

Retaining Staff Members of Color at a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution

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## **Abstract**

There continues to be a gap between the growing multicultural student body and predominantly White faculty and staff members who work with students. One factor in increasing the likelihood of persistence in college for minoritized students is the presence of a mentor with a similar ethnic background. Nevertheless, as of 2004, the populations of faculty, staff and administrators are still disproportionately dominated by White Americans. This study investigated how a university or college can better retain staff members of color. The participants were current and past staff members of color who worked at one university within the Midwestern United States. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were coded and then categorized into overarching themes that emerged from the data. Findings from this study contributed to the limited research on professional staff members of color in higher education. A majority of the current research focused solely on the hardships of faculty of color without acknowledging professional staff members of color. Through this study, I sought to understand the difficulties faced by staff members of color and what circumstances led staff members of color to leave or stay at their institution. I now also have a better understanding of what a university might do to ensure staff members of color feel supported while working within an institution.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have difficulties retaining staff members of color (Turrentine & Conley, 2001). For faculty, generally, factors that can influence the retention are salary, quality of life, time pressure/constraints, sense of community, gender, marital status, institutional leadership and autonomy, distribution of resources and tenure status (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009). Yet, little research has been conducted on what factors influence the retention of professional staff members at colleges and universities, and more specifically, professional staff members of color of these institutions. Professionals of color, including both faculty and staff, experience challenges on college campuses that can negatively influence certain retention factors such as low numbers of minoritized people on campus, barriers to tenure or promotion, feelings of otherness, and experiences of racial or ethnic bias (Jayakumar et al., 2009).

The chilly climate felt by professional colors at colleges and universities due to these challenges lead to feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction (Antonio, 2003). Ultimately, professionals leave institutions because they feel unwelcomed. Most research conducted in the area of retention focuses on faculty members but further research is needed to explore why staff members of color leave institutions, remain at institutions, and what services an institution may provide in order to support their staff of color.

### **Rationale of Study**

Racially and ethnically diverse staff members can have numerous positive impacts on a university or college campus. Turrentine and Conley (2001) state that students benefit from student affairs professionals of diverse backgrounds because they observe different role models

and glimpse the workforce they will one day join. Along with the diverse perceptions and experiences that staff members of color can bring to various campus discussions and positions, professional staff members of color can impact the campus community through mentoring. Campbell and Campbell (2007) found that mentoring relationships based on ethnic/racial matching of both the mentor and mentee led to more semesters of enrollment, more units completed, higher GPAs, higher graduation rates and a higher percentage of students entering graduate programs.

College and university campuses are becoming more diverse. It is reported that from 1999-2001, minoritized college enrollment increased from 1.5 million to 4.3 million students (Cox & the Gale Group, 2005). Although White students still serve as the major population of college students, the growth of minoritized students is projected to continuously grow (Cox & the Gale Group, 2005). The lack of minoritized faculty and staff to support minoritized students can be detrimental to their persistence through college. Minoritized students' benefit when their race or ethnicity is represented in professional staff and faculty who can give them direction and mentor them (Campbell & Campbell, 2007).

Diversity is not only important on a university campus but in the workplace as well. According to Konrad, Prasad, and Pringle (2006), the increase of diversity in the workplace positively impacts attitudes towards diversity, performance and salaries. According to Wolfe and Dilworth (2015), "In the context of the workplace, valuing diversity means creating a space that respects and includes differences, recognizing the unique contributions that those individuals can make, and creating a work environment that maximizes the potential of all employees" (p. 6). McLeod, Lobel, and Cox (1996) conducted one of the first studies in regards to importance of diversity in the workplace. They found that heterogeneous work groups were more creative and

created a more positive impact on the workplace than homogenous groups of workers (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996). As such, staff members of color not only have a positive impact on the student population, but also their fellow professional staff members of colleges and universities.

Finally, when colleges and universities constantly lose staff or faculty members they suffer financial losses. Departments within a university or college spend a portion of their budget for recruiting and hiring new employees in terms of bringing candidates to campus and providing them with meals and lodging. If hired, the department of the university must provide their new employee with a salary and benefits. In total, universities can invest approximately \$100,000 into one full-time professional staff or faculty member position per hiring (Smith, Thompson, & Woodall, 2014). Losing a staff member of color poses budget issues for a department due to the need to refill a vacant position and revisiting a costly hiring process. It would be more efficient for universities to maintain practices that encourage staff members of colors to remain at their current institutions.

### **Background of the Study**

In the history of the United States, racial and ethnic minoritized people have been fighting an uphill battle to gain equal rights and consideration in this country, especially in regards to education and employment. In 1964, during the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Act was passed in order to end segregation in public places and to ban discrimination based on race, sex, religion or national origin for employment (History.com Staff, n.d.) This act made it legally possible for many minoritized people to obtain a postsecondary education, but those who chose to do so faced many forms of discrimination due to the Act not being viewed favorably across the nation (Hilrado, 2010). The amount of discrimination individuals faced while implementing the Civil Rights Act was depicted in the high levels of controversy between

various circuit courts across the country when hearing cases on the importance of diversity in education (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Employment for minoritized people in higher education became more feasible over time as a result of race-friendly legislation, but in 2001, candidates of color for student affairs positions still consisted of 18-24% of the total labor pool (Turrentine & Conley, 2001).

Another action towards the betterment of education employment for minoritized people is Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action was introduced in 1961, also during the Civil Rights Movement, in order to ensure the employment of applicants and the enrollment of minoritized students into universities and colleges (“Background on Affirmative Action,” n.d.). Although it was originally focused on helping women and the African American population, it is currently used at some higher education institutions to help all racially and ethnically minoritized people for admissions decisions at universities across the country (Downing, Lubensky, Sincharoen, & Gurin, 2002). Even though Affirmative Action was introduced in 1961, “by 1965 only five percent of undergraduate students, one percent of law students, and two percent of medical students in the country were African American” (“Background on Affirmative Action,” n.d., para. 2). Therefore, more focus was placed on the enrollment of minoritized students but the employment of minoritized people still increased slowly due to skill and performance ratings generated when seeking employment (Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001).

Currently, minoritized people still comprise of small percentages of those employed at universities and colleges. Turrentine and Conley (2001) found that African Americans made up 12-15% of staff; Hispanics consisted of four to five percent of staff; Asian Americans consisted of two to three percent of staff; and, Native Americans consisted of zero to one percent of staff members in the field of student affairs. In comparison, faculty, staff, and administrative members

in higher education consists of 80-90% White people (Kayes, 2006). As the population of students in higher education became more diverse, Rainsford (1990) suggested that institutions should make changes that display the institutions commitment to diversity. These changes included altering institutional missions; leadership commitment; measurable goals; campus participation; assigning responsibility; assessment of progress; plans for setbacks; fundraising towards the idea; recruitment of students; faculty and staff and ultimately transforming the campus community (Rainsford, 1990). Almost all universities now include the values of diversity or inclusion to their current mission statements; however, the addition of these values has not completely solved the issue of creating inclusive campuses. As noted by Kayes (2006), “Recruitment of diverse faculty and staff is not retention, so any initiatives to diversify faculty and staff that do not address hostile institutional and faculty/staff cultures will end up fueling the ‘revolving door’ so common for the faculty and staff of color” (p. 65). An institution’s ability to recruit professional staff members of color must also be equal to the institution’s ability to make professional staff members of color feel included on campus as well.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study focused on the retention of staff of color at a Midwestern predominantly White institution and what types of support this institution could provide in order to retain their staff members of color. To explore these topics, current and past staff members of color at a Midwestern predominantly White institution were interviewed to determine what influenced them to stay at or leave an institution and what resources a university could provide to support their experience.

