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Navigating the Intersections of Identity: The Shared Experiences of Women of Color Chief Student Affairs Officers

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Navigating the Intersections of Identity: The Shared Experiences of Women of Color Chief
Student Affairs Officers

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration
Higher Education

by

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B.A. Florida State University, 2010
M.Ed. North Carolina State University, 2012

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Abstract

There is a lack of equitable representation of women of color in upper-leadership roles on college campuses. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO), navigated both their racial and gender identities in their professional role, how they were prepared for this identity navigation throughout their career, and how they mentor younger professional women of color. Women of color CSAOs only make up about 4% of the population, so it was important to learn from their experiences in order to improve as a field. A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach, and Intersectionality as the theoretical framework, was conducted amongst women of color who serve as CSAOs at predominantly white, four-year colleges or universities. The theoretical framework was applied to illuminate the structural, political, and representational aspects of intersectionality that were experienced by the participants. The findings from this study illuminated the practices in the higher education and student affairs workplace that impact the racial and gendered experiences of women of color who serve as CSAOs. The results can and should be utilized to create more equitable workplace practices and policies for institutions of higher education. Overall, this study sought to add to the small body of research on women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers by continuing the much-needed conversation about the intersection of navigating both race and gender in a white and male dominated workplace.

Keywords: student affairs, women of color, chief student affairs officers, intersectionality

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Higher education in the United States was originally founded for the education of White males (Gasman, Abiola & Travers; 2015; Harper & Jackson, 2010). Today, the racial and gender landscape of students in higher education has changed, but the demographics of faculty, staff, and administrative leaders at institutions of higher education has not kept up with the changing demographics of the student body (Gasman, et al; 2015; Lomax Wardell, 2010). Currently, this progress has slowed for women in higher education careers and is even slower for their women of color colleagues. The White House Project (2009) report highlighted the fact that nationally women are 57% of all college students but only 26% of full professors, 23% of all university presidents and 14% of presidents at the doctoral degree-granting institutions. The number of women presidents has increased in the past several decades, but that increase has stalled and has not changed in the last ten years. Additionally, women consist of less than 30% of the board members for college and boards (The White House Project, 2009). Overall, women students do not see themselves represented in upper leadership even though they are overrepresented in college enrollment (Gasman, et al; The White House Project, 2009). Clearly, a problem of gender equity, in academic employment, currently exists in higher education (Curtis, 2011).

The problems lie in both the lack of equitable representation of women in upper-leadership roles on college campuses in the United States., and the even more pronounced lack of women of color in upper leadership positions when race is added into consideration. These discrepancies in representation take different shapes across functional units on campuses, however. Regarding women of color, only 2% of faculty at the nation's top public and private universities are women of color (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011). The number of women

serving as a chief academic officer (CAO), which is often a pipeline to the presidency, declined from 40% to 25.3% between 2008 and 2013 at public doctoral degree-granting institutions (Johnson, 2017). Calculating race, about 86% of CAOs are white, 4% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 3% identify as Other (ACE, 2013). People of color are 42% of the college student population, yet only represent 14% in the Chief Academic Officer role. Meanwhile, at the intersection of race and gender, women of color represent a mere 3% of CAOs (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). As for the college president role, 26% of all college presidents were women in 2007, and only 4% of all presidents were women of color (ACE, 2007; King & Gomez, 2008). Last, 47% of Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) are women and roughly 9.4% are Black or Latina (Wesaw & Sponslor, 2014). The Chief Student Affairs Officer role was the focus of this study because of the large number of women that enter careers in student affairs, but do not ascend to an upper-leadership level (Costello, 2012; Reason, Walker, Robinson, 2002).

Women of color leaders striving to lead authentically in predominantly White spaces, face an internal burden of navigating at-least two socially-constructed marginalized identities. Authentic leadership is often defined as knowing who you are and consistently and openly being yourself as a leader (Eagly, 2005). Global women leadership scholars have argued that it is difficult for women to enact leadership authentically, because organizations are usually shaped to fit men, more than women, whether consciously or unconsciously (Breithaupt, 2015; Saint-Michel & Petit, 2015). When gender intersects with additional social identities, like race, being an authentic leader in that organization becomes riddled with further complications (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). Authenticity for leaders with multiple marginalized identities means living, “moment-to-moment (with) negotiations and decisions about managing who we are, given the

context” (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012, p. 711). Women of color leaders have named that their marginality allows them to be creative, resourceful, and advocates for themselves and others who hold marginalized identities, even when they are presumed incompetent by their White and male colleagues (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017; Patton, 2009).

Women of color leaders striving to lead authentically face an additional burden of navigating their identities in predominantly White and male spaces. Enke’s (2014) study of conceptions of power amongst (mostly White) women Senior Student Affairs Officers confirm that leadership is a gendered process; and if leadership can be a gendered process, then it might also prove to be a gendered and racialized process for women of color (Lomax Wardell, 2010; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). It is important for the field of higher education to increase the diversity of their leaders, and to develop their leaders who exist within the margins. Researchers assert that developing racially marginalized leaders is important because they can promote changes in an organization, serve as role models and mentors, and link the institution to more diverse communities (Elmuti, Jia & Davis, 2009; Epps, 2008).

Women of color college students, who might constitute the pipeline to higher education administration careers, outpace their male counterparts in college admission and graduation, yet are still severely underrepresented and underpaid compared to their male of color peers once they enter the workforce (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). In 2012, Latina women held 7.4 percent of bachelor’s degrees earned by women, though they constituted more than 16% of the women population in the U.S (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). Similarly, African American women earned 8.58 percent of bachelor’s degrees held by women but they constituted 12.7% of women. In contrast, Asian women held 8.36% and White women held 75.66% of bachelor’s degrees. Asian women only constitute 5.14% and White women constitute

62.97% of women in the United States. Several student identity development models point to the importance for college students to see themselves reflected in the leadership positions on their campus to support positive identity growth, and the lack of both women of color as college students and administrative leaders does not allow this healthy self-development to occur (Cross, 1991; Evans et.al, 2010; Helms, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

The lack of equitable representation is a problem because the scarcity of women of color in visible leadership roles contributes to a decrease in career persistence and a lack of mentors or role models who can pave the way in increasing more diversity into the upper echelons of higher education institutions (Biddix et.al, 2012; Costello, 2012; Lomax Wardell, 2010; Patton, 2009). This lack of equitable representation in leadership also occurs in divisions of student affairs, the functional area at the center of this study. Student affairs is defined as the, “co-curricular higher education division responsible for the student’s personal development and holistic growth” (Waltrip, 2012, p. 13). Student affairs administrators are responsible for a variety of projects on college campuses: counseling and crisis intervention, supporting multicultural students on campus, coordinating student leadership development programs, Greek Life chapters, planning new student orientation, and residence life. Chief Student Affairs Officers manage and professionally develop the staff who oversee these programs, determine the budget for the division, and provide the overall strategic direction for the division. The majority of Chief Student Affairs Officers report directly to the University President. As previously mentioned, 47% of CSAOs identify as women and 9.4% identify as Black or Latinx women (Wesaw & Sponslor, 2014). The Chief Student Affairs Officer role is typically one of the most visible

leadership positions for students, and with women of color representing only 9.4% of CSAOs, women of color students are not seeing themselves represented in campus leadership.

Women and people of color in student affairs administration see disparities in rising to leadership positions. Despite studies that show that over the past several decades women have enrolled in student affairs and higher education administration graduate preparation programs, entered the field of student affairs, and progressed to mid-level positions at higher rates than men, they still have not proportionately advanced into the role of Chief Student Affairs Officer (Blackhurst, 2000; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Women also tend to receive less preparation for advancement in higher education leadership, and less assistance with home-life from their partners, both factors can lead to stagnation in women's career advancement (Mayer, Surtee, & Barnard, 2015; Mcnair et al, 2015; Probert, 2005). Student affairs often describes itself as a field devoted to equity, inclusion, and promoting diversity, yet numerous studies have found that women and people of color are not represented proportionally at the senior levels of student affairs administration (Biddix et.al, 2012; Jones & Komives, 2001; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002). In fact, although 47% of Chief Student Affairs Officers are women, 77% of those women identify as White, and 19% of them identify Black or Latina; in total, only 9.4% of all CSAOs identify as Black or Latina (Wesaw & Sponslor, 2014).

The previously cited statements are connected to why this study focused on women of color in Chief Student Affairs Officer roles, as there is a clear disconnect between what the field of student affairs purports itself to be and what occurs regarding equitable representation. There is also a clear pipeline issue to leadership for women of color in student affairs. It is important that the field of student affairs commit to increasing diversity at its staff, faculty, and upper

leadership levels especially since the CSAO is one of the more visible leadership roles to students. The scarcity of women of color in visible leadership roles may contribute to a decrease in career persistence for other diverse populations and a lack of diverse mentors or role models for an ever-growing diverse student body (Biddix et.al, 2012; Costello, 2012; Lomax Wardell, 2010; Patton, 2009). For the purposes of this study, a woman of color will be defined as a person who is not White/of European heritage and as someone who openly presents as a woman in the workplace.

Statement of Purpose

This phenomenological study sought to add to the limited amount of research on women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers, by exploring their shared experiences navigating race and gender in their professional role. Women of color was defined as any non-White identified woman. The CSAO role was the focus due to the small percentage of CSAOs who are Black or Latinx, and because of the large number of women that enter careers in student affairs, but do not ascend to that leadership level (Reason, Walker, Robinson, 2002; Costello, 2012). Interviewing and a demographic survey was the primary data collection method. Once initial themes are reduced and uncovered, Crenshaw's (1989) theory of Intersectionality will be applied to further illuminate the women's shared experiences. The theory of Intersectionality is the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and their related systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination. Intersectionality is specifically rooted in how the experiences of women of color differ from White women. The Intersectionality framework is appropriate for women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers because the original theory was designed to examine these unique experiences of women of color, particularly for African American women. The framework will allow for flexibility in examining the nuances in shared

experiences attached to multiple marginalized identities. Women of color higher education professionals exist in the doubly oppressed intersection of racism and sexism, and women of color who serve as leaders in higher education must operate in a profession that is dominated by white and/or male presidents (Crenshaw, 1989; Turner, 2002). The shared experiences of these leaders shed light on practices in the student affairs workplace that makes it difficult for women of color in that role and how women of color successfully navigate their identities in the Chief Student Affairs role.

Research Question

There is a lack of equitable representation of women of color in upper-leadership roles on college campuses. The purpose of this study was to explore how women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO), navigated both their racial and gender identities in their professional role, how they were prepared for this identity navigation throughout their career, and how they mentored younger professional women of color. A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach, and Intersectionality as the theoretical framework, was conducted amongst women of color who serve as CSAOs at predominantly white, four-year colleges and universities. The theoretical framework was applied to illuminate the structural, political, and representational aspects of intersectionality that may be experienced amongst the participants. The main research question was, *how do women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) navigate both their racial and gender identities in their professional, campus role?* The sub-questions for this study are:

- How were the women of color CSAO's prepared, throughout their education and career, to navigate their racial and gendered identities?

- In what ways do women of color CSAO's mentor other women of color student affairs professionals?

Definition of Terms

It is important for the reader to understand the definitions of key terms that will be used by the researcher. Therefore, the following terms will be defined; woman of color, intersectionality, institutional oppression, racism, sexism, student affairs, and Chief Student Affairs Officer.

Woman of Color: a woman-identified, person of color, meaning not of White or European racial/ethnic background. The term was developed in 1977 at the National Women's Conference when a delegation of Black women brought forth their Black Women's Agenda and the other women of color at the conference wanted to be included. The women agreed, and the document was adjusted to include all non-White women, thus creating the term "women of color" (Ross, 2011).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality suggests that, and seeks to examine how, various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, age, nationality and other spectrums of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. Intersectionality proposes that we should think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all the other elements to fully understand a person's identity, lived experiences, and the shared experiences with others of similar social identities. (Crenshaw, 1989)

Institutional Oppression: The practice of institutionalized oppression is based on the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority, and is defined as "the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions,

solely based on the person’s membership in the social identity group” (Cheney, LaFrance & Quinteros, 2006). Institutional oppression occurs when laws, customs, and practices systematically produce inequities based on one’s membership in targeted or marginalized social identity groups. Institutional oppression creates a system of invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in disfavored social identity groups. The barriers are often invisible to those in privileged social identity groups. Institutionalized oppression is a matter of result regardless of intent (Cheney, et al, 2006; Adams, et al, 2016).

Racism: A system of advantage based on race and supported by institutional power, structures, policies, and practices that create and sustain advantages for the dominant white group while systematically subordinating members of targeted racial groups. This relative advantage for Whites and subordination for people of color is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and normative practices of society (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2016)

Sexism: The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress women and privilege men (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2016)

Student Affairs: Student Affairs is a division in higher education administrations that, “could be said to consist of any advising, counseling, management, or administrative function at a college or university that exists outside the classroom” (Love, 2003). Student affairs educators are typically responsible for the holistic development of college students (Rentz, 1996).

Chief Student Affairs Officer: The Chief Student Affairs Officer is a senior administrator within higher education administration and leads all student affairs efforts at a college or university. In most cases the CSAO, “reports to the President and is at the peer-level

of other institutional division leaders such as the Chief Academic Officer and Chief Business Officer” (NASPA, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

There is an established problem in the rates of women of color who ascend to upper-leadership in student affairs (Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This study sought to discover how women who are currently serving in Chief Student Affairs Officer roles navigate their racial and gender identities in their professional role. A review of the current literature on women, women of color, and people of color in higher education and student affairs leadership is necessary to ground the study and illuminate the landscape in which women of color CSAOs exist. Likewise, it is necessary to unpack the tenets of Intersectionality as the theoretical framework and establish how it aligns with the research question and methodology. The following chapter includes a comprehensive literature review and outline of the theoretical framework.

Literature Review

Women of color in leadership roles in higher education experience challenges and barriers based on racial and gender stereotypes, balancing work and home life, and a lack of mentors and peers in that role (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Enke, 2014; Patton, 2009). The research discussed in this literature review can provide valuable policy and practice recommendations for institutions and how they can build more equitable systems for women of color to thrive in leadership. The literature review also pointed to the need for more specific research on women of color in student affairs leadership, a need which this study sought to address. The literature review consists of several sections including: (a) challenges and experiences of women as higher education leaders (b) challenges and experiences of people of color as higher education leaders (c) career persistence of women in student affairs (d)

challenges and experiences of women of color as higher education leaders (e) ways women of color leaders navigate their identities in higher education (f) career persistence of women of color in student affairs, and (g) the effects of mentoring on women of color in student affairs.

Challenges and Experiences of Women as Higher Education Leaders

First, the challenges and experiences of women higher education leaders will be outlined to better situate the higher education career landscape for women. To begin, numerous researchers have established that there are too few scholarly studies of women's contributions and experiences in higher education leadership roles (Enke, 2014; Lomax Wardell 2010; Costello 2012; Waltrip, 2012; Scott, 2016). This reveals that there is a need for continued research on women in these campus roles. Perhaps, not surprisingly, women are still underrepresented and underpaid in higher education senior leadership positions even when increasingly, the students are women (AAUP, 2011; ACE, 2013; Griffiths, 2012; Lennon, 2013; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Women constitute 56% of chief diversity officers and 38% of chief academic officers or provosts (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). In 2015, women were 23% of presidents at bachelor's and master's-level institutions, and 14% of presidents at doctoral degree-granting institutions (June, 2015). Associate and community colleges have the largest share of women presidents, at 33% (June, 2015).

Representational leadership is important to women leaders, especially those searching for mentors, sponsors, and role models. In a study that compared the organizational cultures and personal resilience of women leaders in higher education at an older institution and a newer institution, the women at the newer institution believed they experienced lesser effects of the "glass ceiling" because there were more women in senior leadership roles who served as support systems (Griffiths, 2012). The term "glass ceiling" was first used in A.M. Morrison's (1987)

article which examined the lack of women in business leadership positions like CEOs or chairmen, despite their representation in the workforce. The transparent or glass barrier was not as visible at the start of women's careers but ultimately blocked advancement in their careers and salaries (Hindle, 2012). In terms of salary, women faculty members continue to be underpaid when compared to their male counterparts (AAUP, 2011). These salary disparities also vary by institutional types with women at doctoral institutions earning only 78% of what male faculty earn and women at two-year institutions earn 96% of what men earn (AAUP, 2011).

In a more recent study from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, researchers found that women in chief officer roles in higher education earned about 80 cents to every dollar earned by their male counterparts (Bichsel, McChesney & Calcagno, 2017). This study assessed the salaries of chief officers in 15 positions including campus president, student affairs, academic affairs, finance, facilities and athletics, to name a few. Women were underpaid in 12 of the 15 positions, but were paid more in positions of student affairs, information/IT, and facilities. In chief officer of student affairs roles, women were paid, on average, \$1.03 for every dollar men made. In chief officer of facilities roles, women were paid, on average, \$1.17 for every dollar men made. One explanation is that women are paid more equally, or make more than men, in positions where they are either more equally represented or woefully underrepresented. For example, in student affairs, about half of all CSAOs are women, and, in facilities, women chief officers are outnumbered by men at a ratio or more than nine to one (Bichsel, McChesney & Calcagno, 2017; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Still, women are still underpaid in most of the categories, regardless of the ratio of gender representation in those chief officer roles.

Historically, colleges and universities have paid male faculty a “family wage” which meant he was paid more than his female colleagues to better support his family (Toutkoushian et al, 2007). This practice is no longer legal, but has continued in covert ways as a pay gap still exists across multiple career roles in the academy. These patriarchal ideas of gender roles often dictate that a man deserves more pay to maintain his breadwinner status and contributes to bias towards women in search processes for upper leadership roles, for fear that she may not be able to balance home duties and work duties (Boushey, 2007; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Toutkoushian, et. al 2007). This might explain why single men make less than married men and might explain why married men make more than married women, but does not explain why single men still make more than single women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). These practices and beliefs, grounded in systemic sexism (and systemic racism for women of color), tend to eliminate many women from the pool of candidates for leadership positions, and underpay them throughout their careers (Curtis, 2011; Toutkoushian et al, 2007, Wallace & Marchant, 2009).

In addition to underrepresentation and being underpaid in higher education careers, women experience less preparation for advancement into upper leadership and endure gender discrimination in the workplace (Hannum et al, 2015; Probert, 2005; Redmond et al, 2016; Wallace & Marchant, 2009). Probert (2005) discusses how women have traditionally received less preparation for upward mobility and have been described as having less human capital for their employers than their male counterparts. In a study that looked at 35 women at the senior-most levels of institutions of higher education and explored their journey into leadership roles and their experience of being a leader, 51% of the total sample stated that barriers to leadership included lack of opportunities and lack of support (Hannum et al, 2015). Nearly 75% of women

of color experienced this barrier compared to only 35% of White women, a statistically significant difference.

Other research states that gender discrimination was felt by women the most when they were seeking upper-level positions or academic promotion (Black & Islam, 2014; Redmond et al, 2016). Despite research on the effective, developmental and collaborative nature of women leaders, studies reveal that employees often prefer male leaders, it is harder for women to be promoted into leadership roles than it is for men, it is more difficult for women to be seen as effective leaders than it is for men, and leadership obstacles are more prevalent for women of color than for White women and for men (Eagly & Carli, 2008; Griffiths, 2012; Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004, Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The previously outlined evidence of salary disparities, gender discrimination, less representation in upper leadership, and less preparation for career advancement, suggests the privileging of men and marginalization of women, at work in higher education careers.

