reforming the details involved with collected the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I maintained an electronic and hard copy research journal that began to capture themes that emerged in the data I was collecting.

Role of theoretical frameworks. CRT, CRP, and personal and professional experiences around race guided the initial coding process. Beginning with Ladson-Billings’ (1995) CRP tenets as codes to identify strategies that VPSAs believed prioritized SoC success through their student affairs programs, initiatives, and strategies. Three CRT tenets were also utilized as preliminary codes: interest convergence, race permanence, and liberalism. As I read through the data, I utilized a posteriori coding to capture data that does not directly align with theoretical

frameworks. Disconfirming evidence also contributed to providing the nuanced reality of VPSAs' experiences with influencing campus culture.

Data analysis procedures. The data from this study is guided by three phases of qualitative data analysis (Mertens, 2015). During the first step, the data was prepared for analysis by reading transcribed interviews, organizing notes, and making decisions about what information was used for analysis. Next, the reflections, interview transcripts, and division artifacts were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software. The second and third phases of data analysis included data exploration and data reduction. These phases occurred simultaneously.

As I began to collect data, I took notes in my research journal. During each interview, I took notes while I listened to my participants share their experiences. I paid specific attention to what artifacts they referenced and connections to theory that I intended to use to guide my codes. I reviewed notes after the interview and entered notes into my research journal about first impressions. Prior to uploading all materials to the qualitative analysis software, I listened to each interview using the audio file to confirm that the transcripts were accurate. I identified confidential information including names of individuals, locations, and institution names by replacing with pseudonyms as previously selected prior to the interview process. As I checked data for accuracy, I continued to review notes that I made during the interviews and added created a list of artifacts and events that I wanted to gather more information about from student newspapers and campus websites. I also asked two of my doctoral student peers to review a de-identified transcript and provide me with initial themes to confirm the themes that I saw emerge while conducting the interview and initially reviewing the transcripts. Their feedback aligned with my findings.

Data exploration and reduction followed the two-stage method of coding as described by Miles et al. (2014). Before beginning to code, I created a code list that included *a priori* coding terms that reflected CRT, CRP and the political power definition. In my first review of the transcripts and artifacts, I knew that some of these would be more prevalent than others. I defined each theory as a code family and specified specific codes for each of the components that rose as a theme. I reviewed my methods section and analysis descriptions by Bartlett & Vavrus (2017) to align my processes with their analysis steps for comparative case study.

During the first cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding to highlight specific programs and initiatives, process coding to describe the action steps/behaviors, and values coding to describe the values, attitudes, and beliefs. I also used emotion coding as well to identify some of the personal and professional experiences around race. As I proceeded through the first round of coding, I selected data in chunks to capture what VPSAs were saying or a more detailed description of the institutional context. Also, during the first cycle of coding, I created document groups based on institution type, race and gender identities in preparation for conducting a horizontal analysis. I negotiated and revised codes between the first three transcripts that I coded.

This combination of elemental and affective coding methods was used to identify the data that is relevant to answering the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Elemental coding is foundational to future coding cycles and includes descriptive coding methods that are used to assign basic labels to data chunks (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding is also an effective method for extracting meaning from the multiple forms of data including, but not limited to, interview transcripts, reflections, and documents, that were gathered in this study (Saldaña, 2016). Affective coding acknowledges the human experience and includes values coding that can capture information gathered from participants regarding their perceptions of

power and racial climate (Saldaña, 2016). This coding method is often used for critical studies, therefore served as an appropriate strategy for this research study.

The second cycle organized individual codes into code families, or emerging themes, from the data collected utilizing pattern coding methods (Saldaña, 2016). Through pattern coding, initial codes were reviewed across interview transcripts and division artifacts are categorized into patterns, or emergent themes. Pattern codes are reflective of the themes that tie the data together (Miles et al., 2014). Codes created through pattern coding seemed to align with specific ACPA/NASPA professional competencies to answer the first question, so I went through my first-cycle codes placed them into code groups labeled by the social justice and inclusion competency. The codes that reference CRP tenets emerged into patterns around academic success, cultural authenticity, and student voice. The codes used to capture personal and professional experiences were combined into a personal and ethical foundations category and data that reflected perceptions of political power were merged into the social justice and inclusion code group.

Trustworthiness

Patton (2015) provides a checklist of ethical considerations for researchers to use when conducting qualitative research. These 12 items guided my efforts to provide systematic data collection and analysis throughout their research design and methods. Ultimately, the trustworthiness of a study is measured by the ethical decisions made by the researcher. Specific strategies ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, credibility and confirmability was addressed throughout the research project. Member checks, or audits, are one of the strategies that were used to attain credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted member checks by sharing an outline of themes gathered from interview transcripts with VPSA participants and asking them to confirm whether the themes reflect their experiences.

Additionally, I collected confirming or disconfirming data using various artifacts and the interview transcripts to support the proposed findings (Mertens, 2015). Overall, the goal was to provide an in-depth understanding of how VPSA's prioritize promoting SoCs success and how they perceive their power to do so effectively.

Ethical considerations. Scholars have provided guidance on conducting critical inquiry with elite leaders (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). In research similar to this study, minimal risks are attached to this study; however, VPSAs may face potential risks given the elite nature of their leadership role. The participants spent no more than 60 minutes engaging in the semi-structured interview that will require a degree of professional disclosure which may incite anxiety. During the interview, I shared the preference was to audio record for purposes of transcription; however, I provided the opportunity for questions and further discussion after the recording to make participants feel more comfortable sharing more information "off-the-record" (Harvey, 2011, p. 437). VPSAs were very invested in this study and remained in contact with me about updates to my dissertation process and encouraging me to share the information more broadly.

There was a psychological risk based on social identities. For example, speaking with White participants regarding racial climate could have invoked feelings of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). White fragility emerges when a "minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). Discussions around race require individuals to engage in critical self-inquiry. Across the interviews, individuals did not seem to hesitate with answering questions and paused to consider their answer prior to answer. White men, in particular, demonstrated strong opinions regardless of their level of support for prioritizing SoCs. White women, in particular, seemed to be more reflective

throughout the study and also exhibiting comfort in discussing racially biased experiences. This was a key concern as a Black woman conducting a study on race interviewing White VPSAs.

To address these risks, I offered opportunities for the participants to pause and reflect on their responses during and after the interview. The pre-interview questionnaire primed the participants who reviewed the questions to provide a preview of the questions to follow in the interview protocol. This strategy also helped me to honor the time commitment set for the interview having provided an opportunity for participants to think about this topic prior to the interview. Interview responses were also kept confidential by separating the interview transcripts from the name or identifiable details regarding their institution. Pseudonyms were used in place of participant names to protect participant anonymity. This crucial time to reflect prior to the interview can also give participants the opportunity to work through feelings of White fragility, if applicable.

The Role of the Researcher

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is the researcher performing as a key instrument of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, discussing experiences that inform my research interests, and consequently how I interpreted the data in this study is integral in identifying the potential biases and subjectivity as a researcher. Critical qualitative inquiry requires critical self-consciousness which I also display here by exploring how my identities and past experiences have shaped my interest in this study. Throughout my doctoral studies, I have explored topics related to race, campus climate, organizational culture, and leadership. My interest in these topics and how they shape college experiences for SoCs at HWIs stems from my personal experiences having attended and worked on campuses where faculty, staff, and students from racially diverse backgrounds were few.

I was born and raised in suburban New York to parents who moved to the United States from Jamaica to further their education and provide more opportunities for their children. My parents both struggled to find jobs as new immigrants to this country, regardless of their previous academic achievement. The importance of my cultural heritage and nationality is the bedrock of my family's values. My parents taught us to honor our Caribbean roots and embrace our American identity, flaws and all. In New York, we were amongst a community of immigrants with similar values. I believed that America must have been full of enough promise for my parents to pick up and leave their homes and family to give my sisters and I a chance to progress. "They can take away your prized possessions, but they can never take away your education," is a mantra we lived by.

Shortly after I was born, my dad found a job working at a college directing TRIO programs. My dad's role introduced me to college and the idea that there were people who work to give opportunities to kids like me. I learned more about what it meant to be Black as I watched my dad's culturally relevant leadership of TRIO programs. When my dad passed away, I remember seeing the legacy he left through the lives of former students he had helped to enroll and graduate. Through his work and dinner table conversations, my parents reinforced the reality that being Black in America meant that we faced racism and a future of systemic disparities. However, through the lens of immigrant parents, I always sensed some hope with the despair that things must be better off here and perhaps, education was the way to defeat these inequities.

I ventured into my research with these perspectives. My exposure to the college environment and administrators who make decisions that influence the postsecondary success for SoCs has fostered a line of questioning in my research about how administrators use their power and position to influence students' lives. I believe that my Caribbean ethnicity, specifically my

immigrant parents, has birthed a hope in the American society for being one that values upward mobility through the education system. Thus, I believe we can do better.

As I continued to examine how race interacts with educational experiences, CRT resonated with me in a way that no other theory did. It acknowledged that the experiences of SoCs, like me, counters the narratives we often see centered in today's society. For me, it explained how my experiences were manifested by a racialized system, and that these experiences are shaped by a power structure that centers White, wealthy, heterosexual, men. It is my firm belief that addressing the problem begins with acknowledging the root of the problem which I aimed to capture in my literature review. Throughout my research, I remained critical of systems that espouse values they do not enact and spread hope by providing action steps on how we can transform the future of higher education to best support SoCs in benefiting from the promise of higher education.

Our education system cannot wait until more People of Color to take leadership positions to change the tide. Waiting would reflect the CRT's critique of liberalism suggesting that incremental change is acceptable. Therefore, in the privileged position of researchers, scholars can utilize the CRT as a tool to ask critical questions of those in positions of power today. Regardless of personal identity, campus administrators need to consider the experiences of their increasingly diverse student populations which begins with reflecting on their roles in the system. Consequently, the research questions that guided this study follow suit by asking about how VPSAs, individuals with positional power within an institution, influence campus culture in addition to asking about their perceptions of their power to support their students from racial minority backgrounds.

Limitations

Although this study provides a broad and in-depth analysis of VPSAs' influence on campus culture and their perceptions of power to create change as it pertains to the success of SoCs, there are methodological limitations that plague the study. In an effort to conduct a manageable and attainable research study, decisions about the selection criteria and the primary source of data collection were made that limit the scope of the study. As the study progressed, the use of CRP and CRT reflected my emerging and developing practice of critical analysis as a novice researcher. Despite the limitations with the research design, analysis, and findings, the study contributes to a critical conversation about senior leaders and their role in prioritizing SoCs on their campuses taking into consideration the context of the student affairs culture, HWI context, racialized experiences, and the expectations for a VPSA role.

Selection criteria. Study participants were selected from the southeastern region who work at public 4-year institutions for more than two years and have earned professional degrees in the field of education. Each characteristic of the participant is intentionally chosen to reflect the description of the majority of VPSAs as illustrated in Wesaw & Sponsler's (2014) descriptive analysis. However, in choosing individuals who represent the majority of VPSAs we lose a critical network of individuals who work at private institutions outside of the southeastern region, or those who work at 2-year colleges, like community colleges, that have disproportionately more SoCs in comparison to 4-year institutions. VPSA experiences, including those who have degrees outside of education and have served less than two years, provide valuable insight to research topic as well; however, would increase the number of possible participants beyond the attainability of one research study.

A national sample would best capture these experiences and would take a team of researchers interested and funded to collect and analyze a wealth of data. Nonetheless, the

intentional decision to include participants who fulfill the proposed criteria does provide unique insight into VPSAs in often criticized spaces. For example, while the southeast is a convenient location to conduct this research, public 4-year colleges and universities in the southeast have a deep history of racial tension and strained college access for SoCs. Thus, the selection of study participants limits the scope of this research but seeks to begin investigating leadership in historically contentious environments.

Primary source of data collection. The primary source of data collection in this study was collected from VPSA participants. One of the limitations of this study is the absence of the students' voices. In critical research, power dynamics take center stage. Recognizing that an institutional agent has the power to make decisions that can impact a student's environment, it is important to hear the voices of students who their decisions are influencing. Although measures are taken to crystallize the data provided in the interviews, the study primarily captures one perspective. While VPSAs can personally share what they perceive their influence to be on campus culture, the students are the ones who can truly confirm or challenge the VPSAs perceptions. Including student voices can inform future research steps.

Variation in data collection. Aspects of the pre-interview questionnaire and follow-up exercise were intended to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their campus culture and their practice. The intent was to illicit the values and beliefs they may have that guides their practice. Unfortunately, extensive data from these instruments and the length of reflections varied significantly. The data collected through the pre-interview and reflection forms were brief and often coincided with the information provided in the semi-structured interviews. As a limitation, the participants who participated in the three stages of data collection with equal and consistent effort in responses demonstrate stronger reliability and presence in the findings. In the analysis and writing the findings, this presented as a challenge to equitably represent each

VPSA who participated in the study. To accommodate this variation, I primarily used the data collected from the interviews.

Defining SoCs. When focusing on race in educational research, researchers face a looming dilemma when developing research questions. I find myself asking, “who have I left out?” as our campuses become increasingly diverse. Ladson-Billings (2014) shared her support for researchers who update CRP in an effort to address an increasingly diverse student population. This guides how I have made decisions in this study. While my leaning is to focus broadly on Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American students, it counterintuitively dismisses the unique concerns of each racially minoritized student groups on campus. Each community of students from racially minoritized backgrounds has different needs and grouping can be a detriment to recognizing the uniqueness of each culture represented across racial groups.

For the purpose of this study, the decision was made to combine groups to reflect the practice that administrators may not focus on strategies to improve Black student achievement separately from the strategies to improve Latinx and Native American student achievement. However, asking broad questions and probing questions that ask for examples of practices, policies, and programs may illicit race-specific initiatives that address unique needs of each group. The nuances within each smaller community are important enough to study independently and the hope is that this study can spark more critical qualitative studies that focus on individual groups.

As the study progressed, the majority of the conversations had with VPSAs reflected a large emphasis on Black students citing many of the historically Black organizations. Throughout the gathering of artifacts that included the list of student organizations, signature programs, enrollment and retention data, it is clear that there is a presence of Asian, Hispanic

(term used primarily by participants and across data), and Native Students. The permanence of talking about Black or African-American students even after participants heard and saw the study's definition of SoCs sends a strong message as to who was at the forefront of their minds when they discussed concerns shared by SoCs.

Utilization of CRP. Choosing CRP to guide this study reflected my belief that as educators, and in this case college student educators in student affairs, pedagogical practice is demonstrated in any work with students within and beyond the classroom walls. However, it is important to consider that CRP emerged from a study specifically focusing on African-American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This presents a conflict with this study's focus on SoCs of varying racial and ethnic identities and upon first look, can appear to be a limitation for the study. Despite the perceived limitations of using a theory that focuses on African-American students when speaking of a more diverse group of SoCs, I chose to remain with CRP after reviewing theories that emerged after CRP and hearing Dr. Ladson-Billings utilize CRP in a lecture. For example, Paris' (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes a more pluralistic approaches to culture and pedagogy and appropriately challenges the use of "relevance" in CRP but does not overlook the intent of CRP to unveil the intentional practice of supporting SoCs in education. Additionally, when attending a recent lecture from Dr. Ladson-Billings, she applied her CRP framework to a college and university environment incorporating the benefits that a racially and ethnically diverse group of students are afforded when institutional practices reflect culturally relevant practices. Paris' discussion of CRP and Dr. Ladson-Billing's own practice of utilizing CRP in a higher education setting and incorporating a diverse group of SoCs in the examples she provided for each CRP tenet affirmed my decision to utilize CRP in this study despite its initial focus on a secondary environment and focus on African-American students.

Utilization of CRT. As a novice researcher, utilizing CRT as a tool for analysis and guiding framework for this study evolved throughout this study. My skills in embedding CRT throughout this study developed over time. For example, a reader can observe the slow maturation of utilizing CRT from how it is used to inform the research design to how CRT guides the discussion. Learning how to appropriately use CRT in a research design requires meticulous consistency from the research questions to discussing the findings. The more familiar one becomes with this framework is the more seamless it becomes to perform the stages of a research process through a critical lens. This study provided me with increased opportunities to utilize CRT appropriately as the study progressed; however, this progress presents as a limitation because CRT is not consistently reflected throughout the study. For example, the findings capture participant responses to questions that were not consistently critical thus critical analysis exists more in the discussion of findings than the findings. Reflecting on the use of CRT in this study, I recognize that CRT could have been used more intentionally in the research design and development of the interview protocol which could have led to clearer connections of CRT in the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews. Undoubtedly, becoming a critical scholar takes a concerted effort to build the repertoire and fine tune the lens in which to use this theory. While my novice use of CRT is utilized here, this study has opened my eyes to ways in which I can further develop into a critical scholar using CRT in every crevice of this study.

Despite the limitations, this study aims to call attention to the individuals who have the power to challenge or perpetuate systems that exclude SoCs. Many studies have highlighted the experiences of SoCs, but fewer provide a deep analysis of the institutional agents that contribute to the tense racial climate that exists on today's campuses. Bensimon (2005) captures the significance of this research study when acknowledging that practitioners are missing from educational research. Research on higher education makes tremendous contributions to

identifying and describing the problems through quantitative research and supporting counternarratives of underserved populations through qualitative research. Appreciatively, these studies focus on the students, but it leaves behind the gap of interrogating the individuals with power in higher education. This research study intends to contribute to the latter. It is grounded on the research that has led us to understand the problems more deeply and hear the stories more broadly and then ask, “So, what are educators doing about it?” Asking this question begins with reflecting and critiquing our cognitive lenses and campus cultures that inform the strategies we use to promote equitable success for SoCs.

SoCs and racial justice advocates want more than administrator resignations or renaming of buildings. They are fighting for a chance to gain the benefits of postsecondary attainment. Therefore, the heightened call for institutions to improve their campus climate for SoCs should not be simplified as a rallying call for demands but viewed as a fight against the systemic oppression that perpetuates racial inequity in our society. Through advocating for their students, campus administrators, like student affairs professionals, are critical agents in addressing the holistic support provided for their SoCs.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As discussed in previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to examine how VPSAs prioritize promoting success for SoCs and the VPSAs' perceptions of having the power to do so in their leadership positions. In this chapter, I share the findings that emerged from this critical qualitative case study. This study acknowledges the intersectional influences of an HWI context, student affairs culture, participants' racialized experiences, and the campus community's expectations for the VPSA role. The participants' experiences and perspectives reveal VPSAs' nuanced efforts in prioritizing SoCs in their work. Semi-structured interviews are the primary source of data used to describe the findings although they are complemented with artifacts that provide a description of the institutional context, student affairs culture, student experiences, and VPSA role on the campuses represented in this study. Overall, this chapter provides an in-depth description of VPSAs' efforts to prioritize SoCs on their campuses and represents a critical race analysis of the data collected.