This study provided first-hand suggestions from staff members of color about how the university could support them and ultimately increase the likelihood of retaining staff members

of color. Current research about diversity, job satisfaction, and hardships of minoritized professionals in higher education is primarily focused on faculty members of color. This study looked to inform those departments, functional areas, and supervisory staff that fall under the umbrella of student affairs or student services within the Midwestern institution of study. The needs of staff members of color should be known and understood by all involved in the area of student affairs or student services in order to help departments in their efforts to increase diversity amongst their staffs.

### **Research Questions**

In order to explore the experience of staff members of color at the Midwestern predominately White institution, three questions guided this study:

1. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to stay at an institution?
2. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to leave an institution?
3. In what ways can institutions better support their staff members of color throughout their experience?

### **Design, Data Collection, and Analysis**

A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was conducted in order to gather data in this study. I audio-recorded semi-structured individual interviews with participants. The interviews were transcribed in order to complete line-by-line coding of each transcript. Participants were current or past professional staff members of color from a Midwestern predominantly White institution. Participants were recruited through email invitation using non-random sampling and snowball sampling, as participants were welcomed to suggest other staff members of color for interview. Interview questions were designed by the researcher in reference to the common themes found within the literature review. Given the semi-structure

of the interviews, I had the ability to ask follow-up questions that were not predetermined. Individual codes were grouped into sub-concepts and the overlap between sub-concepts created the overarching themes of the data.

### **Definition of Terms**

Below are definitions of key terms that may be found throughout this study based on the context of the study:

- **Critical race theory (CRT)** - a theory used to “analyze the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups” (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54)
- **Diversity** - “The practice of valuing all humanity, a means of increasing access and inclusion, a framework for creating a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members, and an individual and collective responsibility for combating prejudice and discrimination through a gained understanding of these issues during education, training, and engagement with others” (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p. 5)
- **Minoritized** – “The objective outcome, experienced by “minority” racial-ethnic groups, of the exclusionary practices of more dominant groups resulting from historical and contemporary racism” (Chase, Dowd, Pazich & Bensimon, 2012, p. 3)
- **Predominantly White Institution (PWI)** - “Institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 524).
- **Retention** - “The process of the ability of an institution to not only employ qualified academic staff, but also retain competent staff through the establishment of a quality work-life, motivated staff climate, best place of work, and being an employer of choice,

depending upon dedicated formulation and execution of best practices in human resource and talent management” (Selesho & Naile, 2014, p. 297).

- **Staff** - Individuals who are responsible for the administrative functions of a college or university.
- **Staff of Color** – Individuals who are responsible for the administrative functions of a college or university who also identify as a part of a minoritized population.
- **Student affairs/student services** - the division of services and support for students at institutions of higher education to enhance student growth and development.

### **Delimitations & Limitations of the Study**

The study delimitations include not interviewing faculty members of color. Although their experience as person of color on campus is valuable experience, their faculty status did not support the purpose of the study. Second, only interviewing current or past minoritized staff members at the Midwestern predominantly White institution is a delimitation of this study. The experiences of staff at this institution may not represent the experiences of minoritized staff members at other Midwestern predominantly White institutions. Another delimitation was the choice of not interviewing minoritized staff members from minority serving institutions (MSIs). The campus climate for staff members at MSIs may be supportive for the minoritized individuals on campus. Last, not interviewing White staff members is delimitation to my study. Although the experience of White staff members could be used to compare to minoritized staff members, I followed the theoretical framework of CRT with a focus on counterstorytelling.

A limitation to this study is choosing to only interview at one Midwestern predominantly White institutions. Although the institution could be defined as a predominantly White

institution, the campus climate may not represent the same campus climate of all predominantly White institutions.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The introduction of this thesis was used to introduce what is explored in this study, highlighting the problem statement, rationale, background, and purpose of the study. The remaining chapters provide an overview of relevant literature, description of the methodology, findings from the study, and conclusions and implications of this study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Research on the experiences of staff members of color is limited in comparison to faculty members of color when discussing difficulties faced in their roles, campus climate and overall job satisfaction. The data gathered from studies focused on faculty members of color helped explore the experience of a racially minoritized employee on a university campus. This information was used to inform this study and the interpretation of data for this study. Within this literature review the theoretical framework that shaped this study will be introduced. Next, the review will explore the ways in which campus climate has been perceived by faculty and staff members of color; the difficulties faced by faculty members of color; and the overall of levels of satisfaction staff members of color reported in regards to their work experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory (CRT) was created by legal scholars Derrick Bell (1989) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) to be used, initially, from a legal standpoint. It has since been infused into education by professors Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995). As stated by Hiraldo (2010), “CRT analyzes the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups” (p. 54). Ladson-Billings cited the establishment of Affirmative Action as an example of this because White women have benefitted the most from a policy that was intended to benefit racially minoritized people; a reality which ultimately perpetuates the privilege of the dominant White population (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT can be divided into five tenets used to explore different forms of social inequities: *counterstorytelling*, *the permanence of racism*, *Whiteness as property*, *interest convergence* and *the critique of liberalism* (Hiraldo, 2010). This study highlights the tenet counterstorytelling by

sharing the lived experiences of minoritized others in order to understand retention from a different vantage point (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

First, the permanence of racism can be described as the way in which structural and institutional racism are reinforced (Hiraldo, 2010). Other researchers have referred to this tenant as *ordinariness*. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) describe permanence of racism or ordinariness as the way in which racism is not acknowledged and therefore difficult to address. White privilege in education is so prominent and common that it can be seen as the norm of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Defining *power* and *privilege* as normal can lead to disregarding the existence of true racism.

Second, Whiteness as property can be described as the right to ownership based on being White (Hilrado, 2010). This entitlement to property is an asset granted to White people and stems from the roots of slavery in the United States. This form of *ownership* can be viewed in higher education through examining the number of faculty, staff, and administrators of color. As mentioned before, the population of faculty, staff and administrators consist of 80-90% White people (Kayes, 2006). With such a large population of White people, their opinions dominate educational spaces. Educational systems are also a part of systemic racism in which White privilege perpetuates accessibility for White individuals in education while hindering people of color (Hilrado, 2010). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described the intersections of property and Whiteness in four distinct terms:

1. Rights of disposition;
2. Rights to use and enjoyment;
3. Reputation and status property; and
4. The absolute right to exclude.

As described by Cheryl Harris (1993), “being [W]hite means gaining access to a set of public and private privileges that allow for greater control over the critical aspects of one’s life” (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 19). The four distinct terms described by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain the ways in which privileges can be used to perpetuate accessibility for White people while oppressing minoritized individuals.