This climate of gender discrimination for women in leadership is important to review to understand the challenges for women leaders, and how they are perceived in leadership roles. The dominant paradigm for leadership is often shaped around traditional notions of masculine behavior expectations (Enke, 2014; Nidiffer, 2001). Within this paradigm of masculine leadership, women may have to align their leadership style to one that violates expectations of femininity, which may also lead to harsh criticism from subordinates (Breithaupt, 2015; Enke, 2014; Jablonski, 2000). This double-edged sword in women's leadership may connect to why the participants in Enke's (2014) study on perceptions of power amongst women Senior Student Affairs Officers were uncomfortable discussing the concept of power; in fact, most avoided the use of the word altogether. Instead, the women described their influence and leadership as

power-to make decisions or power-with others rather than power-over others and power from a title or position. Enke (2014) elaborates that, “men tend to understand it (power) as competitive, hierarchical, and a zero-sum game, whereas women are more likely to construe power as cooperative, interdependent, and increased when shared with others” (p. 204).

Stress and exhaustion plague women leaders in higher education. While women are underrepresented in leadership roles, they are overrepresented in household leadership, meaning they often carry the major responsibilities for caring for dependents and managing household duties on top of their workplace responsibilities (Boushey, 2007; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mason & Goulden, 2004). The toll that comes with having to balance career duties and obligations at home often leads to stress and burn-out. The work-place demands on women in middle and senior leadership positions on college campuses challenge their well-being and increase their stress (Kersh, 2018; Mayer, Surtee, Barnard, 2015). For women who work in student affairs, and are typically called on to deal with student emergencies or students in distress, extreme exhaustion has been cited as a challenging aspect of their roles (Kersh, 2018). This exhaustion is negatively correlated with exercise and engagement in professional development activities and positively correlated with the number of evenings and weekends worked per semester. This chronic stress and exhaustion is linked to burnout, which may result in women in student affairs persisting in their careers at lower rates than men. Despite the prevalence of exhaustion linked to women’s experiences as student affairs administrators, Delores et al (2013) found that some women in higher education prefer careers in student affairs because of the focus on values, holistic development and leadership cultivation.

Additional experiences linked to women leaders in higher education careers include the positive role of professional and personal mentors, successfully navigating the high stress

environment of academia and student affairs, finding supportive partners and spouses who shared home and family responsibilities, and feeling proud for executing their career plans and goals (Delores et al, 2013; Gasman, et al, 2015; Redmond et al, 2016). Overall, the challenges for women that have been discussed in this section included underrepresentation in senior leadership, gender discrimination in salaries and perception of leadership style, less preparation for advancement, stressful workplace demands, and exhaustion. This review provided insight into the challenges and experiences of women in higher education careers. Next, the literature on the challenges and experiences of people of color in higher education leadership will be outlined.

Challenges and experiences of people of color as higher education leaders. Like women leaders in higher education, people of color are underrepresented, underpaid, and experience discrimination as leaders in higher education. Over the past 30 years, there has been slow progress in the representation of people of color in the college presidency role. In 2017, only 17% of college presidents were people of color, and a mere 5% of college presidents identified as women of color (ACE, 2017). At the eight Ivy League institutions, there were no people of color in the university president and provost roles, and none of these provosts were women as of 2013 (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013). This underrepresentation is also evident in divisions of student affairs, as has previously been mentioned, about 20% of CSAOs identified as either Black or Latinx (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Meanwhile, in 2013, the demographics of college graduates from all combined colleges and universities was 67% White, 12% Latinx, 10% Black, 8% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1% Native American, and 2% multiracial (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). In total, graduates of color made up 33% of all college graduates, but these graduates are not seeing themselves represented in the senior administrative positions on their campuses.

When women and people of color are promoted to leadership positions in higher education administration, they are more likely to be promoted to risky or precarious leadership positions than are White males, meaning that they may be set-up for failure by being placed at unstable institutions and positions (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). This theory is posited in the glass cliff framework (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; McGee, 2017, Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Attached to these precarious, glass cliffs, might be added challenges based on the leader's race and/or gender identity. In a study that focused on Black presidents at predominantly white institutions, participants shared that their race and gender served as a challenge and impediment throughout their career regarding being treated differently than White or male colleagues, feeling like they were held to higher standards, and experiencing increased scrutiny regarding their abilities (McGee, 2017).

Scholars have also reported that faculty and staff of color often experience “chilly” campus climates in higher education, meaning that they experience increased microaggressions, tokenism, and hostility (Gasman, et al, 2015; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). They also experience challenges finding mentors due to the lack of leaders of color on their campus, and difficulty finding community in their departments, especially when they are the only person of color (Gasman, et al, 2015; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Smith, 2009; Smith, et al, 2011). The importance of mentors with shared identities is also evident in the literature surrounding leaders of color as ways to positively navigate campus roles (Chang, Longman & Franco, 2014; Gasman, et al, 2015; McGee, 2017). Interestingly, for leaders of color, mentors are found in both lateral and hierarchical roles, and on campus and in the community, a theme that is also revealed in the literature on the importance of mentors to women of color in higher education (Briggs, 2012; Patton, 2009, Simmons, 2016). These experiences on the glass cliff and in chilly campus

climates reveal the challenges that leaders of color must navigate in their role and may shed light on what women of color leaders also navigate in higher education administration. The challenges and experiences attributed to a leader at this intersection of marginalized racial and gendered identities will be unpacked in a later section.

Career persistence of women in student affairs. Women have enrolled in student affairs and higher education administration graduate preparation programs, entered the field of student affairs, and progressed to mid-level positions at higher rates than men, but they have not proportionately advanced into the role of Chief Student Affairs Officer (Blackhurst, 2000; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Therefore, the career persistence and experiences of women in student affairs is important to review to understand why women are not persisting or progressing in the field. According to several job satisfaction and career persistence studies across a variety of professions, women often report lower levels of job satisfaction due to conflicts between roles and responsibilities at home and in the workplace, low pay, and long work hours (Waltrip, 2012). For the women that do persist and rise to leadership positions, resilience has been observed by Black and Islam (2014) as an essential quality and a common trait of women leaders in higher education. Additionally, women leaders are often more focused on building relationships and developing their staff; this emphasis on people is also reflected in the literature on the leadership styles of women (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis 2009; Redmond et al, 2016). Most studies focusing on why women leave the higher education workplace, examine faculty departure or examine the departure of new professionals in student affairs (Gardner, 2012; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Quinn, 2009). There is far less literature on the career persistence experiences of women in student affairs.

Most practitioners in the field of student affairs are women, but unfortunately, a demographic census of women practitioners in student affairs has not been conducted since the early 1990s and 2000s (Blackhurst, 2000; Hubain et al, 2016; Taub & McEwen, 2006). In higher education and student affairs graduate programs, it was reported in 1994, that women earned 66% of master's degrees and 55% of doctoral program graduates yet, women were more likely to leave the profession three years after their master's graduation than men (Blackhurst, 2000; Jones & Komives, 2001). In terms of overall masters and doctoral degrees conferred from colleges of education, women represented 76.3% of master's degrees and 69.4% of doctoral degrees in 2016 (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). Looking at these numbers, it would appear that the pathway to higher education leadership roles for women has never been more open, yet women are underrepresented in senior positions within higher education and numerous studies mention that there are too few scholarly studies of women's contributions and experiences in higher education leadership roles (Lomax Wardell 2010; Costello 2012; Waltrip, 2012; Scott, 2016). Although women's representation in the Chief Student Affairs Officers role appears more balanced, with women representing 47% of all CSAOs surveyed in 2014, there are still more women represented in graduate programs, new professional roles, and mid-level professional roles in student affairs than are making it into the CSAO role (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). In the previous sections the challenges and experiences of women and people of color in higher education leadership and the career persistence issues of women in student affairs have been reviewed. Next, a review of the literature that applies to women of color, and their unique intersectional challenges, will be unpacked.

Challenges and Experiences of Women of Color as Higher Education Leaders

The challenges experienced by women of color leaders in higher education and their experiences in those roles will provide a solid starting place for this study on women of color CSAOs. Regarding leadership and shifting demographics, the numbers of women and minorities in presidential and other executive leadership positions at colleges and universities has not increased significantly since 1986 and is greatly disproportionate to the vast diversity of the student body (American Council on Education, 2007). Studies have made it clear that leadership challenges are more pronounced for women of color than for White women and men (Evans, 2007; Patton, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles, 2010; Santovec, 2010). Barriers to leadership roles for women of color administrators in higher education most commonly includes: being overlooked for upper administrative positions, having their scholarship and previous career experiences ignored, and balancing work and family obligations (Hernandez, 2010; Stripling, 2012; Turner, 2007; Vasquez, 2012). This study is unique to others because the research question directly examines how the women navigate their multiple, marginalized identities in their current career role, how they were prepared throughout their career for that navigation, and how they mentor younger women of color in the profession.

The literature on women of color in upper leadership positions typically revolves around the chief academic officer experience (Stripling, 2012; American Council on Education, 2007; Cook, 2013; Walton & McDade, 2001). Research on women of color in faculty leadership positions notes the challenge of balancing home, family, work, and racial stereotyping (Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). Although these studies clarify the experiences of women of color in chief academic and faculty roles, these studies do not directly address the experiences of women of color in Chief Student Affairs Officer positions. The latter population's experiences

could be like their peers in academic leadership roles, but may also point to differences based on the cultures of each campus division, socialization into the field and differences in job responsibilities.

Women of color navigate the intersection of at least two historically and socially marginalized identities, race and gender. Studies suggest that the racial and gendered experiences of these women revolve around the themes of tokenism, hyper awareness of systemic racism and sexism, and misperceptions of leadership styles as the “angry woman of color” or “bitch” stereotype (Scott, 2016; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Turner, C. 2007). The misperceptions of leadership styles of women of color are often attributed to their race and gender. In a study that employed an intersectional theoretical framework, two Black, women researchers, who also identify as immigrants, found that practicing an “authentic” leadership style often resulted in misunderstandings of their leadership by colleagues and students (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). One of the authors mentions that, it is not a matter of discrimination as such, but more of a reminder that “we don’t really belong here”, and that their leadership style does not fit into the dominant paradigm (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017, p. 400). This further points to the need to not only change the current culture in higher education, but to also breakdown and rebuild the culture. Authentic leadership is often seen as a-contextual and unproblematic—a leader merely needs to be self-aware and act in a way that is true or consistent to their self-knowledge but that framework fails to see the ways in which systemic discrimination affects women of color leaders who are authentically leading (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). This type of leadership style poses issues for women of color who must navigate the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, and asks who can be authentic and who cannot?

Women's leadership has often been characterized as more relational, collectivist, interpersonal, and participatory (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Enke, 2014; Patton 2009). This emphasis on building relationships and developing staff is evident in several studies on women leadership styles (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis 2009; Redmond et al, 2016). Despite these findings, research shows that women may have to align their leadership style to one that violates expectations of femininity, which may lead to harsh criticism from their subordinates (Breithaupt, 2015; Enke, 2014; Jablonski, 2000). For women of color, misperceptions of their styles are often attributed to their race and gender (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Enke, 2014; Patton, 2009; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). In Enke's (2014) study on the conceptions of power amongst women Senior Student Affairs Officers, there was one participant who identified as a woman color, specifically biracial (Mexican and White). This participant was the only participant that reflected on how her racial and gendered identities related to her conceptions of power and leadership. She discussed feeling like she had to "mute herself" so as not to be perceived and stereotyped as an angry woman of color. She also shared that at her predominantly White institution she was viewed as the representative for all women of color, even though she did not feel like she fit neatly into either one of her racial/ethnic categories. These findings align with studies on how women of color experience their roles in higher education administration (Scott, 2016; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Turner, C. 2007).

Ways women of color leaders navigate their identities in higher education. Women of color leaders navigate the intersection of at least two historically and socially marginalized identities, race and gender. The compounded stress of "being the only one in the room" and having to "prove one's worth" is a common theme in studies about the experiences of women of color leaders who advance their careers in higher education (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Ngunjiri

& Hernandez, 2017; Scott, 2016; Turner, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong; 2011). The idea of proving one's worth is also evident in how the women leaders in Enke's (2014) study revealed that they feel a need to dress more professionally than their male colleagues to exude authority, while also dressing femininely to fit into societal gender expectations. This next section will outline what the literature discloses as the ways that women of color leaders can navigate their gender and racial identities in their higher education careers.

Enke (2014) hints that one way women leaders might navigate their identities, and the attached systems of discrimination in which those identities are operationalized, is to consider becoming more comfortable using the term power and claiming power in their leadership roles, otherwise it might prove detrimental to their careers. Other researchers have uncovered how immigrant, women of color leaders, believed that their marginality allowed them to be creative, resourceful, and advocates for themselves and others who hold marginalized identities, even when they were presumed incompetent by their White and male colleagues (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). The positive aspects of resiliency as reported by women of color leaders as a positive attribute of their identities, and an essential quality for advancing in higher education and student affairs has also been discussed in the literature (Black & Islam, 2014; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Relationships with other women of color has been found to aid women of color in successfully navigating their identities in leadership positions (Patton, 2009; San Antonio, 2015; Tran, 2014). San Antonio (2015) revealed that women of color in student affairs are typically involved in reciprocal relationships with informal leaders of color in their network and attend social and diversity related events to connect with other people of color for support. Informal support systems with other women of color such as friendships, family, sororities and peers are

often the most accessible forms of support for African American women in the academy, due to the small numbers that exist in upper leadership roles (Chang, et al, 2014; Patton, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). However, as more women of color enter the higher education workforce, researchers have hypothesized that these rising leaders could challenge existing structures and resist assimilation into the dominant paradigm while developing supportive networks to overcome barriers and bring more women of color into upper leadership roles (Davis, 2009; Chang et al, 2014; Tran, 2014). Another example of supportive networks that assist women of color in their identity navigation is mentoring, particularly mentors who share similar, salient, social identities to the leaders (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mayer, Surtee, Barnard, 2015; Mcnair et al, 2013; Patton, 2009). Further investigation into the effectiveness of mentoring opportunities for women of color will be explored, next.

Career persistence of women of color in student affairs. There is not a significant amount of research on the topic of career persistence of people of color in student affairs, but it is important to briefly review before discussing the intersection of race and gender in the career persistence of women of color. The field of student affairs, and the institution of higher education, often depict themselves as committed to inclusion, equity, diversity, and social justice (ACPA et al, 2010, 2015; Curtis, 2011). This depiction may signal that the field is welcoming and inclusive for practitioners of color to enter, persist, and rise to leadership. Yet, according to the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Chief Student Affairs Officer census data, 73% of the 868 CSAOs surveyed identified as White, 13% identified as Black/African American, 7% identified as Latinx, and 7% did not respond (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). In total, 20% of CSAOs are people of color. This reveals that people of color in the field of student affairs are not represented in leadership roles at the same rates of White practitioners

and might signal a problem of career persistence amongst student affairs practitioners of color, or a difficult climate for them to navigate into upper leadership roles.

Scholars have found that African American student affairs administrators leave Predominantly White Institutions and prefer roles at Historically Black Colleges and Universities due to their racialized experiences with students and colleagues (Flowers, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Jackson & Flowers, 2003). Other scholars have reported the challenges that students of color in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) master's programs experience (Hubain et al, 2016; Harris & Linder, 2018). Students of color in HESA programs have reported racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, tokenization, and experiencing a disconnect between what their programs promised (in terms of social justice and inclusion) and what they experienced in the classroom (Hubain et al, 2016; Harris & Linder, 2018). Racial battle fatigue is defined as the exhaustion associated with people of color trying to educate White people about their experiences with racism (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Delgado & Stefancic (2012) established, via Critical Race Theory, that racism is endemic to life in the United States. When racism is pervasive to all systems in U.S society then it can be understood that racism exists in the field of student affairs and therefore adversely affects practitioners of color in their career persistence and advancement.

The previously reviewed studies focused on women or people of color in student affairs and not necessarily the intersection of women with racially marginalized identities (Blackhurst, 2000; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Next, a discussion of the career persistence of women of color in the field will occur. Women of color exist at the intersection of women and people of color. Therefore, they exist in the double-bind of navigating both racist and sexist systems, and may have to navigate additional systems of

oppressions based on their other social identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans, 2007; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Opp & Gosetti, 2002). The career persistence of women of color in student affairs has not been researched in detail, but studies on the career persistence of women of color in STEM education and on African American women in higher education administration discuss the women's experiences with racial and sexist microaggressions, the lack of professional associations devoted to their promotion and retention, the positive effects of relationships with other women of color in their profession, and the importance of attending/holding membership in diversity-based conferences/professional associations (Arredondo, 2011; Kachchaf, et al, 2015; Ong, Ko & Hodari, 2016).

In short, women of color do not persist in the field of student affairs or reach the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer at the same rates as men and White women (Reason, Walker & Robinson, 2002). According to the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Chief Student Affairs Officer census data, about 47% of the 868 surveyed CSAO's identified as women. Of that 47%, about 13% identified as Black/African American and 6% identified as Latinx women (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This census highlights the disparities in representation between Latinx women, Black/African American women, and White women who serve as CSAO's. It is important to note that this census does not provide data for women of color outside of the Latinx/a and Black/African American ethnic/racial communities. In total, women of color CSAOs represent 9.4% of all CSAOs. A doctoral degree is often required for CSAOs, but women of color represent only 4.4% of all masters and doctoral program graduates (American Community Survey, 2012). That data set counted the following races/ethnicities: African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American, and did not organize graduate rates based on specific degree conferred (for example: Ph.D in Higher Education

Administration). Although this study is not focusing on career persistence, the career persistence of women of color in student affairs and higher education was important to review to establish an understanding of how and why women of color are not persisting into the CSAO role.

Effects of mentoring on women of color in student affairs. Common support systems mentioned by women of color who have earned senior student affairs roles include mentors, sponsors, family, identity-affirming spaces, and spiritual practices (San Antonio, 2015; Scott, 2016). Mentoring, in a classical sense, refers to a “relationship between a younger adult and an older, more experienced adult who helps the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work” (Kram, 1988, p. 2). Similarly, Crawford and Smith (2005) suggested that mentoring includes the development of individuals on both professional and personal levels. The positive effects of mentoring on women in their careers has been well documented throughout the literature on faculty and student affairs administrators, although the latter is less researched, especially amongst Chief Student Affairs Officers (Blackhurst, 2000; Gardner, 2012; Simmons, 2016; Turner, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008). Furthermore, the support of a mentor has been found to increase career retention, psychosocial support, and promotion rates for women of color in the academy (Chang, et al, 2014; Howard-Vital & Morgan, 1993; Patton, 2009; Tran, 2014).

Mentoring has been shown to have positive effects on the careers of women and people of color in student affairs and in other professions (Chang, et al., 2014; McGee, 2017; Simmons, 2016). Mentoring has also been attributed to increased career retention and promotion rates for women of color (Chang, et al, 2014; Tran, 2014). The lack of a support network and mentors has been connected to the negative experiences of women of color who serve as Senior Student Affairs Officers (Jones & Komives, 2009; Vasquez, 2012). Studies have shown that women

might engage in different mentoring practices than men, more specifically, women may not seek out mentors directly and women of color have been found to value self-reliance which may prevent them from publicly seeking out a mentor (Simmons, 2016; Chang, et al, 2014).

Still, other studies support that women leaders of color in higher education attribute their professional successes to having mentors, even when those mentors are not found on their campuses due to the dearth of women of color leaders (Briggs, 2012, Patton, 2009; Santamaria, 2014). In Patton's (2009) study, most of the Black women graduate students found mentors in family members, friends who shared their identities as Black women, and at church. Some women of color in academia have found creative ways to find mentors, including drawing inspiration from the work of famous women artists of color like Frida Kahlo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Octavia Butler (Santamaria, 2014). These findings point to the need for upper-level leaders in student affairs to mentor younger women of color in the profession. Especially since in the field of student affairs, mentoring has been positively correlated with job satisfaction and role adjustment (Blackhurst, 2000; Jones & Komives, 2009).