This study's findings are reflective of 10 VPSAs who participated in this study, each representing a four-year, public, HWI in the southeastern region of the United States. Participating VPSAs represent five doctoral universities, three master's college and universities, and two baccalaureate colleges. Their experiences in higher education and student affairs range from 16 to over 40 years of professional experience in the field. The participants have been in their VPSA role between 10 months and 15 or more years. Eight participants have been granted their terminal degree in education while two indicated they were in the dissertation phase of their doctoral studies. Each participant indicated they had 10 or more years of progressive leadership experience. All participants earned their most recent degree in education with a student affairs focus. Data collected from the participants revealed four primary findings: (a) VPSAs perform their role and responsibilities in a context nuanced around race; (b) VPSAs' divisions engage in

culturally relevant practices to promote SoCs' success; (c) VPSAs' racialized experiences inform their approach with SoCs; and (d) VPSAs cultivate political power from their position's rank and access to SoCs.

This chapter is divided into three sections that are guided by the study's two research questions:

(1) How do VPSAs prioritize promoting success for SoCs?

(2) How do VPSAs perceive their power to promote success for SoCs?

The organization of this chapter is likened to zooming into a picture to gain a deep perspective of the VPSAs role in prioritizing SoCs in efforts to promote their success. Beginning with the broadest view, I utilize artifacts that describe the institutional context and student affairs culture at the institutions represented in the study. Then, I use the CRP framework to identify and organize the strategies VPSAs have initiated or supported across the student affairs departments they supervise to prioritize SoCs. Next, I share the participants' racialized professional and personal experiences that guide their approaches towards prioritizing SoCs and offer a horizontal comparative analysis that highlights how VPSAs race and gender influence how they prioritize SoCs in their roles. Finally, I will share and discuss the participants' perceptions of power to prioritize SoCs at their institution.

VPSAs Perform Their Role and Responsibilities in a Context Nuanced Around Race

Institutional context. The institutional context in which the VPSAs conduct their day-to-day responsibilities guide their responses. For the purposes of this study, the SoCs enrollment and six-year graduation rates are important descriptors of the institutional context. SoC enrollment includes students who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African-American, Native Hawaiian or other, and multiracial as listed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). For the purposes of this study, HWIs are defined as institutions

with 50 percent or more White students on campus. As observed in the table below, SoC enrollment ranges from 13 percent to 49 percent. Across all institutions, the highest number of SoCs identified as Black or African-American. As VPSAs responded to their questions, they most often referred to Black or African-American students and Latinx or Hispanic students despite having heard and seen the broader definition of SoCs as defined by this study. SoC enrollment is provided in Table 4.1 as a visual representation of the SoC enrollment at each institution.

Table 4.1 Enrollment for Students of Color at Participants’ Institutions.

Institution Pseudonym	SoC Enrollment
University of Plain Ridge	36%
South River University	31%
College of Southern Shore	19%
Atlantic University	20%
Southern State University	26%
University of Blue Ridge	37%
Mountain Ridge University	47%
Piedmont State University	41%
Chesapeake State University	49%
Mountainside University	13%

Lastly, six-year graduation rates across the institutions represented in this study revealed a success disparity, on the basis of degree completion, across racial groups. Of the institutions that reported their retention rates for each racial and ethnic group, 53.8% of White students graduated with a bachelor’s degree within six years, followed by students who identified as Asian (52.8%), Hispanic (51.2%), Black (46.5%), and American Indian (26.9%). Although this represents the overall success rates across institutions represented in this study whose data is reported to NCES, individual profiles of each institution’s data provide a nuanced representation

of reality. For example, three institutions indicated a higher success rate for Asian students than their White counterparts. However, the success disparities within the Asian community are often overlooked as Asian students have the largest variation between certain Asian groups when observing postsecondary outcomes (Ross et al., 2012).

Another nuance that can be observed is in the limitation of this dataset where the percentage of students are reported but not the number of students. Thus, in other cases where success rates for SoC groups were higher than White students, the reports used from NCES did not show whether there were three students or one student that contributed to a 100 percent or 66 percent success rate. Further analysis of the available data may demonstrate that the 100 percent success rate refers to one student from that racial or ethnic identity group who graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years. This success rate, therefore, does not take into consideration the larger implications and experiences of having one student to represent their racial or ethnic identity group.

Student affairs culture. Insight into the student affairs culture can be captured by the mission statements that guide how VPSAs lead their divisions and hold their supervisees accountable for working with students. The mission statements for each institution are readily available and visible and therefore collected from public records including websites and published strategic plans. According to the data, the overarching goal of student affairs at the participants' institutions is to create an environment on campus that fosters student learning and development. Overall, the student affairs mission statements emphasize how the student affairs divisions represented in this study are student-focused and complement the institution's mission. Although analyzed, the full mission statements are not included as to preserve confidentiality.

The language in the mission statements for the student affairs divisions represented in this study does not prioritize SoCs or other marginalized groups that may be represented on a

college campus. References to supporting all students, creating welcoming campuses, and fostering inclusive environments suggest some awareness that there are groups of students that have varying experiences from the majority and the institutional structures are not organically supportive, welcoming, or inclusive. Overall, the mission statements suggest these student affairs divisions consider the varying efforts students need to enhance their college experience and prepare them for postsecondary success.

The mission statement also provides an insight into the nuanced role student affairs plays in supporting the institutional mission and supporting the students. Although mission statements are student-focused, institutions like Mountain Ridge University that articulate the division “supports the educational mission of the University” signals that the divisions serve the institution and students—two groups who can often be at odds signaled by the demographic differences seen across leadership and student populations. In the mission statements that specifically state their support for the institutional mission, as seen in Atlantic University, Southern State University, University of Blue Ridge, and Mountain Ridge, these mission statements do not reference inclusivity, diversity, or multiculturalism as the remaining missions include. While all student affairs divisions represented in this study exist within an institutional context, the support of the institutional mission is not articulated in each of the mission statements. The rationale for articulating the allegiance to the institution within the mission statement is not identified in this study; although it signals how and who the division directs their service towards if used as a guidepost for policies, practices, programs, and decision-making at their institution.

Finally, because mission statements are visible and readily accessible to the public, it is plausible that mission statements aim to maintain a notion of social desirability for the majority of community members. In the case of an HWI, faculty, staff, and students are predominately

White, thus, mission statements that reflect colorblind and racial ideals are more appealing for the White majority. Even when covertly addressing how student affairs divisions support the diverse needs of student populations within an institutional culture that is not organically welcoming or supportive, specific marginalized identities, including racial and ethnic minorities, are not referenced. Given the data that supports the disparities across racial and ethnic minority groups, publicly naming specific groups that the division seeks to support would have a concrete rationale supported by data. In the absence of the mission statements articulating commitment to SoCs but the presence of culturally relevant practices noted by VPSAs in this study reveal conflicting messages that may be explained by their efforts to prioritize SoCs to mimic “straddling the line” between context and reality.

VPSAs’ Divisions Engage in Culturally Relevant Practices to Promote SoC Success

The student affairs profession emphasizes working with students from a counseling and developmental lens borrowing from the field of psychology (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Reynolds, 2017). Less research has been done on the pedagogical practices used to promote student success. This provides a unique opportunity to introduce the concept of pedagogy for student affairs professionals. As a review, CRP was introduced by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) based on her work observing and engaging with teachers whose Black students demonstrated relatively higher academic success in their classrooms. This theoretical framework has its roots in a primary and secondary classroom environment; however, this study seeks to extend the framework as best practices for educators beyond the classroom, and in this case, student affairs professionals. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interview protocol reflected the three tenets of CRP: (1) academic success, (2) cultural competence, and (3) critical consciousness.

The study’s participants found ease in thinking of examples where they prioritize SoCs by promoting their academic success, encouraging cultural competence, and creating an

inclusive space that fosters critical consciousness. In this section, I will share the themes that emerged from the data, aligning them with the three tenets of CRP. I renamed Ladson-Billings' terms *cultural competence* and *critical consciousness* to align with the student affairs context and participants' responses. The term cultural competence in Ladson-Billings' work refers to encouraging students to be culturally authentic in tandem with being academically successful. From a student affairs perspective, I found the term *cultural authenticity* to be appropriate to describe how VPSAs believe their students are finding opportunities to be themselves on campus in tandem with being a student at their institution. Ladson-Billings' discussion of the term critical consciousness identifies the practice of helping students utilize their academic and cultural knowledge to critique inequities and help their communities. On a college campus, this emerges as *student voice* where college students are able to engage in activism and draw attention to the barriers and supports for their success on campus.

The following findings and discussion reveal how participants believe to be leading their division in utilizing strategies that support academic success for SoCs, create environments, both abstract and concrete, for students to demonstrate culturally authenticity, and instill expectations for their staff to guide SoCs in speaking out about their racialized and biased experiences to spark campus-wide change.

VPSAs lead divisions that prioritize academic success for SoCs. CRP's first tenet is based on the fundamental belief that students have the potential of experiencing academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Participants involved in this study shared their student affairs departments' efforts that prioritized promoting success for SoCs through affirming practices, programs, and relationships. These efforts supported academic success for SoCs in a way that was meaningful to the students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the same respect, whispers of racial idealism and interest convergence emerged as deficit and diversity-minded rationales for

prioritizing these efforts while others explained why these efforts did not exist at their institution. The next sections will highlight how VPSAs prioritized academic success for SoCs across their divisions.

VPSAs provide support for affirming practices, programs, and relationships for SoCs.

Affirming practices, programs, and relationships refer to the positive messaging, celebrations, and intraracial support networks that participants believed to motivate success among SoCs on their campuses. Positive messaging often occurs in individual interactions students have with VPSAs and their student affairs professional staff but also extends to goals within strategic plans. Student achievement is recognized through formal and informal celebrations that publicly acknowledge academic success among SoCs. Intraracial support networks are developed between peers and alumni mentors that reinforce the reality of being successful graduates. In many cases, these networks are developed through academic support initiatives that prioritize specific needs for SoCs. Although these efforts vary across each institution represented by the participants, six participants referenced cultural centers as being the primary coordinator for these affirming practices, programs, and relationships.

Affirmations and celebrations that encourage SoCs. At Mountainside University, there is an expectation that student organization advisors encourage students to keep their academics a priority and motivate them to continue succeeding in the classroom. Thomas shared, “We make sure that we instill confidence in them, and that’s in every student, but to make sure that you can succeed here.” Mary described the effort needed to combat the feelings of inferiority that SoCs may feel on campus.

How much effort does it really take to say, “I believe in you, and I want to know what you need for you to be academically successful in your experience here.” We gotta take

the time. That is some of the messaging, and it's gotta be reinforced, because there's so many self-doubts that can creep in anyway.

At Chesapeake State University, the positive messaging also comes from invited speakers. For example, their diversity office hosts “guest speakers and other activities [that] help students stay motivated and focused on their goals.” In some cases, artifacts from the student affairs departments represented in this study identified specific department-wide goals to increase graduation and retention rates for SoCs. For example, Southern Shore's student affairs strategic plan includes a goal that focuses on diversity and student retention efforts “to develop programs and services that support the increase of the retention of students from diverse backgrounds by 15%.” Setting a specific and measurable goal for student affairs guides decisions and resource allocation for initiatives towards supporting success for SoCs.

Ann expressed her belief in her students' abilities by setting a higher GPA requirement, relative to their national organization requirements, for students who are involved in historically Black and multicultural Greek-letter organizations.

For the Greeks, for the Black Greeks and our multicultural Greeks, I set a benchmark of 3.0. You've got to hit 3.0 ... I know you need a 2.7 or 2.75 to join the organization, but to be able to stay in good standing with me, you need a 3.0. So, I've given the challenge every semester.

Setting this goal sends a message to students that these goals are attainable. She follows up this message by acknowledging the organization with the highest GPA in the student newspaper.

We do it in the campus newspaper. We put an ad in, and we say, “Congratulations to” and we name the organization. In the beginning of January, we'll bring them together and celebrate them and we'll put it on the web. We're highlighting the ones who are doing it, and hopefully that encourages the others to step up their game.

The VPSAs also talked about celebrating SoC milestones and achievements in a formal setting. Catherine shared how students engage in “multicultural graduations” organized by the diversity office within their student affairs division at the College of Southern Shore. Their website explains that this program:

Provides a wonderful opportunity for us to celebrate and honor our spring and summer graduates and students who have achieved academic excellence. In anticipation of commencement, we host these three events to bring our diverse [student] body together and honor their successes and recognize this important milestone in their lives. These events also serve as a way for underrepresented student groups to pay tribute to those faculty, staff, and family members who have helped them along the way.

South River University’s cultural center also acknowledges SoCs in the fall and spring who attained a minimum GPA of 3.0 or above the previous semester. In an article in South River’s student newspaper, an awardee shared how this was added motivation for her to continue doing well in school and hopes to encourage her peers by the example she sets.

Affirming programs focused on academic success. Positive messaging and celebrations can have empty meanings if there is no action to support these message and goals. Programs and resources allocated to support SoCs in the collegiate journey are crucial to promoting success. Andrew reinforces his division’s efforts to support SoCs and fill the gaps through their programs. He shared his personal perspective, “For me, it’s [trying] to put it in the context of student success and saying if you really want students to succeed here and get to graduation, then we need to address these things.” Thomas said, “People of Color sometimes believe that it means more, your actions mean as much as anything else.” Knowing this motivated Thomas to actively engage and respond when SoCs expressed concerns about their experiences.

Catherine and Andrew shared success observed with their summer bridge programs, run through student affairs, that served predominately SoCs, at times captured by the program's focus on low-income or first-generation student populations. Catherine described her institution's summer bridge program.

The program is a month-long program prior to classes beginning in the first semester for students. It is structured around academic readiness. They do six hours of courses plus a study skills course, and then structured activities, team building, interaction with faculty and staff and leadership at the college.

In response to the "pretty substandard" education students receive at public schools in the neighboring county, Andrew's institution created an access program for students that exhibit "some evidence that they're willing to succeed," but may not fulfill all admission requirements. In partnership with a local two-year institution, students are accepted to this program and receive "targeted academic advising, student support services, and a student life component." Andrew shared that students who participate become involved student leaders on campus and he associates it with the support they receive in this program. He said, "We've seen those students, the [Plain Ridge] Scholars, when they become our students, become RAs and take on leadership roles because they were nurtured... in that smaller group initially."

Other programs created were in response to data that demonstrated success disparities across groups. Elizabeth, Ann, Mary, and Milton talk about student affairs-led programs that are focused on subgroups within the student communities of color. Elizabeth remarked:

We developed a program last year as we noticed that [our] NPHC and multicultural Greek students were not performing at the same academic level that our historically White fraternities and sororities were performing. We started an academic support

program for our NPHC and MGC groups to encourage academic success. That program has included study halls and tutoring and that kind of thing.

When asked how the students perceived this offering, Elizabeth went on to explain:

The student organizations themselves, and through their advisors and national organizations, have also placed emphasis on academic progress and success. And so, I think they were at least at the surface level appreciative of the opportunities to have some structure around academic support.

At South River University, Ann described how they used data to discover that a specific subgroup of their SoCs was underperforming.

One of these, we were realizing, of course, is that male students, regardless of race, were not performing as well as our female students and [that happens a lot] across the country, and so we started focusing in on that and then we started digging deeper and realized that Males of Color were usually at the bottom of all of that. And so, we have created a program that is targeting all males, and then a sub-piece that looks at Males of Color. And it deals with mentorship, which is internal and external folks. We have the ... things within it about how to dress for going on interviews. We do things with them on how to study, and more importantly, walking them to get tutors and helping them to get the academic help that they need. We've got folks who work with them and talk how to take notes, how to deal with the conflict.

Mary referenced the success of an African-American male initiative on their campus that engages 25 students in study halls, academic advising meetings, and study skills workshops. Mary attributes the involvement in this group with high retention and graduation rates relative to students who are not involved. Milton described a similar program that was previously housed in an academic department that will soon transition to student affairs. Milton described this

program as “one of the most significant initiatives related to [the SoCs] population.” To explain the move, Milton said:

I think it’s a resource prioritization challenge that exists for that academic area. [They] know that our Dean of Students has a passion for it, but also has a direct connection with our student population on a day to day basis.

Both African-American male-focused programs utilize funding from state grants to support SoCs on their campuses. Comparable to a state program, one federal program was mentioned as a program that also supports student success for SoCs as well. Elizabeth shared the work that TRIO programs does within their student affairs division to provide academic support for student success.

Through our Student Support Services area, we run a TRIO program, and while it’s not necessarily the case that all of our students that are in our TRIO program are SoCs, our TRIO program is predominantly SoCs. And so, through that program, we use a college coaches model ... Our students are assigned to college coaches, which are not only helping with their academic needs but with their peer and social support as well.

Three institutions take a more organic approach in providing academic support for SoCs. At James’ institution, the professional staff member responsible for diversity initiatives takes more of an organic approach in providing academic support for SoCs. James explained:

We have a lot of first-generation students on our campus. Many of them are SoCs. She [the professional staff member responsible for diversity initiatives] designs programs and works with our academic success center, they’re kind of like the academic advisement at our university. She works with them on strategies, especially at the beginning of the year that may address specifically issues that SoCs might have in the academic classroom.

Meanwhile, there are programs that are home-grown initiatives at Piedmont State University where an enrichment program aims to “link cultural identity to academic achievement.” This program, run through the student affairs’ cultural center, includes academic seminars, early alert programs, study halls, and academic coaching. The support is evident for this program as it plans to initiate peer mentoring and success networks in the near future. Similar to Piedmont State University, Chesapeake State University runs an achievement program through their student affairs diversity office that prioritizes providing support for SoCs.

The [achievement program] was established to enhance the academic welfare of minority students [this state]. The goals of the program include: The promotion of academic success and degree matriculation. Development of human potential and positive citizenship. The creation of an environment that fosters the success and retention of students.

Affirming relationships build successful communities. At HWIs, SoC enrollment is less than half the student population while White students make up the majority. On an HWI campus it is more likely for a White student to walk around and see a representation of individuals who look like them in their residence halls serving in leadership positions, honored by building names, and represented by alumni who embody the fruition of postsecondary success. Reflective of higher education’s culture of exclusion, regardless of the steady increase of SoCs on campus, SoCs are least likely to find their racial and ethnic identity group represented across campus. VPSAs’ divisions address the lack of representation by creating opportunities for SoCs to engage with each other and Alumni of Color, as engagement with a critical mass of your Peers of Color can have positive effects on your success (Jayakumar, 2015; Museus, 2008).

Some participants shared how they engage current SoCs with former SoCs in mentorship. At South River University, Ann explained:

We have a pretty strong Black Alumni chapter who come in and do networking activities with them, career pieces with them ... mentoring and coaching ... And we get them to talk about the need to be academically successful.

Catherine also shared that the students benefit from engaging with many of the students who first integrated their institution. She said, “Many of the alums who were the first SoCs to attend here are still living and active, and involved, and can talk a lot about that transition to the campus.”

The promise of affirming relationships can also be found in the critical mass of students in visible roles on campus. Louise remarked,

Students who see themselves are more likely to be more engaged. And you get to see yourself here. You know that some of these scholarships and students in the Honor’s Program, are African-American.

At Southern Shore, there is also a mentoring program that connects first-year students with returning students, faculty, and staff on campus. Catherine remarked:

It is designed so that the mentors have the opportunity to provide curricular and co-curricular support and share their skills and experiences with the newest members of our student body. Likewise, it is an opportunity for students of different backgrounds to learn from one another through shared experiences.