Third, *interest convergence* was defined by Bell as “[B]lack people making substantial progress against racial oppression when their interests align with those White elites” (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 14). The example presented earlier on from Ladson-Billings in regards to civil rights legislation primarily benefitting White people (Hiraldo, 2010) depicts how the racism experienced by minoritized people created the need for certain civil rights legislation, and in turn, ultimately benefits White people and perpetuates the usage of power and privilege. This same idea is also referred to as *material determinism*, in which there is little incentive found by White people to eradicate racism because of the advances it provides (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Fourth, *critique of liberalism* refers to the idea that all individuals have equal opportunities (Hiraldo, 2010). References to ideas such as colorblindness and the neutrality of law are used to denounce thoughts on the social construction of race in order to define minoritized people as others (Hiraldo, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Finally, *counterstorytelling* can be viewed as minoritized people naming their own realities juxtaposed against the viewpoint of the dominant population (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The usage of counterstorytelling helps minoritized people by allowing them an outlet to express their oppression to avoid internalization and causes dominant groups to self-reflect on their oppressive actions instead of rationalizing their actions (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this study,

staff members of color were able to share parts of their experience through interviews, which gave them the opportunity to express any oppression they faced during their work experience. This study also provided staff members the opportunity to suggest ways in which PWIs could better support their staff members of color.

### **Synthesis of Research**

Research that explores the experiences of minoritized faculty and staff members find multiple factors that impact the type of experience they have on campus. These factors include campus climate, difficulties faced, and levels of satisfaction. This section will explore these factors more closely in order to understand what is currently known about the experiences of faculty and staff members of color.

#### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate has been found to affect the views of faculty and staff members of color in regards to their department and university's commitments to diversity. In a study conducted by Watson, Williams, and Derby (2005), they found that "administrators perceive the racial climate to be more hostile, separated, exclusive, and conservative, while faculty and students perceive the climate to be more friendly, integrated, inclusive and liberal" (p. 84). This finding represented the thoughts of administrators without consideration of race or ethnicity. This specific distinction between staff and faculty highlights that the experiences for each group are different and should be studied separately. Although perceptions of campus climate have been studied, Chang (2000) depicted in his study how actions of hate speech committed towards various minoritized groups across the country can also affect a campus climate. Negative campus climates are perpetuated through the dismissive behavior of White faculty and staff members to the existence of racism (Chang, 2000). Ignoring the existence of racism creates a hostile

environment for faculty, staff and students of color because it relates to the idea of colorblindness that ignores their racialized experiences. In relation to *interest convergence*, the possible resources used to change campus climate in order to improve the experience of minoritized people may also conflict with resources that support other institutional values (Chang, 2000).

In a study conducted by Mayhew, Grunwald, and Dey (2006), campus climate was measured by staff members and results were disaggregated in terms of staff demographics. Results of this study indicated that the ways in which a staff member racially identifies affects their perception of campus climate and also their perception of how much a department or institution values diversity. As stated by Mayhew, Grunwald, and Dey (2006), “Staff members of color were less likely than white staff to perceive that the campus community has achieved a positive climate for diversity” (p. 79). The authors concluded that staff members of color perceived that there were major institutional obstacles to increasing diversity on campus and had experienced or witnessed offensive behavior against marginalized groups (Mayhew et al., 2006). Negative perceptions of diversity caused staff members to feel that their departments and institution had low levels of investment into diversity. However, it was suggested that, ultimately, institutional leaders have the power to be change agents for increasing the role and value of diversity on campus (Mayhew et al., 2006). Changes to campus climates can aid in making a better environment for minoritized individuals but occupational difficulties should be assessed as well.

### **Difficulties Faced**

There is limited research on the specific difficulties staff members of color face in their roles; however, some similarities between faculty and staff members in this area while reviewing

the literature. Besides the racism and discrimination faced by minoritized individuals on campus, there were four specific obstacles identified throughout the literature that faculty members of color face in their roles: lack of respect, isolation, overburdened, and lack of mentors.

**Lack of respect.** Faculty of color commonly report the lack of the respect they receive from both students and colleagues (Patton & Catching, 2009). In those situations, students challenge the authority and expertise of faculty members of color while in the classroom (Patton & Catching, 2009). The issues students have with their instructors are usually reported to senior administrators or faculty members instead of being addressed directly with the faculty member in question (Stanley, 2006). According to Antonio (2003), many White students view faculty of color as “affirmative action hires” (p. 16) and therefore perceive them as illegitimate members of faculty. In addition, colleagues sometimes devalue the research of faculty members of color as not important or tenure-worthy due to their scholarly areas of expertise being perceived as not fitting the traditional research canon (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Lee, 2011).

**Isolation.** Being minoritized at a PWI can lead to feelings of otherness and isolation (Osajima, 2009). Faculty members of color described their presence as tokenized in their field because of underrepresentation and others being unwelcoming (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). A study focused on the experiences of African American faculty members also described isolation in terms of marginalization. Allen and fellow researchers (2000) stated that marginalization on campuses reduces access to networks, resources, and experiences necessary for success. Both of these factors caused faculty members of color to feel isolated and unsupported in their work environments (Jayakumar et al., 2009).

**Overburdened.** Besides completing their official work requirements, faculty members of color feel stress from unofficial duties placed upon them (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999).

These duties usually consist of mentoring students of color or participating in committee work within their departments (Stanley, 2006). Faculty members of color take on greater teaching, mentoring, service, and administrative/committee responsibilities than do White faculty (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Osajima, 2009). Staff member of colors may face these same stressors, as they take on responsibility in each of those areas and work with students more directly in non-academic situations.

**Lack of mentors.** Mentors are important for faculty and staff members of color in order to help them navigate PWIs (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). Marcus (2000) found mentors helped new staff understand the organizational culture of a university. However, in this study it was discovered that most staff of color do not experience this type of mentor relationship. Patton and Catching (2009) found that African American faculty, specifically, found that the mentorship they obtained from White superiors was less beneficial because their mentors could not relate to their circumstances or provide substantial feedback. As mentioned by Turner and colleagues (1999), successful mentoring relationships can help retain staff members, especially when the relationships focus on personal and professional development.

### **Levels of Satisfaction**

Faculty and staff members of color report having low levels of job satisfaction based on various factors. In a qualitative study, Marcus (2000) found that student affairs professionals believe they have found a good area of work, however, women of color specifically felt less satisfied and unfulfilled from work. Marcus also found that faculty and staff of color were unsatisfied with their positions due to the quality of supervision and socioemotional issues. Over 70% of staff members of color gave extremely low rankings when it came to the quality of supervision they receive (Marcus, 2000). Another study by Pololi, Evans, Gibbs, Krupat,

Brennan, and Civian (2013) focused on minoritized faculty members in medicine. The authors found that minoritized faculty members were less likely to be satisfied in their positions in comparison to their White counterparts. Both the Marcus and Pololi et al.'s studies found that these levels of satisfaction were also due to low promotion rates that could have possibly been based on favoritism within the department.