The pipeline issue of women of color leaders in higher education might very well be increased through mentoring, especially when mentoring occurs across shared intersections of identity. This may create an increased workload for women of color, since there are not enough of them in leadership roles to serve as mentors, then the few in leadership feel burdened to serve as a mentor for all the professionals who seek them out. In Patton's (2009) interviews with Black women graduate students, participants revealed that it was easier to confide in mentors who shared their identities as Black women, and that only with these mentors could they share their full experiences in the academy which included both their racial and gendered experiences. The participants who had White mentors stated that they were still helpful for general advice, but that

they did not feel comfortable sharing intense personal experiences with White mentors. Patton (2009) concluded that, “current interactions between White professors and Black students appear woefully inadequate and or insignificant” (p. 340). This racially-inadequate style of mentoring was evident in Dowdy & Hamilton’s (2012) case study on the first Black woman leader in the department and how her White women mentors never mentioned her race, or the racial difficulties that the leader may have experienced. Patton (2009) warns that this is not an excuse for White professionals in the academy to not engage in mentor outreach to Black women graduate students, but rather, “it should be viewed as an opportunity to be reflective about the importance of mentoring relationships and to actively and consciously work toward developing relationships that foster the qualities that African American women seek” (p. 533). These findings point to the need for upper-level leaders in higher education to mentor younger women of color in the profession, and for younger women of color to seek out these mentors.

The positive implications for the creation and development of mentoring opportunities for women of color is clearly related to the success of aspiring women of color leaders, and current leaders (Chang, et al, 2014; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011; Redmond et al, 2016). Indeed, the mentoring of all underrepresented populations in higher education might prove successful in diversifying the pipeline to leadership positions. Overall, the findings in this section revealed that women of color in higher education should continue to support and mentor each other, and that institutions should consider creating more opportunities for this mentoring to flourish. Graduate programs and professional associations must provide avenues for women of color graduate students and faculty to connect in mentoring programs (Hubain et al, 2016; Harris & Linder, 2018). Academic department chairs might consider acknowledging the time that faculty members contribute as mentors as part of the tenure and

promotion process. Lastly, the ways that women of color find mentors outside of their profession should also be honored as viable mentors and support structures (Davis, 2009; Patton, 2009; Santovec, 2010).

The literature revealed that although there are studies that have engaged in exploring the experiences and challenges of being a woman leader in higher education, a leader of color in higher education, or a woman of color faculty leader, there is a need for an increase in studies that explore women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers. This literature review also discussed the importance of broadening the “dominant” definitions and perceptions of leadership, increasing the understanding that women of color leaders are balancing career and home responsibilities whilst navigating racial and gender stereotypes, and developing mentoring programs for women of color leaders while also supporting current leaders in their mentorship of young women of color in the profession. Further analysis is needed to unpack how women of color leaders experience and navigate their identities, and the connected systems of oppression to those identities. This study's findings contributes to the field by providing research on how women of color navigate their multiple identities in their role as Chief Student Affairs Officers, how they were prepared for that navigation, and how they mentor professionals.

Theoretical Framework

Since the research questions will be exploring two historically and socially marginalized identities, race and gender, Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989) seminal theory, Intersectionality, will be utilized as the theoretical framework. Intersectionality will be referred to as a framework, and not a theory, because several scholars agree that it has no core factors or variables that can be operationalized and empirically tested (Strayhorn, 2013; Bowleg, 2012; Bowleg, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Intersectionality, as a framework, was developed by Crenshaw in

the 1980s to address the double oppression that women of color, particularly Black women, experience. The framework is the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and their related systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination. Intersectionality suggests that, and seeks to examine how, various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, age, nationality and other spectrums of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality proposes that we should think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all the other elements to fully understand a person's identity, lived experiences, and the shared experiences with others of similar social identities. This framework can be used to understand how systemic injustice and social inequality occurs on a multidimensional basis (Crenshaw, 1989).

Elements of Intersectionality

Intersectionality originated from critiques of theorists treating women as a homogenous group, often meaning comparing all women experiences to White women experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for discerning how multiple social identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism, at the macro structural level. The framework compels us to examine the differences that might exist in similar social groups, specifically how the interaction of various social identities interface with structures of power and hierarchy. There are three aspects of intersectionality that Crenshaw defines and explores in how they shape the lives of women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). The three aspects are structural, political, and representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

First, structural intersectionality illuminates how existing structures doubly subordinate women with intersecting identities due to the attached systems of oppression and structural barriers to those identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Structural intersectionality consists of the ways in which, “the location of women of color, at the intersection of race and gender, makes their experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of White women” (p. 1245). Crenshaw provides an example of structural intersectionality in her example of how several domestic violence shelters will turn away women who do not speak English, because of a lack of bilingual staff. Several patterns of subordination are intersecting in this example, specifically gender, ethnicity, first language, and perhaps socioeconomic status. These patterns of subordination are exacerbated, even when unintentional, by the structures in place at the shelter. Another example of structural intersectionality is evident in affirmative action decisions in college admissions and hiring processes. Affirmative action was designed to increase the numbers of racial and gender minorities on campus and in the workplace, yet White women are the largest benefactors of the policy (Gu, McFerran, Aquino & Kim, 2014). Within both public and private sectors, White women surpass the employment rates of people of color, including women of color, due to affirmative action (Kohn, 2013; Massie, 2016). Therefore, a structural policy that was put in place to increase racial and gender representation still maintained, albeit unintentionally, the current power structures which disenfranchise people of color in the United States. Since women of color live at the intersection of race and gender, and are therefore affected by both identities and their attached systems of subordination, they are left behind when compared to White women in affirmative action decisions.

Political intersectionality defines how women of color exist with two subordinate identities that often involve conflicting political agendas. Crenshaw (1991) explains that, “the need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and White women seldom confront” (p. 1252). For example, Crenshaw outlines how some anti-racist advocates argue that feminist advocacy doesn’t belong in communities of color, because it is divisive, exclusionary of women of color, and represents White women’s concerns only (Crenshaw, 1991). This is a problem because anti-racism organizers may unintentionally be replicating sexism and a lack of understanding how gender discrimination affects women of color. Denying that issues like sexual objectification, harassment, and assault occurs in communities of color harms women of color and forces them to choose between political agendas which affect both of their experiences as women and people of color. Political intersectionality might show-up in the professional lives of CSAOs when they are asked to advocate for racial equity on campus, or are asked to be a voice for the experiences of people of color, but may not be included in similar conversations about gender equity. When racial political issues are represented in the dominant paradigm as men of color issues, and when feminist political issues are represented in the dominant paradigm as White women issues, women of color fall into a gap in which they are not being viewed, represented, or held as individuals who experience both racism and sexism.

Representational intersectionality includes both the ways in which popular images are produced through a merging of dominant narratives of race and gender, as well as, “a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). Representational intersectionality provides a way to understand how

beliefs about women of color are built and maintained by how their intersectional interests are represented, misrepresented, or not represented in the media. Crenshaw discusses rap music as an example in the 1990 obscenity prosecution of the rap group, 2 Live Crew. A Black male proponent of the group's innocence explained that the lyrics were not misogynistic because Black Americans enjoy rap music, and stated that Black men's sexual lives are often more scrutinized than White male's sexual lives. Crenshaw agreed with the latter, but argued that the members of 2 Live Crew cannot claim an in-group privilege to perpetuate misogynist language towards Black women, because even though they share a racial identity with Black women, they also benefit from a power relationship over them as men. A contemporary example of representational intersectionality can be found when organizers against police brutality share the killings of men of color at the hands of police, but fail to share the rates at which women of color suffer similar fates. Black women make up 6.6 percent of the United States population, yet account for 33% of all women killed by police according to the African American Policy Forum (American Community Survey, 2016; Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Representational intersectionality provides a way to understand how social constructs of the intersections of race and gender are developed and replicated.

Intersectionality in Higher Education Research

Intersectionality suggests that the confluence of systems of subordination shape individual experiences in distinct ways (Crenshaw, 1993). Intersectionality, as a theory, was developed to examine the gap in understanding that women of color are members of two social identity groups, and are often rendered invisible due to the structural, political, and representational issues that impact the intersection of their identities. Intersectionality has been utilized in both qualitative and quantitative higher education research as a framework and a

methodological approach (Bowleg, 2012; Bowleg, 2008; Núñez, 2014; Strayhorn 2017).

Intersectionality has been utilized to provide attention to the roles of interconnected domains of power and social identities in the reproduction of inequalities on campus (Anthias, 2013; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Hurtado et al, 2012; Núñez, 2014). Bowleg (2008) illustrated how to appropriately apply the framework without reducing the theory to a mathematical equation of race + gender, by sharing examples of how she has incorrectly applied the theory to her studies on Black Lesbians. Bowleg (2008) reminds researchers employing an intersectional framework that, “social identities and inequality are interdependent for groups such as Black lesbians, not mutually exclusive” (p. 312). This means that researchers should not ask participants to rank their identities and that researchers should allow the participants to explain which experiences resonate with their identities.

Strayhorn (2017) asserts that Intersectionality should be adopted more in higher education and student affairs research:

Adopting intersectionality in higher education research practice has several advantages over single-axis logics that ignore how oppressive power really works, monocausal explanations that attempt to identify a single or “most important” cause of an effect, and attend to investigations of college students’ experiences that might satisfy statistical assumptions but violate real-life attributions, contradictions, energies, frustrations, and imaginations. (p. 60)

In fact, intersectionality has been utilized as a framework in more recent studies in higher education. In 2014, a book titled, *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis*, was released which featured 22 chapters of studies engaging the theory in higher education research (Mitchell, Simmons, Greyerbiehl, 2014). Scholars have employed the

structural, political, and representational tenets of intersectionality to analyze sexual violence towards Asian American and Pacific Islander women in higher education (Museus & Saelua, 2014). Other studies have used intersectionality to examine how Black women and Latinas bring their multiple identities into collegiate classrooms and found that voice and silence for Black women and Latinas is never neutral or without meaning (Perdomo, 2014).

Intersectionality is a useful analytical approach for the examination of how social identities and societal contexts constrain or support women of color, without defaulting to what Strayhorn (2017) explains as single-axis logics. Throughout Intersectionality's history of being employed by academics and activists, the framework has assisted researchers in revealing how power and overlapping identities work in nuanced ways, and which systems need to be dismantled when trying to build equity (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). In this dissertation, Intersectionality was used as a tool to gain a greater understanding of the ways women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers navigated their identities professionally, how they were prepared, throughout their education and career, to navigate their racial and gendered identities, and in what ways they mentored young professionals.

Rationale. The framework was appropriate for women of color who serve as CSAOs because it revealed what was occurring at the overlap of social forces that often creates a double-bind for women of color. The creator of Intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989), was also involved in the development of Critical Race Theory and Critical Feminist Theory (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). These theories were influenced by Intersectionality, and vice versa. Although the selected theoretical framework is connected to Critical Race Theory and Critical Feminist Theory in its acknowledgement of the centrality of racism and sexism, and its desire to influence action, Intersectionality was chosen because it gives the researcher flexibility in selecting which

social identity categories and associated forms of power and privilege to address (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Núñez, 2014). Intersectionality better informed the research problem and questions because of this flexibility. The framework was applied in its original form by analyzing the identities, and attached societal systems of oppression, of race and gender. The framework was appropriate for this research on women of color who serve as CSAOs, because the researcher will be scrutinizing how societal structures of oppression, discrimination and domination are connected to the women's social identities. As a framework, Intersectionality has been applied to the study of legal structures, political movements, Queer studies, sociology, and social psychology (Cole, 2009; Chan & Erby, 2017; Mohanty, 1986; Mohanty, 2003; Mohanty, 2013; Spade, 2013; Verloo, 2013). Ultimately, Intersectionality was selected because it allowed for a more nuanced and complicated way in examining the research problem.

Connection to research problem. Crenshaw has described how women of color exist in and navigate through a racist patriarchy, in which they must negotiate their racial and gender identities to survive and thrive daily (Crenshaw, 2017). This study revealed how women of color have navigated their intersecting identities of race and gender in their positions as CSAOs. The framework was connected to the research problem which involved a systemic lack of equitable representation of women of color in upper leadership positions in higher education. The theory also assisted in critically capturing the social inequalities that disproportionately affect women of color, many of which were revealed in the experiences that the participants shared. The three tenets of Intersectionality, structural, political, and representational, were utilized to analyze participants' shared experiences as women of color CSAOs. The framework aided in examining how the women's identities affected their daily career experiences, and how the interlocking systems of oppression and discrimination interfaced with their experiences. In

this way, Intersectionality was used as both theory and praxis, which is a suggested use of the framework (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Núñez, 2014). This research study aspires to, “further illuminate how interlocking systems of power, privilege and domination shape higher education equity and opportunity for groups from unique social identities” (Núñez, 2014, p. 40) with the goal to add to the research on women of color in student affairs leadership, and potentially influence the creation of more equitable opportunities for women of color in student affairs.

CHAPTER 3

The purpose of this study was to explore how women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) navigated both their racial and gender identities in their professional role, how the women were prepared for this identity navigation throughout their career, and how the CSAOs mentored younger professional women of color. A qualitative study, using a phenomenological method and intersectional theoretical framework, was conducted amongst women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) at four-year colleges or universities. Semi-structured, recorded, interviews, coupled with a demographic questionnaire were the primary sources of data collection. The following sections outline the details of the research methods, including, but not limited to, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

The main research question was, *how do women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) navigate both their racial and gender identities in their professional, campus role?* The sub-questions for this study were:

- How were the women of color CSAO's prepared, throughout their education and career, to navigate their racial and gendered identities?
- In what ways do women of color CSAO's mentor other women of color student affairs professionals?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was best for this study, because it allowed for data collection which provided rich information about participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Creswell states that, "qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (2013,

p. 4). Qualitative research design is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to “understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning a situation has for those involved, or delineate process” (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). A quantitative design would not provide the rich data necessary to answer the research questions. A qualitative approach was ultimately the most appropriate research design to answer the research questions which focused on the shared experiences of participants in relation to their career position and social identities.

Phenomenology is the philosophical name for the qualitative method of investigating or inquiring into the meanings of the lived experiences of participants through a shared phenomenon, or shared experience (Van Manen, 2014). The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of participants and develop common themes related to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological methodology was selected due to its focus on describing the participants’ experiences with the shared phenomenon of being women of color navigating those identities as CSAOs at predominantly white institutions. In this study, the shared experiences of the women varied based on time at the institution and location of the institution, but overall, there was found to be several shared experiences connected to navigating marginalized identities, in a senior leadership role, at a predominantly white institution. Phenomenological research is concerned with the experience as it is described from the perspective of the participants (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This emphasis on describing the participant’s experiences as they are related to the researcher is an important part of phenomenology. Intersectionality has been described as a framework that, “one could use to argue, explain, and understand phenomena” (Strayhorn, 2017, p. 57). Therefore, the exploration of phenomena made Intersectionality a complimentary partner to the selected methodological approach of phenomenology.

Critical constructivism was selected as the epistemological framework. Constructivism as described by Jonassen (1991) refers to how reality is produced by the observer. In traditional constructivism, the researcher forms reality or their truth, by giving meaning to what is observed and heard. Critical constructivism problematizes both positivism and traditional constructivism by rejecting that anything can be neutral, including the observed and the observer, due to the oppressive system that we all operate under (Freire, 1970). Critical constructivism asserts that the historical, social, cultural, economic and political context construct and influence our perspectives on the world, self, and others (Kincehloe, 2005). More specifically, while a person's perspective of the world may be valid for them, the social identities and experiences of that person also influences, or constructs, their worldview. Since this study is researching identities in particular, and is being conducted by a researcher who shares identities with the participants, critical constructivism is an important framework to name.

Participant Selection

The recruitment goal for this study was ten to twelve participants, due to the need of the researcher to deeply understand the participants' shared experiences as women of color CSAOs (Bowleg, 2008; Strayhorn, 2017; Van Manen, 2014). Creswell (2013) states that saturation occurs when fresh data no longer reveals new understandings. In total, eleven participants were recruited for this study, and data saturation was met with the eleven participants. A population size of larger than twelve would have proven difficult in the data collection and data analysis phase, if Intersectionality was to be applied correctly as an analytical lens (Strayhorn, 2017). The centrality of deeply understanding and engaging with the data was evident in both Intersectionality as a theoretical framework and phenomenology as a methodological approach (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Strayhorn, 2017; Van Manen, 2014).

All participants had to identify as women of color. Women of color was defined as any non-white identified women, including biracial and multiracial women who may have one white parent. The term “woman” is being used, and not the term “female”, because "female" is a scientific term that refers to the biological sex of a species, that has the reproductive organs to bear children (Brown, 2015). In contrast, the term "woman" refers specifically to human beings and acknowledges that being a woman is more than just having sexual reproductive organs (Brown, 2015). Transgender and cisgender participants were eligible to participate in this study, but had to self-identify as women, and openly identify as such in the workplace. A sample of women of color from various racial and ethnic samples was intentionally sought, included but not limited to; Latinx women, African American/Black women, Indigenous women, Pacific-Islander women, Middle Eastern women, and Asian American women. Other parts of the women’s identity were not be used to exclude them from the study. For example, women who identify as gender non-conforming or who identity as homosexual, were eligible to be included in the study, if they identify as women of color. The participants must be currently employed as Chief Student Affairs Officers at four-year colleges or universities, in the United States. Participants can be employed at private or public, predominantly white institutions.

The theoretical framework of Intersectionality was applied to participant selection by allowing women of color with social identities outside of just marginalized racial and gender identities to participate. The framework was also applied when reviewing interested participant’s demographic surveys to select a diverse participant group that is representative of various racial, ethnic, and other identity backgrounds. Overall, only heterosexual women of color, namely Black, Latinx, and biracial women, participated in this study. This was one of the limitations of the study, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Recruitment Strategy

Network sampling and snowball sampling was utilized to recruit participants for this study (Miles & Huberman, 2004; Creswell, 2013). First, the researcher leveraged their network in student affairs and in NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) to gain access to this population. The researcher serves on several NASPA leadership boards and therefore had access to NASPA email listservs. The researcher emailed NASPA listservs with a call for participants, posted an announcement for participants on Facebook, and utilized colleagues and friends to share the announcement with their Chief Student Affairs Officers who identified as women of color. In this manner, network sampling was employed to find a larger segment of a group or community that is tied together by some common relationship, like a racial and gender identity (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004; Trotter, 2012). After initial participants responded and were confirmed as participants, the researcher employed the snowball sampling process. Snowball sampling includes utilizing recruited participants to refer other women of color CSAOs, in their networks, to the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The researcher secured two of the participants through the snowball sampling process. The researcher aspired to build a diverse sample of races and ethnicities, institutional types, sexualities, socioeconomic status, education level, and years in the field of higher education, therefore a brief survey was sent to potential participants to gather this information and then use it in participant selection. The researcher hoped to then select a diverse pool from these demographic surveys, but since there was difficulty in finding the eleven participants, the researcher interviewed the first eleven participants that responded. Racially speaking, the participants represented Black, Latinx, and Biracial women.