Similarly, Elizabeth spoke about a preview day that connects Latinx students to prospective students through building affirming relationship with current students.

This year for the first year we sponsored a Latinx preview day for high school students in [our state] who come from high schools that are at least Hispanic serving in some more significant way than many of our high schools are. And that was a very powerful experience for the high schoolers, and also for our Latino students who are really the hosts of that experience, and I’m hopeful we will continue to do that. The students then

being able to engage high school students and talking about their own experiences, the ways that they found success academically, personally, socially on the campus, and providing that encouragement that college is an option, that our campus is an option and that if you come here you can be successful here. It was a powerful way for them to communicate their own experiences.

Not all participants described efforts made to support success among SoCs. Louise acknowledged the institution's hesitation in supporting SoCs because of the impression that critical mass and representation in leadership position are a reflection of this issue having been solved. Louise also provided insight on how this race ideal can appear as an acceptable rationale despite her disagreement with the rationale.

We do not have any formal programs for SoCs. It is believed that because we are 47 to 48 percent [SoC enrollment] that there is not a need to target them. So, I don't agree, but I sort of understand it. I know other institutions where I worked, we've had to do special programs because maybe they did not feel they had access to a lot of things on campus. Our students, our African-American students, and I'm just saying them in particular, they have access to everything. They're on the Dean's List, they're orientation leaders, they're ambassadors, they run SGA. They are very heavily represented on our University Programming Board, so all of those things that I experienced at other institutions with smaller numbers really do not exist here.

Meanwhile, Thomas alluded to a familiarity with the enrollment and success numbers for particular SoC groups. From his reflection on the numbers, it is unclear how he defined "pretty good" or to whom this "pretty good" success rate is compared. Nonetheless, Thomas shared that in spite of the numbers, programs and services would be helpful in ensuring SoCs, specifically African-American students in this example, received support.

The retention rate's pretty good for our African American students. African American females [do] a lot better than our African-American males by far. By far, that's for any of our students. Our female students here at Mountainside graduate quicker and are retained a lot better than our males. Actually, our White males have a lower [retention rate] than our African-American males ... There's more White males than African-American males, but we just got to do a better job of that. So, we need to have programs and services that ... make sure ... [supporting SoCs] is almost a standard operating procedure versus an actual policy.

In both scenarios, VPSAs shared their belief that African-American students are doing relatively well academically, which is why specific initiatives were not created for SoCs on their campuses. However, the six-year graduation rate at Mountain Ridge, where Louise works, touts a 37 percent completion rate for Black or African-American students who she referenced specifically in her response, and 17 and 30 percent six-year graduation rates for Asian and Hispanic students respectively. Strikingly, this data also means that over 60 percent of SoCs are not graduating within six years at Mountain Ridge suggesting there is justified need to improve support for SoCs' academic success. Thomas' institution reveals similar retention data that suggests an 18 percent gap between Black or African-American students (60 percent) and White students (78 percent), although not disaggregated by gender as Thomas referenced. This suggests there is a need to prioritize SoCs' academic success at his institution as well.

Although other institutions represented in this study also show room for improvement for graduation rates among their SoCs, the students who are directly involved in the programs, networking opportunities, and more involved with co-curricular activities that increase their access to student affairs professionals reap the benefits of receiving affirming messages, programs, and support networks. Despite these efforts, VPSAs also provided rationales that

reflect CRT's critique of liberalism where liberalism accepts the ideals of colorblindness, meritocracy, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In this study, VPSAs justified their efforts to support SoCs academic success with concepts of liberalism.

VPSAs justify their efforts to affirm success for SoCs with racial idealism. Critical legal scholar Derrick Bell suggested that contrary to racial realism, racial idealism suggests that racial equality is an attainable goal (Bell, 1992). Idealism, or liberalism, recognizes progress towards equality rather than the permanence in racism within institutions (Bell, 1992; Patton, 2015). In this study, the ideals of liberalism emerge as VPSAs offered a justification of their support for SoCs. Racial idealism, as argued by critical scholars, embodies a positive outlook on race and promise for improvement in society, but most importantly, it is not realistic and can often overshadow the reality of racism in our society.

When speaking to SoCs who are engaged in student organizations, Thomas sends a complex message. He explained that he says to students "Look, you're here for a reason. You're capable, you're smart, you've gotta have the drive. We can't give you the drive." Within this positive affirmation, Thomas suggests that success is an outcome of a student's motivation to learn. This idea aligns with the myth of meritocracy that proposes when students work hard, they can achieve any success they desire. These messages suggest that the difference between a student who does succeed and one who does not is the presence or absence of drive. Mary demonstrates the liberal view of meritocracy when she said, "it's that genuine belief in, we know that you can be successful here, otherwise you wouldn't have been admitted to the institution." While this signals a commitment to SoC success, it dismisses the barriers that exist in the admission process that disproportionately favors White students in admission processes regardless of the effort and dedication of SoCs to their academic success.

Liberal ideals around race are not unique to VPSAs. In interacting with a colleague, Ann shared how she challenged their honors program for not admitting a representative group of students into their program.

Our honors college has a Black student and they would be okay with that. And when I found this, they sort of said yes. And I remember this young lady from the Honors College coming in my office, and I wanted to talk about why, and this woman started the conversation off by saying, “We don’t have a quota system.” This shocked me and I let her continue talking and I said, “Listen to what you just said to me. You said you don’t have a quota system and you don’t lower your standards ... Your academic standards. So, you’re automatically saying that SoCs, specifically Black students, do not have the academic credentials to get into the Honors College.”

The liberal ideals are a reflection of deep-seated values that undergird their institutional cultures. Like Louise, VPSAs may understand the rationales even though they disagree with them as demonstrated in their support for affirming efforts to support SoCs’ academic success. Nonetheless, the liberal ideals are maintained by institutional cultures steeped in racist systems that lead VPSAs to use interest convergence as a means to gain support for SoCs’ academic success on campus.

VPSA rationales for the existence of affirming efforts demonstrate how raceless systems are not questioned and compel VPSAs maintain the status quo—a system that rewards racially biased practices including standardized tests and admissions practices. These practices are upheld by a liberal concept of objectivity in a post-racial world that believes every student now has a fair chance at meeting the admission requirements and enrolling at an institution. Altruistic efforts to support SoCs and increase SoC enrollment do not exist unless the interest of Whites is

not compromised, also known as interest convergence. For example, Catherine described what the institution compromises when SoC enrollment increases.

Just based on the pool of students that we attract, when you increase the number of SoCs, not just African-American, then that lowers the SAT score. Then it also increases the acceptance rate. We have a goal to be, a level of selectivity and to hit that level of selectivity, that doesn't drive up numbers of SoCs. It's a constant bouncing act of what is most important.

While Catherine's statement can be striking, it illustrates how higher education is rewarded for excluding SoCs based on elevating the importance of standardized testing that is biased in nature. In an effort to advocate for an academic success program serving Latinx students, Elizabeth shared how she utilizes interest convergence with her colleagues.

I'm just being frank here, we want our enrollment to grow, we know that Latinx students are a student population that has been historically underserved by higher education and particularly in our State. And so, if we want to grow our enrollment, then one of the ways that we can do that is by being more effective in our outreach and support of Latinx students.

In describing the purpose behind giving SoCs positive messaging, Mary said, "I think reinforcing, you deserve to be here. That Piedmont State University is going to be a better institution as a result of your presence."

These rationales suggest that the argument to support SoCs' academic success has to be stronger than the *compromises* that institutions make to enroll SoCs. These rationales make it seem as though it is a risk an institution takes to enroll an SoC and thus, SoCs should perceive this as a privilege to attend an institution. In exchange for their acceptance, SoCs contribute to making the institution a better place. These ideas dismiss the responsibility of public institutions

to the serve their statewide or regional constituents, which also includes reflecting the demographics of their communities, and work towards addressing racial inequity perpetuated by educational systems. Rather than relying on systems to increase SoC enrollment or emphasizing how SoCs can benefit their institution, liberal ideals should be questioned and support for SoCs should be reframed, to focus on what their racialized experiences in education can teach institutions about how to support them. Elizabeth said,

We always fall back on ... “Our African-American students are not succeeding here because they came from high schools that weren’t as strong.” Well, in [our state], there may be some relevance to that comment. But that is not a justification for why a student can’t be successful here, right? And [that may] give you insight into what they may need once they get here. But that doesn’t mean that they can’t be successful here.

VPSAs provide extensive examples of programs and practices that support SoCs’ academic success; however, VPSAs clearly struggled with how to position these efforts in the larger institutional structure. Institutions depends on meritocracy, color blindness, and interest convergence to justify support for SoCs’ academic success in spite of the data that points to strategic effort needed to support the group. Although student affairs divisions intend to complement the academic mission and student learning, efforts to support SoCs are nuanced within the context VPSAs fulfill their responsibilities of leading a student affairs division and prioritizing SoCs. When serving the institution and students, VPSAs utilize liberal rationales while supporting efforts to promote SoCs’ academic success.

VPSAs lead divisions that conditionally promote cultural authenticity for SoCs.

Cultural competence is the second tenet of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators guided by CRP utilize culture as a vehicle to enhance student learning and thereafter promote students to develop or maintain cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In a student affairs setting,

this proposition is best reflected in how student affairs promotes cultural authenticity in SoCs' experiences. I use the term *cultural authenticity* to reflect how VPSAs believe their divisions promote racial identity development and growth for SoCs in tandem with their academic success. Research shows that academic achievement among SoCs often comes at the expense of authentic cultural expression (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For example, SoCs may use formal vernacular, as defined by the dominant White culture, in the classroom but use different language in their communities (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015). This example, among others that demonstrate a DuBoisian double consciousness (as referenced in Huber & Solórzano, 2015) signals how institutions, especially HWIs, provide limited spaces for students to demonstrate cultural authenticity.

As observed in the mission statements, student affairs divisions often emphasize its role in creating inclusive environments where students can be authentic and develop their identity. Across the data, VPSAs highlighted student organizations as the primary way in which their divisions promote cultural authenticity. Andrew referenced the priority that his student affairs departments places on student organizations when he said, “for us, it’s been trying to foster student organizations where students can find a home.” In addition to student organizations, VPSAs provided examples of cultural centers within the division that have a focused effort on creating the environment where students could be culturally authentic. However, despite the success of the student organizations and cultural centers, cultural authenticity was conditionally applauded and encouraged as VPSAs wrestled with supporting SoCs authenticity and stakeholders’ perceptions. Thus, when organizations, programs, or centers sparked negative feedback from stakeholders and leaders, who are also predominately White, VPSAs wrestled with the extent to which cultural authenticity could be practiced. In this section, I share the findings that describe how VPSAs perceive the role of student organizations and cultural centers

in prioritizing SoCs in demonstrating cultural authenticity. To close this section, I share findings that suggest how VPSAs wrestle with supporting SoCs cultural authenticity and perceptions of stakeholders and peers who are predominately White.

VPSAs recognize the integral role of student organizations for SoCs in their cultural development and expression. Across the data, student organizations were referenced as an engagement opportunity that promotes academic success and inspires increasing cultural competence. Student organizations do this by often instituting a GPA requirement for leadership and sometimes involvement, while also reflecting the benefits of the power of a critical mass. Within student affairs departments, many of the students who are involved in organizations or hold leadership positions in their student organizations have increased touch points with the student affairs staff and administrators. The participants utilize these opportunities of interacting with engaged students to encourage and remind students that being involved in student organizations also requires dedication to their academics. For example, Thomas said,

When we talk to any of our African-American or Black students, we make sure they understand ... if you want to be involved, this is what you got to maintain. We'll help you maintain that. We have programs and services, [in addition to] GPA requirements, for your study skills.

As mentioned earlier, Ann sets her own benchmark for historically Black and multicultural Greek-letter organizations. "I know you need a 2.7 or 2.75 to join the organization, but to be able to stay in good standing with me, you need a 3.0."

An example of how student organizations create an opportunity for cultural discovery and authenticity is captured in an example that Milton shared about the development of one of the student organizations on campus.

Our African-American students have connected in the last two or three years with cultural heritage, which is literally from Africa, and a large group of them have started an entrepreneurial initiative. I don't know how best to say it. It's part of a student organization, but they have chosen to branch out into also bring African wear to campus, and retail it, and sell it. There's been some pageants associated with that, which have been very popular. The money that they're making from it, they're sending back to Africa, to support works in that area.

Milton shared a little about how this organization came to life through a class project the students were involved in.

These African-American students in an entrepreneurial course... who were really looking to create something like this, and market this way. So, it really... came out of a student group that were business majors about three years ago, as a class project. Then it has turned into a student organization, and a very active student organization that has gotten a lot of support from students on campus.

In this example, through the format of a student organization, students were able to utilize their academic skills developed in the classroom and used a student organization as a mode to put their academic skills into practice. Milton also noted how it changed the visibility of students on campus when the students had access to wearing authentic attire from African countries.

Student organization websites also included a diverse number of groups that emphasized building community for a cultural identity group. Excluding groups formed around identity studies programs and international student groups where racial identities were not identified, there was diversity within each racial and ethnic identity group. For example, some institutions had Asian American groups that were specific to a country. At Piedmont State University, their Korean Student Association, South Asian, and Vietnamese student groups serve subgroups of

Asian American students. At the University of Blue Ridge, the NAACP, African-American Alliance, and CURLS student organizations are all identified as Black and/or African-American groups with each focusing on a different aspect of their racial and ethnic culture. The number of students in each organization was beyond the scope of publicly accessible information.

The student organizations for SoCs have varying names but similar intents and goals. Representative of the two largest groups represented through student organizations, the following are examples of what the student's organizations aim to provide for their group members. One Black student organization prioritizes building cultural competence and promoting expression.

[This organization fosters] self-understanding and pride amongst people of African ancestry and individuals interested in the African culture and heritage with substantive and ongoing evidence of educational and social programming which promote social justice, diversity, enhance literacy and understanding between cultural entities.

Similarly, student organizations for Latinx student groups determined their focus on developing connections beyond their campus. One student organization for Latinx groups stated in their purpose:

[This organization] focuses on networking, developing a Latino alumni base, creating Latino leaders on campus and Latino professionals in the workplace, providing social avenues to unite Latino students on campus, and engaging in community service opportunities.

In some cases, student leaders in these organizations are given the opportunity to serve on committees where they had valued input in making policy and practice decisions in and beyond the student affairs division. This agency will be discussed more in the next section on student voice. Nonetheless, research shows that affinity groups based on race provide a unique opportunity for students to connect and benefit from the critical mass. Students who are a part of

these organizations make connections and feel as though they can be culturally authentic in these spaces because they are surrounded with others who share similar racialized experiences.

Andrew and Milton call attention to the role historically Black and multicultural Greek-letter organizations play in providing culturally authentic spaces where academic success and cultural identity are synonymously prioritized. Andrew explained,

We had some interest from traditionally African-American fraternities and sororities, but we've been more successful... because of the graduate chapter function of most traditional historically Black fraternities and sororities. That's continuing to be some of our stronger chapters.

Milton described the NPHC organization on his campus.

Within our NPHC organizations, those groups have a strong identity. Our multicultural Greek organizations particularly focus on our Latin American, Hispanic students. We've seen much more of that. They have a strong place and presence on our campus, probably more so than our predominantly White fraternity groups.

Other VPSAs found these organizations to be vital partners in supporting SoC success. Charles attributed his students finding a place to be culturally authentic on campus through student organizations, and student affairs as providing the platform for them to share their cultural expression.

I do think that's in a lot of the celebrations that we do, whether that's the celebrations through our Black Student Association and the events that they have celebrating and integrating those, to respecting the kind of things that our NPHC groups might want to bring to the table.

The data revealed the emphasis that VPSAs place on student organizations to create welcoming and inclusive spaces the support student success, especially for SoCs. Participating in

a student organization not only gives SoCs an opportunity to demonstrate cultural authenticity, but also share their culture with others at the institution. In doing so, they remain closely connected with organization advisors who are often connected to, or within, student affairs departments. Access to the student affairs professionals can increase their visibility and their concerns to leadership, which will be discussed later on, as well as connect them to the resources that are created within the division to support SoCs' academic success, as discussed in the previous section.

VPSAs empower cultural centers within their student affairs divisions to connect SoCs' collegiate experiences to their cultural identities. Nine out of 10 institutions represented in this study included a diversity or cultural center within their student affairs organization chart. For each of these institutions, the VPSAs directly supervised the individual in charge of this office. At the remaining institution, the majority of the education and support for SoCs came out of an institution-wide office while student affairs worked directly with the active student organizations for SoCs. The VPSAs whose student affairs divisions included a diversity or cultural center talked about the critical importance for their work.

These centers served as the coordinating arm for hosting heritage month celebrations and traditional events that encourage cultural expression on campus. Similar to other institutions in this study, Ann said, "We have a cultural center here on campus and the cultural center does a lot of things for [SoCs] through a programming aspect." At Mountain Ridge University, home to Louise, the cultural center within the student affairs division states that the purpose of the office is to focus on the "academic, social, and cultural development of their students that facilitate cultural expression". At Piedmont State University, the diversity and cultural center's purpose is the following:

Offers programs that acknowledge and embrace cultural differences, facilitate intercultural conversations, and create an environment in which our campus community becomes culturally competent and socially just.

At Southern Shore, the goal of their center is to “provide a safe haven for students to develop connections with other students.” Catherine also shared early in our interview how she perceived she would be referencing their diversity and cultural center frequently during our conversation.

The key office that I knew we would talk about in this is...related to these conversations, there are a couple in the division, one is the multi-cultural student programs and services office. Our main efforts are going to be facilitated from that office. That office is in charge of outreach and support, and engagement of students and, in an evolving way, campus wide programming to educate the broader student body as well.

The cultural centers have gone through changes over the years in some cases to become more programming-focused and in other cases created for the first time. Charles remembered the changes the cultural center made during his tenure.

We had a Multicultural Affairs Office when I came to Atlantic and that reported to the Office of the Provost, Academic Affairs. Since then it's moved from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs, back to Academic Affairs, and now it's in Student Affairs.

Charles explained that the changes made with their cultural center was reflective of how the institution viewed the purpose of the office. Since his arrival to the institution, not only has the placement of the office changed, but also the name, to reflect “how we approach creating a diverse and inclusive environment where students know.” Mary also discussed a change in name to reflect the needs of the current student population. Mary remembered, “It was Minority Student Retention Services. And it is not all about me, but we were behind in our language.” In

the absence of a cultural center, Milton prioritized the creation of a center as one of his first tasks to accomplish when he started his role as VPSA.

When I interviewed on campus and had my interviews with staff and students, that was one of the main things that was highlighted, was that the institution needed an office, needed staff and graduate assistants, and resources to really support SoCs, but also students who were transitioning, students who were looking for a place to identify and connect.

Regardless of the current iteration of the office, VPSAs identified having a diversity and cultural center in the student affairs division as a best practice in order to provide focused support for underserved populations, especially SoCs. In Milton's words, "It is under student affairs and 100% of its focus is on students." According to VPSAs who participated in this study, cultural centers existing in student affairs are likely to thrive because of the student-focused culture within student affairs. These centers within student affairs have direct access to SoCs and thus can connect their students with resources to support their identity development and expression reflecting the overarching mission of student affairs divisions.