### **Literature Review Summary and Conclusion**

Faculty of color face many difficulties in their role such as lack of respect or mentorship in which can be inferred as also the same experience of staff members of color. Due to these difficulties experienced by staff and faculty members of color, they report having low job satisfaction and low quality of supervision. Accompanied with the burden of extra work from committee involvement and mentoring relationships with students of color on campus, faculty and staff members of color feel that they hold greater responsibilities than White faculty or staff members. White faculty and staff members also perceive campus climate differently than minoritized faculty and staff members in which helps perpetuate negative campus climates due to dismissive behavior. Each study reviewed leads to the conclusion that universities are lacking in their efforts to retain their faculty and staff of color once hired. White faculty and staff members experience smaller workloads, less classroom difficulties, and more opportunities for professional growth or promotion within a university. The differences in the experiences of White and minoritized faculty members are continuously depicted through the literature; however, more research needs to be conducted in order to explore the particular experiences of minoritized staff members.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design**

### **Introduction**

This study focused on the retention of staff of color at a Midwestern predominantly White institution, and what types of support the institution could provide in order to retain their staff members of color. The study was designed as a qualitative study in order to understand the meaning people had constructed about their experiences (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological approach was used when interviewing participants in order to learn from their lived experiences. As discussed by Merriam (2009), “A phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world, that is, their ‘everyday life and social action’” (p. 25). I chose this approach in order to better understand the lived experiences of staff members of color and find the basic underlying similarities between their stories. The underlying similarities helped depict what the experience of a staff member of color was at a Midwestern predominantly White institution. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to stay at an institution?
2. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to leave an institution?
3. In what ways can institutions better support their staff members of color throughout their experience?

The research design was selected as it relates to CRT’s focus on counterstorytelling. As defined by Ladson-Billings (1995), counterstorytelling is the act of minoritized individuals naming their own realities juxtaposed against the viewpoint of the dominant population. In this study, staff members of color interviewed were sharing their everyday experiences within a Midwestern predominantly White institution in which countered the literature on their experiences or

highlighted differences between their experiences and those of White staff members. In this chapter I describe the participants, data collection, and data analysis for this study.

### **Participants**

There was a total of 18 participants of this study who were current and past professional staff members of a Midwestern predominantly White institution who self-identified as ethnic/racial minoritized individuals. In order to obtain participants of this study, first, personal contacts were formally contacted through e-mail in which the study and interview structure were described. Second, other minoritized staff members who fit the criteria received an email. The email communication was sent by the department of institutional analysis. I also emailed staff who were a part of minoritized support groups using information available on the university's website. Participants were also asked to recommend others who they believed fit the participant criteria. The referred participants were instructed to contact the researcher for more information. The final sample of participants consisted of 18 minoritized staff members. Of this sample 15 out of 18 participants were female and 16 out of 18 participants identified as Black or African American.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The private nature of the interviews influenced participants' ability to be honest in their response and secure in the confidentiality of the conversation. Although I had a list of interview questions, the semi-structure of the interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions to responses given by participants.

Based on my positionality to this study and the participants, my lived experiences were sometimes similar to some participants of the study and informed my interest in the topic. What follows is a brief description of my positionality:

I am an African American woman currently studying and working the field of student affairs. I am a strong advocate for social justice and understanding the negative implications that race has in the United States, especially for minoritized people. I do believe that the negative implications are socially constructed and ultimately perpetuated through the usage of power and privilege. When approaching this study, I brought my own lived experiences with racism and stereotyping as an African American staff member on a Predominantly White campus. I believe this approach will help me understand the experiences that some participants in the study faced in regards to discrimination, a difference in standards of work, over commitment in areas of diversity and the general feeling of being unwelcomed when first arriving to a Predominantly White Institution.

My positionality allowed me to co-construct the experiences shared by participants in a way that provides insight and understanding of what it means be a minoritized staff member at a predominantly White institution.

The data for this study were collected from participants at a predominantly White institution in the Midwestern United States. Private appointments were scheduled to interview participants in convenient, comfortable, yet private spaces in order to protect the identities of participants. Interviews ranged from 17-60 minutes. Each individual interview was audio-recorded. The data collection lasted one academic semester. The interviews were transcribed using two online services and the data collected were submitted through recordings named as the

participants' pseudonyms in order to ensure privacy. Participants chose a pseudonym to help protect their identities. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer. Hard copies of transcripts were locked in my private filing cabinet.

### **Data Analysis**

I used line-by-line coding of each transcript in order to analyze each interview. Coding can be described as the process of making notes next to pieces of data that you feel will be relevant to your study or answering your research questions (Merriam, 2009). Individual codes that overlap or repeat amongst transcripts were grouped together into sub-concepts. Sub-concepts helped create categories to connect the unique codes of each transcript. After coding each interview and developing sub-concepts from the data, overarching themes were created based on the relationship amongst the found sub-concepts. Themes can be defined as conceptual elements that cover or span many individual examples of the theme (Merriam, 2009). Second, reflexivity was used to ensure trustworthiness of data analysis. As stated by Creswell and Miller (2000), reflexivity is a procedure in which a researcher self-discloses their assumptions, beliefs and biases.

### **Summary**

I conducted 18 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews over the course of two months. Participants were current or past staff members of color from a Midwestern predominantly White institution. Participants were interviewed about their experience within the university. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for further analysis. Concepts that emerged from the coding of data were used to construct overarching themes in the data. The overall findings are presented in chapter four.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Context

A total of 18 participants responded to the email invitation distributed to all staff members at a predominantly White institution in the Midwestern United States. Each participant self-identified as a person of color and a staff member at the institution. Of the 18 participants, 15 were female and three were male. A participant information sheet was completed for each interview. The information gathered from this sheet included mandatory responses to questions such as pseudonym for participant, race/ethnicity, and whether each participant was a current or past employee of the institution. Information that was optional for participants to share were age, sex, and the story of how they got involved in student affairs. The demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Demographic Information*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Current or Past Employee</i>	<i>Sex</i>
Superwomen	Black	Current	F
Pineapple	Black	Current	F
Erica	Black	Current	F
Von	Black	Current	F
Red	Black	Current	F
Elena	Bi-racial	Current	F
Sasha	Black	Current	F
Maxine Shaw	Black	Current	F
Rene'	African American	Current	F
Lizzy	Black	Current	F
Melody	Bi-racial	Current	F
Jenny	Black	Current	F
Jennifer	Black	Past	F
David	Black	Current	M
Johnny Booze	Black	Current	M
Robert Langdon	Black	Current	M
John Doe	Black	Past	F

During the interview process, participants shared how long they were employed with the institution and there was a vast range of experience within the institution. The significance of this emerged when comparing the experiences and how participants defined the current campus climate. In addition, staff members with longer histories of employment with the institution provided more historical information about the development of the institution and the past initiatives or issues minoritized staff members faced while at the institution. The historical perspectives provided within the narratives added a richness to the data that depicted the journey of the institution, its successes, and its pitfalls in regards to racially tense issues such as employment, representation, and retention within the institution.

Another fact to note is the roles of participants at the institution varied between close contact with students to no contact with students at all. This dynamic determined the focus of staff members and their reasoning for remaining at the institution. Those who worked more closely with students mentioned more of an obligation to support students, especially minoritized students, but also were more aware of how the campus climate and plights of minoritized staff members impacted the experience of minoritized students on campus. What follows are the themes that emerged during the study.

### **Findings**

Seven themes emerged that provide a broad overview of the commonalities each participant shared about their experience at the institution. Themes were developed by grouping more specific concepts based on a total of 48 individual codes from each interview. Individual codes from each interview were grouped into broader concepts and then the final themes were used to categorize the experiences of the participants. The development of the themes, concepts and codes are reflected in Appendix A.