Data Collection

Researcher openness to the experiences that participants will be sharing is called epoche, and epoche is the first step in phenomenological data collection (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). Epoche asks that the researcher begin the study bias-free and without any assumptions or hypotheses. Bracketing, in phenomenological research, allowed the researcher to parse out these assumptions to enable openness and active listening while collecting and coding data (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). A journal was kept by the researcher to ensure that bracketing and researcher reflexivity was occurring throughout the research process. The journal also assisted the researcher in synthesizing initial commonalities and differences across the participant's experiences. Next, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, and the goal was to interview each participant at least once for one hour. Before each interview, a demographic questionnaire was sent to the participants to gather name, salient social identities, name of university, and institutional type. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather background and career information to reduce the time spent on these questions in the interview. Additionally, resumes were collected from participants to evaluate years in the field, previous positions held, and details of current position held. Only seven of the participants submitted resumes, so the resumes were not used in data analysis.

Each interview began with a brief review of the collected background information. Background questions are defined as questions that, "refer to the particular demographics (social identities, education, number of years on the job, etc.) of the person being interviewed as relevant to the research study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 97). The researcher also answered these questions with the participant in an attempt to be transparent about their identities and experiences. These questions assisted with rapport building and gave the opportunity for the

interviewee to answer questions that could be easily answered without a high level of reflection necessary.

Semi-structured interviews consist of a pre-determined set of open-ended questions to elicit detailed descriptions of experiences from participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Merriam (2009) describes the semi-structured interview as being more “open-ended and less structured” (p. 90). The less structured approach suited this study well, because it allowed for more flexibility during interviews. Semi-structured interviews gave the researcher the ability to prompt further discussion on a question, and even insert or adjust the list of pre-determined questions brought to the interview. Open-ended interview questions were appropriate for this phenomenological study because they created space for participants to describe their experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews took place over the phone to account for the likelihood that participants were in various locations across the United States. Participants were given the option to use Skype or Google Hangout, but none of the participants selected this option. Interviews were recorded on the researcher’s computer, and through a recording device on the researcher’s cell phone. After each interview was completed and transcribed, the initial transcriptions were sent back to each participant for member checking. Member checking allowed the participant to review their transcription for errors, additions, and edits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A full discussion of research quality will be discussed in a later section.

The theoretical framework, Intersectionality, was applied to the research study to analyze participant interviews (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality was coupled with a phenomenological interview protocol to ensure the creation of strong, intersectional, open-ended, and semi-structured interview questions which allowed for the sharing of all social identities that influenced the participants’ experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). These questions were designed to

allow participants to share the breadth of their experiences and multitude of social identities that shape those experiences (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Therefore, the interview questions invited participants to discuss all dimensions of their identity and experiences, rather than only allowing the participant to reflect on the two or more identities being studied by the researcher. An example of an intersectional question was, “Discuss what it’s like to be a woman of color Chief Student Affairs Officer?” Phenomenology requires that participants are asked two broad questions about their experiences: (1) what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? (2) What contexts and situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis

Intersectionality demanded that the researcher listen deeply to all the identity-based experiences that participants might share, to build an intersectional understanding of how their marginalized identities, and the attached systems of oppression, impacted their experiences (Bowleg, 2008; Strayhorn, 2017). Once the interviews were completed, multiple steps were used for data analysis. To begin, Moustakas (1994) outlined systematic steps of phenomenological data analysis. First, the researcher reviewed the data and removed any statements that were irrelevant to the phenomenon being studied. This cleaning-up of the data left behind “horizons”, which are defined as the substantial meanings and remnants of the phenomenon. This assisted the researcher in cleaning up the data through the lens of the research questions and theoretical framework to ensure that the phenomena was being reviewed accurately.

The second step involves reduction, or assigning codes to the horizons. Reduction, as defined in phenomenology, is the focusing-in on the meaning of the phenomenon as described by the participants (Van Manen, 2014). Each code was assigned one meaning and described the

phenomena. Codes were assigned for each transcript, and the researcher tried to assign codes without being influenced by the codes in other participant's transcripts, to ensure that the phenomenon described by each participant was reviewed equitably.

Next, after cleaning up the data and reducing the experiences into initial codes, the theoretical framework was applied for a-priori theoretical coding to discover key concepts through the lens of Intersectionality (Saldaña, 2013). Intersectionality was applied to the initial codes to uncover examples in the participant's experiences that related to the three tenets of the theory: (a) structural, (b) political, and (c) representational intersectionality. In this way, the researcher was able to find examples in the participant's description of the phenomenon that related to the theoretical framework. This assisted in illuminating how the intersection of the participant's identities influenced them as Chief Student Affairs Officers.

In the fourth step, the individual narratives of the participants were crafted into "textural descriptions" using excerpts and direct quotes from the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions are defined as the descriptions of the experience. It is important that the construction of the participant descriptions occurred in a narrative form to guide the understanding of participants' individual experiences, which assisted in understanding the essence of the shared experience. These narrative descriptions assisted the researcher in understanding the totality of experiences for each participant, while also assisting in finding the shared experiences across the narratives.

In the fifth step, the construction of individual participant textural descriptions was crafted into structural descriptions, which are defined as the context of the experience. In this way the researcher contextualized the experiences of each participant based on their identities, time in the field, and time at the institution to evaluate if there were additional similarities or

differences in experiences. Once codes were assigned, and initial themes began to emerge, the researcher met with her committee chair to discuss the initial findings. This peer debriefing allowed the researcher to communicate what was appearing in the data and organize the findings into the final themes. These themes are unpacked in the Findings chapter.

In the sixth step, the individual descriptions were compiled and re-structured as summative descriptions, or themes, with the goal to find the essence of the shared experiences with the specific phenomena. This essence is the full experience of the phenomenon. In the final step, the goal towards the full essence of the experience was synthesized to consist of what occurred and how it occurred, and described a universal description of the phenomenon of being a women of color Chief Student Affairs Officer. The theoretical framework and literature review were also deployed to assist the researcher in unpacking the findings in relation to the phenomenon. Throughout the process, the researcher utilized a journal to track initial codes, themes, and to unpack her connection between the data, literature review, and theoretical framework.

Researcher Identity

Next, in the spirit of intersectionality, the researcher will share her various social identities and acknowledge how they might impact the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher identifies as a biracial Latina (White and Cuban-American), cis-gendered woman, able-bodied, heterosexual, who grew up in a low-socioeconomic status household, but is now comfortably middle-class. The researcher holds both marginalized and privileged identities. The researcher has a master's degree in higher education administration and has been employed in various positions on college campuses for about seven years. The researcher is currently employed at a private, predominantly white institution in New Orleans, Louisiana. The

researcher aspires to upper leadership in educational administration. The researcher herself has encountered a myriad of positive and negative career and personal-life experiences attributed to her racial and gender identities. The researcher has also received mixed-messages from others in the field of higher education regarding how to navigate her social identities throughout her career. Lastly, the researcher actively seeks women of color as mentors, and mentors several undergraduate, women of color. Overall, the researcher's identities and experiences have had a large impact on the topic being studied. The researcher acknowledges that these characteristics have influenced the research design and may influence the data analysis process. The following steps will be applied to ensure trustworthiness and limit researcher bias.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of these qualitative research findings was the responsibility of the researcher and should be the goal of any study (Patton, 2001). In quantitative research, trustworthiness is similar to the validity and reliability of the study. For qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that establishing the trustworthiness of a research study is imperative to determining its worth. There are four components to establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). How the researcher established trustworthiness of the data will be reported, next.

Credibility. Credibility is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the “inquiry in such a way that the probability that findings will be found to be credible is enhanced” (p. 296). In short, credibility allows for assurance in the certainty of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined several techniques for establishing credibility, including, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member-checking. For the purposes of this dissertation, credibility was

established through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Triangulation incorporates using multiple data sources to produce a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2001). The researcher utilized a triangulation of sources to examine the consistency of different data sources in the same method, by studying CSAO women of color with varying social identities, and across different institutional types. Peer debriefing is a process in which the researcher discusses the data analyses process and initial findings with a disinterested peer to check for implicit biases and assumptions, and to test emerging themes and hypotheses for plausibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher engaged in peer debriefing by discussing and developing the themes with an adviser. Lastly, member checking occurred by sending interview transcripts and the initial data interpretations to the participants to edit, provide clarity, or add the intentions behind their statements that may have been missed by the researcher.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the generalization or applicability of the research findings to further contexts and situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved through thick description, meaning the researcher richly described the phenomenon through detailed accounts of the participant's experiences, and the patterns that arose across the participants' shared experiences. These descriptions can be found in the Findings chapter.

Dependability. Dependability is the ability to show that findings are consistent if another researcher were to attempt to replicate this study. Dependability can be assured by describing the research methods clearly and by providing detailed notes of the entire research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher achieved this through field notes to keep track of the research design, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and any adjustments to

the study. The researcher utilized the committee chair as an external auditor to review that the researcher's conclusions were supported by the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Confirmability. Lastly, confirmability is the degree of researcher neutrality and bias in the findings of the study. The findings should be shaped by the participant responses and not the researcher's biases or motivations. This was maintained through a journal to bracket out researcher's biases and to practice researcher reflexivity. Like dependability, confirmability was achieved through an audit trail which included maintaining the raw data and keeping methodological notes throughout the entire research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The main ethical considerations for this study will be the maintenance of participant's confidentiality and protection of the data. Due to the participant's high-profile campus leadership role as Chief Student Affairs Officers, and the likelihood that the women of color will be sharing sensitive issues that they have experienced in their work roles, confidentiality and protection of the data is imperative. Confidentiality will be ensured by using pseudonyms in interview transcriptions and in the findings. The interview recordings, interview transcriptions, and subsequent data will be protected through password protected drives maintained by the researcher.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study, grounded in an Intersectional framework, will examine how women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers navigate both their racial and gender identities in their professional role, how they were prepared to navigate these identities throughout their career, and in what ways they mentor professionals who share their identities as women of color. This dissertation proposal has grounded the research problem in data, reviewed

the relevant literature that relates to the research questions, connected the theoretical framework to the study, and outlined the research methods. Overall, this study seeks to add to the small body of research that explores how women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers navigate their identities in a White and male dominated workplace.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

There is an established problem in the rates of women of color who ascend to upper-leadership in student affairs (Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This study sought to discover how women of color, who are currently serving as a Chief Student Affairs Officer, navigate their racial and gender identities in their professional role. Chief Student Affairs Officer was defined as the senior leader in the division of student affairs at a four-year institution. The main research question was, how do women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) navigate both their racial and gender identities in their professional, campus role? The sub-questions for this study were:

- How were the women of color CSAO's prepared, throughout their education and career, to navigate their racial and gendered identities?
- In what ways do women of color CSAO's mentor other women of color student affairs professionals?

During the interviews, the participants described their experiences with the shared phenomenon of being women of color navigating their social identities as CSAOs. Phenomenological research is concerned with the experience as it is described from the perspective of the participants, which is why a phenomenological qualitative method was selected for this study (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The research findings reported in this chapter were analyzed through the use of the following data sources: semi-structured interviews and demographic questionnaires. The theoretical framework of Intersectionality was applied to illuminate the structural, political, and representational aspects of intersectionality that may be experienced amongst the participants.

Chapter 4 is organized into two main sections. In the first section descriptions of each participant will be shared. Eleven women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers were interviewed for the study. Pseudonyms have been selected to maintain the anonymity of participants. In the second section themes that emerged during data analysis will be unpacked and analyzed. The shared experiences, or findings, of participants, were categorized into three main themes: (1) The Role of Identities in Career, (2) Drive and Motivation, and (3) Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus.

Participants

Eleven participants were successfully recruited for this study throughout the Summer of 2018. Interviews occurred over the phone and lasted on average, 55 minutes. Participants all currently served as the Chief Student Affairs Officer at a public, four-year college or university, in the United States, and identify as women of color. Eight of the women racially identified as Black or African-American, two of the women identified as Hispanic or Latina, and one of the women identified as multiracial and Black. The women ranged in age from 35 to 67 years old, with the average age being 56 years old. All but two participants had earned a doctoral degree. The other two held a Masters in Arts and Juris Doctor degree, respectively. Further demographics of the participants can be viewed in Table 4.1. Next, a brief description of each participant will be outlined.

Eva. Eva identifies as a multiracial and Black woman. She also identifies as a first-generation college student. Eva has worked in higher education and student affairs for 11 years, and has held the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer at her campus for about 2 years. She became interested in campus leadership as an undergraduate through the encouragement and mentorship of a woman of color student affairs professional.

Bug. Bug identifies as an African American woman. She also identifies as a first-generation college student who grew up poor. Bug has worked in higher education and student affairs for 46 years, and has held the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer at her institution for 10 years. She has held multiple senior leadership roles for the past 20 years. One of her favorite things about her current role is being able to mentor and help students and young professionals.

Rose. Rose identifies as a Black woman, wife, mother, grandmother and a first-generation college student. Rose has worked in higher education and student affairs for 23 years and has served as the Chief Student Affairs Officer at her institution for 12 years. Rose became interested in higher education and student affairs through her campus involvement in undergrad. One of her favorite things about her role is being able to have a seat at the leadership table in order to make informed decisions that impact her entire campus.

Tava. Tava identifies as an African American woman. She has worked in higher education and student affairs for 20 years. Tava has held multiple roles outside of the field of higher education including roles at advocacy agencies. Tava's favorite thing about her role is being able to strategically shape the overall student experience at the university.

Lana. Lana identifies as an African American/Black woman. Lana has worked in higher education for about 20 years and has served as the Chief Student Affairs Officer at her institution for under two years. Lana entered the field of higher education and student affairs because of her passion for serving underrepresented students. Her favorite thing about her role is being able to serve students at a different level as a senior leader.

Ria. Ria identifies as a Hispanic woman and a first-generation college student. Ria has been a Chief Student Affairs Officer at multiple institutions for the past 20 years. She entered the

field after a career in mental health care. Her favorite thing about her role is being able to execute policies and programs that address the needs of students with great impact.

Alma. Alma identifies as a Black woman and a mom. Alma has been a Chief Student Affairs Officer for eight years and has worked in higher education and student affairs for about 25 years. Her favorite thing about her roles is being the student voice on the senior leadership team in order to impact student success at a macro-level.

Virginia. Virginia identifies as an African American woman and a first-generation college student. Virginia did not plan on a career in higher education and student affairs, but has worked in the field for over 40 years. She has served as the Chief Student Affairs Officer at her campus for 13 years. Virginia's favorite thing about her role is seeing students graduate and become successful individuals.

Viola. Viola identifies as an African American woman, a woman with a disability, a Christian, and a first-generation college student who grew-up poor. Viola became interested in a career in higher education and student affairs through her undergraduate involvement and the support she received as an undergraduate student. She has worked in the field for 44 years and has held Chief Student Affairs Officer roles for the past 27 years. Her favorite thing about her role is being able to make a difference in the lives of individual students.

Zara. Zara identifies as a Black woman, a first-generation college student, and a Christian. Zara has worked in higher education and student affairs for 33 years and has served as a Chief Student Affairs Officer for 9 years. Zara did not plan on a career in higher education. Her favorite thing about her role is having an impact on students at a critical part of their lives.

Olivia. Olivia identifies as a Latina woman and a first-generation college student. Olivia has worked in higher education and student affairs for over 20 years and has served as the Chief

Student Affairs Officer at her campus for 6 years. Her favorite thing about her role is giving a voice to marginalized students and having a positive impact on the student experience.

Table 4.1 *Participant's Demographics*

Name	Education	Race	Ethnicity	Sex & Gender	Age	Pronouns	Additional salient social identities
Eva	Ph.D	Multiracial	Black	Female/ Female	35	she/her/hers	Christian, partnered, women's fraternity member, fitness instructor, lover of soca music
Bug	Ph.D	African American	Non-Hispanic	Female/Female	67	she/her/hers	None
Rose	Ph.D	Black	n/a	Female/Female	62	she/her/hers	Wife, mother, grandmother, first generation college student
Tava	J.D	African American	Non-Hispanic	Female/Female	62	she/her/hers	n/a
Lana	Ph.D	Black/ African American	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female/Female	45	she/her/hers	Race and gender are most salient
Ria	Ed.D	Hispanic	Hispanic	Female/Female	62	she/her/hers	n/a
Alma	Ed.D	Black	n/a	Female/Female	n/a	n/a	n/a
Virginia	Ph.D	African American	Black, non-Hispanic	Female/Female	63	she/her/hers	n/a
Viola	Ph.D	African American	African American	Female/Female	n/a	n/a	n/a
Zara	Ph.D	Black	African American	Female/Female	57	she/her/hers	First generation college student, Christian, singer, foodie
Olivia	Masters	Latina	Latina	Female/Female	n/a	she/her/hers	n/a

Findings

This study sought to understand the shared experiences of being a woman of color Chief Student Affairs Officer, specifically in regards to how they navigate their identities in their professional, campus role. The study provided space for the women leaders to share their personal experiences, reflect on messages they received about their identities, and share advice to others in the field of student affairs. The shared experiences of participants were categorized into three emergent themes: (1) The Role of Identities in Career, (2) Drive and Motivation, and (3) Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus. Data analysis revealed that the participants shared many experiences. The themes that emerged indicated that the women of color had a strong sense of who they were, specifically rooted in their racial and gender identities, and shared a passion for making a difference in the lives of students and colleagues. That passion for making a difference was also deeply rooted in their identities as women of color, who had navigated and continue to navigate predominantly white and male spaces. The women of color in this study were also used to being the only one with their identities in most of the senior leadership spaces they found themselves in, which further propelled their passion to be a voice for marginalized students, faculty and staff. In the following sections, the experiences of the participants will be discussed, in their own words, and organized according to the themes. Overall, the findings below indicate that campuses are still challenging places for women of color to navigate, even at the senior leadership level, and that women of color are motivated by their own identity experiences to create more inclusivity and equity on campus for marginalized students.

The Role of Identities in Career

The role of identities in career is an overarching theme in this study. The various social identities that the women of color held in this study were salient to their experiences as Chief

Student Affairs Officers. All of the participants were able to articulate how their identities impacted various aspects of their career and role on campus. The women of color were clear in their beliefs that their identities impacted everything around them, most importantly how they approach and experience their work. They also shared messages they had received growing up as women of color, namely that they would need to be prepared to work harder than others. Tava elaborates on this point when she describes how she feels her racial identity of being an African American was the identity discussed more in her family than her gender identity. Tava shares:

And I think it's also the one (race), that when you're raised, you know, as you grow up with the elders in your family, with the mentors that you have along the way, you know, there's those messages, you know "you have to work smarter, and harder you know, if you're African American", that's how I was raised anyway, but they didn't say that about me being a woman.

This messaging, shared by several of the participants, aligns with the theoretical framework, Intersectionality, which focuses on the overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is specifically rooted in how the experiences of women of color differ from white women, and the participants noted how their experiences differed from their white or male colleagues.

Participants also shared that their marginalized identities often made them more passionate about fighting and advocating for the underdogs on campus, specifically other marginalized students, staff or faculty. As women of color, they brought their full selves, including all of their identities, to the table to assist colleagues in understanding the experiences of marginalized or silenced populations on campus. This theme had several sub themes

including: (1) The Only One, (2) Under a Microscope, (3) Imposter Syndrome, (4) Experiences with Stereotypes and Microaggressions, and (5) Pride.