VPSAs wrestle with peers' and stakeholders' understanding of cultural authenticity for SoCs. While VPSAs emphasized the importance of student organizations and cultural centers as an opportunity for students to demonstrate cultural authenticity, there were examples where SoCs' authenticity was stifled because of cultural unfamiliarity. Charles shared an instance where the Student Government Association (SGA) was making decisions about allocating financial resources to their fraternities and sororities on campus.

Student Government was negotiating money for the Panhellenic Council, the IFC [Interfraternity Council], to go to these conferences, so they could help educate their groups. And so those councils went, but when it came to NPHC, they don't act as one

council. Every fraternity and sorority have their own enclave, and so we were struggling with why we gave so much money to IFC and Panhellenic, then how do we do this for every[one], how do we send every NPHC group?

In this case, there was pause in how to allocate resources to the historically Black Greek-letter organizations because members of student government were not familiar with how these organizations were run. According to Charles, a student spoke up to challenge the conversation.

I heard the students just struggling and she said, “Well, it’s not a matter of equity, it’s a matter of an accommodation that you cannot find real equity there, but you can accommodate these groups to meet what they need.” I looked around, I said, “Gosh, there’s really wisdom right there.”

In the event a student would not have spoken up to address how resources should be allocated, there could have been a decision made where NPHC received one allocation in the same way Panhellenic and IFC organizations received their funding. This would not have served NPHC organizations in an equitable way; therefore, their involvement with their organizations were only available under the condition that others were familiar with how their organizations were run differently from the Panhellenic and IFC organizations.

At Piedmont State University, an African-American student group traditionally hosted a speaker for the Martin Luther King event on their own until one renowned speaker elicited negative responses from the state legislature. As a result, Mary was tapped to work with the students on future programming. In Mary’s description of the event, she critiqued the previous manner in which the program was developed and implemented.

At Piedmont State University, students a part of the [African American Student Alliance would invite] the key note speaker for MLK for years, it was a one-night event. The African-American Student Alliance sponsored it. Very little campus engagement. And so,

a prior president and I were talking about why is this not a university wide experience and celebration? And there was a real struggle, and I know I kind of got tagged on this, because... we also want to do this. Why can't it be bigger? Why can't we be invited to the table to help to plan and to help to make this event larger than what a registered student organization can do? That continues to be a little bit of almost a power play.

Mary initially shared how the intent to connect with the group was to broaden the reach for the program to the entire institution. When asked about the power play, Mary explained "They want credit. They want it the way that it was, they want the exclusive kind of authority to bring in whoever they want." She then further elaborated on another reason why the administration felt the need to intercede in the program.

Sometimes that speaker has been very controversial, which right, wrong, or indifferent, that can bring negative attention to the institution, which then brings increased pressure from the legislators, and then many of those legislators are the ones who hold on to the purse strings, and then it adversely impacts the overall university system of [our state].

According to a local newspaper, the speaker chosen by the students and paid by student fees, was publicly criticized by political figures, while predominately Black organizations stood alongside the students in support of bringing the speaker to campus. The same local newspaper highlighted a former administrator's rationale for supporting the students to bring a speaker as a practice of free speech. This perspective characterizes conditional authenticity where students are able to plan and celebrate their heritage and are often relied on to educate the entire campus; however, this can only be done under the condition that others, or predominately White leadership entities, are not disturbed.

In this example, SoCs likely felt an ownership over planning and implementing an event as a form of cultural expression. While the individuals chosen to speak at the institution had

public support and opposition, the decision was made to change how the program was being run after becoming aware of the opposing remarks from a White stakeholder. Although explained as having good intentions when the offer was made to expand the ownership of this event by including professional staff members and community members, according to Mary, SoCs did not receive this news well. Contrary to what Mary said, SoCs are not looking for credit, rather they are defending their ownership and opportunity to demonstrate authentic cultural expression. This is prime example of conditional authenticity where SoCs are able to operate as usual until stakeholders, who are predominately White, disagree with their demonstration of cultural authenticity.

Juxtaposing this event at Piedmont State University is the “White nationalist” and renowned speaker that spoke at Mountainside University. Thomas shared:

I know you probably know Richard Spencer, the White Nationalist is what he goes by, we had him on campus last year. You could see, [via] the group FIRE [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education], that we have a green light now of being an open campus. In this scenario, administrators were outspoken about disagreeing with Spencer’s views because of the inflammatory rhetoric and likelihood of inciting unsafe conditions on campus. The institution also went as far as attempting to cancel the event. Although the institution had a firm response, Thomas highlighted the praise they received from FIRE for hosting this speaker by being recognized as an open campus that supports free speech. This raises the question, where was FIRE at Piedmont State University? It is ironic that an institution can speak openly about disagreeing with a White Nationalist’s beliefs and be publicly praised by a free speech organization, while SoCs who host a charged speaker known for addressing efforts to dismantle racism with supportive and opposing opinions resulted in changes to how SoCs contribute to

planning their own program. It reflects who institutions truly answer to in their efforts to support student success.

Students are often the ones to call attention to the unfair treatment of cultural authenticity. Andrew shared a meaningful conversation he had with a student during a peaceful protest advocating for students to honor Martin Luther King's birthday at a previous institution where he worked. There were discussions across faculty and staff about whether or not the day should be celebrated.

The thing though I'll always remember about this is that students in the course of my career have said things to me that really stuck with me. We were talking about it, because the faculty response to this was immediately, "We could do this, but we have to do something educational. There has to be a lecture. There has to be this or that." As a realistic person, I thought to myself, "You know, if we give students a three-day weekend, the likelihood that we can recruit very many of them to come to any event will be a hell of a testament to our ability to market something because I just don't know that that's realistic." The student one day said to me, "Dean," he said, "What do you do on the 4th of July?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Do you put a bandage on your head and get a guy with a drum and march around with a flag, or do you barbecue and go water skiing or something else like that?" I said, "Kind of the second." He said, "Why is Martin Luther King's holiday subjected to a different sort of standard? Why does it have to be educational?" I thought, "That's a powerful statement." What that was, was that student taking a view, helping me to see that ... Basically, again, faculty always want to do something educational with it because by and large they're majority view and they see that and say, "Well, if we take a day off from class, we should do something educational."

Andrew spoke about taking on the perspective of the student and recognized that the standards were different for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Independence Day. This perspective-taking that Andrew took on lingered with him from his previous institution and guided his thoughts in equitable expectations for students celebrating their culture on his campus. This example also reflects the conditional authenticity that students are able to engage in on campus. In this case, engaging with SoCs and hearing their perspectives revealed how institutions and their agents can place limitations on the extent of their cultural expression. In the case of Piedmont University, it is likely similar perspectives would be shared if given an opportunity to share their frustration with decisions to redistribute the responsibilities of planning the MLK event. Overall, student affairs divisions emphasize student organizations and their cultural centers as prime opportunities and locations where students can develop cultural competence or demonstrate cultural authenticity. However, this is not without VPSAs wrestling the voices of their stakeholders and advocating for their students.

VPSAs seek to elevate SoC voices. The third tenet of Ladson-Billings' CRP is critical consciousness, which I define as student voice. In her definition, critical consciousness refers to developing "a broader sociopolitical consciousness competence that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). One way students demonstrate their critical consciousness on campus is by expressing their voice on campus. Student affairs provides numerous platforms for students to question and challenge the systems that do not support them. In today's context, we see this often displayed in college student activism on campus; however, students' voices can emerge when engaging with administrators about their experiences and through governance responsibilities. Across the study, VPSAs highlighted efforts to engage specifically with SoCs,

guide students in activism, and provide opportunities to exercise their voice through student governance.

VPSAs prioritize engaging with SoCs to learn about and discuss their experiences.

Charles captured the importance of prioritizing direct time with students over his tenure.

I've been at Chief Student Affairs' Officers meetings around the country and they say to me "you don't have time to meet with student government, you need to have your student activities' person, yada, yada, yada, do that." I said, "Let me tell you something, I don't have time not to do that. Students empower me, I empower students. Students need to know they have access to me.

In speaking of the power engage directly with students, Andrew said:

I think my staff sees their role to be responsive and to raise those questions with me that they're hearing from students. My role is also to say those things in the cabinet. I'm a great believer, having served on several different cabinets of different institutions, that if I'm not speaking truth to power, then I'm really not doing my job.

While Andrew's and Charles' statements were not specific to engaging with SoCs, other VPSAs shared how they prioritized engaging with SoCs. Catherine shared how she prioritized engaging with SoCs at one of her monthly meetings.

I do a regular series of dinners where I invite presidents of student organizations to come to a dinner. We have an hour, hour and a half, together and we talk about things happening at the college and their impressions. I also facilitate it, we have an interim president, who is open to this, so I facilitated the same type of activities with him and our second gathering of the year was student leaders, organizations that represent SoCs, and some Muslim students, and other students as well.

Ann visits with student athletes, whom she identified as a group that is predominately SoCs, to engage in an open dialogue about their expectations and needs for success.

Whenever I get a chance, I'm speaking to our student athletes, particularly men, and men's basketball and football, because the bulk of those individuals are Black males. And talking to them about making sure they get what they're supposed to get from this institution. So, we're having those very honest and open conversations.

Similarly, Elizabeth regularly meets with SoCs in organizations within their diversity and cultural center. Elizabeth said, "I meet with our student organizations who are housed in our cultural center at least once an academic semester, but more frequently as the opportunity presents itself." Milton finds himself talking primarily to SoCs when discussing what is happening at the institution.

It's been common for me to be in environments where I'm having leadership conversations, or conversations about the direction of the institution, or asking students about students' needs. I'm talking to a majority population of students who are SoCs.

VPSAs also sought opportunities to be visible where the SoCs spend their time. For example, Thomas shared that being visible has given him the opportunity to have open and honest conversations with SoCs when they ask him tough questions.

I got to be visible. I mean, I got to be visible, and talk to them, and tell them I don't think that's going to fly, so they don't ... so we're honest with each other, or, one student asked, "I don't understand why we can't have 20% minority rate at the school by next year." I'm like, "there is no way we can increase by 14% in one year. It's not mathematically possible."

Elizabeth also makes sure that she is visible at formal and informal events organized by SoCs.

I attend events that are being presented by our cultural student organizations on a very regular basis. I go to the office and hang out and play spades or cards, or just sit and visit on a regular basis. And I try to always make sure students know that if there are things about their experience that they think I need to know, that they can share those with me without me having judgment about that or just being there to listen and hopefully try to help improve the experience if it's something negative that they feel like they need me to know.

Elizabeth also encourages a student affairs culture where there are consistent opportunities for students to provide feedback.

I think we've tried to create a feedback culture here. And I talked about it in the construct of feedback loops. So, how can we create feedback loops where students are always being asked, what's going on with your experience? How are things going? How are you interacting with the institution and its very components? And then, when things come up, it's not as hard because the students feel like they can reach out and say, "Hey, this is happening." And it's not like reaching out to somebody that they've never talked to before.

Similar to Elizabeth, Catherine also prioritizes making time to be present where the students are, in addition to inviting them for individual conversations. She described, "being present with the students in spaces where they are and also inviting them into spaces where you feel like you can let their voices be heard." Across the VPSAs' experience captured in this study, consistent effort was made to connect with SoCs on their campuses. VPSAs felt as though these one-on-one connections were primers for mutually beneficial relationships where SoCs could get direct support and advocacy from an administrator and administrators could learn from SoCs experiences. The student-focused culture of student affairs lends itself to prioritizing

relationships with students to identify needs that will support their academic success and increase opportunities to demonstrate cultural authenticity.

VPSAs guide students when engaging in activism. Participants shared examples of student activism where they guided students in effectively advocating for change on their campus. Ann believes that student affairs at her institution guides students by giving students autonomy. In response to a question about how student affairs encourages students to use their voices to impact change, Ann said,

We do it by the programs we offer and giving them power to structure their programs the way they want to. We're there to guide them but plan the program you want. We're gonna give you advice. We're gonna do this ... But that gives them that collective voice, in my opinion, and gives them that empowerment. So, we're doing it on a constant basis, all day, every day. Individually, but also in the group aspect.

Ann later described how her students sought to change the name of their campus building.

We had a building with the name of [a White supremacist] and the Black Student Union got involved and wanted the name to come off. And they, along with other student organizations, mostly Black student boards, but some others ... Some White ones, too ... SGA for one ... beautifully managed that. We coached them along the way.

At Blue Ridge University, James worked with the NAACP to respond to a biased incident on campus where a White student's twitter handle was connected to racist remarks. In explaining his role with the students in addressing this incident, he explained, "I went to the NAACP meetings. I actually was the person there that they organized the sit-in through." James' presence at their meetings signaled his intentional effort to engage with SoCs and guide them in sharing their perspectives with the broader campus community.

Louise takes a different approach in encouraging her students to use their voices to impact change and directs them to professional development opportunities that work on their skills necessary to elevate their voices.

As far as expressing themselves, we make sure that when they do something, that they're training includes opportunities for them to learn how to use their voices and learn how to speak up.

The training her division offers is for all student organization leaders and it covers various topics. The topics are not limited to policies and procedures, rather they build on skills that are reflected in their student affairs mission statement according to their student handbook that emphasizes the development of the whole student by prompting self-expression and personal growth.

Louise explained more about the focus of their student training.

We also offer them training that's just not, this is how you do your job. This is how you have compassion for what it is, this is how you express yourself, this is what you look at before you bring a topic up, these are the key components that you need to have in place; these are the competencies that you need to have.

Similar to Louise, but also more specific to activism, under Charles' guidance, Atlantic University provides their students with tools that guide their engagement in activism in Atlantic University's Student Activism Guide. Charles shared that the history of the institution's role in activism on opposing sides of the civil war and the civil rights movement makes it vital to guide students towards activism when he said, "I think it's really important, institutional culture, the institutional setting, that we all embrace of who we are and the time that we set, we don't escape our history, and so we are part of that." The student activism guide reflects this acknowledgement of the historical context of the institution and how activism has shaped their institutional culture today. The introduction of Atlantic University's activism guide stated:

Continuing this tradition is important to students of the campus. The [student affairs] office has compiled this guide to help students better focus their attention and passion to communicate and advocate for change.

The guide includes seven steps that outline how to engage in activism on campus. The seven steps include finding your passion, educating others, determining your goal, determining the appropriate resources, developing your plan, and implementing your plan. This guide is readily available to all students and was personalized from a public online resource.

At Southern Shore, Catherine believed it was important to center a student's expertise in activism, so invited this student to teach her staff about the tools students are using to engage in activism on campus during a staff training around current issues. Catherine explained:

We had a student last year who did a great presentation for us on how students mobilize through social media. She came and presented to a division-wide professional development that we had. I'm, like, "She has this great program and we're going to learn a lot about how they're doing what they're doing." Giving them a chance to educate us.

At Southern Shore, Catherine views the students as the experts in activism and modeled the value of student voice by inviting a student to share their expertise in a staff training. VPSAs reveal that elevating student voices can be a collaborative effort where both student affairs professionals, including VPSAs, engage in an intentional effort to provide a platform that highlight SoCs voices.

VPSAs provide a platform for SoCs to exercise governance on campus. Across the interviews, VPSAs emphasized the importance of having diverse student governing bodies that were contacted to make institution-wide decisions. When a student organization is recognized as a governing body, they are often invited to the decision-making process to represent the student voice with administrators and other university stakeholders. VPSAs either highlighted their

racially diverse SGAs, how they prioritized having SoCs on planning committees, or how they elevated active organizations for SoCs to their governing boards.

Student governance is unique to each campus and is sometimes created as a result of the institutional context. At Mountainside, Thomas shared the historical context of why the Black Student Union was selected to be a governance group and how it invited other student groups for SoCs to join the governing student groups as well.

The Black Student Union became a governance group because there was a need. They needed to have more say in things, but also be heard a little bit better. They need to be given a platform, and when I say, “given a platform,” you got SGA sitting up here on a pedestal, you need to make sure we have something else over here, and that’s also why the International Student Association [is included], so we can get all three voices.

Thomas described the traditional organization that acts as a governing body, SGA, as a group of predominately White students, thus giving the need for their Black Student Union to have an opportunity to exercise their governance on campus. When their institution increased their international student population through an institution-wide initiative, the international student organization was also invited to join the two groups as a governing body. Thomas explained what it means to be a governance group.

The Black Student Union’s probably our second largest, or our largest student organization out of the 519 we have. We treat them as a governance group, not just a student organization, so there’s a difference in there. Student organization comes, they do their thing, they invite people, but a governance group, we treat them a little different ...

The three groups that we treat that way, I should say, four: The Graduate Student’s Association; Student Government Association, which is primarily undergrads; the Black Student Union; and the International Student Organization. We treat them that as kind of

like the Black Student Union is representative of all the minority groups on campus and dealing with that.

At Blue Ridge, James highlighted the diversity in their SGA and the efforts made to include SoCs in planning committees signaling the importance of their voice. “We need SoCs. We make sure that they’re represented on important university planning committees. We invite them to the table when we have important decisions to make. They are well-represented in our student government.” Similarly, Ann shared, “When we create student groups or have committees or whatever it is that we need to do, we’re looking at it to make sure it is well-represented and that that entity represents the student body.” Ann also emphasized that this is an expectation she has for her student affairs staff. “Everybody knows, we’ve got to make sure we have a good representation of women, of White, Black, purple, green, yellow, right? Everybody’s represented.” In these examples, we see that student voice is captured in institutional or division-wide committees to hold these committees or decision-making structures to represent the diverse student population where a predominately White leadership cannot.

Meanwhile, students’ voices are not only brought to the table in decision-making but also in opportunities to advocate for change. For example, in response to racist flyers being posted on campus, Charles invited 14 student leaders that represented diverse student organizations to speak with Atlantic University’s president and other senior leaders. Charles described how students were able to express their voice about their experiences.

When those 14 student leaders got together, they were talking about a different experience on campus than I was having. They were feeling very threatened. The Hispanic student especially, ...and I gave him real credit; he wanted to say the f-bomb so many times in the meeting, but he held off.

At the University of Plain Ridge, Mountain Ridge, and Chesapeake State, student leaders are predominately SoCs and thus play an integral role in representing the student voice on campus through governance responsibilities. Andrew shared that at Plain Ridge:

This year's president and vice president of student government are African-American.

Our African-American students overrepresented in groups like our ambassadors for the admissions office and the RA population and different student leadership groups like that.

Louise highlighted how prospective SoCs may be impacted by the representation of SoCs in leadership positions.

I think when they come here to open house and they see the student panel, and they see a Black male or Black female that says, "Hello my name is such-and-such and I'm the Student Body President." Like, what? And then when they get on campus and they look for student leaders, and half of them are African-American.

This example demonstrates the broader influence of providing a platform for SoCs to engage in leadership positions and decision-making activities. Including their voices can demonstrate an investment in the student experience as it relates to SoCs.