Overall, the codes used to distinguish the findings emerged from similar thoughts mentioned by participants within their individual interviews. The codes were then combined to create concepts that could also be combined to finalize one overarching theme. The two separate codes *helping students of color* and *differential treatment* led to two separate concepts of *students of color obligation* and *unfair expectations* that both ultimately fit under the umbrella of *unspoken expectations* based on the underlying similarity of these ideas. The final themes that emerged after analyzing the data were (1) institutional factors, (2) “the invisible employee,” (3) support, or the lack thereof, (4) unspoken expectations, (5) negativity of the environment, (6) institutional benefits, and (7) navigating the institution. The findings section will be organized from a macro to micro level understanding of larger institutional factors that impact the experience of minoritized staff members to more individualized ways of coping with the current institutional environment that minoritized staff members had developed in order to maintain their employment at the institution of study. Within the explanation of each theme, counternarratives of minoritized staff members will be shared to depict the untold stories of individuals at the institution.

### **Institutional Factors**

The institution was frequently described as the source of many issues that minoritized staff members faced or notice in their everyday work lives. Such institutional factors that impacted the experiences of minoritized staff members included unfair hiring practices, lack of upward mobility for minoritized staff members, the institution’s location and what participants identified as probable responsibilities of the institution that were currently not being fulfilled. These concepts were highlighted in the majority of individual interviews as 1) issues participants experienced firsthand or 2) issues they were aware of based on the experiences of colleagues.

**Unfair hiring practices.** Multiple participants mentioned that the institution does not hire fairly. Although they were aware of various initiatives established to promote equitable hiring, participants highlighted this as an area of growth for their institution. The unfair hiring stemmed from internal hiring practices, a lack of diversity in applicant pools, or blatantly not considering minoritized staff members for promotion opportunities within various departments within the institution. Some participants described the hiring process as extremely competitive and almost impossible to obtain without connections already established within the institution. During Superwoman's interview, she reflected on her time at the institution and the issues she saw minoritized individuals facing to obtain employment. Superwoman stated:

I have seen where some people have went on and got three degrees and still can't get a job, still cannot get their foot in the door, and so then you wonder, "What does it take? Why do I have to fight so hard just to get a standardized job?"

The answer to her question seemed to be answered in the interview of multiple participants who perceived this to be an issue related to race and preference of the institution. Referring to internal hiring processes, Sasha noted, "Somebody already has somebody in mind for a job, and that person in mind is not usually a person of color." Sasha's attributed unfair hiring practices to a pre-selection process that does not consider minoritized staff members. Superwoman, however, alludes to unfair hiring practices to be rooted in the usage of privilege stating, "Our issues stem from the ones who have the power and control to keep you from opportunities that you can have." Participants also discussed how constantly seeing these unfair practices impacted them. For example, Pineapple stated:

What I've seen is that they go to bat for Susie Q over here to get what they think she deserves but the Black person over here doing the same job, putting in the same effort,

doing the same thing is not rewarded the same. You keep doing that over and over and over again and people lose hope.

Aside from unfair hiring practices across pockets of the institution, participants described other duties of the institution that seemed to be left unmet or unaddressed.

**Institutional responsibility.** According to participants, there are certain responsibilities that must be addressed in order to help the institution function successfully. Participants noted these responsibilities, aside from hiring practice in which were previously discussed, include commitment to issues of diversity and addressing issues that may impede on the well-being of an institution's employees. Many participants shared that they felt that the institution made various attempts to make a progressive step in addressing various issues but they were ultimately unsuccessful. Many participants shared that the institution practiced "going through the motions" in order to maintain a reputation without actually putting action behind the words or initiatives they presented to alleviate certain issues. This was the impression many participants had in regards to the institutions response to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Elena shared how she described the initiatives of the institution in regards to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

You comply or you're committed. So you comply with what you're supposed to do because you're supposed to do it or you're committed to the work and you do it [at a] fundamental level. [Institution of study] is a compliance institution.

Some participants expressed that they felt that certain issues, such as diversity issues, were left to be solved by the communities of color on campus or resources on campus that were specific to minoritized groups of people. Robert Langdon shared this sentiment stating, "That should be the priority of the institution...I don't believe issues of diversity or issues of color is just an issue for

people of color, or people identified as part of this diverse community, I think it's an issue for everyone." Aside from unfair hiring and unmet responsibilities of the institution, some participants also indicated that the Midwestern geographical location of the institution impacted their everyday experiences.

**Location.** Some participants indicated that the geographical location of the institution itself contributed to the difficulty of attracting and also retaining minoritized staff members. Minoritized staff members discussed how the institution mirrors the surrounding community's population of predominately White individuals. Some participants attributed a lack of representation for communities of color as a factor that makes attracting more professionals of color to the area difficult. Maxine Shaw described her lived experience in the location of the institution:

It's hard enough living in [institution's location] as a person of color. And so, that means you have to remember that when you are bringing people of color here as students, faculty, or staff, whatever, because I can't feel uncomfortable where I work and uncomfortable at home. I need some place where I don't feel like... on guard.

Some participants expressed that the geographical location and population of individuals who inhabited the location created an oppressive atmosphere; the oppressive atmosphere was replicated by the institution as a result of influence from the surrounding community. John Doe described how the new area she was moving to fostered growth unlike the current institution in which she was employed:

It's really like, "So what do you have to bring?" And I need that in my life and I think it makes you a better person if you can just do your work and develop your craft and

develop your skillset without societal...without socialization of this area oppressing you, because it makes it hard to think and it clouds your thoughts.

In addition to geographical location of the institution, participants also highlighted how the campus climate and workplace environments can negatively impact their experience within the institution.

### **Negativity of the Environment**

Participants explained how the campus climate not only impacted their everyday experiences but also their workplace environment. Most participants expressed not experiencing overt racism while on campus or in the workplace but more so instances of constant microaggressions that built up over time. Most participants were also aware that these microaggressions and negative instances might also impact the experiences of minoritized students. Aside from reports of experiencing microaggressions and levels of discomfort in certain spaces, minoritized student comfort was also discussed as a priority of concern for these professionals. Along with microaggressions, some participants described discomfort that led to lack of acceptance of one's true self from those around them.

**Campus climate.** There were some different views concerning the perceptions of campus climate. For professionals who had just begun working at the institution, the campus climate was warm or inviting; however, those who worked at the institution for multiple years viewed the campus climate as unwelcoming, hostile, and unaccepting to non-majority identities on various intercultural levels. Maxine Shaw described the campus climate by stating, "Anything that's not White, gender, you know, Christian, middle class, and probably males, even though males are in the minority in this incoming class. It's just not...it's a hostile place I think." Some participants related one's ability to navigate the campus climate was dependent upon the amount of privilege

your identities could provide you. Jenny highlighted this thought by saying, “I think it just depends on how much privilege you have. It’s probably less welcoming the more marginalized identities you have.” Based on this perception of the campus climate, some participants believed that the only way to successfully navigate this climate was to assimilate to the surrounding culture and views. John Doe mentioned in this by saying, “I’ve noticed that maybe if you’re a person of color who you assimilate and you ignore your cultural background, you’ll be fine.” It was easier for participants to highlight negative factors about the campus climate but recognizing the level of comfort participants felt on campus varied based on different factors such as the workplace environment.