The only one. The compounded stress of “being the only one in the room” and having to “prove one’s worth” is a common theme in studies about the experiences of women of color leaders who advance their careers in higher education (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017; Scott, 2016; Turner, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong; 2011). Both of these concepts were found in this study. Every participant in this study was either the only woman of color, woman, or person of color at senior-level meetings or events at their campus. This impacted several aspects of their experiences as Chief Student Affairs Officers. First, they were hyper-aware that they stood out as the only one representative of their identities. Second, it created a sense of vulnerability as the only one in various spaces, third, it created exhausting situations where they always had to speak on behalf of their communities. Olivia describes how she feels like she is extremely noticeable at fundraising dinners as a woman of color, where the only other people of color in the space were herself and “the help”. She states:

I would show up at houses, you know I got this look of shock and I would, I told some of my friends, I felt like a unicorn the way they would look at me, like oh my god, I’ve never seen one of you! Or, you’re not what I expected-was expecting to be at my house...so I could be at one of these events at someone’s house with 40 or 50 parents, and, you know, they have help come in to set up chairs, food, and all of that, and serve people and so the only people of color in that space would be me and the help.

Several of the participants had similar reflections to describe how they could move throughout their day at senior leadership meetings and events and either not see other women, people of

color, or women of color. For example, Viola described how she has always been the only one, throughout most of her career:

I have always been the only person of color, and when I say that I really mean the only African American and person of color - not just person of color, but no African

American, I had not interacted with no other women of color in my Vice President roles.

This hyperawareness of identities and being the only one created situations where participants would question whether they were “enough” to be in the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer. Olivia shared that she often felt this way especially “in rooms with highly educated people”, and that this may have also been tied to her identity as first-generation college student. Virginia mentioned that she has to constantly remind herself that she belongs in the role because she has earned the credentials and performs solid work. Virginia explained:

It’s ok to be the only one sometimes in the crowd. I’ve been the only one a lot - in most of my life, in somethin’, um but I don’t let that define me or feel like I, you know, I can’t- I know what I have, my credentials speak for myself, my work speaks for me, and um I, so I feel like I can be that role model for people on how to be successful.

She uses the opportunity to represent for women of color and to be a role model for other women of color aspiring to leadership roles in student affairs. These feelings of not being enough will be further elaborated upon in the imposter syndrome theme section.

The women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers also noted that their identities often meant that they were called upon to serve as the diversity representative on campus committees. They reported that they felt a need to serve on these committees to represent women of color perspectives, but also were exhausted from being pulled into so many meetings. This is reflective of representational intersectionality, specifically, the aspect of feeling the need to represent one’s

identities in various spaces so as to not be misunderstood or erased by dominant perspectives (Crenshaw, 1989). Tava mentions sometimes refusing to be that spokesperson for her community:

And so you know you often get the question, “well how do folks in the black community feel? You know... and I say, ‘well you might want to go to the black community and ask them!’ You know, I’m not the spokesperson for the community!

Rose reported that being the only one meant that she finds herself being in the middle of identity matters on campus, and has to manage the stress of being one of few while advocating for students with marginalized backgrounds during incidents of bias on campus. In fact, most of the women of color could describe how they often felt caught in the middle of campus racial bias incidents in which they were also deeply hurting, while also having to support students. Rose questioned:

How do I help students all students, but particularly our students of color, understand that I do have their best interests at heart and I can relate to what they’re going through and, so, it’s hard sometimes sort-of being in that middle.

These experiences connect to aspects of the theoretical framework, specifically political intersectionality which Crenshaw (1991) explains as, “the need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront” (p. 1252).

Under a microscope. The women shared experiences of feeling like they were constantly under a microscope, having to work harder than others, and needing to be more prepared than their peers and colleagues due to their multiple marginalized identities. The Chief Student Affairs Officers in this study expressed that they experienced a societal pressure to have

to do well since they were representing their communities in a visible, leadership role. Ria shares:

I wanted to make sure that I did the best job I could, which I think puts pressure on oneself to do the best and it can be, it can be stressful at times, but I hope that in the long run that I've done a good enough job that people will want to hire, if you will, more Hispanic women.

Ria expresses a fear that if she does not perform well that other women of color will be affected, and may not be hired as a result. This aspect of being lumped together with the performance of other women of color was also expressed by Tava who shared that, "members of the majority culture can very much be seen as individuals with individual experiences and backgrounds" but that is not the case for people of color. Women of color are judged more harshly than their white and male counterparts due to racist and sexist structures that subordinate them on multiple levels. This phenomenon is outlined in Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality as an example of structural intersectionality (1991).

The leaders lamented that they play into this idea of having to work harder than others, often to their own disadvantage. Lana reported that she has always received messages about having to work harder as a woman of color and she has internalized those messages. She states that, "I will tell everybody, you cannot out work me, I guarantee it, there is not a person who can outwork me, and I don't say that as a boastful place, I say that from a disturbed place!" For Lana, this constant strive to outwork others has cost her not being able to explore other paths in life such as getting married or having children, both of which she regrets not pursuing earlier in her career. Viola also regretted not getting married and shared, "I'm not married, and that is probably one regret that I have about my career and how I chose to navigate it and how I chose to do it."

For both Lana and Viola, these regrets were not expanded upon at length but rather were shared as costs to how they have navigated their careers, and for that reason are important to mention.

Not only were the women of color concerned with having to outperform their peers for fear of being judged more harshly, but they also felt the need to be more prepared in the workplace than others. Their hyper-consciousness of appearing professional at all times manifested in several ways, one of which was the need to dress more professionally than others. Eva, in particular, mentioned that she felt the need to look more professional in order to remain a credible authority figure, meanwhile other senior-level leaders did not have to share this concern. Eva elaborates:

I'm very mindful of the way I , I talk, the way I carry myself, the way I dress, I don't get to come to work, for example, I don't get to come to work wearing a polo and khakis, I have others that are on the leadership team, white males specifically, who get to come that way.

This specific example relates back to the literature review, particularly Enke's (2014) study which revealed that women higher education leaders felt a need to dress more professionally than their male colleagues to exude authority and to prove that they deserved to be at the senior leadership level. Most of the women also experienced the need to present more research, data, and facts to prove anything they might be advocating for in a meeting. Eva describes this phenomenon succinctly:

Others have the opportunity to say they don't know or not have all their facts, or to not have research or other things to back up how they lead or the information they share, or the issues they advocate for, I am not afforded that same luxury....I have to follow-up

with, and again this is just me throwing out a number, but ten times more research and information than what my counterparts might have to.

These experiences of having to prove that they have earned their place are coupled with colleagues questioning if they deserve to even be in the role. Ria describes how countless times she has heard rumors that colleagues on campus believe she was hired because of her identities, only for them to later return to her and say, “we really get it, why you were selected”. The pressure of being under a microscope, watched and observed at all times, was a shared experience for women of color in the Chief Student Affairs Officer role. The feeling showed up across participant data and was a clear message the women received throughout their ascension to the role, namely that they would be watched more closely than others because of their visible identities.

Imposter syndrome. Related to the women of color feeling like they are under a microscope and must perform better than others is the feeling like they are imposters in their role. Clance and Imes (1978) first coined the term “imposter syndrome” in the 1970s to describe, “an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” (p.1). This psychological phenomenon was a shared experience for the participants. Imposter syndrome showed up mostly in the women feeling like they must always prove that they deserved to be where they were, or that they could outwork anyone in the division. Lana described the feeling as an unhealthy one, stating, “it’s just not, not good, of just wanting to keep grinding as if I have something to prove. It’s just like that imposter syndrome that comes up, yea, a lot.” Some participants attached this action of “constant grinding” to perhaps why they have not been able to build out parts of their personal life, including marriage and families. Rose experienced imposter syndrome a bit differently, in that it

was not so much feeling like she had something to prove, but that she never felt good enough for the role, and is constantly question how she ever made it to a Chief Student Affairs Officer role.

Indicative of imposter syndrome, Rose continues to ask herself:

“Do you really belong? Do you-Can you really do the work? Can you really-you know, there’s so many things you don’t know” and so, anyway, so I certainly, you know, dealt with that and I still deal with that sometimes. Not as much, because I’m older now and I really don’t care as much but earlier on, I think that certainly impacted my career, I think as an African American woman and as a --both as an African American, and as a woman. And, class! And hav-Having grown up poor, you know I-I remember, even now-I can be with my colleagues and they start talking about wine and the different kinds of wine and you know this one came from Italy and I’m sittin’ there like “all I wanna know is if its sweet” ‘cause I don’t - I don’t know, that’s not my background.”

The participant’s experiences with imposter syndrome may indicate that women of color in Chief Student Affairs Officer roles continue to battle internalized feelings of inferiority based on their social identities. Indeed, these feelings are supported by Crenshaw’s (1989) Intersectionality which declares that the intersection of social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination are imperative to understanding and addressing the experiences of women of color.

Experiences with stereotypes and microaggressions. Every participant in this study had experiences with stereotypes, biases and microaggressions in their role as a Chief Student Affairs Officer. The women described incidents of their authority being questioned/not being seen as an authority figure, of not being taken as seriously as white colleagues, and even being perceived as the angry woman of color in leadership. Several participants shared that these

incidents were directly tied to how visible their racial and gender identities were to those around them. The findings from this study align with previous studies which have suggested that the racial and gendered experiences of women of color revolve around the themes of tokenism, hyper awareness of systemic racism and sexism, and misperceptions of leadership styles as the “angry woman of color” or “bitch” stereotype (Scott, 2016; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Turner, 2007). Alma noted that she even received comments from fellow women, particularly white women, about her need to smile more so that she seemed more approachable and less intimidating. Alma described how she handled the situation, explaining:

I knew why she said it, she thought she was being helpful, and so I asked more questions to help her dig a hole for herself and I just said, “Tell me more, why’d you say that?”, and she said, “Well... if people don’t know you then, you’re intimidating” and I said, “Well, whose fault is that? Because you started with if people don’t know me!”

She continued by stating it is hard to tell if comments that colleagues say to her are always driven by identities, since they do not outright attach their comments to her racial or gender identities. The insidious nature of microaggressions and being unsure if that is what people actually meant to say was expressed by several of the women of color. In regards to not being seen as an authority figure, Olivia recalls how faculty members often misperceive her as a secretary:

They see this brown person, um, and it’s just fascinating I mean even around faculty sometimes when they don’t know who I am at first, some of the first parts of the conversation, they’re talking to me like they think I’m not educated, um, you know that maybe I’m a secretary or something like that. And so that’s fascinating to watch

too...when I get introduced or something and my title comes up, to see then how different they are with me after that!

Virginia discussed how constituents both on and off campus often assume that the Chief Student Affairs Officer is a male or white, and that parents or colleagues who she's never met before are shocked that she is a Black woman. Virginia specifically couched this as a challenge for her to navigate, sharing:

I've run more into - run into barriers more from outside people who-who-who either want or feel like there should be a man in the role ... Or who are not sure about your credentials as a Black person. Um, so you know you have to kind of set that straight pretty quick in terms of your, what you- you-know, what you bring to the table. Does it- um I don't let it uh deter me but it's just a little more challenging.

Lana also reported issues with not being perceived as an authority figure, particularly amongst the men who directly reported to her. Lana explains, "I think they have a lot of issue taking direction from a woman and so I think that has been something I had to address head on". All of these quotes and experiences relate to Crenshaw's (1991) concept of representational intersectionality, described as, "a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). People are not used to seeing women of color represented in leadership roles, and this leads to further scrutiny or undermining of their power once they reach those roles.

Other stereotypes that the women experienced included being viewed as difficult to work with, or being told that they were the affirmative action hire for the department. Ria was currently experiencing the latter at the time of this study, specifically she was navigating a rumor on campus that she was only hired because of her identities. She says, "and you know I can

choose to let that eat at me or I can choose to move on, and get things done. I had people come to me later and say, we really get it, why you were selected.” Ultimately, Ria uses these experiences as motivation to prove these people wrong. Zara noted being misperceived as “difficult” by her colleagues, and she thinks that has a lot to do with her identities and the stereotype of the angry, Black woman. Viola had similar experiences with Zara, and Viola lamented that she believed her colleagues label her as angry because she is passionate about issues of equity and inclusion. Unlike the other women of color, Viola also had a disability and this identity played into how she experienced stereotypes and microaggressions on her campus, too. She believed that people were uncomfortable around her disability, “because they’ve never had to work that closely with someone who has a disability but refuses to let that disability stop her in any way.” Viola further gave an example of how her campus human resources department once said to her:

Why don’t you just go out on disability?’ The, the, Associate VP of HR said this to me: ‘We could get you disability, we wouldn’t fight it and we know your doctors would support it.’ Ahh! It’s like what are you saying?

All of the Chief Student Affairs Officers shared experiences and incidents of stereotypes and microaggressions, specifically revolving around being questioned/not being seen as an authority figure, of not being taken as seriously as white colleagues, being perceived as difficult to work with, or even being perceived as the angry woman of color in leadership.

Pride. Over half of the participants mentioned feeling extremely proud to make it to the role of Chief of Student Affairs Officer. The finding is significant, not just because most of the participants shared the feeling of pride, but because it evoked such a strong, positive response from those who mentioned the feeling. According to the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Chief Student Affairs Officer census data, about 47% of the

868 surveyed CSAO's identified as women. Of that 47%, about 13% identified as Black/African American and 6% identified as Latinx women (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This census highlights the disparities in representation between Latinx women, Black/African American women, and White women who serve as CSAO's. With these statistics in mind, it is clear why the women of color CSAO's of this study would feel such immense pride in serving in a senior-level role. Rose and Viola shared that they were so proud and surprised that they would ever make it to such a senior-level position, because they both grew-up Black and poor. Rose even shared how she never aspired to be a CSAO because she never saw herself represented in upper leadership. She states, "every vice president I ever knew was either a man-uh vice president- and back then, a white man, or a woman and definitely usually a white woman." Viola expressed her additional pride in being named president of a predominant national association for student affairs administrators. She describes the feeling as:

That was...I can't even describe it to you. This little poor, Black, skinny girl from Ft. Worth Texas, stop 6, the last stop on the bus had become the president of a national association and I was the first African American, female president, of the association, and I was too proud.

The participants' pride in making it to the role is also connected to their desire to represent for other women, people of color, and women of color at their campuses. Eva discussed this after sharing that she was proud of becoming a CSAO and completing her degree as a first-generation college student, an identity that she brings to her workplace along with her racial and gender identities. Eva explains why she thinks this is important:

I bring my identities to the table every time, and uhh like I mentioned $\frac{2}{3}$ of our students are students of color, at my campus, even though this is a PWI, so I say I bring all of my

identities to the table because my identities are similar to the identities of our students and I have a responsibility to advocate for them-with their needs and their identities.

Virginia connects to Eva's experience of being proud to represent one's identities by sharing that she enjoys being able to relate to families of color and ensure them that she will support them at her institution. When only 9.4% of all Chief Student Affairs Officers are Black/African American or Latinx women, it is understandable as to why so many of the women took pride in not only making it in the role but in navigating and displaying their identities in ways that made other women of color, women, or people of color feel like they belong at their institutions.

Drive and Motivation

The women of color in this study shared similar motivations and drivers as to how they have navigated their identities in the workplace. Their drive and motivation as a Chief Student Affairs is therefore an overarching theme in this study. There were multiple ways in which this theme showed up as shared experience. First, the CSAOs desire to make a difference in the lives of others who shared their identities was palpable. In particular, their resolve and passion for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion was a large driving force as to why they felt the need to be in the role. Second, they received were motivation from mentors, and passed on that guidance to those whom they mentored. Lastly, the participants shared at length the importance of being a positive representation of their identities - even when this caused stress and fatigue. In the next section the following sub-themes will be unpacked and relevant quotes will be used to exemplify the findings: (1) The Desire to Make a Difference (2) The Importance of Mentors and Mentoring, and (3) Representation and Role-Modeling Matters.

The desire to make a difference. The women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers overwhelmingly wielded their identities as ways to navigate making a difference on their

campus, especially for the students and colleagues who may share some of their identities, but also for the entire student body. Their shared desires to make a difference connected to why they have stayed in the field, and what they enjoyed most about their role. A majority of the participants agreed that the ability to make a difference in the lives of individual students and at a large-scale, strategic level, was their favorite thing about their role. This was also how they build relationships and collaborations across campus to garner support for their plans, a sub-theme which will be described later. Virginia illuminates this point by describing how she implores her entire division with the task of caring for students, what she calls establishing, “a culture of care”. Virginia elaborates and connects this to how she navigates making a difference for issues that affect social identities by leaning into her identity as a woman of color:

I'm not there to say you all are racist or y'all aren't thinking about anything, that's not the way I approach things. Um I feel like I wanna be a contributor-um and I think that I am respected for-for-for both being able to contribute from a student affairs perspective but also being able to contribute from- as a person of color perspective 'cause I-I will challenge things, I mean I, I will bring up those issues and challenge some thinking when it is necessary!

The participants' ability to navigate campus politics by leaning into her identities and sharing their own experiences with marginalization and discrimination was a driving force for their success in the role. Participants also connected their identities to their abilities to listen to others, understand their perspective, and practice empathy.

These desires to make a difference culminated in most of the CSAOs proudest moments on campus. One of Bug's proudest moments was establishing her campus as a minority serving institution, while Olivia's was proud of hiring the most diverse team of student affairs

professionals on her campus. Ria shared how she developed a scholarship fund for students of color and first-generation students, in order to increase the access to higher education at her campus. She also established an entire office dedicated to serving low-income students. Ria attributes having compassion to her longevity in the role. She states:

I don't consider myself brilliant, I consider myself smart, but I don't consider myself brilliant, but if you do not have compassion and if you do not have strong interpersonal skills that show emotional intelligence-you're ultimately not going to do well. And so I really believe that treating people well, and with respect, is really so, so, fundamental, no matter how brilliant you are.

Ria's compassion, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence compliment her desire to make a difference by allowing her to actually materialize initiatives that support marginalized students. Connected to the desire to make a difference, the shared experience of being passionate about equity and inclusion was shared by over half of the CSAOs. The women of color related this passion to being connected to their drive and motivation to continue coming to work every day, despite the challenges they may experience in their role. Lana, specifically discusses how she has always connected diversity and social justice to her work. Lana states, "because for me, diversity and social justice work have always been a part of my life and my professional portfolio." Lana eludes to some frustration in feeling like other campus colleagues do not share the same motivations for being in the field of higher education. This frustration was felt amongst several participants. Viola shared that her colleagues on the senior leadership team perceive her as "too liberal" because she fights for the inclusion of all students, particularly the "underdogs", a population that she specifically identifies with herself. Viola lamented how she is misperceived in the following statement:

I'm too liberal. That's a good way to put it. And they think I'm liberal in my thinking, I'm liberal in my actions and I'm not, I just stand up for what I think is right, and what I think is fair, and what I think is equitable and I fight for the underdogs!

Again, in this example it is clear that Viola's identities as a Black woman who grew up in the segregated South, and who as a disability, are connected to her passion to advocate for the underdogs. Again, like most of the participants, she is open about how her identities influence her navigation of her professional role.

The drive and motivation to stay in the role of Chief Student Affairs Officer is attached to the women's desire to make a difference and advocate for issues of equity and inclusion in their role. In the examples outlined above, it is clear to see how this desire has helped to motivate the women of color, even when they are experiencing challenges to their identities. In fact, their socially marginalized identities are directly attached to their motivation to advocate for students who share those identities. This relates to a study conducted by Ngunjiri & Hernandez (2017) about immigrant, women of color leaders. Their participants reported that their marginality allowed them to be creative, resourceful, and advocates for themselves and others who hold marginalized identities (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017). The participants navigate their identities in their professional, campus role by leaning into how their identities influence their decision making, particularly when issues of equity and inclusion are at stake.