VPSAs' Racialized Experiences Inform Their Approach to Supporting SoCs

The findings from this study answer the research questions in three distinct ways. First, participants share how they engage in culturally relevant practices and empower their divisions to support SoCs. Second, participants reflect on how their personal and professional experiences with race influence their approach to promoting success for SoCs. Lastly, they share how they perceive their agency to prioritize SoCs in conversations and decisions around student success. This section seeks to highlight the personal and professional experiences that inform VPSAs' perspectives on race and their approach to prioritizing success for SoCs utilizing the social justice and inclusion professional competency as a framework. Table 4.2 recalls the

demographics provided in Table 3.1 highlighting intersectional the gender and race demographics for each participant as it will be discussed in the findings and analysis.

Table 4.2 Participant Descriptions.

Institution Pseudonym	Pseudonym	Race & Gender
University of Plain Ridge	Andrew	White man
South River University	Ann	Woman of Color
College of Southern Shore	Catherine	White woman
Atlantic University	Charles	White man
Southern State University	Elizabeth	White woman
University of Blue Ridge	James	Man of Color
Mountain Ridge University	Louise	Woman of Color
Piedmont State University	Mary	White woman
Chesapeake State University	Milton	White man
Mountainside University	Thomas	White man

Student affairs professionals utilize ACPA & NASPA (2011) professional competencies as a guidepost for practice. The social justice and inclusion competency is a relevant framework for sharing how VPSAs personal and professional experiences around race inform their practice. This competency involves “the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups and seeks to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power” (ACPA & NASPA, 2011, p. 30). As discussed in the literature review, the social justice and inclusion competency defines social justice as a process that requires individuals to develop self-awareness and commit to utilizing agency to promote equity across the campus environment and beyond. VPSAs who participated developed their awareness

around race through varying experiences, often being mediated by their own personal identities. In this section, I will share how VPSAs developed their perspectives on race and how they believed these experiences informed their practice.

Research indicates that past experiences shape our values and actions. Relevant to this study are VPSAs' personal professional experiences around race and how these experiences influence their approach to prioritizing success for SoCs in their roles. Personal experiences around race vary across racial and ethnic identities and influence the way VPSAs approach their work differently. While culturally relevant practices may appear the same, the experiences that inform the action are not. These differences can be observed more closely through a horizontal comparative case study analysis. Bartlett and Vavrus (2016) defined a horizontal comparison as a method of analysis that compares how similar responsibilities can vary across individuals who may hold a position of a similar scale. Using this comparative case study (CCS) method of analysis, next, I will take a closer look at how these personal and professional experiences around race frame participating VPSAs' work differently based on their own racial identity. Although unique to each individual, the following themes emerged differently within racial groups, and at times gender.

White VPSAs reference first learning about race in college. Like many White participants referenced, Andrew grew up in an all-White community and his first exposure to People of Color was in college.

My exposure to anybody who didn't look like me didn't even happen until I went away to college. I worked with some folks as an undergraduate, in particular an African-American assistant dean who used to teach a class called Intro to Intercultural Relations. He would always have to go out and recruit some White kids to be in the class. He did it and

recruited those of us who were active students in student government and those kinds of things.

Similarly, Charles grew up around a few Black families that attended his high school, but it was predominately White. For him, his authentic engagement with Black students began in college.

We only had a couple Black families that went to our high school, and I went to Catholic grade school, and so it was a predominately White area... for undergraduate, that was a predominately White environment... There were Black students there and I had some Black friends, but it wasn't a significant experience in that sense for me.

Milton described how he made lasting relationships with People of Color while he was in college.

I went to a predominantly White school. I grew up in a suburb of a major city. I think it's when I went to college and found my own identity and who I wanted to be that I was more open to getting to know anybody and everybody. [Now] I have stood in weddings and been at babies' birthdays and everything, just [went to] a graduation of one. I'm the only White person there.

Andrew, Charles, and Milton connected with individuals who were racially and ethnically different from them when they arrived to college. Although these experiences are reflective of a time where access to college for SoCs was even more limited than what current students experience today, the racially homogenous neighborhoods continue to characterize our country today.

In some cases, VPSAs did not have meaningful interactions with SoCs until their graduate programs. Catherine recalls working with student leaders in a graduate assistantship where African-American students held many of the leadership positions.

I came to graduate school in [a southern state]. My graduate assistantship was in housing, and at the time in housing, at [my graduate school], a very interesting time, where students, African-American students, really took on leadership roles in the housing environment and the White students, kind of, ran student government. It was very interesting... I got to come and attend a conference with students and my supervisor... I step onto the bus to go ride with them to where we're going, and everyone on the bus is African-American, and there were probably 50 people on there, except for me [two interns]. I literally got on the bus and I'm like, "This is what it has felt like for my friends growing up that have been African-American at my college and in my high school."

After college, Charles got a position working as an educator in a low-income, predominately Black neighborhood. This positive experience encouraged him to go back to graduate school where he had a more formal introduction to diversity.

I would say my formal education in, kind of an introduction to diversity came at [my graduate school] when I was a doctoral student and a hall director there, when I walked into my first staff meeting, six of my nine staff were African-American.

These students, according to Charles, taught him so much about the African-American culture that later informed him in helping his son navigate being the only White student on his sports team. Much like Charles' meaningful relationships with SoCs in graduate school, Elizabeth shared how despite her growth beginning when she was a student leader, graduate school provided her another opportunity to explore her own racial identity and the privileges associated with her White identity.

My own growth and development about the understanding of who I am and how my race and ethnicity affects my work really started when I was a student leader. And then when I was at graduate school, I came to a much more centered understanding of my own

privilege and my own upbringing and experiences, and then how those impacted the way I view the world.

Not all participants referenced cognitive dissonance around race that resulted in a change in the way they view the world. Different from what others mentioned, Mary and Thomas shared experiences where they observed differences from a personal perspective. Mary spoke about a family member with a disability who she observed navigating the world overcoming many obstacles. This became the source of her perspective that informs how she promotes equity in her role.

I think growing up watching a person who has limitations imposed on them, not by their choice, but by their birth, and so they are not identical in any way, but I think there are some transferrable experiences and emotions that I bring to the table as a result of my personal family.

Mary referenced how this experience gave her insight into how individuals without her White privilege may navigate a world that is not welcoming.

Watching how a person has had to navigate a system that hasn't always been very welcoming to them, that's the transferability that I think I bring personally. And I ask a lot of questions, and that's how I learn, and I watch, and I get pissed off if things, they don't pass the test of, are people really being treated equitably? And it may not be identically, but equitably.

Mary stressed the differing interpretations for how individuals with marginalized identities can be treated. She alluded to how fair treatment is not acceptable and continues to privilege some individuals over others. Equitable treatment is not identical, rather it compensates for the systemic barriers that inhibit equitable outcomes. Mary articulated her observations as well as the

critical reflection she has engaged in through her personal experience being close to someone with a disability.

On the contrary, for Thomas, he recalled a time when he was the only White person at an African American's funeral in high school as a time when he recognized cultural differences across race.

I was the only White guy that was asked to be a pallbearer. And that was an African American funeral, and that is different. That there, that was a different funeral than I've ever been to. The whole "rejoice," the whole singing ... some of the actions, and so forth, so from an early age it was just something that was different, and I experienced that.

While Thomas shared this experience as learning moment for him, he does not share how this directly influences his work, nor other moments where he had been in a space where he was a minority. Thomas' comments demonstrate a missed opportunity to share any critical reflection that has been associated with this experience. As a White male, working at an HWI, it is likely that he is rarely in an environment where he is not in the majority. In fact, it is likely that when he engages with SoCs at events, as he referenced earlier in this chapter, may be the only time he was in a space where he was a part of the minority group. Absence of these experiences create obstacles in truly understanding those who are racially different from him.

The experiences that White VPSAs shared are unique to each individual; however, a common thread is timing of their most meaningful engagement across race. Excluding Mary who did not reference a meaningful experience with race specifically, the remaining six White VPSAs shared experiences engaging with People of Color from high school to graduate school. Seeing in the experience of having lived no less than 15 years without meaningful interactions with individuals who are racially and ethnically different from them is the privilege of existing in an environment that favors White identities and cultures. As some of the participating VPSAs

referenced, they came to terms with their delayed interactions as products of a society that prioritizes Whiteness. While White VPSAs navigate their introduction to racial and ethnic differences at varying levels, VPSAs of Color shared the racially biased personal and professional experiences that make their work towards prioritizing SoCs in their work imperative.

VPSAs of Color reflect on learning about others' perceptions of race through biased incidents. When asked about a meaningful experience around race, Ann shared the demographic of the area where she grew up. "There were Black families and White families and for the most part, the two got along well. Those two populations got along well because it was about farming." However, when she arrived to college, she described a hurtful experience.

The first time I was knowingly called the "n" word was my freshman year at [my undergraduate institution] ... We were crossing the street and these guys drove by and hollered at us and told us to go home, or something to that effect. It rocked my world, because I never had experienced that face to face, but it opened my eyes and changed some of the things.

Ann described how this incident motivated her to take more formal instruction around race and racism and inspired her to take specific classes at her undergraduate institution that she found empowering. Meanwhile, James recalled what it was like attending his undergraduate institution. He described how he experienced dissonance coming from a very diverse hometown to a less diverse area in the southeast.

I never really knew myself as a minority. [Where I'm from] was just, everybody's whatever, nobody's White, they're not Black, everybody's got something. When I got to [my undergrad institution], it was a little bit of an eye-opener that people would view me as not part of the majority.

For Ann and James, their recollection of their college experiences were times when they were introduced to others' perceptions of their racial and ethnic identities. Unlike White VPSAs, these were incidents where their personal identities were questioned or attacked.

Ann, James, and Louise also shared professional experiences where they learned about how others' perceptions of their racial identity inform their work. Ann recalled speaking to a colleague about perceptions.

I have a good friend of mine who's Native American, who says to me at certain times, "Ann, be careful. They're gonna think you're an angry Black woman." And I say, "I don't really care." I don't really care, because if that's what they're gonna say, I'm gonna say, "You're an angry White man."

Ann recalled learning from working with a professional staff comprised primarily of White men.

At that time, it was predominately middle-aged, White men. Taught me a lot. And not all of it felt good, but they taught me a lot. And helped me to find my voice, because I don't know that I had it. They helped me to find my voice. They didn't mean to.

This unintentional help Ann received from White men to find her voice, sparked the necessity of her having to self-advocate for professional survival. In the absence of others who look like her with similar racialized experiences as her, Ann is forced to share her perspective recognizing that her voice and perspective rarely, if ever, takes centerstage or informs decision-making.

When an event took place that gained national news that evoked racist rhetoric, James overheard a student he worked closely with join in on the rhetoric.

He made a comment in my office in front of a whole bunch of people about how we needed to round up all [a racial minority] and get them out of the country. And I said, "Well, you need to go call my dad first, because he'll be the first one getting on the ship."

It never clicked for him. When I say he was mortified about that statement, because he thought a lot of me and knew how angry that made me.

Louise shared an instance in a staff meeting that revealed a colleagues' ignorance around race and slavery.

We do senior staff field trips sometimes. So, we were talking about what was available, so one of my coworkers said, "Well there's a Confederate war exhibit that maybe we can put that on the table." ...I think my President saw my face and he said, "No, let's go ahead and take that one off, let's look at blah blah blah." I was like, thank you. When you were gathering the information, why didn't you think about that before you presented it to everyone? To everyone else it seemed like [what the heck?] ... I'm thinking, really? Really?

Racially biased experiences across VPSAs' professional and personal life have shaped the personal and professional development that prepare them to become VPSAs. When they recall meaningful racialized experiences around race, VPSAs of Color remember instances where they remember individuals who either covertly and overtly said or did something racist in their presence diminishing their value or recognition of their racialized experiences. Unlike White VPSAs who have the privilege of choosing to be in spaces where they reflect on their White identity in an effort to grow and develop, VPSAs of Color have needed to prioritize responding to racially biased incidents and engage in survival tactics before having the opportunity to reflect on their identities and how it shapes their view of the world.

White VPSAs acknowledge how their race and ethnicity influences their engagement with and advocacy for SoCs. During the interviews, the White participants acknowledged their privilege of being White in today's society. They explained how they made meaning of how being White influenced their interactions with colleagues and SoCs. In

Andrew's case, he demonstrated awareness of how his identity influences his engagement with students.

I think that throughout the course of my career, I sort of always am mindful that I am White and know that when I walk with a group of students who don't look like me, that there's a certain amount of testing that's going on, and I think that's been very helpful to me.

Similarly, Milton identified his experience stepping into a role where the campus community had desired a Person of Color in the position. This influenced his ability to connect with partners around campus and SoCs.

I think one of the biggest challenges in coming to the institution that I'm at, at the moment is because our African-American student population is so active on campus, and because they have not had the support that they have had in the past. There was a lot of interest from them and from influential faculty or staff, advisors of students, to have a Person of Color in the VP position.

Milton also faced challenges with People of Color on campus when he proposed and initiated the development of the diversity and cultural center on his campus. He shared how the students critiqued and questioned his intentions and how he was able to find financial and physical resources for the office to be created. Milton chose to recognize that he was not a desired candidate for People of Color on campus and how his race privileged him to advocate for this space.

So, when it came that a new guy was coming in, a White guy was coming in. Then all of a sudden within the first six months, he's found a way to resource an Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion, and then within a year, made it an actual, physical location.

There were students that just weren't supportive through that influence. But I made it my

point to not hide from that. I think that alone, by going to those meetings, by listening, by having those conversations, and in some cases, by just being strong enough to be steadfast in this initiative and let it develop, I had to build that trust with students. Now we're in a completely different place. Those students have graduated and moved on. Younger generations of students have come in. Freshman students don't know it any other way.

In similar fashion, Elizabeth recognized that her professional experiences are influenced by the intersectionality of her race and gender.

I certainly try very hard when I am working with students to recognize how my situation in the world might be the same or different than the students that I'm working with. And I do try to always give voice to that in a way that hopefully is disarming more than anything else. But fully recognize that as a White woman that my experience both in my career path and trajectory and the experiences at the institutions that I've worked in are certainly different than what colleagues who may be of a different race or ethnicity than I, might have experienced.

In this reflection, Elizabeth acknowledges race permanence and chooses to openly acknowledge this concept in an effort to disarm those with whom she is interacting.

While all White VPSAs may have acknowledged their privilege associated with their race, some did not exhibit an understanding of how they maintained systems of oppression, power, and privilege as the foundational outcome of social justice and inclusion competency. For example, Thomas shared how he separates his beliefs and values to himself.

My job is to represent every student that walks in this door. Now, everybody's gonna have a different philosophy on that. I'll be completely honest with you on that, I have AVPs a little bit more "wear their stuff on their sleeve" than I do.

When asked whether he saw this as a privilege to be able to do so as a White male, he responds “most times when people come in, they might assume that I’m Conservative, anti-Black, anti-gay ... that’s a lot easier than somebody assuming I’m their champion.” This response unveiled a gap in understanding what experiences People of Color have on campus whether in an administrator, faculty, or student role. Despite this clear depiction of unawareness with regard to People of Color in professional settings, Thomas shared how he uses the perception of the power connected to his identity to elevate another person’s voice.

If you think I can get what we need to get done, you think I can get it because I’m a White male and you’re not. Let me go have a conversation with that person and see if I can get what we’re looking for.

Thomas referenced saying this when he realized that SoCs do not have representation among college leadership and offered to utilize his position and racial privilege to bring their concerns to the appropriate individuals who can make change. Thomas represents the most nuanced example of how the VPSA role can hold one accountable for advocating for SoCs even when it is not reflective of personal or professional values. Thomas reasoned that it is his job to advocate for students, so it is likely that this action is repeated regardless of whether or not he is working with an SoC, thus prioritizing the responsibility of the positions over prioritizing SoCs.

For VPSAs who identify as White women, they often think of the intersection between their gender and race as it relates to their leadership role. For example, Catherine said:

I think the more work I do, the more I think about being White and being privileged. I also think about being a woman. I feel like at my institution, at least, I was just reflecting on this the other day, that White woman, maybe more so than some other folks at least at my institution, can play a role of, kind of, translating and bringing folks together.

White women felt as though being a minority on the basis of gender gave them more insight into how other marginalized groups may feel. White women saw this as an opportunity to empathize and question the spaces they were in. Catherine explained:

I think there's some empathy that comes of feeling marginalized in that way, but definitely still being part of the majority, which carries with it a way to walk through the world that our faculty, staff, and SoCs do not have. I think about that a lot. How do I use the challenges that I have to be able to understand and advocate for others?

However, to some extent, White women focused on their minority status for their gender more than their race. In many cases, White women shared they were in a room where no persons of color were present. In that, there was no verbal acknowledgement of their privilege of being in the room, rather they looked through the lens of being the only woman in the room rather than the lack of People of Color. This intersectional experience for White women is steeped in privilege and marginalization; however, in identifying the marginalization of their gender they become dismissive of the privilege associated with their race. Losing race permanence can cloud their efforts in truly advocating for SoCs and Peers of Color.

Overall, White VPSAs acknowledged the privilege associated with their race in advocating and engaging with SoCs. In most cases, acknowledging this privilege is the most important in developing relationships with SoCs. However, the privilege of being White buffers White VPSAs from feeling direct and personal challenges to their work towards prioritizing SoCs like VPSAs of Color experience.

VPSAs of Color face challenges when engaging with and advocating for SoCs. Ann, Louise, and James shared how they are faced with scrutiny, or the pressure to perform a certain way, when engaging with or advocating for SoCs. Louise described her experiences with cabinet peers when an incident occurred that appears to deal with racial issues.

I know when we talk about some of these situations that students say are racial, I think sometimes always turning to me to solve it's sort of, oh well let's turn it over to Louise. And it just makes me wonder sometimes, if I was in another position other than Student Affairs, would they look toward me? And I think they would because I'm the only Person of Color at the table.

In this experience, Louise is tokenized as an individual who primarily works with issues around race on campus relieving White administrators around her of the responsibility to address racialized concerns on campus. This is undue pressure and expectations that Louise experiences in comparison to her White peers. As an example of how White VPSAs have the privilege of relieving themselves of being the expert on diversity, when Andrew, a White male, was referred to by his president as a "chief diversity officer" because he voiced his concerns about their support for SoCs, he shunned the idea.

It's an odd thing... It was at the board of trustees meeting that the chancellor explained to me that I was the campus diversity officer. I said, "Can you see my face? I don't know that I'm really the appropriate person to do this," but it was that traditional view of this really falls to student affairs, which I think is an interesting view of the world.

James also shared this perception that because he is a Person of Color, he is more equipped to respond to and support issues that deal with cultural competency.

When I came onboard, if somebody was natural that it [professional staff member that supports diversity initiatives] kind of reported to me. But because I had that interest, I had a little bit of that background, in some of the stuff that I've done. Obviously, I'm a minority person. Maybe some natural action that I might be able to report...Because [of] my name, I get a little more initial credibility with some person that may not know me, because they're like, "Oh, well, he's a minority, he must know better," that whole

assumption there. Like, [“our diversity coordinator”] knows how to handle any diversity issue, she’s our diversity initiatives person. No one person can know everything, which is ludicrous. I do think that gives me some initial credibility with that.