**Workplace environment.** Some participants described that work environments provided a sense of comfort, yet, instances of a lack of acceptance and some forms of tokenism existed for others. Melody described how her own office is a comfortable space created for both her and her students:

I feel comfortable in certain places and certain spaces and I feel most comfortable with my students. I feel like that’s when I could really be myself and it’s also I see as a benefit for them too because often times outside of my office they don’t have those spaces that they can be themselves, so I feel like my office is my safe space.

Some participants described their workplace as a welcoming environment that lacked that possibility to create authentic relationships amongst staff members. Jennifer described this in her experience by stating:

I think it can be welcoming, but I don’t think we are intentional about making it authentic...being authentic is another thing. That means saying, “We have a shared

experience in something.”...Let’s really have a conversation around personal and professional development and how our roles impact students.

The level of discomfort felt within the workplace environment led some participants to be a part of, or observe several siloes, of people of color. The separation of different racial/ethnic groups of people was noted in multiple interviews. The impact of this separation was mentioned by Von within her interview: “I think each race tries to stay with their group. Which doesn’t help the campus grow because our students see it.”

Still, some participants did not share these sentiments, as they were the only minoritized individual in their department. In instances such as this, participants expressed experiences with tokenism within their department. Sentiments shared included instances of being expected to speak for your entire race during discussions of diversity. Rene’ shared an instant of tokenism that she experienced earlier in her career in regards to promotion. As Rene’ recalled, “The promotion was not deserved based on anything that I had done...It was like oh, we just want to give you this title so we can say again statistically that we have a person color with this title and this role.” This promotion created an unwelcoming work environment for Rene’ amongst her and her colleagues. The negative work environments experienced by minoritized staff members can lead to feelings of isolation and possibly invisibility within their roles.

### **“The Invisible Employee”**

Within their various roles at the institution, participants shared feelings of being invisible to the institutional community. Invisibility was displayed in the form not feeling valued and a lack of racial/ethnic representation across campus, specifically when discussing roles at the senior administrative level. Melody shared an instance of feeling invisible at the institution stating, “People would just walk into a room and completely ignore you and then the audacity

several years later to be like, ‘Oh, nice to meet you. Are you new here?’ I’m like I’ve been here for three years.” Nevertheless, some participants shared that they felt that their voices could be heard as long as they knew how to navigate within the institution to find the individuals of power to address what issue they may have had.

**Not valued.** A majority of participants shared sentiments of not feeling valued in their roles as professionals on campus. Some of these feelings stemmed from not being in a strong position of influence within the institution. Jenny noted this in her interview by saying, “You highlight things that are not cool, but there’s only so much that we can do.” The lack of influence and the possibility to evoke change seemed to discourage some of the participants who entered their roles with the expectation of being change agents within the institution. Maxine displayed this fact stating, “I’ve stopped giving my opinion because I know it’s not really heard,” and, “I just want the things that I do to be understood to be important and be treated that way.” For some participants a lack of value in the role as professional could be viewed in the form of questioning their capabilities or level of competence. John Doe expressed experiencing this feelings noting, “There’s not as much acknowledgement of ideas and expertise and how there’s an assumption that you’re less than or you don’t know as much.” Sasha shared similar feelings when describing some of her experiences:

I guess I would say I’ve felt more or like second guessed in my ability to do certain things, or like, just second guessed on whether or not you can actually like complete a task or like if you are really competent enough to do something.

Participants described these experiences of being valued less in comparison to their White counterparts. Staff members expressed feelings of being less valued sometimes led to silence and overall, feelings of “why bother?” Maxine Shaw illustrated this feeling in the concluding

statement of her interview: “I mean I am kind of disappointed in myself for being disappointed because really, what did I expect?” The feelings of not being valued relate to the problem of a lack in representation in regards to the chance of these staff members receiving advice or solutions to issues from administrators who cannot validate their sentiments as a shared experience.

**Lack of representation.** An issue in regards to representation was mentioned multiple times between individual interviews. Participants felt that their racial/ethnic identities were not reflected in the senior administrative staff of their institution. This often caused participants to reflect on how this lack of representation impacts the minoritized students on campus. Von discussed this notion in her interview:

I’ve told my bosses if I was a student, I wouldn’t come ask you anything because you all don’t look like me. I’m not saying that I am afraid, but just like you relate to your peers, I relate to my peers.

In relation to the impact on students, specifically students of color, participants also mentioned how there is a lack of representation when crucial decisions are made. Pineapple stated:

It (campus climate) definitely needs some work because it’s clear on a lot of levels that things are wrong. I think that having more people of color at the table is really the first...that’s how you can start seeing some change.

Johnny Booze explained a reason he was told for the lack of representation at the institution.

Johnny noted:

When I sit on a committee with people like, “Well it’s hard for us to recruit a minority Ph.D. in such and such area.” I call bullshit because I’m just like I’d be more than happy to get this front of the right people.

Participants explained the lack of representation impacted minoritized students on campus and this factor alludes to the amount of responsibilities minoritized staff members have to compensate for the lack of professional of colors on campus.

### **Unspoken Expectations**

Participants of the study expressed feeling pressure not only within their role but also to complete tasks that are not necessarily in their job description. These tasks are perceived as necessary and expectations of minoritized staff members in order to support minoritized students and to create a more institutionally diverse environment.

**Students of color obligation.** The commitment of staff members can sometimes go beyond the call of duty, specifically in working with minoritized students, because they feel obligated to support this group of students. Participants shared similar instances of how this idea of obligation guides or impacts their decisions within their work environments. Johnny described his obligation to specifically African American male students:

You have to have a Black male role model available. If someone doesn't stay and fight the fight, it's never – the challenges will never be brought up, the differences in perspectives will never be available and most importantly our young Black men will have no one that they can look up to and say that they can be successful.

Other participants reflected on the question, "If not me than who?" in regards to supporting minoritized students within their offices. Rene' was faced with this question by others when she considered taking a new position: "When I left that office everyone was like, 'Who are we going to send our students to that we can trust is going to give them the right information, the real deal, the same opportunities?'" Often the issue of "who to trust" caused participants to feel responsible for minoritized students. Erica discussed exploring the issue of "who to trust" in her role as a

mentor to undergraduate minoritized students: “If this mentoring position wasn’t available, then literally who would they have? It always just really got to me.”

**Extra involvement.** Some participants described their extra involvement as necessary but a cause of frustration when they evaluate the difference in the amount work to be done between themselves and their White counterparts. Jennifer expressed some of her frustrations with the uneven work load: “It does get a little frustrating because it’s like, ‘Um, do you really understand that I’m doing probably twice the work you’re doing in mentoring in this program, and mentoring this student just because.’” Melody expanded on this notion of extra involvement when it relates specifically to minoritized students:

On the same hand they want us to save all the black and brown kids on campus which is more work. And our students are dealing with issues that we are dealing with ourselves and so it’s really hard to do the best for our students which should be the responsibility of all faculty and staff on this campus, but often times it ends up being like we’re going to give you all the students of color.