The importance of mentors and mentoring. The literature review outlined the positive effects between mentoring and the success and retention of women of color in higher education careers. Indeed, the positive effects of mentoring on women in their careers has been well documented throughout the literature on faculty and student affairs administrators, although the latter is less researched, especially amongst Chief Student Affairs Officers (Blackhurst, 2000;

Gardner, 2012; Simmons, 2016; Turner, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008). This study adds to the literature by confirming that mentoring is crucial to how women of color can successfully navigate their identities as Chief Student Affairs Officers.

Every single participant was able to articulate the importance of being mentored and how they mentor other professionals in the field of student affairs. Participants also attributed their success and progression in their career to the support they received from others, including during their time as undergraduate students. The mentors may have shared their identities as women of color, or may not have. Mentors showed up in the form of family members, peers, students, and past supervisors. Regardless of where the mentors were found, the participants named mentorship as a key part of their drive and motivation to stay in their role. Rose illustrates this point by sharing that her drive to move-up through the ranks in student affairs was because:

...people believed in me and people mentored me and people pushed me to, because they saw things in me that I didn't see in me at the time. So, I think it takes all of that to help anybody and I've been lucky to have all of that! And the support of my husband and my family and my kids, and all of that, I couldn't have done any of this without all of their help.

Rose's comment and feelings were shared across participants, in that they all believed they could not have gotten to where they were alone. Although the women described the importance of mentors regardless of shared identities, most did wish that they were able to see more women of color represented in leadership as they were coming up through the ranks. Tava explained, "I wish had known, women of color in this role, I did not-I did not see any-I saw very few women, actually, in senior leadership, I saw very very very few." These sentiments connected to how several of the women felt that it was their duty to have an open door policy for other women of

color in the field. The participants stated that they try and make themselves available to anyone who wants to connect with them for guidance or advice, and even felt like answering calls to be in research studies was contributing to mentorship.

The women of color shared that it was important to demystify the Chief Student Affairs Officer role so that more women of color can see themselves in such a role, Rose explained how she used to idolize senior leaders, and used to think that she could never become one. She explains more below:

I can't be like them, they can do this this and this, and I can never do that', and so, that, that to me is one of the biggest things that I try to do is to help people see hey, I am just a regular person, just like you and especially students and young staff-but here's how I got here, it was about work, it was about luck-because luck has a lot to do with it too, it was about having great supervisors, having great mentors, I was lucky that all those things came into play for me.

This common thread of wanting more people, particularly people from marginalized backgrounds to learn how to become senior leaders and believe in themselves is a shared experience amongst the participants. It should be clarified that most of the women defined mentors as ones that were selected by them. Zara in particular made this distinction, based on her experience of getting unwanted advice from a male of color and white woman on how to network and navigate through the field of student affairs. She described how they assigned themselves as mentors to her and their advice did not align with her personal and professional values.

Overall, receiving mentorship and serving as a mentor for others was a large motivator and driving force for how the women of color navigated their identities in the workplace.

Beginning from their time as undergraduates, the women were able to remember fellow women and women of color who had supported them and shepherded them along their journey in higher education. The participants felt like it was their duty to give back and encourage their colleagues in the field.

Representation and role-modeling matters. A shared sense of duty connected to representing for one's race and gender was evident across the various experiences that the women of color discussed in regards to their drive and motivation in their career. The participants felt a need to continue to show-up and have a seat at the table on behalf of those who shared their identities. The Chief Student Affairs Officers were able to connect their experiences in their role as a way to give back and uplift the communities where they originated. Olivia, a Latina from the Southwest who shared that most people would never think that someone like her would ever make it to a senior leadership role in higher education, beautifully illustrates the importance of representing her community:

I'm not just strategic at work, I'm strategic in my life and how I'm representing myself and my community is very important to me um and that's the piece because then I'll be able to give access to others from my community, which is really why, in the end, I'm doing all of this.

In general, the women shared that they felt a deep need to represent their identities positively in order to make their entire community look good. Olivia also shared that ultimately, she wanted to show others that first-generation women of color could "get things done" and set strategic visions for a campus.

The importance of wanting to be the person that other women of color on campus could see themselves in was illustrated by Tava's proudest moments, when students who share her

identities seek her out for advice. Tava attributed these moments to one of the reasons she continues to stay in the role, a sentiment expressed by many of the participants. Tava unpacks why these are proud and important moments for her explaining, “we understand the importance of seeing somebody who looks like you, doing something that you may aspire to do, so that those moments continue to come for me”. Overall, the women of color in this study enjoyed being the person in campus leadership which students from marginalized backgrounds could feel connected to in some way. The mixture of pride, enjoyment, and the desire to give back to their communities was a shared motivation often rooted in not being able to see themselves represented in leadership as they moved up the ranks in higher education.

Additionally, some of the women acknowledged that having the title of Chief Student Affairs Officer granted them a level of privilege that they did not have earlier in their careers. Rose shared a particular example as to how this title privilege can show up and be used for good:

You know, earlier in my career, I would say what a lot of people will say, that you’re in a meeting with deans and you say something and everyone ignores it, but the white guy says it and they’ll say, “Oh! That’s a good point!” So, I’ve experienced that. I don’t get that as much honestly now, because title. I’m a Vice President and I’m older now, I am more comfortable in this environment. So if somebody tries to do that to me now I would just say, “Wow that sounds like something I just said!” or even better, now if I’m in a meeting and I see someone else feel that way-now I remember when I was younger and in that space and would think “Now, am I the only one in this room who saw what happened?” So If I see something like that I will try and be the one that says something, because I have more-I’m in the position of power and I can say, “Wow, that’s a good

point and so-and-so (insert woman/person of color staff member) also said that so let's talk about that".

Ria also discussed experiencing more direct, overt affronts to her identities like white men explaining things she had already said, but that most of that does not occur anymore, a privilege she alluded to being attributed to her title. Olivia, on the other hand, stated that she still is not taken seriously by faculty. She shared her experience giving a presentation to faculty and how they reacted:

I mean even thinking they could talk to me in-in-in a way that I know they would not do to others or a white male. Um, a couple years ago I did a presentation for our faculty senate on Gen Z - uh these are the students who are now coming in (to college), and um, faculty were horrible in that session. I mean they just told me like I had no business being in this role, um just, they were nasty.

It is safe to say that the women had a variety of experiences relating to what privilege their titles may have granted them, but it is important to note these varying experiences, so as to not paint all of the participants with the same brush.

Overall, the women of color believed it was their duty to use this privilege to uplift and support others who wanted to be in the role, while also being the representation for student concerns at the executive leadership level. Alma lamented that the student voice is often overlooked at President's cabinet meetings. She believes:

I have the opportunity to sit on the chancellor's cabinet and I think that makes all the difference in the world because there is still a student voice at that-at that leadership table when they're having discussions when -you know- sometimes they don't think about students and how they're experiencing the institution.

This point is tied to the participant's shared identity as student affairs practitioners who value student development. Overall, representation and role-modelling mattered immensely for the women of color in this study.

Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus

Advice on how to navigate social identities as a campus leader was threaded throughout the interviews with the participants. This theme further unpacked how the women of color move through their day, how they build coalitions and support for their work, and how they navigate the overwhelmingly white and male dominated President's cabinets, which most of them were involved in at their campus. In general, the participants felt like building relationships on campus positively affected their navigation, and that length of time in the role was also seen as a benefit. The Chief Student Affairs Officers all shared a belief that their direct communication style was also crucial to leaning into the power granted to them by holding a senior role on campus. Enke's (2014) study on perceptions of power amongst women Chief Student Affairs Officers illuminates how women were uncomfortable discussing the concept of power, and this showed up in this study as well. Rose illuminates this un-comfortability:

...and so that I had to learn as the VP, I had to learn how to embrace my privilege and my power and that's all about class, and my race, and my you know, my gender, and power has always been the bad thing, you know that's what's been used to sub-subjugate people, that's what's been used to you know, bias and power, and people in power using it in inappropriate ways and so you know when I first became vice president I used to say, "Oh, don't call me Vice President, my name is Rose, just call me Rose, you don't need to call me Dr, I don't need all of that..."

Rose continued by sharing that it took some close colleagues and mentors intervening and telling her she needs to embrace her title and use her power to advocate for others. Most of the participants did not use the term “power”, and if they did use it, it was only to share how uncomfortable it is to think of themselves as someone with power, since historically they have not had societal power as women of color. The subthemes for this section are (1) Relationship Building and Community Building Are Imperative for Success and (2) Be Prepared for Senior Leadership Colleagues to be Unsupportive.

Relationship building and community building are imperative for success. Women leaders in higher education often describe their influence and leadership as power-to make decisions and power-with others rather than power-over others (Enke, 2014). Enke (2014) elaborates that, “men tend to understand it (power) as competitive, hierarchical, and a zero-sum game, whereas women are more likely to construe power as cooperative, interdependent, and increased when shared with others” (p. 204). Although Enke’s (2014) study was not focused on women of color, the participants in this study share similar sentiments that the way they navigated their identities and power was through building relationships across campus. These relationships and coalitions served them well and assisted them in building support for their initiatives on campus. It should be briefly mentioned that for the women who had spouses, partners, or children, maintaining those relationships and balancing work obligations with family time were also helpful navigational tools in their role. Alma shared that one of the ways she was able to build a nationally recognized sexual assault program was by building relationships with people and departments on campus who had never been involved in the conversation.

Collaboration and building teams to tackle campus-wide initiatives was indicative of how the

women navigated their identities. Eva stated that she is known on her campus as the senior leader who always gathers multiple voices around the table. She shared:

Folks have made comments of, “Eva is going to put a team of people behind this”, and they know that I will pull together groups of people from -and not just- student affairs, but also operations and academics, because I’m very collaborative in that way-they also know, I, I will always ask in every single circumstance, “How will this impact our students?”

Participants described the way they build trust and relationships is by maintaining transparency about decision making and by allowing their staff to have authority over their departments. The negative aspects of not building relationships was also found in the experiences of a few of the participants. Zara reported feeling distant from her fellow President’s Cabinet members and wondered if she should spend more time developing those relationships. Ultimately, she believed she did not have enough time, stating:

I definitely don’t hesitate to reach out to them when I need to but I don’t find myself going out of my way to, you know, pursue lunch or things to remedy the situation. I haven’t really had time so, and so I haven’t really done a lot of that. And I probably could do more of that.

For the majority of participants, relationship building and collaboration were self-described keys to their success as leaders. These traits have been found in other studies which reported that women leaders are more focused on building relationships and developing their staff than male leaders (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis 2009; Redmond et al, 2016).

The idea of not micromanaging was found across several of the Chef Student Affairs Officers experiences in relation to how they build trust and relationships. Bug, a Chief Student

Affairs Officer who had been at her institution in various roles for over 20 years shared that in order to not micromanage, “you have to be relatively secure and comfortable with yourself so that you’re not intimidated by others.” Indeed, several of the women shared they prefer to hire people who are smarter than them and are able to lead their departments without much direction. They also reported leaning onto their fellow leaders in student affairs to share responsibilities and time at meetings or events on campus. Alma connected this delegation of responsibilities as a way to activate her direct reports and allow them to have creative direction over their units:

Because even though I am also managing student affairs, I am also managing up, so I am also having to make appearances and represent student affairs where they have no idea that I’m showing up! And I don’t have to make every decision, I tell the associate vice provost: hey, you get paid to make decisions, make decisions! Tell me - if it’s a poor decision, tell me why you made the decision, and I’ll back you up! But, I’m not going to sit here and be involved in every decision, you have to let people go.

For the Chief Student Affairs Officers who were also mothers or partners, this ability to trust their staff and not micromanage was also tied to how they balance their multiple responsibilities inside and outside of the workplace.

The length of time at an institution was a benefit to the identity navigation and relationship building of the participants even when they were consistently the only woman of color in senior leadership. Alma explains how this benefit shows up for her, “I don’t know if it’s the longevity that I’ve had people don’t challenge me much, I’m also not a wilting flower I have no problem stating my, my position.” Bug adds that length of time in a position or at an institution can mitigate affronts to social identities. She says, “it’s probably the point I’m at in my career and kinda given where the university is I don’t feel like I’ve been held back or not

benefited from any opportunity because of any of my, my identities.” Bug added that she feels deeply respected at her institution and that it has a lot to do with how long she has been at the campus. Alternatively, Lana shared some frustration in not being taken as seriously because she was so new in her role at her campus. She felt that relationships were hard to build because she is the only Black woman in senior leadership and that people did not take her seriously because she has been at the institution for the shortest amount of time amongst the senior leaders.

For this study, the women of color also named that being strategic in their navigation of campus politics was boosted by coalitions and relationships they had built and maintained. Ria exemplifies the importance of building strategic relationships as a strategy to navigate politics:

I think everywhere has its politics, and what I do is I try and build strong relationships with people just because I think it's important and it's come in handy, especially when I need to advocate for something, and so I would say that's how I navigated if you will, just strategically, and I say I form relationships. What you need to always have is a guiding coalition that's going to support what you're going to do and you know when you go to them requesting support or with thoughts about some particular project , it's just important to know that you have some background with or some connections (with them).

On top of being strategic, the participants believed that they were able to establish positive results and maintain these campus partnerships when they upheld professionalism, practiced persistence, and employed a direct communication style.

Virginia shared how she is very comfortable having direct, “come to Jesus” meetings with her staff, but makes sure to maintain her fairness and approachability. Lana connects her identities to her direct communication style:

I think being a black woman from the South has been something, too, because I'm pretty direct and I don't enjoy passive aggressive and people don't really speak their mind and I can't guess about what you really mean so I need you to just tell me what you need to say! And that can be challenging, culturally, for people, certainly for me and I've had to work on how I address those challenges and issues because they are-they are legitimate. Lana was particularly experiencing issues between her style and the predominantly, white, mid-western campus where she was employed. These strategies of being direct and strategic were named as ways to navigate and survive the campus climate which, for all of these participants, was predominantly white and riddled with issues that affected students of color and other marginalized students.

The fact that issues of inequity based on identities were found in all of the participant accounts should not come as a surprise given the key concepts of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality has been utilized in higher education research to provide attention to the roles of interconnected domains of power and social identities in the reproduction of inequalities on campus (Anthias, 2013; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Hurtado et al, 2012; Núñez, 2014). The plethora of reproduction of inequalities had to be strategically navigated since the women often shared experiences with those who were feeling marginalized on campus.

Persistence was exemplified across various accounts of trying to push agendas at the senior leadership level. Zara shares that she uses persistence in not taking no for an answer on issues she thinks are important, but she also strategically chooses issues and know when to back-down if it is going to harm rapport or relationships. Viola shares this belief, stating that you "can't die on every mountain", but that she will continue to pursue agenda items the following year. Participants also expressed enjoyment at being able to operate at on a larger-scale as a

CSAO, connected to being able to build relationships, and be in the same room as other senior leaders. Tava specifically states that this is one of her favorite parts of her role:

What I do have is the opportunity to really shape the overall student experience at this university, and that's the part I really like, because I think, each year, I get to work with senior leadership to ensure that the overall student experience is focused on the broad learning outcomes and resources allocations and the things that make our student experience really stand out so it's the-the involvement in the strategic design and ongoing sustainability of an excellent student experience that really excites me now.

Designing “excellent student experiences” ties back to the desire to make a difference, a shared experience previously discussed. Related to this enjoyment of operating at a strategic level was the need to practice their authentic, direct communication style, and balancing that with stereotypes of a being a bitch or an angry woman of color.

Nearly every participant shared that their strengths included being authentic and direct.

Eva illustrates how this strength manifests:

I will work very hard and I will advocate for our students at any expense and I am not going to... I will address the elephant in the room, and it's better than you calling me a bitch, right? Sooo... that's that.

Eva, like most of the women, prefer to be direct in their communication style rather than being indirect or passive. This has allowed them build better relationships because their colleagues know they can depend on them to be authentic. Alma further elaborates:

I can only be Alma, the minute I try and show up in a different way, then I have to try and remember who I was in what setting and I don't have the time or the mental capacity to do that.

These quotes from Eva and Alma are illustrative of the shared experience of needing to be true to themselves, their values, and their identities. These strategies allowed the women to build strategic relationships, which they believed to be a navigational tool for success as a woman of color CSAO. In conclusion, similar to other studies on women in leadership, the theme of relationship building and collaboration was found to be a positive way to navigate the Chief Student Affairs Officer role (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis 2009; Redmond et al, 2016).

Be prepared for senior leadership colleagues to be unsupportive. This subtheme was a common piece of advice shared by the Chief Student Affairs Officers for how to navigate identities in the workplace. Mostly, they wanted others to know to expect a lack of support from fellow leaders on campus, and that these might be exacerbated by their identities as women of color. The lack of support manifested in two ways; (1) senior leaders not understanding or valuing student affairs, and (2) senior leaders not understanding issues of equity and inclusion because they are white. Senior leadership was defined as the President's cabinet on campus. All of the women of color either currently served on their President's cabinet or previously served and now served on the Provost's cabinet.

Regardless of the reporting structure, there was the shared experience of feeling misunderstood and undervalued as student affairs practitioners. This experience was compounded by the racial and gender identities of the CSAOs. These feelings are supported by the literature, specifically, scholars have reported that faculty and staff of color often experience "chilly" campus climates in higher education, meaning that they experience increased microaggressions, tokenism, and hostility (Gasman, et al, 2015; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). Many of the women named that being a woman of color absolutely contributed to them not being heard

and being excluded from senior level decisions, even when it was unintentional. Ria shares an example of unintentional exclusion, below:

The president used to have a cabinet meeting every Monday morning and then inevitably there'd be a break so we-since there was only one other woman at the table with me-and so all of the men would go to the bathroom and then the two of us would go into the other bathroom and I started joking that you know I think we're going to have to tear down the wall between the bathrooms because I know a lot is happening when you all are standing together over there!

The lack of shared identities at the senior leadership level led to challenges in building relationships outside meeting spaces. Ria's use of humor here was actually named by her as a way she navigated difficult situations while also balancing the maintenance of relationships at the senior level. Other participants reported that they might be excluded from conversations on that involve enrollment or finances, because their presidents do not value how student affairs can be an integral part of these campus issues.

These Chief Student Affairs Officers stated that sometimes their presidents or fellow senior leaders would not support their initiatives and did not value their opinion, particularly on issues of diversity because they were often the only ones challenging their all-white cabinet members to think more deeply about issues of race and identity. Participants reported stress and fatigue in navigating these situations where they were constantly the voice for equity and inclusion. Viola shares how hard this work can be:

And I'm not saying it's not difficult and I'm not saying it's not hard, because it is and I've shed a lot of tears and I've said a lot of prayers because of the way I've been treated and people have responded to me, but, everything that's a part of me makes me who I am. So,

I lead with love and integrity and that's more important to me than anything else. I'm a fair boss, I'm inclusive. I believe in collaboration so all those things have made me who I am.

Again, the themes of being collaborative and inclusive are connected to how she has survived and navigated this role. Additionally, this quote supports the overarching theme that identities mattered and showed-up in everything the women of color did and experienced. It should be noted that not all of the women had to navigate difficult presidents and cabinets; those who did reported this to be a stressful part of the role, and those who did not, reported this to be why they were able to experience less stress in their role. As an example, Ria specifically tied this to how she has been successful in her role, stating "I think the other thing is you know, as long as you have the support of the president-you know I report to presidents only-you're going to be just fine". Regardless of the presidents and cabinets that they had to navigate, all of them articulated feeling like they are successful and accomplished Chief Student Affairs Officers. In conclusion, the CSAOs wanted others in the field of student affairs to know that the support that you receive or do not receive from your senior level colleagues will determine your experience navigating your identities in this professional role, hence why it this is an important theme to note.