James referenced how his responsibility working with diversity initiatives would be a natural connection; however, it is only natural because of his racial identity and the assumption that he is equipped to. For both James and Louise, they can experience racial battle fatigue because of their own racialized experiences in addition to those they are called to address because they are naturally equipped to address these situations on campus. Ann offered her thoughts on the expectation to support SoCs.

I do believe that Chief Student Affairs Officers who are also of color have another responsibility. We do take care of students, period. But I also think that we do have ... At least I do ... Have that responsibility to put some emphasis and some focus on SoCs.... Because if we don’t, who will?

Despite this expectation that VPSAs of color should be responsible for addressing race on campus, VPSAs of color described instances where they were also scrutinized for their efforts to support SoCs. Louise shared:

When I want to do things that have to do with SoCs I’m told, wait a minute Louise, hold on, hold on. I wanted to do this program called dialogues where people come in and SoCs have an opportunity to talk, and just looking at cultural competency. Not so much competency but proficiency and trying to tackle those things. [I am told,] Oh wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute.

In Ann’s case, she acknowledged that a trustee member has a negative impression of her because of how she uses her voice to advocate for SoCs and other marginalized groups on campus.

I think some of the barriers have been people not wanting to have to deal with me. As a Black woman, there are people who don't want to have to deal with me and who feel like they shouldn't have to deal with me, because ... I am a Black woman who's not afraid to use her voice and who has some influence and that influence has made changes, and he hasn't liked the changes.

One of the decisions Ann referenced that received polarizing opinions is the support and guidance that she offered students to advocate for changing the name of a building or her approach to addressing racism. She expressed her personal perspective on doing so when saying:

With the way we are in this country today, I think that also plays a part, in that we've got to call the spade a spade, because otherwise people are just gonna do it and feel like it's okay to do it. And so, we have to do that.

Ann emphasized the importance of her commitment to her own cultural authenticity where she can utilize her voice to address racism just as racism is being publicly supported and accepted.

Overall, there is a difference between VPSAs' personal and professional experiences around race. VPSAs of Color face racially biased interactions with peers, colleagues, and at times, students. VPSAs of Color also have unfair expectations to address racial issues on campus and in turn are scrutinized for their efforts to prioritize SoCs. Meanwhile, White VPSAs have the agency to advocate for SoCs without undue pressure or scrutiny of their personal allegiances. Their advocacy is perceived as professional in nature. Women in the study also acknowledged how their gender identity played a role in a predominately male space. VPSAs of color likely take on more responsibilities to perform in this role and promote success for SoCs; however, all VPSAs internalize their personal and professional experiences around race and utilize their agency accordingly.

VPSAs Cultivate Power to Influence from Their Tenure, Position's Rank, and Relationships

Power is the means by which an organization accomplishes its goal when resources are scarce and multiple perspectives collide (Bolman & Deal, 2017). VPSAs perform their responsibilities within a broad institutional context and student affairs culture. VPSAs also lead divisions and through critical reflection, rely on their own experiences and how they make meaning of them to guide their work. In this study, VPSAs also report directly to their institution's president and work alongside other senior-level administrators on campus on a president's cabinet. When asked about their agency to promote success for SoCs and improve the organizational culture for SoCs, VPSAs shared that their tenure in their position, relationship with the chancellor, and predominately White leadership shapes their agency to make change on campus. However, how power is utilized and distributed is mediated by the context and reality of one's barriers and opportunities to exercise power.

VPSAs believe that power is earned over time. A majority of the VPSAs emphasized the agency that is afforded as a result of the time they have spent in their position. When asked how he perceived his agency on campus, James reflected and shared simply, "I have a history with this institution." He later reiterated the importance of the time he has spent at the institution by saying, "It's not so much my title as it is that I've been here for a while, and people kind of buy into my experience." Similarly, Catherine shared:

I think this is a place where time served matters. I'd say that each day, each month that agency, for me, is increasing by having built relationships with students, by being able to advocate and have the time to speak for their voices.

When Mary spoke about her comfort in asking her colleagues tough questions about how others will support SoCs and promote equitable experiences for SoCs, she explained that it took time to

do so. “It’s taken time. It’s taken time. That’s the biggest thing, I think, is, it’s taken years. Two and a half years to get to a place of some comfort in that.”

Andrew shared, “Over the time I’ve been here, we’ve [the division] taken on a large role.” Upon developing trust with leadership and the president, he was able to oversee revenue generating areas. Andrew continued:

Part of it [agency] has occurred because I oversee areas that have generated revenue and have been able to add to the campus. Because housing and food service could generate money to build a campus rec center and have it paid for in cash, that puts you in a slightly different place.

As in many positions, VPSAs positions can evolve over time and increased responsibilities are a reflection of increased trust in an individual’s effectiveness in a role. According to Andrew, more responsibilities provide increased opportunities to provide insight and exercise power in decision-making. Over time, as Andrew demonstrated his abilities to lead effectively, his responsibilities expanded to include revenue generating departments in the institution. Andrew articulated that because of his access to resources, when resources within higher education are often scarce, his “different place” refers to gaining more power to influence decision-making because of his access to funding. Ann made the argument that her longevity has given her an opportunity to demonstrate this effectiveness which has garnered even more support.

I think I have a lot of support around the campus that people ... Because of my longevity... And you know, I’ve just recently started being able to say this... the effectiveness. I’ve been effective here and I’ve been consistent in who I am and what I’ve done and my behavior. And so that helps, I believe, with being able to garner a lot of support from across the campuses.

Ann also shared that the time spent in her position and in higher education, particularly in her state, diminishes the fact that she is an “at-will” employee.

The fact that I don’t have tenure and I’m an “at will,” was a barrier for me at certain points in my career. I’ve got my 30 years’ worth of service to [this state], so I can walk away today.

This shifts the power from the institution to Ann where if she decided where she can make a decision to walk away from her position if she felt as though her voice and agency was stifled.

VPSAs relationship with the president and cabinet mitigates the extent of their agency. In this study, all participants report directly to the president or chancellor at their university. Thomas emphasized the importance of reporting to the chancellor.

I do think that’s the difference between someone reporting to a President and a provost. I think I’m lucky enough that I report to a President, and in reporting to a President, I have one-on-ones with the President. That could be the biggest difference, between reporting to a provost and a President, for making that cultural change.

Based on the organizational charts, VPSAs who participated in this study sit alongside the senior-level leaders for academic affairs, finance, advancement, and athletics in a president’s cabinet. VPSAs described their role similarly to Ann who explained her primary responsibility as “advocate for students and to help student success.” A position on the president’s cabinet can provide an opportunity for VPSAs to engage with the president on a regular basis and thus build a relationship that levies their ability to utilize power to make change.

Thomas directly described how the relationship with the chancellor mitigates a VPSAs work when he said, “your Chancellor has a lot to say about how effective we are at Student Affairs.” Ann recalled dealing with a contentious protest on campus around race and how the chancellor supported her in the decisions she made to support and guide the students. “I was in

the thick of it from an administrative perspective because my Chancellor put me in it. But I give him credit. He blocked and tackled for me and we walked side-by-side in this fight”. James explained a similar relationship with his chancellor, who he described as “image conscious,” thus he is the second person called only after the public relations person.

Our current chancellor’s been here five years. For whatever reason, we hit it off immediately. She’s always invited me to her table. We’ve had discussions about race where, any important discussion, but including racial climate, where I was the second person she called.

Access to the president as direct reports facilitates trusting relationships and access to sharing SoCs’ perspectives and experiences. As James, Thomas, and Ann described, their relationship and access to the president allows for engaging dialogue around student success where they earn their ability to be viewed as a confidant and expert on the student experience on the cabinet. However, being a direct report not only provides access to the president, but it also includes interactions with cabinet peers who demonstrate varying perspectives that often collide.

Across the interviews, VPSAs discussed their challenges when working with their cabinet peers. Power exists with multiple perspectives. These challenges can pose obstacles for VPSAs to exercise their power to influence change. There are numerous reasons the VPSAs shared why these challenges exist. For example, Ann identified the lack of diverse leadership as a barrier to her ability to exercise her power on campus.

I think another barrier is, unfortunately, is the numbers or the lack thereof ... In this case, I am it, as far as senior leadership at this institution. I’m the only [Person of Color].

That’s a barrier and it’s ridiculous, actually.

For Ann, as a Woman of Color, she faces increased challenges to move her voice centerstage amidst a leadership that consists of predominately White men. The intersection of her racial and

ethnic identities both being marginalized in this setting exacerbates her efforts to contribute to decision-making and advocate for SoCs.

For Catherine, she believes challenges emerge because the cabinet does not interact with students on a daily basis.

I think that most of these folks on the president's cabinet don't engage on a regular basis with students. I think that they would think about student success broadly and not ... thinking about the needs that other student populations, particularly SoCs, have that might be different or in addition to the general student body.

When cabinet members are removed from their increasingly diverse students, they can choose to be unaware of the challenges and inequitable experiences SoCs experience on campus unless it arises as a crisis situation. Because of the context of an HWI, those who cabinet members engage with one another on a regular basis are likely White and not student-facing. Without the access to students, especially SoCs on a regular basis like VPSAs, the concerns that VPSAs share about SoCs' experiences are not familiar to them. Charles referenced the difference between his cabinet peers and his approach to advocating for SoCs. Charles also believes that greater access to students can significantly shape conversations around supporting SoCs. He simply stated, "I think I just have greater access to the students."

At times, data can be a common language for cabinet members. Charles referenced a cabinet member whose primary responsibility is to utilize data to inform decision-making.

One of our vice presidents who's in charge, her role is Strategic Operations, and so she deals with a lot of the university statistics and all of that, so she sees things from a very statistical perspective, and we have people that are very concerned about how the university looks to the outside, so they're very concerned about our message.

Regardless of their motivation behind addressing problems that arise from the data, the use of data can levy the extent of power a cabinet member can use to make change. For Elizabeth, the extent to which data is analyzed determines how data can be used to aid the efforts in prioritizing SoCs. Elizabeth recognized the limitations that arise when data is not aggregated by race.

I certainly feel like I have prioritized the student experience portion of the question around race and ethnicity or SoCs, particularly. I have had less success pushing the conversation around academic issues for our SoCs, mostly because the lens that we've used at my institution around student success has been very data focused and that the way that we're reviewing that data oftentimes excludes race and ethnicity as one of the success factors. Although, I think intellectually we all know that it is a factor but we're not framing it that way. And so, I have not been as able to create those conversations as I would like. I've tried to shape the conversation more on the student experience side of the equation, which is an area that I obviously have more control for.

Overall, as a member of the cabinet, VPSAs have direct access to the president where they can begin to build trusting relationships that lead to increased power and agency to advocate for SoCs. However, in addition to their direct access to the president, they also work directly from cabinet members with varying priorities that take them away from direct interactions with diverse student populations. To make an effort to meet cabinet members where they are, VPSAs referenced that data could be used as a common language when advocating for SoCs.

VPSAs argue their agency is fueled by the relationships they have with students.

Charles acclaimed his agency to his "greater access to the students." In some cases, VPSAs like Mary do not directly work with a representative group of students on a regular basis thus she commented, "I guess my sphere of influence, while it's not directly to the students, it's really through our staff, and then with key student leaders primarily." Thomas then shared a rationale

for why the VPSA voice carries power when he said, “They spend 75% of time outside the classroom. Who’s gonna know more about the students and how they interact personally, and what they need, is gonna be in our role. That is why we carry a lot more weight.” In a similar sense, James explained:

The perception, I hope it’s right, is that students trust me, that the student leadership very much trusts me, and that I have a little bit of knowledge about how to reach out to students effectively, how to bring students to the table.

Milton deciphered a difference between having access to student voices and actually making decisions with these voices in mind.

I think good decisions as a result of that agency come from access to that voice. I think well informed decisions might be the best way to do it. I think the agency exists with or without that, but I don’t think you can do right in your work without having that student voice piece.

From another perspective, Elizabeth connected her agency to the open dialogue that she fosters in the campus environment through her division. As mentioned earlier, Elizabeth’s student affairs division created a feedback loop for students to engage with the student affairs staff and administrators on a regular basis. Because of this expectation of two-way communication between their staff and students, Elizabeth believes that this culture has given her agency as well because students are talking about the issues they face, or they observe that other SoCs experience.

I feel a lot of agency, and a lot of opportunity to bring awareness to issues of diversity and inclusion around race and ethnicity and other forms of diversity because I think we now have created an environment where ... we’re talking about it. Like we’re not pretending that everything is roses and rainbows, but that there are real challenges and

that we actually can do things. We're not just sitting back and saying, "Oh gosh, there are a lot of challenges. This is really bad." We're actually doing things to address the systemic and historical issues that have prevented students.

Chapter Summary

To close this chapter, a participant's quote stood out across others that captured the essence of VPSAs role in supporting SoCs on our campuses. "Generations of students change every year. But as an institution, we're not as nimble." This captures how institutional agents like VPSAs may be stuck in the middle of the pull and tug of institutional context and advocating for SoCs in an effort to promote equitable experiences. I would argue that as a student affairs profession, we are nimbler than the institution. Across the data, there is evidence of promising practices, the presence of critical reflection on race on varying levels, and an opportunity to for VPSAs to position themselves with power to make change.

VPSAs have the unique challenge of advocating for an increasingly racially diverse student population when institutional leaders remain predominately White. This presents challenges of reaching transformative outcomes that disrupt the status quo of exclusionary practices that have to be supplemented by culturally relevant efforts. Mary eloquently called attention to standing out in the crowd when she said:

Recently there's stuff about how more student affairs staff members are more left leaning and more liberal, and well you know, a lot of times we're out there fighting for the underdogs. And if that happens to align with a certain political party, well that's what it is, but we also can't assume that everybody thinks the same way we do.

This study revealed four primary findings: (a) VPSAs perform their role and responsibilities in a context nuanced around race; (b) VPSAs' divisions engage in culturally relevant practices to promote SoCs' success; (c) VPSAs' racialized experiences inform their

approach with SoCs; and (d) VPSAs cultivate political power from their position's rank and access to SoCs. Although on the surface, VPSAs seem to be promoting success for SoCs, they also "straddle the line" between racial idealism and realism to compromise the urgency of addressing the inequitable experiences SoCs face on campus. The efforts made to support academic success, create environments that welcome cultural authenticity, and center student voice are plagued with ideals that overlook the permanence of race and how the institutional systems are built to favor White students rather than SoCs. VPSAs cannot continue to play it safe by "straddling the line" in their role as administrator and student advocate. With the current disparities we see across graduation rates and other success indicators, VPSAs are needed to challenge the aspects of institutional culture that hinders SoC success.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Since its inception, this study has sought to closely examine how VPSAs prioritize SoC success at their 4-year, public institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. Chapter 1 draws from a national context to illustrate how a contentious racial climate has inspired heightened college student activism that questions administrators' lack of response or race-neutral leadership to biased incidents and microaggressions that characterize SoCs' experiences. Chapter 2 illuminates the inequitable experiences that SoCs face on today's college campuses, reveals the role that student affairs professionals play in challenging or perpetuating higher education's culture of exclusion, and describes how CRT and CRP can be used as frameworks to analyze and organize a thorough examination of the relationship between race, educational leadership, and organizational culture. Chapter 3 defends the use of critical qualitative case study that relies on a process-oriented design to gather data that provides an in-depth description of how VPSAs fulfill their position's responsibilities within the context of "culture, place, and community" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 38). In Chapter 4, the findings demonstrate how VPSAs engage in or promote culturally relevant practices that prioritize SoCs within the confinements of a context that is in constant conflict with the student affairs commitment to practice social justice and inclusion for an increasingly diverse student population. In this chapter, I will build on the previous chapters to discuss how this study provides a deeper understanding of the nuanced practice of VPSAs in prioritizing SoCs, provide recommendations to improve practice, inform policy, and extend theory, and identify how this study can inform future research.

Four primary findings emerged from this study: (a) VPSAs perform their role and responsibilities in a context nuanced around race, (b) VPSAs' divisions engage in culturally relevant practices to promote SoC success, (c) VPSAs' racialized experiences inform their

approach with SoCs, and (d) VPSAs cultivate power from their tenure, position's rank, and relationships. VPSAs play an integral role in creating inclusive environments that foster holistic learning and development for all students and promote success for SoCs (Harper & Patton, 2007; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). Although VPSAs who participated in this study generally supported SoCs in their journey towards success, their efforts were greyed by colorblind rationales, bartering interest convergence, and censoring cultural authenticity. This critical qualitative case study reveals that a VPSA's effort to prioritize SoCs on their campuses is nuanced and may contribute to a premature celebration of best practices to support SoCs rather than the restless equity-minded practice required to challenging the status quo of centering Whiteness (Bensimon, 2005).

This study intends to contribute to a body of literature where few have centered practitioner knowledge when studying equity in student outcomes and applied CRT to educational leadership and politics (Bensimon, 2007; Harper & Patton, 2007; López, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Patton, 2016). Informed by the research that supports counternarratives of SoC experiences (see Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Smith, 2009), this study asks the institutional agents with positional power about the measures they have taken to prioritize promoting success for SoCs on their campuses. VPSAs are crucial in this conversation because over time they have earned a seat at the table reporting to the institution's president being responsible for representing the student voice (Sandeem, 1991; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). Evolving from the civil rights movement, VPSAs have a history of being a familiar advocate for SoCs on campus (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2005). As Mary shared in her interview, "a lot of the times we are out there fighting for the underdogs". In today's divisive racial climate, VPSAs advocate for a diversifying student population that is not reflected in the predominately White campus leadership (Jackson, 2004; Harper, 2018; Patton, 2016). In their roles, VPSAs are

uniquely engaged with two very different worlds whose clash hinders the progress of nearing equitable student outcomes across racial and ethnic demographic groups. VPSAs in this study share their practitioner knowledge and reveal how much farther education, and specifically, the student affairs profession needs to go. This chapter synthesizes the study's findings within the context of current research.

Straddling between Context and Reality

Student affairs plays an integral role in creating inclusive environments that foster holistic learning and development for all students (Renn & Patton, 2017; Sandeen, 1991; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). VPSAs lead the charge in providing support for best practices and represent the student voice as a member of the senior leadership team (Sandeen, 1991; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014; Wilson & Wolverton, 2011). The extent to which they can advocate for SoCs is mitigated by an institutional culture that continues to create barriers for SoCs to succeed (Patton, 2016). This study provides a unique, in-depth description and analysis of VPSAs' nuanced practice of prioritizing SoCs in the role of an institutional agent within a culture that continues to perpetuate racist values and standards. One example that captures the nature of this struggle is illustrated when Elizabeth shared an experience about mediating between her students and the president:

When we had our campus-wide conversations around the State flag, that was a really tough navigation. Because on the one side, the students made very clear and strong and correct arguments about their position... Then the president is on this other side, trying to navigate this political part of it. [I was] trying to communicate both those perspectives to each other. [I went] back to the students, back to the President, and then the reverse of that. That was rough!

This "back and forth" between students and senior leadership is unique to VPSAs and Elizabeth later describes this as straddling the line when she said, saying, "We might have a discussion at

the cabinet about the conflict that was happening at the state level but no one else on the cabinet is straddling that line.” This further describes the unique role VPSAs play in mediating between students who represent reality and the political arena that is often overrepresenting White men (Jackson, 2004).