**Unfair expectations.** Aside from completing these extra task and obligations, minoritized staff members express the feeling of being held to unfair standard in regards to the professionalism. Von describes an instance of double standards when it came to staff expectations: “There’s been times where a staff member is gone, you know they don’t worry about covering their shift, but as soon as I ask I’ve got to worry about covering my shift and I think that’s wrong.” This double standard held against minoritized staff sometimes creates pressure into being “the perfect employee.” Pineapple described the expectations she feels others have of her within the work place:

I can't have a non-professional moment because it will follow me. I've seen people who've had those moments and they can't get anywhere here. They can't move on. You can't be normal. You can't be a normal person. You have to be somebody extra on top of your game all the time and that's hard.

Ciara discussed how other minoritized staff members policed her:

It use to bother me so much when people would come in with thong sandals, ripped jeans and a plaid shirt...let me come in with that- somebody is going to address it or even you know a colleague of the same color will say "You know that's not professional...you shouldn't be wearing that."

**Work-related stress.** The extra obligations and unfair standards can cause staff members to feel high levels of work-related stress while still fulfilling their everyday work responsibilities.

Jenny described the stress of minoritized staff members: "Being a staff of color is burdensome because there's only so many of us...you can only be that one person of color on so many searches...You get overtaxed and over tapped because there's not enough of you. It's sad."

Maxine Shaw described the role of student affairs administrators to be one of the most stressful jobs. She further discussed how the work-related stress and stressors of women of color in particular could be overwhelming:

Women of color tend to have personal stressors with, you know, family stuff- especially first gen...so you have all that and then you have all these little stupid things that happen on campus...trying to manage that, trying to manage like, "Will people make an appropriate comment"...A lot of it to me boils down to keeping calm.

Although staff members were aware of some negative experiences and implications of being minoritized at predominately White institution, they also highlighted areas of support they have received or wished to receive in their role.

### **Support, or the Lack Thereof**

A majority of participants were able to indicate a means of support that they use to aid in their experience as a minoritized staff member. Of each response, commonalities were found around the notion of good supervision and mutual support amongst minoritized staff members.

**Supervision.** Many participants discussed the impact of supervision on their experience. Whether it was positive or negative, supervision was key in evaluating the experience of staff members in relation to comfort, feelings of value, opportunities for growth and overall support in their current roles. Melody described the influence her supervisor had on her experience in her role: “Just being in a space where I feel valued and heard...that makes me feel good and it makes me feel like I can be my authentic self without having to constantly worry if I’m going to be seen as angry all the time.” Participants also discussed how positive supervisor relationships led to further professional development opportunities and growth. Ciara stated, “I feel like I can really develop and people actually care about my development as a professional.” Although this positive experience was heavily noted throughout interviews, some participants were aware that this is not necessarily true for all staff members. Jennifer noted this during her interview: “I talk to other people who work here, and they don’t have the same experience I do...I don’t think there’s consistency in leadership in terms of who runs individual departments.” Some participants described that their lack of support from their department stemmed from not fully being supported by their supervisors.

**Mutual support.** Participants also discussed the means in which they support each other: racial/ethnic affinity groups, organizations established around shared experiences, and other professional groups at the institution that support unity amongst various racial/ethnic groups. Jenny described the more personal connections she has fostered due to shared experiences: “We find that we create a sense of community...we’ve gotten together out of sheer survival and being pissed and being sad and having to lift each other up.” Red explained the importance of strong community amongst minoritized staff members:

When you have a strong community it makes the work more enjoyable and just knowing that you have people that share similar experiences as you and that are- that understand these experiences and understand those experiences affect our student as well.

Some participants discussed how they show, or how they have been shown, support on an individual level. Erica discussed a supportive interaction she experienced with a White staff member: “The underlying advice is, ‘Even though I know my experience is not the same as yours, I also belong to a marginalized group, and my door is open, so come talk to me.’” Rene discussed how she used her own experiences to support other minoritized staff members: “One of the things that I have been able to do with several of my colleagues over the years is to work with them utilizing some of the skills I’ve gained.” Still, some participants seemed to experience a lack of connection between themselves and others of shared experiences or who identified as minoritized. Robert described his experience stating, “No [one sat me down] and said, ‘Well, here are the resources for you.’ I think I had to go up and reach out for them for myself. So I guess that was kind of little sad at the same time.” Aside from support from others to aid in their experiences, minoritized staff members also shared personal strategies used to navigate issues within the institution which will be explored in the theme: Navigating the Institution.

## **Institutional Benefits**

When asked what keeps them employed at the institution, most participants referred to the financial and educational benefits they receive from the institution. Most participants alluded to the importance of maintaining an income for their families and the university provided them with that. A second benefit that emerged was the educational opportunities provided by the university.

**Financial benefits.** Regardless of the hardships experienced by participants, the financial support from the institution trumped their difficulties and the thought of leaving the institution. Many participants expressed their institutions' benefits program and how it was in comparison to other institutions. Johnny Booze expressed this sentiment in his interview by stating:

You're not going to find another university in the United States that is going to kick in 13% into your retirement without you putting a dime into it. The benefits are just...they're tremendous.

The financial benefits gained from the institution were also important for those staff members who had familial obligations to consider. Many participants referred to maintaining a lifestyle for their family that was built as a result of being employed at the university. Jenny stated, "Survival. I have a family to take care of." Pineapple added to this thought by saying, "I've got kids in the schools. We've got roots that we've sown into the ground at this point, so I'm not ready to move."

**Educational benefits.** Some participants discussed the educational benefits available to them due to them being employed at the institution. When discussing what influenced them to stay at the institution, some participants discussed currently benefiting from taking courses that were paid for by the institution. Sasha discussed this factor in her interview stating, "Educational

benefit is also great which is really what keeps me – I mean to be honest that’s what keeps me here too is working out my masters and having that paid for.” Furthering their education was viewed as a way to develop professionally to aid in their possibilities of upward mobility. Although the university provided all staff members with these opportunities, staff members of color still felt a need to create specific ways to successfully navigate through institutional barriers.

### **Navigating the Institution**

To conclude each interview, participants shared advice given to them and that they shared with others to aid in the experience of a minoritized staff member. From these interview questions, and periodically throughout the interview, 14 out of 18 staff members shared tips they have learned or shared with others about the need to be aware and cautious within the university setting. Nevertheless, some participants stressed the importance of not attributing all setbacks and negative experiences to race.

**Be careful.** The need to “always be cautious” or “to stay under the radar” displays a lack of trust between the minoritized staff and the institution. Pineapple alluded to this idea when discussing her coping strategy of “shifting” to adjust to all situations: “We’re constantly shifting between who we are in this situation, who we are in that situation but you always have to be on your game and it’s hard. When I go home at night I’m done.” Other participants shared how limiting their non-presence kept them safe in their own work environment. John Doe stated, “It makes me feel like – I shouldn’t talk...I should make my presence as small as possible so as to just not be targeted with – the negative actions that I see taken against people of color.” The tips shared by minoritized staff to navigate safely within the institution included:

1. “Conceal my passion and purpose.”- John Doe

2. “Stay and fight...or leave. Sometimes leaving might be in your best interest, your health, your sanity.”- Rene’
3. “Be aware of the system.”- Red
4. “You need to find that one person that you can trust so that if you are sharing those struggles or challenges, they can actually help you come up with some solutions and strategies.”- Jennifer
5. “Not being so focused on your colleagues of a different race than you...focus on your job and your reputation.”- Ciara
6. “Learn how to play the game.”- Von
7. “I try to teach my colleagues how to document and what to document...but also if they need to leave, leave.”- Elena
8. “If you want to advance, and if you want to do anything, the first thing you need to know is what the rules are.”- Superwoman
9. “Never wake the bear. So if you stop, watch, and listen, you’ll find out who the bears are in your department.”- Johnny Booze

Others shared the importance of self-care as a minoritized staff member in order to maintain energy to persevere and consistently support students. Maxine stated it simply by saying, “You got to make time for yourself.” Jenny shared the importance of self-care for minoritized staff members to avoid *racial battle fatigue*. Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) described racial battle fatigue as a way to “address the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (p.55). Jenny noted that:

You've got to think about there's something called racial battle fatigue, and if you are constantly fighting and you're never restoring yourself, you're never having an opportunity to rebuild, to remember what your worth is or to connect with others that see value in you.