Summary

In this chapter, the significant themes from the 11 participants were outlined in regards to how they navigate their social identities as women of color in the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer. The three main themes found were (1) The Role of Identities in Career, (2) Drive and Motivation, and (3) Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus. Throughout the participants' shared experiences, it is evident that their social identities heavily influenced why they entered the field, what they enjoyed most about the field, and the commitment all of them

shared to dedicate their careers to advocating for marginalized students, faculty and staff. These Chief Student Affairs Officers were able to articulate the influence, importance, and pride they shared in being women of color. The women were also able to build coalitions with other marginalized campus constituents to support their ideas and agendas.

The participants shared several experiences with women and people of color in previous studies on these populations as higher education leaders, while also having unique experiences perhaps indicative of the nuances found in the field of student affairs and student development ((Delores et al, 2013; Gasman, et al, 2015; McGee, 2017; Redmond et al, 2016). In the next and final chapter, the implications of the findings will be outlined and recommendations will be made to student affairs administrators and researchers. Additionally, areas to explore in future research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

There is an established problem found in the lack of equitable representation of women of color in upper-leadership roles on college campuses despite there being more women and people

of color in college than ever before (Jones & Komives, 2001; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This study explored how 11 women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (1) navigated their racial and gender identities in their professional role, (2) how they were prepared for this identity navigation throughout their career, and (3) how they mentored younger professionals in the field of student affairs. A phenomenological qualitative study using Intersectionality as the theoretical framework was conducted amongst women of color who serve as CSAOs at four-year colleges or universities. This chapter will discuss the findings reported in Chapter 4 by outlining how the themes connect to each other, to the literature review, and to the theoretical framework. Following the discussion, implications for policy and practice will be discussed, and recommendations for future research will be shared. Lastly, the limitations of the study will be reported.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study filled a gap in the field of higher education research as it pertains to studies on women of color in the Chief Student Affairs Officer role. In fact, several researchers have established that there are too few scholarly studies of women's contributions and experiences in higher education leadership roles (Costello 2012; Enke, 2014; Lomax Wardell 2010; Scott, 2016; Waltrip, 2012). There are even fewer studies that have focused on the experiences of women of color in higher education leadership. The shared experiences of the women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers were categorized into three emergent themes: (1) The Role of Identities in Career, (2) Drive and Motivation, and (3) Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus. The three emergent themes were then further unpacked into sub-themes. The subthemes for, "The Role of Identities in Career" included: (1) The Only One, (2) Under a Microscope, (3) Imposter Syndrome, (4) Experiences with Stereotypes and Microaggressions,

(5) Pride. The subthemes for, “Drive and Motivation” included: (1) The Desire to Make a Difference (2) The Importance of Mentors and Mentoring, (3) Representation and Role-Modeling Matters. Lastly, the subthemes for Strategies for Identity Navigation on Campus (1) Relationship Building and Community Building Are Imperative for Success and (2) Be Prepared for Senior Leadership Colleagues to be Unsupportive. Overall, the findings revealed that the participants shared many experiences, most of which were deeply connected to their marginalized social identities and the attached systems of historical and social subordination to those identities.

Addressing the Research Question

The main research question for this study was, *how do women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAO) navigate both their racial and gender identities in their professional, campus role?* The literature review concluded that women and people of color have to navigate additional systems of oppression based on their other social identities, but fewer studies focus on how women of color navigate these identities, especially at the Chief Student Affairs Officer level (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans, 2007; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Opp & Gosetti, 2002). The findings provide practical advice for other women of color in student affairs who may not have access to mentors who share their identities on their campus – a common experience amongst the participants. By utilizing intersectionality, this study allowed each of the participants to articulate their identity-based experiences without having to only focus on one or two of their identities. For example, for the CSAO’s who reported growing up in low socioeconomic households or were the first in their family to attend college, discomfort in experiences across class lines occurred, too. The women of color in this study had to navigate

spaces in which other senior leaders did not look like them or share their experiences as Chief Student Affairs Officers.

One of the sub-research questions was, “how were the women of color CSAOs prepared, throughout their career and education to navigate their racial and gender identities?” The ways that they navigated their identities were connected to messages they received from family members or mentors about how to succeed as a woman of color. The CSAOs reported navigating these spaces by carefully preparing any material they were asked to present, being mindful of who they confide in on campus, dressing more professionally than their white or male colleagues, and constantly striving to be the most prepared professional at the leadership table. Most of the women of color did not mention receiving any formal education around how to navigate systems that were not built for them, which may have influenced their passion for assisting and mentoring others interested in the role. The literature confirmed that women experience less preparation for advancement into upper leadership and endure gender discrimination in the higher education workplace (Hannum et al, 2015; Probert, 2005; Redmond et al, 2016; Wallace & Marchant, 2009).

One of the largest takeaways for the study, which also addresses the main research question, is how the women of color utilized their own identities and positionality to create more inclusivity and equity on campus. Not surprisingly, the Chief Student Affairs Officers in this study shared that their social identities impacted everything that they did. Their identities were at the forefront of their experiences, decision making, workplace navigation, and how others perceived them as leaders. The CSAOs were navigating their racial and gender identities while simultaneously using them as tools to advocate and create more equitable practices and policies for others who shared socially marginalized identities. This often led to positive strides in the

realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion on their campuses. For example, when Ria described her creation of a scholarship for students of color and first-generation college students which eventually became an exemplary model for her state's public higher education system. This connects to a study conducted with immigrant, women of color leaders, who all reported that their marginalized identities influenced them to become advocates for themselves and others who held marginalized identities (Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017).

In total, 9.4% of CSAOs identify as Black/African American or Latinx (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). This census highlights the disparities in representation between Latinx women, Black/African American women, and White women who serve as CSAO's. These numbers also reveal why the women of color would share the experience of feeling like they are the only one on their campus in a leadership role, which was outlined as a significant finding. Being the only one on their campus heavily impacted the experiences of the Chief Student Affairs Officers. It is important to expand upon that finding in this discussion because that experience connected to how the women of color navigated their identities in their role, which addresses the main research question. As was mentioned in the findings, being the only one often led to increased scrutiny and a feeling that they were under a microscope, but it also added to their motivation to be strong role models for others who shared their identities and to build networks of support. Women's leadership has often been characterized as more relational, collectivist, interpersonal, and participatory, so it is no surprise that building relationships and networks was a notable navigational strategy for participants (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Enke, 2014; Patton 2009). This directly links to the main research question, because once again the women were wielding their identities and voices to interrupt predominantly White and male spaces, namely the executive cabinets on their campuses. The women also discussed navigating their identities in their

professional role by having to go above and beyond their typical duties because they felt a societal pressure to have to do well since they were representing their racial and gender communities in a visible, leadership role. This constant feeling of having to go above and beyond in order to be a good role model for others who shared their identities often led to exhaustion. The compounded stress of “being the only one in the room” and having to “prove one’s worth” is a common theme in studies about the experiences of women of color leaders who advance their careers in higher education (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017; Scott, 2016; Turner, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong; 2011). In the findings, all of the participants articulated ways they felt tired because of the constant navigation of their identities. Only a few participants commented that they had established strict boundaries and delegation of duties so that they are not over-extended in the workplace. Alma was one of the participants who discussed this at length, and connected it to her identity as a mom. Alma shared:

So I’m a mom, and in my wisdom, haha, my son’s birthday is August 23rd. Campus is popping haha - because it’s August! Haha, and so what I’ve had to do-you know at the beginning of the semester you are-I mean there are invitations to do a welcome here, do a welcome there, talk here, talk there, and I just made it my personal, like, I am off limits August 23rd! I am not doing the university welcome, somebody else can do it. Students don’t know what a VP of Student Affairs is anyway!

This tactic allowed Alma to enjoy time with friends and family, even at the busiest time in the semester, but again, her experience of drawing a hard line as to when she will not be available was an anomaly when compared to other participants. A more significant tactic for navigating their identities in their professional role was building relationships and finding supportive mentors, as was outlined in the findings.

The literature review outlined numerous studies that have reported the positive effects of mentoring on women of color in student affairs. This study adds to that body of research. The support of a mentor has been found to increase career retention, psychosocial support, and promotion rates for women of color in the academy (Chang, et al, 2014; Howard-Vital & Morgan, 1993; Patton, 2009; Tran, 2014). All of the participants shared the experience of attributing their success to having strong mentors. Mentors were found in the form of other successful women of color, or professionals who did not share their social identities. Another important takeaway from this study is that women of color want to engage in professional relationships with other women of color in the field of student affairs. It was a constant goal for the Chief Student Affairs Officers to engage in mentoring relationships with other women of color, or to join professional and personal communities organized for women of color. Since many of them were the only one on their campuses, it was rare that they had an on-campus mentor who was also a woman of color, but they build these connections across campuses, in their local communities, and across functional areas. Many other studies support this finding that women leaders of color in higher education attribute their professional successes to having mentors, even when those mentors are not found on their campuses (Briggs, 2012, Patton, 2009; Santamaria, 2014). The participants did make it clear that they found value in also having mentors who did not share their identities. Olivia shared that she has found mentors and allies with some of the gay, White men on campus, and she also stated that, “you know in these roles there’s not a lot of people we can go to.” Olivia’s experience echoed several other women of color’s experiences in the literature which have found mentors with others who share marginalized identities (Chang, et al, 2014; Patton, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The importance of mentoring others in the field and serving as a role model is a third important takeaway that was mainly found in the theme titled “Drive and Motivation”. This theme directly connects to the third research question, “In what ways do women of color CSAO’s mentor other women of color student affairs professionals?” Every participant agreed that it was their duty to serve as mentors for the next batch of leaders in higher education administration, and that they felt a particular desire to make a difference in the lives of students and colleagues who shared socially marginalized identities. Many of the women comically noted that their administrative assistants were often frustrated with the amount of meetings they took with people interested in engaging in a mentoring relationship with the Chief Student Affairs Officer. For those of us employed in student affairs, this is promising to hear, especially since within student affairs, mentoring has been positively correlated with job satisfaction and role adjustment (Blackhurst, 2000; Jones & Komives, 2009).

As a result of the findings, I concluded that campuses are still challenging places for women of color to navigate, even at the senior leadership level. Despite the challenges the CSAOs in this study felt a deep calling to serve in the role and serve as role models for others with marginalized identities. The women have found ways to navigate their identities successfully while always being mindful that they have a responsibility to pave the way for leaders that share their racial and gender identities. Overall, the participants were proud of themselves for achieving the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer, and were always open to mentor others in the field, whether or not they shared their racial and gender identities. In fact, almost every participant noted that they entered the field of student affairs knowing that they wanted to make a difference in the lives of students (particularly students who shared their identities). This study finds a unique place in the literature because it adds to the few studies

conducted specifically on student affairs leaders of color, and that use Intersectionality as a theoretical framework. In the next section, the findings will be connected to the theoretical framework, Crenshaw's (1989) theory of Intersectionality.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The women of color in this study experienced their professional roles through the lenses of the various social identities that they shared, namely race and gender. For the women who held other identities like first-generation college students, being partners or parents, or who identified as spiritual or religious, these aspects of their lives also shined through their work. For most of the participants, race and gender were the visible identities that they had to navigate on a daily basis. These were the identities that were noticed by others first, and that the women experienced the most hardship or joy. Since this study centered intersecting social identities, and explored the experiences attached to those identities, Intersectionality was a fitting theoretical framework.

Intersectionality is a framework for observing how multiple social identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism, at the macro-structural level. The theory is the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and the related systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination to those identities.

Intersectionality is specifically rooted in how the experiences of women of color differ from White women (Crenshaw, 1989). The framework compels us to examine the differences that might exist in similar social groups, specifically how the interaction of various social identities interface with structures of power and hierarchy. The three aspects of Intersectionality include structural, political, and representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Overall, the findings

directly aligned with the theoretical framework. The women in this study believed that their identities were at the forefront of their experiences, including their decision making, workplace navigation, and how others perceived them as leaders. They also received several identity-based messages growing up as women of color, namely that they would need to be prepared to work harder than others. Next, the findings will be connected to the framework and the findings will be organized by the three aspects of Intersectionality.

Structural Intersectionality. Structural intersectionality consists of the ways in which, “the location of women of color, at the intersection of race and gender, makes their experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of White women” (p. 1245). The Chief Student Affairs Officers hold positions of power on their campus, yet that did not make them immune to microaggressions. Every single participant was able to articulate their personal experiences with stereotypes and microaggressions, and they believed that these incidents were directly tied to how visible their racial and gender identities were to those around them. One of the biggest stereotypes discussed by Ria was the belief on her campus that she was an affirmative action hire. When asked about barriers and challenges she has experienced, Ria shared, “I think one of them (the challenges) is, you know, you would hear whispers of the fact that the only reason I got it (the job) was because of my background.” What is most interesting about this stereotype is that White women surpass the employment rates of people of color, including women of color, due to affirmative action (Kohn, 2013; Massie, 2016). Even though White women are benefitting the most from this policy, Ria, and other women of color, are navigating stereotypical beliefs that women of color cannot earn their roles with their skills and experiences alone, and that instead, they must have had assistance with a structural policy.

Political Intersectionality. Political intersectionality defines how women of color exist with two subordinate identities that often involve conflicting political agendas. Crenshaw (1991) explains that, “the need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and White women seldom confront” (p. 1252). For some of the participants the conflicting political agendas included their social identities and the politics of the campus. This particularly showed up for the participants when they discussed having to handle situations on campus that were rooted in affronts to their identities. They found it difficult and exhausting to have to take care of students, faculty, and staff who were hurting on campus, while also having to take care of themselves. Tava illuminated this experience when she discussed the time a known White supremacist visited campus and protests erupted. She stated,

Being here when there were protests on campus, and lots of toxicity in the environment around race, and social justice issues has been challenging because, you know, advocating on behalf of students, being an agent of the university, but also feeling, also being one of the identities that, is feeling threatened, has been-been quite challenging and difficult to manage at times, personally, you know you manage things professionally, but you ride home every day and sit with it when you leave the office

The tenet of political intersectionality highlights the nuance in personal experiences around navigating identity-based issues. Often, for white or male colleagues who never have personal experience with racist or sexist encounters, they do not personally feel attached to these issues because they do not share identities with the groups navigating the racist or sexist encounters. For the women of color in this study, there was a direct attachment, as is exemplified in Tava’s experience.

Representational Intersectionality. Representational intersectionality provides a way to understand how social constructs of the intersections of race and gender are developed and replicated throughout society. Representational intersectionality includes, “both the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color” (Crenshaw, 1989). Representational intersectionality can show up when anti-racist or feminist organizers fail to recognize how racism and sexism influence both of their movements. This is also the aspect of intersectionality that can be enforced by the mere fact that there is not a large representation of women of color leaders on campus, or portrayed in popular culture. This is related to why most of the women experienced times when people were shocked that they were the Chief Student Affairs Officer on campus, or did not believe that they should be the CSAO. Virginia explained that often when she is speaking on the phone with parents about issues their students may be experiencing that they are surprised to learn she is African American. She shared, “they may pick up on it (over the phone) but usually not, um so I think they’re a little surprised sometimes to find out that I’m African American”. Other participants share that this leads some people to believe that they cannot be partial to matters that involve social issues or social justice. Other participants revealed that people did not believe that they should be the Chief Student Affairs Officer because of their identities. Viola outright said that, “I’ve had bosses who don’t think that a woman of color should have this job or my position”. Representational intersectionality also connects to how many of the participants felt like they had to be careful about everything they said or did on campus. The CSAOs described how they had to be careful about who they smiled at (or did not smile at) in the hallways for fear that people would think they favored them or disliked them on campus. Other studies that have

used intersectionality as a framework revealed similar experiences and found that voice and silence for Black women and Latinas on campus is never neutral or without meaning (Perdomo, 2014).

This study advances the theory of Intersectionality by applying it to women of color in Chief Student Affairs Officer roles. The original theory was not applied to women of color in upper leadership roles in any profession, but this study shows that regardless of class and professional lines, the theory's tenets of intersecting experiences of oppression applies to all women of color. Furthermore, this study implies that Intersectionality can and should be applied to more research and practice in higher education and student affairs specifically when focused on women of color. Intersectionality can also be applied to illuminate the experiences of marginalized identities outside of race and gender. The theory should always be used as a tool to allow research participants, students, faculty, and staff to share their experiences at the cross-sections of their identities, not just in the scope that the researcher or practitioner is viewing. A great deal of harm can be done if people are not allowed to discuss their experiences across all of their identities (Black & Islam, 2014). The discussion of other identities that impact their professional role revealed itself throughout this study when women of color who were mothers, spouses, first-generation college students, or grew up in a low socioeconomic household had differences in experiences in their role based on their intersecting identities.

Two of the goals of this research study was to contribute to the literature on how women of color can successfully navigate their race and gender in their student affairs leadership role, and utilize Intersectionality in higher education research. Both of these goals were achieved with this study. As has been discussed, the women of color in this study related to several of the experiences shared by women of color leaders in faculty and academic leadership roles, while

also having nuanced experiences due to the fact that they worked in the division of student affairs. Additionally, this study successfully employed the Intersectionality framework to higher education research. The framework allowed the research to deeply understand and hear the intersecting identity experiences of the leaders, and how they relate to the structures on their campuses.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings in this phenomenological study outlined the successes and challenges experienced by women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers in higher education. The shared experiences of the participants revealed to campuses what their women of color CSAOs are encountering in their professional role. Hopefully, this study will compel campuses to mitigate the challenging racial and gender experiences that their senior leaders of color are experiencing, while also supporting the strategies they employ for success. The participants shared experiences in those roles provides valuable implications for higher education policy. The study also provides insight into how institutions can build more equitable practices and prepare structures in which women of color can thrive in leadership. Lastly, this study provides advice to women of color who are aspiring to student affairs leadership and to women of color who are currently serving as Chief Student Affairs Officers. As Spade (2013) sees it:

Marginalized and oppressed people can and should form alliances—tied together by their similar experiences of oppression, even where the genesis of these oppressions does not have a common link—to collaboratively fight to tear down structural regimes that serve to oppress peoples across multiple axes (p. 1047).

The advice in this study may assist in the building of alliances between student affairs staff who share marginalized identities and will hopefully empower them to support others in the field who share marginalized identities, even if they are different from their own.

Based on the findings, implications for policy include several recommendations for campuses. The main implications for policies include increasing the number of women of color in student affairs leadership roles and to require campuses to address their climate regarding marginalized faculty and staff so that more women of color choose to seek and maintain employment. Intersectionality should be applied to policy decisions regarding women of color on campus, since the theory is a tool to reveal structural, political, and representational barriers that a campus may unknowingly be imposing on their women of color community. These recommendations include: increased mentoring programs; support for professional development regarding senior leadership advancement; required professional development for campus presidents and senior cabinet members to engage in dialogues around power, equity, and inclusion; regular campus climate surveys to measure the climate for faculty, staff, and senior leadership; and human resource policies that support the hiring and promotion of qualified leaders from marginalized identities, particularly women of color.

In previous studies, common support systems mentioned by women of color who have earned senior student affairs roles include mentors, sponsors, family, identity-affirming spaces, and spiritual practices (San Antonio, 2015; Scott, 2016). The findings in this study align with previous findings and affirms that policies that supported mentoring of women of color could increase the number of women of color in student affairs. Campus human resource departments might consider establishing policies that match incoming women of color staff with other women of color on campus. The support of a mentor was found to increase career retention, psychosocial

support, and promotion rates for women of color in the academy (Chang, et al, 2014; Howard-Vital & Morgan, 1993; Patton, 2009; Tran, 2014). These mentor programs would not need to match the women of color to senior women of color, but could match them across interests and career goals, even if that other woman of color is a peer in the campus hierarchy. Human resource departments could also create support groups for women of color, to lessen the labor of one on one mentoring programs, since all of the participants shared the experience of wanting to be mentors to anyone who sought them out while also balancing their time and additional labor connected to being the only one in upper leadership. All of the participants in this study discussed how mentoring has positively affected them, even if it was a peer and not necessarily someone above them in the campus hierarchy.