While student affairs can be commended for its poignant focus on institutionalizing social justice and inclusion as a professional competency, there is much room for improvement as the demonstration of this competency mirrors a commitment to racial idealism that is characterized by incremental change, interest convergence, and colorblind perspectives (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Bell, 1992; Harper & Patton, 2007). At times *straddling the line* appears as VPSAs adopted or utilized deficit and diversity-minded rationales to make sense of institutional systems that create barriers for SoC success (Bensimon, 2007), reflected interest convergence in how they advocated for their efforts to support SoCs (Iverson, 2007), and censored the extent to which SoCs could express themselves (Jones, 2019; Quaye, Griffin, & Harper, 2014). These findings demonstrate elements of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The following discussion describes how best practices are negated by a viewpoint that perpetuates liberal and racial ideals.

Affirming SoCs sets an example for the campus community, but the deficit rationales linger. Hurtado, et al.’s (1998) campus racial climate framework defines the psychological dimension as the campus community’s perspectives of racialized experiences on campus. When VPSAs promote and encourage affirming practices, programs, and relationships, for SoCs, their divisions recognize that SoCs experience their college environment differently from White students. Creating opportunities for SoCs to be celebrated and recognized for their academic success elevates their success to increase the sense of belonging in a space that historically excluded their ancestors. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, mission statements and

strategic plans prioritize student engagement. Hurtado, et al. (1998) remind us that institutional agents play an integral role in controlling the environment around them thus, when agents with positional power demonstrate an awareness of racialized differences and provide support and affirmation for SoCs, pleading ignorance to these issues becomes a choice rather than a product of an awareness deficit. This study highlights the VPSAs evidence-based efforts to affirm SoCs and calls attention to rationales stemmed from deficit perspectives and interest convergence that compromise truly altruistic and equitable measures (Bensimon, 2005; Iverson, 2007).

While affirming practices, programs, and relationships are supported and celebrated by the participating VPSAs, deficit perspectives and rationales characterized the intent of their efforts. One VPSA says, “If you want more students of color, your quality declines” when talking about the paradoxical outcomes of recruitment efforts for a more diverse student population. Institutional agents operating from a deficit cognitive frame associate disproportionate success among SoCs with “cultural stereotypes, inadequate socialization, and lack of motivation” (Bensimon, 2005, p. 102). VPSAs who participated in this study did not justify their programs to fill the gap with cultural stereotypes, but they did inadvertently reference the inadequate socialization and lack of motivation stating that SoCs are more likely to come from low-performing schools and that all students need is driven to succeed given the vast academic support provided by the institution. One participant notes, “being in an institution where this very strong PWI, the idea is to give them some introductory transition to help them with the transition that comes when all of the students return” while Thomas encourages SoCs by saying “you’re smart, you’ve gotta have the drive. We can’t give you the drive”. The notion that SoCs are more likely to attend under-resourced schools is based in fact; however, utilizing the preparatory programs to determine whether SoCs have the “willingness to succeed” or to prepare

them to be in a predominately White environments puts the responsibility on the student rather than the institution to prepare for a more diverse student body.

Bensimon (2007) suggests that these perspectives suggest that what is considered to be affirming programs and practices is based on the intent of fixing students rather than fixing the system. These efforts are reminiscent of the colonization of Native Americans into the higher education landscape where education was used as a primer to rid Native Americans of their culture and replace it with their own (Lundberg, 2014). Critical scholars who call attention to the tendency to erase cultural experiences outside of the White dominant culture urge institutions to begin to address the flawed system (for example: Patton, 2015, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998; Brayboy, 2006; Soloranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012).

In an attempt to fix the system, we see strategic initiatives at some of the institutions that the participating VPSAs represent. The diversity strategic plans provide specific measurable goals for providing support and resources to promote success for SoCs. In some cases, these plans have been implemented and can be observed in action on their institutions' websites. Atlantic University provides a three-phased diversity strategic plan that outlines specific measurable goals to create an educational program for faculty and staff about what has occurred on campus and the plans for follow up. However, as Iverson (2007) points out, strategic plans often utilize interest convergence that exhibit benefits for SoCs in exchange of benefits for Whites, or in this case the predominately White institutions. McCoy and Rodricks (2015) acknowledge that institutions personify interest convergence when they accept SoCs in an effort to increase enrollment or appear as inclusive although the institution does not provide resources necessary to support the students. During the study, VPSAs partly justified their programs in an effort to address enrollment concerns and increase overall retention rates which are intrinsically tied with funding. Southern State's VPSA mentions, "If we want to grow our enrollment, then

one of the ways that we can do that is by being more effective in our outreach and support of Latinx students”. With an increasingly diversifying student population, there are limited possibilities for institutions to survive without recruiting and sustaining SoCs at their institutions.

Assuming truly altruistic and equity-minded practice ignores the benefits that the historically White institutions stand to gain from these institutions. Thus, we can celebrate the efforts that VPSAs implement to provide support for SoCs to achieve academic success but cannot separate their attempts from the benefits that the institution stands to gain from these efforts. In the absence of these gains for the institution, is where we can see the values that inform how far VPSAs are willing to go to promote the success for SoCs on their campuses. For example, Ann lead an effort to develop a program for Men of Color on her campus when she observed the inequitable outcomes that were demonstrated. This required an intensive commitment from staff members as is it involved the coordination of a mentorship program and academic tutoring which involved external and internal partners. The time and resources devoted to this program in a resource scarce environment is a reflection of an intentional commitment on behalf of Ann and her division.

These efforts can be viewed from another lens. The affirming programs and practices that the VPSAs discuss have positive outcomes for the students involved; however, these opportunities are open to a select group of students who fulfill certain criteria. The exclusivity of providing assistance or opportunities for SoCs to participate in programs that are proven successful continues to demonstrate the culture of exclusion that characterizes higher education. Mary alludes to this exclusivity of access to their programs when she says, “I can look at our African-American male initiative, but that’s an n of 25 each year. And that’s far greater, but when you look at the resources that are dedicated, how do we scale it?”. Mary’s example is reflective of other VPSAs who shared how their programs were for a subgroup of students rather

than available to all or required for all to engage in. At Plain Ridge, the Scholars program that gives conditional admission to a majority of SoCs, is only open to a small group of students. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Andrew shares “when they become our students, become RAs and take on leadership roles because they were nurtured”. Programs that reflect best practices in offering SoC support are often limited to a certain number of students leaving the remaining students, who may demonstrate similar inequitable experiences on campus, without access to the intensive and meaningful programs the divisions provide.

As Mary implies, how can these programs increase visibility and connect with more SoCs who can benefit? Unfortunately, in a resource-scarce environment, it is difficult to maintain programs that support subgroups of the student population regardless of the disparity of resources allocated to support SoCs. In Chapter 4, there were instances where VPSAs discussed having to advocate for funding to support SoC-focused programs thus revealing a cultural hesitation towards affirming programs for SoCs. Andrew shared that he understood that part of the struggle in supporting SoCs was because some administrators do not understand the “dramatic difference between the people who have resources and the students who need to access those resources”. Quaye, et al. (2014) provided an extensive review of research on SoC engagement and highlighted research that signals how culturally-based organizations are sometimes perceived as “self-segregation” (p. 20). This perception is not applied to mainstream initiatives that serve predominately White students. This is illustrated in the example Ann shared in Chapter 4 when she confronted her colleague about the lack of SoC representation in the Honors program. Her colleague’s response implied that there were no high-achieving SoCs who could qualify for the program. This biased perception of SoC-focused programs goes beyond programs that prioritize SoC academic success and emerges in how student organizations are

believed to provide an outlet for students to demonstrate authentic cultural expression and build cultural competence.

Student organizations provide spaces for cultural authenticity and perpetuate Whiteness as property. Each campus represented in this study had a plethora of student organizations for SoCs. As referenced in the findings, the mission statements retrieved from culturally-based student organizations' websites stated their intent on celebrating and honoring their cultures and identities, with some adding a focus on providing peer and mentorship support. The list of culturally-based student organizations provided a more realistic insight into the diversity within SoC enrollments at each institution—far beyond the data retrieved from enrollment records. For example, student organizations that represented the Asian student population reflected the vast diversity within this group with organizations including, but not limited to, Korean Students Association and Vietnamese Students Association.

In this study, “student organizations” were referenced 45 times across the 10 interviews. Park & Kim (2018) reiterate the power of student organizations as a “key university-recognized structure” that support relationship building in the campus community (p.1). This relationship-building within SoC groups is integral in promoting SoC success (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008). Student organizations are an example of the power of critical mass that suggests SoCs who interact with others within their race build confidence and become more engaged in the larger community (Jayakumar, 2015). Given this context, there is evidence that supports how culturally-based student organizations provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate cultural authenticity. However, culturally-based student organization represent a subgroup of organizations. The remaining organizations, as Quaye, et al. (2014) refer to as “mainstream” student organizations, exclude SoCs through their racially biased activities or by way of their culturally irrelevant activities or interests.

Student organizations do not only serve the purpose of connecting students, but they also provide direct access to administrators. VPSAs often referenced student organization leaders who were called on to provide insight into decision-making and concerns that arose from the student community. Representatives from the culturally-based student organizations were often asked to serve on various university committees and connect with VPSAs to provide insight on their experiences. For example, VPSAs often shared how the culturally-based organizations joined Student Government Association (SGA) as a governing body. Many VPSAs described their SGAs as being predominately White. Thus, giving governing responsibilities to culturally-based student organizations like the Latinx and Black student organizations placed an unfair burden for these organizations to not only represent their constituents but also to provide a space that uplifts and educates their student members. Meanwhile, organizations like SGA were only asked to govern. Being in SGA, which is often predominately White, gives the White student permission to step back from representing the culturally diverse student population to simply govern. In this case, being White affords you the privilege of not having multi-faceted expectations to perform beyond the scope of your organizations. VPSAs should begin to question whether they are holding SGAs and other “mainstream” organizations accountable for equitably representing their diverse student population or redistributing the burden of educating Whites on campus to SoCs.

VPSAs teeter the line of censorship when empowering the voices for SoCs for student leaders. SoCs’ representation and participation on committees and serving as a governance body in making institution-wide decisions were strategies VPSAs used to elevate SoC voices. For example, James said, “We make sure that [SoCs are] represented on important university planning committees. We invite them to the table when we have important decisions to make.” To prepare them for engagement on institution-wide committees, institutions provided

guidance on effective communication skills. Louise described training opportunities coordinated by the student affairs offices that offer opportunities for students to develop their communication skills. In many cases, students need guidance in navigating the political environment that characterizes institution-wide committees (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Dunkel & Chrystal-Green, 2017). Dunkel & Chrystal-Green highlighted how students can benefit from activities that sharpen communication skills that are tied to their involvement on campus.

The manner in which skill development is offered should also be considered. One foundational outcome for the advising and supporting student affairs competency states,

Recognize the strengths and limitations of one's own worldview on communication with others (e.g., how terminology could either liberate or constrain others with different gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, cultural backgrounds, etc.) (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p.36).

How VPSAs define "effective" communication is a reflection of one's worldview. This presents an opportunity for SoCs receiving conflicting messages that liberate and constrain their voices. For example, in a meeting regarding recent racially biased incidents, Charles shares how a Hispanic student was sharing his experiences throughout his schooling pre-college and in college. Charles recognized how emotional this student was about his experiences when he said: "He was frustrated and I mean, the anger was coming out of him." However, he later said, "I really thought you showed great restraint with that f-bomb." In this scenario, Charles privately empowered the student to vocalize his frustration by actively listening to his story, but he publicly commended the student on refraining from authentically showing his frustration. This student walks away from Charles possibly considering whether or not it was more important to share vulnerably and openly or to refrain from using passionate language. While it is important

to provide guidance and help students develop effective communication skills, how we respond to their student voice reflects what VPSAs truly value.

Perhaps the most relevant to censorship is the contention around free speech and whose free speech is protected. Donnor & Ladson-Billings (2018) described how colorblind perspectives explained why egregious racist taunts are deployed as first amendment rights of Whites. SoCs and Whites voices are empowered differently. As referenced in Chapter 4, the African-American student organization at Piedmont received negative feedback from White stakeholders for inviting a prominent Black speaker on campus describing her as “tone-deaf” or “pushing the envelope”. As a result, the organization was asked to relinquish their authority in planning their cultural event and join a committee that included other staff, faculty, and students to plan the following year’s event. Meanwhile, when a White supremacist came to Mountainside and administrators threatened to deny his access, the VPSA shared how FIRE praised the institution for going through with the event. This inequitable treatment of SoC reflects the consistent clash between the HWI context that Patton (2016) describes in her first proposition applying CRT to postsecondary education as “deeply rooted in racism/White supremacy, the vestiges of which remain palatable” (p. 317) and the reality of the “hostile and antagonistic environments” SoCs continue to face on campus (Quaye, et al., 2014).

The Privilege of Straddling between Personal and Professional Obligation

Extensive research provides evidence of how SoCs experience their campus climate differently from others (see review by Harper & Hurtado, 2007). These differences are not unique to students as this study illustrates how VPSAs of Color experience their role differently from their White counterparts, specifically when advocating for SoCs. VPSAs of Color are held to a different standard that implicitly asks them to always show up yet refrain from showing bias towards SoCs. For example, Louise and James are given the professional responsibility to

address racially biased incidents on campus because of their personal experiences as VPSAs of Color. Meanwhile, Louise said “In order to not be seen as playing favorites, what we have to do is sort of initiate other people to do these things with our support.” As referenced in Chapter 4, Ann shares that it is a personal obligation to advocate for SoCs believing if VSPAs of Color don’t, no one else will. These conflicting messages reveal a source of contention for how VPSAs of Color can truly advocate for SoCs. Santamaria & Santamaria (2016) make an urgent call to address the lack of representation of People of Color in educational leadership linking this outcome to the lack of preparedness to support how People of Color demonstrate culturally relevant leadership. This is further illustrated by the privilege White VPSAs have to differentiate their personal investment from their professional obligation based on the situation.

The ability to choose whether or not you will commit to advocating for SoCs is a privilege that is centered around the racist value that all members of society are not innately responsible for addressing racial inequity. White VPSAs were able to take advantage of this privilege and thus exercise this privilege when choosing their rationale for supporting SoCs. As shared in Chapter 4, Andrew, a White VPSA, deflects the responsibility of being a Chief Diversity Officer when the president recognizes his commitment to advocating for SoCs. Andrew then provides a rationale for his commitment as “just doing my job”. Thomas questioned why professionals “wear their stuff on their sleeve”, explaining that he chose not to reveal his values or political stance visually so as not to prevent students from believing he is approachable. People of Color do not have the privilege of having normed assumptions made about them; rather, microaggressions and stereotype threats shape their experiences as students and as VPSAs (see reviews by McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). When White VPSAs choose to, they can connect their actions to their developing race-consciousness while VPSAs of Color as illustrated in Chapter 4 when Milton made it a point not to hide from his Whiteness when SoCs

questioned his effort to create a diversity center. This privilege is recognized and duly noted by VPSAs of Color recognizing that the scrutiny they face are different from their White counterparts. For example, Louise said, “I really do believe if it were three White females [in this office], it would not be the same situation.”

Critical race theorists emphasize the importance of acknowledging race and the impact it has on People of Color (for example, Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In a student affairs context, VPSAs are privy to recognize the benefits of race-conscious practice to benefit the student population but do not discuss the existing inequities experienced by Leaders of Color. As Jackson (2004) reiterates, there is a crisis at the top with lack of diversity across leadership in education. In the VPSA census project, Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) found that a VPSA is most likely to be White and around the age of 50. In a historical context, individuals who fit this demographic are likely to be familiar with the civil rights movement on the heels of the Jim Crow era. The worldview of the average VPSA is shaped by the civil rights movement and the post-racial perspective that emerged after President Obama was elected (Donnor & Ladson Billings, 2018). Davis, et al. (2015) noted how this demographic of education leaders have been trained with colorblind standards that permitted implicit biases in the name of rejecting explicit racist behavior. As a result, it is plausible that in a profession that is grounded on social justice and inclusion and expects active engagement in addressing racial inequity, VSPAs of Color face challenges with the intersection of the leadership position and their identity while White VPSAs exercise the privilege of choosing whether or not to utilize the professional obligation or personal obligation to rationalize their support for SoCs.

The purpose of this study was two-fold—to examine how VSPAs prioritize SoCs and how they perceive their power to do so. The findings clearly demonstrate that while VPSAs attempt to prioritize SoCs using culturally relevant practices, efforts are mitigated by deeply

rooted racism/White supremacy that Patton (2016) said continues to drive practice and knowledge production in postsecondary environments. As a result, the study provides examples of how VSPAs perpetuate liberal ideals of colorblindness, incremental change, and Whiteness as property to appease stakeholders and maintain their positions of power to continue to support SoCs. This study fills the gap by providing insight into a practitioner's role in addressing racial inequity in higher education. This study reveals the challenges one institutional agent can face in an environment complexly intertwined with racism. While much of the research that applies a CRT lens to educational leadership drives our analysis of current systems, often missed is the focus on conceptualizing existing inequities *along with* advancing better practice and solutions (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). Next, I will attempt to provide how the study's findings can inform better practice and solutions.

Implications

Research that unpacks campus racial climate, dissects educational leadership's practices and policies, and promotes culturally relevant practices in education is crucial in transforming the status quo in education. More focus needs to be placed on centering current issues into a historical context as modeled by scholars who discuss race in society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2015). Theoretical frameworks like CRT provide a lens to view education that challenges deep-seated biases, acknowledging the permanence of racism and providing a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Student affairs professionals are charged by their professional competencies to develop critical self-awareness, expand cultural competence, and commit to reflective practice (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). To facilitate this transformation, future research should further investigate strategies that support professional development for current leaders that create spaces for critical conversation for leaders and prepare future leaders to practice culturally responsive leadership.

Improving Practice: Professional development. Much of the research focuses on what administrators have not done well through careful analysis of presidential statements, diversity strategic plans, and student perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Cole & Harper, 2016; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Iverson, 2007). While this research is integral to the conversation, research falls short of making suggestions on how to correct the behavior. When reviewing websites for national organizations that are primarily responsible for providing professional development opportunities for current administrators, most of the diversity initiatives described involve increasing the pipeline for administrators from underrepresented backgrounds. While this may be a practical solution to increasing diversity in leadership roles, there are limited opportunities for senior leaders to engage in a race conscious examination of institutional systems they lead. Instead, professional development opportunities for executive leadership programs include diversity-related topics within a hot topic segment or discuss the increasing SoC population through a lens of best enrollment practices. Linking diversity to crisis-management topics and enrollment implies that SoCs are only relevant when a senior-leaders are facing a problem with increased student activism or failing enrollment numbers tied to financial support in the case of public institutions. Thus, race is not recognized as a central component to determining inequity across higher education. This is a disservice to executive leaders if leadership convenings lack the opportunity to develop race-conscious practice.