Connected to this policy should be a policy for increased professional development funding for women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers to attend conferences that are rooted in connecting women of color senior leaders to each other, since many of the women discussed difficulty finding other women of color senior leaders on their campuses. The literature revealed that informal support systems with other women of color such as friendships, family, sororities and peers are often the most accessible forms of support for African American women in the academy, due to the small numbers that exist in upper leadership roles (Chang, et al, 2014; Patton, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Currently, there are no funds through the major student affairs professional associations that specifically support conference attendance for women of color with a goal to connect them to other women of color. Campus human resources departments should consider creating funding structures that support conference travel with this particular goal. Having mentors who share similar, salient, social identities assists in the support

of women of color navigating senior leadership in higher education (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mayer, Surtee, Barnard, 2015; McNair et al, 2013; Patton, 2009).

Next, for many of the participants, the most challenging team on their campus to navigate was the president's cabinet because it was often the most White and male dominated environment. Scholars have reported that faculty and staff of color often experience "chilly" campus climates in higher education, meaning that they experience increased microaggressions, tokenism, and hostility (Gasman, et al, 2015; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). They also experience difficulty finding community in their departments, especially when they are the only person of color (Gasman, et al, 2015; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Smith, 2009; Smith, et al, 2011). Often, the participants were the only senior leaders in the room who understood or supported issues related to social justice, or who were comfortable having conversations about issues related to identities. Campuses should enact policies that require senior leaders to attend trainings to learn and acknowledge how power, equity, and inclusion impact their policies and practices. These trainings can be enhanced by data from regular, recurring, campus climate surveys that specifically assess the climate for marginalized staff, faculty, and senior leaders. Most importantly, data from these surveys must be utilized to create policies and practices that both support women of color in ascending to campus leadership while simultaneously holding campus administration, most specifically their white and male colleagues accountable for assisting in dismantling the oppressive structures and rebuilding more equity on campus.

Lastly, one of the common themes across the findings was the women of color being the only one, or one of few women of color or person of color in senior leadership on their campus. In a study that looked at 35 women at the senior-most levels of institutions of higher education and explored their journey into leadership roles and their experience of being a leader, 51% of

the total sample stated that barriers to leadership included lack of opportunities and lack of support (Hannum et al, 2015). Nearly 75% of women of color experienced this barrier compared to only 35% of White women, a statistically significant difference. Human resource departments need to examine critically why this is occurring, and enact policies that create more equitable hiring and promotion of senior leaders from marginalized identities, with a particular emphasis on the intersection of racial and gender equity.

Implications for Practice

The most compelling implications for practice from this study are found in the advice that the women of color shared while answering the question, “Is there something you wish you knew as a younger, woman of color earlier in your career?” The advice is practical and inspiring for aspiring women of color leaders in student affairs. In Table 5.1, one piece of advice that each participant gave is shared with the hopes that it will inspire student affairs practitioners who are women of color, and those who do not share those identities. Their advice can also assist campus departments in envisioning new ways to create more equity-centered practices for their most marginalized community members.

Table 5.1 *Participant's Advice*

Name	Advice
Eva	Summary: Learn how to navigate microaggressions. “Not to say that I haven’t dealt with microaggressions in that direct way, but I can see how sometimes microaggressions come out of direct racism and sometimes they come out of ignorance and misunderstanding and sometimes you have to take a step back and recognize where someone is at and change your approach to them if you really want to understand who is in the room. So, I have seen other women of color and other people of color and it has put them in some bad situations whether they burned a bridge, messed up a relationship, got fired from a job, so just having that information (how to handle microaggressions) would have been helpful.”
Bug	Summary: Do not take yourself too seriously.

	<p>“I don’t know probably not to take myself so personally or so seriously... but also not taking things so personally and maybe not having such thin skin. I wish (some) sort of things, wouldn’t bother me so much, or I wish they didn’t take up so much unnecessary energy.”</p>
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Table 5.1 Continued

Rose	<p>Summary: Understand that some people do not want to do what is right. “I wish I had understood politics more, you know, my personality, glass full, everybody’s in here because we all want to do what’s right and learning, no, some people want to do what’s right for them and-or their unit, and could care less about anybody else. And so I’ve had some hard knocks that way, because I’m too, open and too forgiving sometimes, and can be taken advantage of, and so I’ve learned to be more strategic in my thinking and also, listening more.”</p>
Tava	<p>Summary: There is a need for more women of color in these roles. “I wish I had known women of color, like when I was in Law School even and other -you know, in-in, earlier career paths, there were just, very few women of color in in the roles that I was seeking. So, I wish had known more when I was coming up through the ranks.”</p>
Lana	<p>Summary: Weigh the costs of focusing too much on your career. “I wish I had more time to think about how hard I go and what that can cost me personally because I put so much of my life focused on my career that other important things that I wanted to do or have - have kind of gone to the wayside.”</p>
Ria	<p>Summary: Emotional intelligence is crucial to success. “I’ve learned as an older, as a person whose been through a lot and seen a lot, I have seen brilliant, brilliant, people crash, because although you might be brilliant-which, I don’t consider myself brilliant, I consider myself smart, but I don’t consider myself brilliant, but if you do not have compassion and if you do not have strong interpersonal skills that show emotional intelligence-you’re ultimately not going to do well. And so I really believe that treating people well, and with respect, is really so, so, fundamental, no matter how brilliant you are.”</p>
Alma	<p>Summary: Do not feel the need to be the face for everything in the unit. “I have associate VPs, I have directors, they’re leaders of their units, they are getting paid to do this work, I don’t have to be at everything, so I told the director, you tell me what your signature event is that you would like me to come to and I will come, I am not coming to everything!”</p>

Table 5.1 Continued

Virginia	<p>Summary: Know where you work.</p> <p>“Understand the culture of where you’re gonna work and be comfortable with that because sometimes, there’s things you just can’t overcome. But, you have to be able to get a sense of what you’re walking into as best you can. But also understand that at some point if you know, if you feel like from an ethical standpoint, from a philosophical standpoint, something’s not working - I mean just, this isn’t the place for you, you need to be ok about looking and making that change, and being open to make that move.”</p>
Viola	<p>Summary: Gather your credentials.</p> <p>“I mean it’s important to be a strong student affairs professionals too, but (make sure) you write, that you’re publishing something even if it’s just in a journal, make sure that you present, always, at a national conference or a regional conference, and get an MBA! An MBA doesn’t really help you any better but it’s a credential that you can pull out of your back pocket like ‘back up! I have a degree... I’m credentialed!’”</p>
Zara	<p>Summary: Get involved in the field, outside of your campus.</p> <p>“If I could give advice to my younger self, I would have accepted the idea that this was a valid career path and one that would be worth dedicating a decade or more of life to so that I would have approached it a little bit differently, I would have gotten involved more in professional organizations and made more contacts.”</p>
Olivia	<p>Summary: Prepare to be under constant scrutiny.</p> <p>“I wish I’d known like how um how much you will be constantly under the microscope in this type of role, and it’s not - it’s like nuts. I can go to a town hall- let’s say there’s four or 500 staff and I’m doing a presentation, and we’re starting to run out of a little bit of time and I go a little bit faster on the slides. If I don’t say this is why I’m gonna go faster on the slides, at least three or four times, people will then make an assumption and gossip will start that I went through them fast because I didn’t want anyone to see them.”</p>

The advice outlined above is helpful for campuses looking for practical ways to proactively address issues for women of color staff and administrators. This advice can and should be connected to programs offered by student affairs to support their women of color students and staff. Future implications for practice include divisions of student affairs building and allowing for identity affirming spaces for women of color to connect on campus, across divisions, so that

advice and experiences can be shared more often. The literature noted that graduate programs and professional associations must provide avenues for women of color graduate students and faculty to connect in mentoring programs (Hubain et al, 2016; Harris & Linder, 2018). These connections need to be addressed in student affairs and higher education graduate programs and professional associations, too.

Student affairs should also consider supporting the professional development of their marginalized staff members by giving them time and space to connect with other women of color at conferences see themselves represented in the field. Women of color in student affairs should also be encouraged to present at conferences, publish in journals, and enter graduate programs to continue to “gather their credentials” which can assist them in navigating predominantly White and male spaces on campus. The importance of attending/holding membership in diversity-based conferences/professional associations has been found as a positive retention strategy for women of color in faculty leadership roles and was also named as an important way to navigate the CSAO role as a woman of color (Arredondo, 2011; Kachchaf, et al, 2015; Ong, Ko & Hodari, 2016). Additionally, student affairs as a field needs to address why students of color in higher education and student affairs graduate programs have reported racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, tokenization, and experiencing a disconnect between what their programs promised (in terms of social justice and inclusion) and what they experienced in the classroom and profession Officer (Hubain et al, 2016; Harris & Linder, 2018). Unfortunately, the findings from this study revealed that these experiences do not disappear even when a woman of color becomes a Chief Student Affairs Officer. If these experiences are still showing up for women of color at the highest leadership position in the division of student affairs, then there is an indication that student affairs as a field is not effectively addressing topics of intersectionality,

oppression, power and privilege. Ideally, student affairs practitioners should be equipped with offering trainings to their campus peers in academic affairs on emotional intelligence, intercultural understanding, and navigating microaggressions, but this study and previous studies reveal that student affairs has not even figured out these topics for itself, yet. Lastly, student affairs professional associations should also reflect on ways they are perpetuating systems of oppression in the culture of student affairs, and how they can build practices that dismantle the current system of oppression and marginalization for women and people of color. These implications for policy based on women of color in student affairs can and should be expanded to women of color serving in senior leadership roles across campus. It is highly likely that women of color in other functional areas are navigating similar situations and sharing the experiences of the Chief Student Affairs Officers in this study. Higher education as a field must devote more time and resources to supporting their marginalized populations, acknowledging that social identities impact experiences, and creating more equitable and inclusive policies and practices

Limitations and Future Research

Future studies should continue to build upon this study and those that came before this study. Implications for future research studies include focusing on the phenomenon of being the only one representing an identity or identities in campus senior leadership, since this was a common experience for the women. Intersectionality and critical constructivism were useful lenses and frameworks for this study, and the researcher highly recommends the use of these frameworks when studying social identities. Intersectionality was built to illuminate the experiences of women of color who are often marginalized on multiple, intersecting levels. Critical constructivism asserts that the historical, social, cultural, economic and political context construct and influence our perspectives on the world, self, and others (Kinnehloe, 2005). More

specifically, it is important for a researcher studying topics related to social identities to have an understanding that while a person's perspective of the world may be valid for them, the social identities and experiences of that person also influences, or constructs, their worldview. Another future qualitative study could address why women of color student affairs professionals have left the field to further understand career persistence issues, and compare that exit to whether or not they had a mentor with the same identities at their campus or nearby. The researcher also recommends that a study that focuses exclusively on how women of color senior leaders in higher education navigate microaggressions should be conducted. Additionally, conducting a quantitative comparison of salaries across women, women of color, men and men of color in Chief Student Affairs Officer positions could be helpful to view how salary equity occurs in the field of student affairs. Lastly, the researcher would like to compare the experiences of White women and women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers in future research. Overall, this study added to the small body of research that explores how women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers navigate their identities in a White and male dominated workplace. The researcher hopes that more studies are conducted with this population and with all populations who share socially and historically marginalized identities. If we can better understand and build for the people at the margins of our campuses and organizations, then perhaps we can begin to build more equitable policies and practices from the start, rather than having to retroactively address issues.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be addressed. First, as this was a qualitative study with 11 participants, the results cannot be generalizable. A diverse sample of races, ethnicities, sexualities, institutional types (private, public, etc.), and years in the field were attempted, yet

only Black, Latinx, and Multiracial women of color participated in the study. The majority of participants identified as Black women, 2 identified as Latinx women, and 1 identified as a multiracial (Black and White) woman. The participants were all women of color, but there was not a diverse array of racial backgrounds outside of Black, Latinx, and multiracial. If the study were to be replicated, there should be additional time taken to ensure a more diverse sample. Furthermore, all of the women identified as heterosexual and cisgender. While the researcher tried to recruit a diverse sample, there was no diversity in sexuality or gender presentation amongst the participants. The experiences of women of color who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender may vary from those in this dissertation, being that Intersectionality notes that multiple marginalized identities leads to navigating more systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2017). Therefore, the findings cannot apply to all women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers. Second, researcher bias was predicted to be a limitation. Being that I am a biracial, woman in the field of higher education and student affairs, I could have had a bias throughout the research process. Intersectionality reminds readers and researchers that our identities are inextricably linked and enmeshed with systems of domination. Therefore, our identities *will* color the way we experience and interpret the world, and how the world impacts our experiences (Babbit, 2001, Núñez, 2014; Strayhorn, 2017). The fact that I shared some identities with the participants lent to deeper understanding and comfortable conversations and interviews. Lastly, due to the high-profile positions that these women hold on their campuses, participants may have been hesitant to participate in the study, and many were difficult to secure as participants. In total, I contacted over 50 participants and received responses from 11. This study examined the shared experiences of the participants at one time in their career, namely once they were at the highest position in the division of student affairs. Future researchers may

find different results if studying women of color at the new professional or mid-management level. It could be interesting for future research to compare the experiences of women of color across these professional levels.

Delimitations

The delimitations include population criteria, research questions, theoretical framework, and methodological approaches which were all deployed to address the purpose of the study, and subsequently narrowed the scope. First, the population criteria are limited to currently employed Chief Student Affairs Officers who are non-white or biracial, multiracial-identified, women. Intersectionality acknowledges that all the social identities outside of race and gender have also influenced the shared experiences of these women, which is why other than race, gender, and employment, other criteria will not be used to exclude participants. For this study, white-identified women CSAOs were not included. Next, as an intersectional phenomenological study, it only focused on the following three subjects, which are represented in the research questions: (1) the identity experiences (and attached systems of oppression) that these women of color navigated in their current professional roles, (2) how they were prepared for this navigation, and (3) how they mentored younger professional women of color. Although the researcher acknowledges that the life histories of these women have an influence on their navigation of their professional life, only their current, professional experiences as Chief Student Affairs Officers were studied. Full life stories, as in narrative methodology, that might examine how the women obtained the role of Chief Student Affairs Officer, will not be reviewed.

Conclusion

Today, the racial and gender landscape of students in higher education is changing, but the demographics of faculty, staff, and administrative leaders at institutions of higher education

has not kept up with the changing demographics of the student body (Gasman, et al; 2015; Lomax Wardell, 2010). It is crucial that campuses begin to examine why this is occurring, and to listen and understand the shared experiences of their historically and socially marginalized staff and faculty. This study sought to understand the shared experiences of women of color in the senior leadership role in student affairs, the division on college campuses that is devoted to holistic, student development. Student affairs often describes itself as a field devoted to equity, inclusion, and promoting diversity, yet numerous studies have found that women and people of color are not represented proportionally at the senior levels of student affairs administration (Biddix et.al, 2012; Jones & Komives, 2001; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002). This study also revealed that women of color at the senior leadership role in the division of student affairs are met with obstacles, navigate microaggressions, and exist under constant scrutiny, despite the field's supposed dedication to equity, inclusion, and diversity. This study has made clear that there is a large area for growth amongst student affairs professionals and their understanding of equity, inclusion, and diversity as it pertains to relationships with their colleagues. The women of color in this study also showed that despite challenges and affronts to their identities, they remained dedicated to the field and their students, and felt immense pride in making it to the role of CSAO. The main takeaways of the study include how the participants utilized their own identities and positionality to create more inclusivity and equity on campus, how they want to engage in professional relationships with other women of color in the field of student affairs, and how the CSAOs share a dedication to mentoring other professionals and paving the way for more women of color to enter the role. This sense of duty to giving back to their communities was a bond that tied the women together. The researcher hopes that this study inspires more studies on

women of color in higher education, and that these findings may assist current women of color to thrive and persist in the field of student affairs.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Preferred pseudonym:
3. Current title:
4. Education (degrees conferred):
5. Race:
6. Ethnicity:
7. Sex:
8. Gender:
9. Age:
10. Pronouns:
11. Additional salient social identities:

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- To begin, we'll focus on your career and position in student affairs. Please share more about your path into and through student affairs?
 - What is your favorite thing about your role?
 - What has been your proudest moment as a woman of color Chief Student Affairs Officer?
- Transition: Let's shift to exploring more about your social identities. How do you think your social identities have impacted your career trajectory, if at all?
 - What is it like being a woman of color Chief Student Affairs Officer at your campus?
 - How does being who you (a woman of color) impact how you approach your work, if at all?
 - What are some of the successes that you've experienced as a woman of color CSAO? Follow-up: What do you attribute that success to?
 - What would your senior leadership team, staff, and students say about you as a leader?
 - Is there something you wish you knew as a woman of color earlier in your career or in graduate school?
 - How do you help guide women of color in student affairs?
- Transition: I'd like to explore the intersections of your various identities. What is it like being a woman of color leader on your campus? Follow-up: Please share more about your experiences being a woman of color on the senior leadership team at your campus?

- Do you find that some of your identities are more salient than others for you in the workplace?
- Tell me about how you think your identities are perceived by others on your campus. Do you find that there's a difference between the identities that are salient to you versus how others perceive your identities (on campus)? If so, how?
- What are some of the barriers or challenges that you have experienced as a woman of color CSAO? Follow-up: how do you navigate those challenges?

Appendix C

Letter of Consent for Adults

Hello,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations at the University of New Orleans, under the supervision of Dr. Chris Broadhurst. I am conducting a dissertation research study to explore how women of color who serve as Chief Student Affairs Officers navigate their racial and gendered identities in their professional, campus role. I am requesting your participation, which will involve one demographic survey and one, one-hour interview. Interviews will occur either in-person or via Skype/Google Hangout, and will be audiotaped. All data will be collected by the end of the fall of 2018. Although participants could possibly disclose information that might be personal, to minimize any risk, the researchers will protect your identity by removing identifying information from all data (e.g., recordings and transcripts). Additionally, you will have the opportunity to review the transcriptions of your interviews to censor any information. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published but your name or identity will not be revealed (you will be given a pseudonym). Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that the study will inform others about how campuses can create more equitable structures for women of color Chief Student Affairs Officers, and may provide practical advice for women leaders of color in student affairs. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me or Dr. Broadhurst (cbroadhu@uno.edu).

Sincerely,

Nicole Caridad Ralston
239 580 8116
ncralsto@uno.edu

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

Signature	Printed Name	Date
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If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon at the University of New Orleans, 504-280-7386 or aohanlon@uno.edu.

Vita

Nicole Caridad Ralston considers herself an educator dedicated to equity and social justice. Her research interests include intersectionality, women of color, and multiracial identity development. In her roles at two different universities in New Orleans, her professional experiences include; improving first-year retention, managing community service programs, designing social justice leadership programs, facilitating workshops on diversity, equity and inclusion, and teaching classes on power, privilege, identities, and empathetic community engagement. She also facilitates leadership curriculum with the LeaderShape Institute, is a graduate of the Social Justice Training Institute, and facilitates sustainable solutions for diversity, equity, and inclusion with Beloved Community in New Orleans. Recently, she launched a consulting company, Caridad Consulting, LLC, focused on improving equity and leadership in education sectors.