Few programs include race-conscious professional development for executive leaders that promote equity-minded practice. Dr. Estela Bensimon and her team developed an Equity Scorecard workshop where senior leaders learn out to evaluate their graduate and retention rates through a critical race lens (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Participants are asked to disaggregate their data by race to reveal the inconsistencies that produce inequitable outcomes in their classrooms. For VPSAs, this can be equally meaningful to disaggregate their student

engagement rates in campus-wide programming and “mainstream” student organizations. This provides evidence that is supported by research that indicates SoCs are not participating at a comparable rate to their White peers (see review by Quaye, et al., 2014). VPSAs can also identify how many students are not engaging with the culturally relevant programs and initiatives students and strategically allocate resources to expand the offerings for current programs that promote student success for SoC groups. Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) identify assessment as one of the five most commonly reported functional areas within student affairs. VPSAs can prioritize asking these critical questions and utilize their assessment coordinators to provide a race conscious analysis of data that can inform better practice.

While opportunities to evaluate the absence or presence of race-conscious practice is crucial to activating improved support for SoCs, White VPSAs need to participate in meaningful experiences that increase their critical consciousness while VPSAs of Color need opportunities to connect to communities of support. As illustrated in this study, VPSAs of Color and White VPSAs have different experiences when advocating for SoCs and thus need individualized professional development. Professional development opportunities where White VPSAs participate in critical reflection that provides them with an opportunity to understand how they participate in maintaining systems of oppression, privilege, and power as emphasized in the foundational outcome for social justice and inclusion are critical (ACPA & NASPA, 2017). With over 80 percent of campus leaders being White, it is easy to accept racist values as commonplace and status quo. Teaching White VPSAs to recognize and thus develop the skills to challenge this status quo on their campuses is crucial to relieving the burden of VPSAs of Color and interrupting the culture of exclusion on their campuses.

VPSAs of Color, although some can also play a role in maintaining racism/White supremacy in their roles, face different challenges when supporting SoCs and thus require

support from those in similar experiences. When I asked Ann to identify barriers, she faced in prioritizing SoCs, she responded saying, “I wish I had more support from other Women of Color around”. Evidence illustrates how SoCs can feel isolated when tokenized (Jayakumar, 2015; Quaye, et al., 2014); VPSAs of Color can have similar feelings. Santamaria and Santamaria (2016) describe how leadership is practiced by leaders with marginalized identities and recognizes how their practices are considered deviations from what is considered the norm. This can cause feelings of alienation and cause for assimilation, especially in an elite leadership role. While programs that are created to increase representation of diverse leaders often involve a critical contingency of individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, the program descriptions do not reveal sustained support or mentorship from other Leaders of Color revealing a gap in offerings for those who are in senior leadership positions. For example, NASPA recently introduced two professional development programs for African-American and Latinx student affairs professionals who aspire to cabinet-level leadership (NASPA, 2019). The programs set out to be meaningful experiences where they can gain mentorship and guidance from esteemed faculty and senior administrators. While the investment in emerging leaders in the profession is crucial, maintaining this community can prove to be as fruitful when participants step into these roles.

Informing Policy: Increasing diverse representation in leadership positions.

Initiatives to increase leaders from underrepresented groups in the leadership pipeline are vital to transforming campus climate. However, fatigue and microaggressions can deter individuals from seeking leadership (Sue, et al., 2007). Jackson (2004) precisely acknowledges that power is not single-handedly found in the presidential or chief leadership positions. Rather, power can be found in various governing bodies whether that is legislative, faculty, alumni, and trustee bodies. Thus, we need to address the pipeline to fuel a more diverse leaders and policy makers. From a

racial realist perspective, only sweeping changes can incite progress towards racial equity thus calling for collective action to make changes.

Today, our admission practices to student affairs programs create barriers for People of Color to enter the pipeline for preparing to enter the student affairs profession. For example, many student affairs graduate preparation programs require standardized test scores to apply for graduate programs. Research, like Hoffman & Lowitzki's (2005), demonstrate that grades are a stronger predictor for college success for racial and religious minority students than standardized exam scores. Yet, in a field like student affairs where individuals are most likely to be introduced to the field through co-curricular experiences and mentors, student affairs professional programs require standardized test scores with their applications. As a collective, student affairs professionals can join together in eliminating standardized test scores and completing more holistic reviews of applications so as to provide equitable access to SoCs interested in our graduate programs. While one institution committing to doing this can model best practice, a sweeping change can only occur if it is done in unison. As a collective, there is stronger power to change the tide on being an exemplar for our institutions. Organizations like NASPA, ACPA, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education have the power and ability to lead these sweeping change.

Extending Theory: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Links Theory to Practice. Ladson-Billings' CRP has traditionally been used in the elementary and secondary classroom setting. As a formally trained elementary education educator, this theory resonated with me with my experiences as a first-grade teacher for a predominately Latinx student class in south Miami, Florida; however, in first learning about this pedagogy, I could recall instances where my professional experience in student affairs reflected these fundamental practices. This study provides evidence that CRP can be utilized to identify the strategies that promote SoC success in

a collegiate environment. The use of CRP in this study is what allows me to gain an in-depth description of the practice. As referenced earlier, critical research conceptualizes the problems of current practice but does not propose possible solutions. By utilizing CRP, a theory that is grounded in what works, this study can specifically examine the barriers and supports VPSAs have in implementing CRP to promote SoC success. The findings reveal specific locations of conflict that should be addressed. Overall, the data confirms that this theory is applicable to be used in collegiate settings and outside of the classroom.

The ease in applying this theoretical framework, however, is not happenstance. The findings reflect counseling foundations, student development theories, and racial climate frameworks that guide student affairs practice (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Unlike commonly used student development theories, CRP uniquely takes a cultural-wealth approach to SoCs success, specifically for African-American or Black students. Patton, et al. (2007) underline the value of overarching college student development theories but recognize the void for addressing how race creates differing experiences in college for SoCs. Using CRP in this research and context provides an avenue to engage practitioners in theory-based practice of supporting SoCs on today's campuses.

As previously mentioned, CRP has been used to identify the best pedagogical practices for African-American students. In this study, I utilized it as a guide for best practices that can be extended to other racial and ethnic identities including students with Latinx, Asian, and Native student populations after hearing Dr. Ladson-Billings apply CRP to these groups in a recent lecture at a nearby campus. Using one theory to describe best practices for a diverse population within SoCs groups is a limitation in this study as described in Chapter 3; however, it sets the stage for CRP to mirror the growth and expansion that CRT has to reflect each racial and ethnic group. On the foundation of CRT, critical researchers have expanded to create theoretical

frameworks that reflect the unique attributes of more racial and ethnic groups. Because of this expansion, educational research is enriched with LatCrit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013), and TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2014), responding to the use of CRP applauded researchers like Paris (2012) who emphasized how CRP can be used to challenge educators to norm the cultures of marginalized students rather than practice pedagogy that defines them in relation to the majority or Whiteness. While Paris (2012) provided a useful critique of CRP and identified how CRP can be extended to benefit a more diverse group of marginalized students, CRP has yet to fully expand to reflect specific strategies for racial and ethnic identity groups that were not represented in Ladson-Billings' first study. Doing so can fill a gap in knowledge of best practices and begin to inform how educators, including student affairs professionals, support a diverse group of SoCs.

Future Research

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the study's findings in current literature, identify how the new insight gained from the study can be utilized to improve practice, and suggest how future research can continue the dialogue on the VPSA role in prioritizing SoC success on campus. In the next section, I will describe how future research should include a comparative analysis of how VPSAs prioritize SoCs across various institutional types and an in-depth analysis of how a VPSAs tenure contributes to VPSAs perceptions of power to prioritize SoCs.

Institutional type. This study has re-emphasized how institutional context and culture is intertwined with any efforts to support SoCs in their pursuit of postsecondary success. VPSAs who participated in this study represented Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral-level institutions according to their Carnegie Classification (Appendix D). Priorities and values for each institution changes based on institution type and thus guide VPSAs efforts to support SoCs. For example, Andrew referenced Plain Ridge's connection with the local community college

where they were able to develop the Plain Ridge Scholars program that provided conditional admission to Plain Ridge after attending their neighboring community college. Initiatives at this level appear to be community based although institutions in their peer group, like Blue Ridge, whose VPSA indicated how minimal resources to hire more than one diversity coordinator hinders their ability to fully address the needs of their rapidly growing SoC population. Meanwhile, institutions like Southern State and Mountainside include large departments that focus specifically on institution-wide diversity initiatives. This data suggests that a closer look into how SoCs are prioritized within student affairs divisions can reveal unique challenges and advantages for VPSAs to exercise their power to promote success for SoCs.

Years of experience. During my data collection, I often noted when individuals shared how time in their position was integral to building relationships with key stakeholders on campus who would then support them in their SoC advocacy efforts. Further research is needed to identify how years of experience links to VPSAs' perceptions of their power to improve the campus culture. This study's findings indicate that VPSAs straddle the line between liberalism and racial realism. In doing so they utilized interest convergence to move their initiatives forward and referenced incremental change in the emphasis they made with progress as a product of extended years of experience. From a critical race lens, interest convergence and incremental change can lead to progress, but they are in expense of the urgent needs SoCs face on today's campuses. Thus, further research is needed to identify if the power VPSAs believe to gain with their years of experience is a reflection of the comfort-level they have with the status quo of an institution's covert measures to perpetuate racism or the success they feel with achieving "small wins". Similar to the horizontal comparative analysis technique used to identify the differences between VPSAs of Color and White VPSAs, a similar approach can be used to identify how

VPSAs perceive their power to make change based on their years of experience in the VPSA role.

Conclusion

To close, I recall Catherine's eloquent explanation of the VPSAs experience to support SoCs. Catherine said:

I feel like I'm moving as quickly as I can because we have a lot of other things we're doing, and you can't say that to students. The students, you know, they're only here four years and if it takes two years to do something, that's half of their time here. Their real frustration is, "You say that you like these ideas, but then they don't happen.

The reality of today's institutions are, as Milton described, "not as nimble to change" at the pace our students are changing. This lack of change-readiness should not be an excuse rather a motivation to work harder and faster with a willingness to take risks. As a VPSA once shared at a public meeting, "Every day, I am only one decision away from losing my job." This notion reminds me of the advice received in graduate school to decide wisely on "the hill you are willing to die on" in your professional life. I am forced to rethink these mantras as they disregard the urgency of action our SoCs require to dismantle racism that create barriers to their postsecondary success. However, this sweeping change is more nuanced than an emerging professional would understand and is often difficult to explain. I find myself reflecting on this study, much like my VPSAs, straddling the line of making brave moves and preserving a professional trajectory that can lead me to a powerful position to make sweeping changes. This study reveals that VPSAs make these decisions regularly and whether or not these decisions are good or bad is not as apparent as the fact that these decisions are nuanced.

This study reveals the nuanced reality of VPSAs' experiences prioritizing SoC success on their campuses. The nuances emerge from a constant pull and tug between racial idealism and

racial realism that some of the participants referred to as “straddling the line”. Racial idealism is a celebration of progress that overshadows the critical reality of inequitable experiences SoCs continue to feel. As senior-level leaders who advocate for a rapidly diversifying student population, VPSAs straddle the line between working in a broader national and institutional context that continues to center Whiteness in bold and covert ways while representing a profession that seeks to support a diversifying student population. A firm and unwavering stance on supporting SoCs is needed to improve the experiences and success for SoCs that begins with setting new cultural norms for the profession and its practices, raising race consciousness the campus leadership level, and holding peers accountable for equity-mindedness that involves a restless commitment to moving values of equity to practice. However, 10 VPSAs cannot do this on their own, rather it is a league of champions that will make a stronger impact. This study urges the profession, the organizations that represent it, to lead the way with raising the bar for our expectations to prioritize SoCs in our practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Introduction

Prior to our interview, I invite you to complete this form to help me gather a general description of participants, your position, and your perception of racial climate on your campus. Data collected from this form will only be discussed as a whole, rather than individually, to protect participant confidentiality. For example, I may say “all participants have worked in their role between 4-6 years” rather than saying “one participant has worked in their role for 4 years, one participant worked in their role for 5 years,” etc. Please feel free to contact me with additional questions. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Focus: Your Current Institution

1. Describe the overall racial climate at your institution
 - a. How would you describe the racial climate? How would the students of color describe their experiences at your institution? How does your campus compare to other institutions in terms of racial climate?
2. Briefly describe any incidents on your campus that increase your awareness of the racial climate and how the institution responded.
3. Research illustrates how race and ethnicity remains a significant factor in determining inequitable outcomes and experiences on a college campus. What are some of the inequitable outcomes or experiences students of color experience at your institution?
 - a. Postsecondary outcomes/experiences can include, but are not limited to, graduation rates, grades, retention, transfer rates, involvement.
4. Why do you think there are inequitable outcomes or experiences faced by students of color at your institution?
5. How does the institution address the inequitable outcomes or experiences faced by students of color at your institution?

Focus: Student Affairs Division/Departments

1. How does student affairs, under your leadership, respond to racially biased incidents?
2. How does student affairs, under your leadership, address the inequitable outcomes or experiences faced by students of color at your institution?
3. In what ways, under your leadership, does student affairs on your campus support the success of students of color?
4. In what ways, under your leadership, can student affairs on your campus improve efforts to support the success among students of color?

Focus: Artifacts

Please provide any documents that describe how student affairs, under your leadership, support students of color. This may include programs, policies, procedures, rituals, or community standards regarding how student affairs supports students of color or addresses racial climate.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to meet with me. I value your willingness to participate in my research study. My name is Jemilia Davis and I am a doctoral student studying higher education. I am specifically interested in how administrators influence racial climate on campus and how their practices promote postsecondary achievement for students of color. My dissertation explores the experiences of Chief Student Affairs Officers at public institutions and how they influence campus culture to support equitable postsecondary outcomes and/or experiences for their students of color. Additionally, this dissertation also intends to explore how CSAOs perceive the power they have to do so. Your honest responses will strengthen the influence this study can have on how senior administrators support students of color on their campuses.

Before we begin, I'd like to go over a few disclosures:

- This research broadly focuses on students of color. The primary focus will be on students from Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American backgrounds.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to participate in this study, to not participate, or to stop participating at any time.
- The conversation will be kept completely confidential; any information obtained from you that can identify you will not be disclosed. Your name will not be associated with any discussion results.
- This interview will be semi-structured and informal. I have a few questions and you may ask clarifying questions any time.
- I expect our interview to last about 60-90 minutes.

Opening questions

Do you give me consent to audio record our interview today?

What is the formal title for your position?

Who do you report to according to your organizational chart?

How long have you been in this role?

What are your key responsibilities as a CSAO?

Interview Protocol

I would like to start the more formal part of this interview by learning more about the programs, initiatives, and strategies you use, in your role, to promote success among students of color on campus.

- 1) What programs, initiatives, strategies exist in your division promote academic success for students of color, under your direction?
 - a) Probes: How do you emphasize academic excellence? How do you remind students from these groups that they are capable of learning and experiencing academic success?
- 2) What programs, initiatives, strategies exist in your division help students of color be culturally authentic on campus, under your direction?
 - a) Probes: In what ways have you engaged in experiences (planning/attending a program, individual interactions, etc.) where students' cultures are celebrated while simultaneously promoting their academic success?

- 3) What programs, initiatives, strategies exist in your division encourage students to use their voices to impact change, under your direction?
 - a) Probes: How do you help students realize the value of education? How do you encourage students to utilize their education for social uplift?

Thanks for sharing. Research indicates that personal experiences shape our values and actions so I would like to transition into learning more about your personal experiences with race and how that has shaped your work as a CSAO.

1. How does your race and/or ethnicity shape your experiences as a Chief Student Affairs Officer?
 - a. Describe a meaningful experience that helped you become aware of your racial and ethnic identity?
2. How does your race and/or ethnicity influence your perception of racial climate on campus?
 - a. How do you connect with students from racial and ethnic minorities on campus to learn more about their experiences on campus?
3. What professional experiences have helped you develop skills to work with students of color?
 - a. What has prepared you to address racial climate on campus?

Finally, I would like to shift gears a little to discuss your perception of power as related to your position.

1. How much agency do you have in your role to influence campus culture?
 - a. Probes: What supports do you have to exercise your power to improve academic success for students of color? What barriers do you face while exercising your power?
2. What differences exist between your role and your cabinet peers when addressing student success among students of color?
3. What is the biggest challenge CSAOs face in promoting success for students of color?

Thank You Protocol

Thank you for your time today. I truly believe that your work is meaningful and hope to support you in your efforts to make a difference for students of color on our campuses. Your participation in this interview has been very helpful. After our time together today, I will send you a prompt that asks you to reflect on this interview and share any lasting impressions from the topics discussed today. Meanwhile, I will transcribe this interview and connect with you in the near future with the themes that emerge from our project. I hope at that time you will help me improve validity by providing your feedback and any clarification you see fit. Also, as a friendly reminder, please complete the questionnaire you received prior to this meeting and use the same pseudonym provided today. Thank you again.

Appendix C: Follow-Up Reflection

Thank you for your participating in my research study. I enjoyed speaking with you and hearing more about your experiences in your role as it relates to promoting equitable postsecondary outcomes for students of color. I am currently working on analyzing the data and plan to be in touch with you regarding some overarching themes and provide you with an opportunity to provide feedback on those findings.

Reflexive practice is integral to effective professional practice. Reflection is defined as “the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences,” and learning as an outgrowth of reflection is “the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behavior” (Daudelin, 1996, p. 39). Student affairs professionals are encouraged to engage in reflexive practice through self-assessment early in their career (Arminio & Ortiz, 2017); however, the fast pace of a senior-level position limits the time on engaging in this practice.

Crucial to this study is not only capturing your experiences but also providing the opportunity to reflect on how your role influences students of color on your campus. With this in mind, review the interview protocol questions and respond to the following questions that prompt a reflection on our thoughts and actions since our interview.

1. What thoughts have lingered since our conversation? What would you like to add, reframe, or dismiss from our conversation?
2. Describe any meaningful experiences around supporting success for Students of Color that have occurred since our interview. *Meaningful experiences can include any events, conversations, or thoughts that have made you reflect on your participation in this research study.*
3. What do you feel empowered to continue to do on your campus in supporting Students of Color?
4. What do you plan to do differently in supporting Students of Color?
5. What did you learn from engaging in this research study?
6. What do you hope this study contributes to the dialogue around promoting success for Students of Color?

Appendix D: Artifacts

	Charles	Elizabeth	Thomas	Mary	Milton	Catherine	Andrew	Ann	James	Louise
Artifacts for All	Atlantic University	Southern State University	Mountainside University	Piedmont State University	Chesapeake State University	College of Southern Shore	University of Plain Ridge	South River University	University of Blue Ridge	Mountain Ridge University
Campus Climate Survey Results	x	x	x	x	x	x	/	x	/	/
Carnegie Classification (College Navigator)	Master's Colleges & Universities: Medium Programs	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activities	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activities	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	Master's Colleges & Universities: Small Programs
Retention and Graduation Rates (College Navigator)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Enrollment (College Navigator)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Organizational Chart	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student Affairs Mission and Vision	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Student Organizations List (for racial identity groups)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

ⁱ The term “historically White institutions” is intentionally chosen to describe institutions represented in this study rather than the term “predominately White institutions” to acknowledge steady increase of SoCs at 4-year public institutions. The institutions represented in this study, although enrolling a critical mass of students in many cases, remain reflections of the past exclusion of SoCs.