**“It's not always about race.”** The mindset “it's not always about race” allowed for some participants to view negative instances differently in terms of understanding why an issue possibly began and what solutions can be taken to solve it. In these instances, participants wanted all issues or concerns to be addressed through their work ethic in the form of “my work speaks for itself” or “no one can deny that I do my job well.” Sasha said:

I don't want anyone to worry about what I look like, I want you to look at my work and see that my work is above and beyond anything you can get from anybody else. So you don't have to think twice about, “She looks like this – like I am not sure she can't do that.”

She continued more on this thought noting, “I like to encourage people to not be so stuck on what anybody else looks like or why this person is treating you like this, just not always thinking of it as like its because I'm Black.” This mentality helped some participants build stronger connections with their White counterparts in the workplace. Lizzy described how mentality could determine how others treat you:

If you expect to be discriminated against, you probably will be. If you expect to be treated like equally, you probably will be. Some of our expectations get us into trouble. If you expect to be treated harshly, you will be.

Pineapple supported this point of view when describing her experience in comparison to other minoritized staff members:

The university itself, they've been good to me. I almost wish I had some experiences similar to my counterparts here, so that I could understand where they're coming from but a lot of what I've seen so far and just the people that I've talked to, a lot of that is just mentality too...how they look at things, how they're used to being treated.

Overall, coping strategies and conscious choices in mentality are used to help minoritized staff members face consistent issues at the institution in order to maintain employment.

### **Other Considerations**

During participant interviews, some factors presented themselves that were worthy of mentioning beyond the themes that emerged. First, it should be noted that longevity of employment impacted the perceptions participants had about the institution. For those who had been employed at the institution for three years or longer, their view of the campus climate could be categorized as more negative. Newer employees believed the campus climate was welcoming or they developed perceptions based off the experiences of other staff members of color. Those employed longer at the institution were more likely to perceive the institution as uncaring since they witnessed the way in which the institution handled certain situations in the past. Newer employees viewed the institution as being inventive and "trying" in regards to be inclusive and conscious of its minoritized population.

Another consideration to note is that the amount of student interaction each staff member had in their role seemed to determine their focus. It is a reality that not all staff members interact with students as their primary function. For those who saw students regularly, their answers seemed to focus or relate back to the experiences of their students or how the current conditions at the university impacted students as well as staff. Those who had less interaction with students seemed to be less in tune with the current campus climate, student concerns, or current events

that happened on the university's campus in regards to minoritized students. Therefore, the focuses of the participants seemed to shift based on their level of connection they shared with current and past students, specifically minoritized students.

### **Summary**

A total of 18 participants were interviewed who self-identified as staff members of color at the predominantly White institution of study. Participants' responses were categorized into overarching themes that highlighted different areas of their shared experiences. Most participants addressed issues they had with institutional factors such as unfair hiring practices, lack of mobility, and geographical location of the institution. Some participants stressed what they perceived to be institutional responsibilities that were not being met. The institutional factors led into discussions about the state of the campus climate and work environments to explore how these two areas impact performance and retention. Within those two areas, staff members shared the idea of feeling invisible and not valued as the professionals.

Along with the feeling of invisibility and isolation, some staff members discussed the toll of unspoken expectations on top of their already busy roles as student affairs administrators. Minoritized staff members looked for support in their roles from each other and supervisors but also shared how the lack thereof has impacted their experience. Finally, staff members shared the ways in which they navigate within the institution, cautiously or consciously, in order to maintain employment and implement some practices of self-care.

In the next chapter, the findings presented are discussed in relation to the existing literature, the theoretical framework, and the research questions of this study. Lastly, implications and recommendations for the institution are discussed based on the findings and suggestions from participants.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the study, explore the findings and how they answer the original research questions, and discuss the relation between the findings and current literature on the topic. Recommendations are shared based on the findings of the study and personal suggestions from participants of the study. Finally, limitations and unanswered questions of the current study are discussed in order to inform future research.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which a Midwestern predominantly White institution could better retain staff members of color. A phenomenological approach was used in order to accurately portray the experiences of minoritized staff members and was supported by the use of critical race theory with an emphasis on counterstorytelling. The participants' experiences were used with the purpose of combatting the dominant point of view of the university setting and its impact on an individual's work experience. Using this theoretical framework, the minoritized staff members' experiences were used to bring focus to the inequity within the institution in regards to equitable hiring practices, overall treatment, and support in their professional roles.

Interest in this study stemmed from personally identifying with the participants of study in regards to their role as staff members and identifying as a minoritized individual at a predominantly White institution. Current literature on the topics of retention and professionals of color primarily focuses on the experiences of faculty members of color. Within this literature, considerable attention was given to the effects of campus climate, treatment from students, isolation, lack of mentorship, being overburdened, and the level of satisfaction felt by faculty members of color at their institutions. Although this research is beneficial to highlight the

hardships faced in academia by professionals of color, there is a lack of research on the experience of staff members of color and the difficulties they face when navigating institutions of higher education. It can be assumed that the difficulties faced may be similar but more research was needed to examine the unique role of a staff member. To expand upon this area of research, the following questions guided this study:

1. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to stay at an institution?
2. What are the reasons that influence staff members of color to leave an institution?
3. In what ways can institutions better support their staff members of color throughout their experience?

A phenomenological research design shaped the study and data collection consisted of individual semi-structured interviews conducted over the course of approximately two months. The interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 60 minutes. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to participant's responses. Within the interview, topics such as work expectations, campus climate, institutional support, and influence to maintain or terminate employment were explored. All participants received an email invitation to be involved with the study. Participants self-identified as members of a minoritized racial/ethnic group and as current or past employees at the institution of study. Participant interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The data analysis process consisted of line-by-line coding of each individual interview in order to bridge individual codes into overlapping sub-concepts between all interviews and to finally create overarching themes. In total, from the data emerged 48 individual codes, 20 concepts and 7 overarching themes. The themes were then discussed, first focusing on institutional factors that affect the experience of minoritized staff members and narrowing to more individualized examples of ways staff

members navigate the institution. The themes discussed in the results chapter were (1) institutional factors, (2) negativity of the environment, (3) “the invisible employee,” (4) unspoken expectations, (5) support or lack thereof, (6) institutional benefits, and (7) navigating the institution.

### **Conclusion**

The concluding findings provided answers to the research questions presented within this study. Providing participants with the space to reflect on their experiences as minoritized individuals in professional roles on a predominantly White campus allowed for richer descriptions and answers to the research questions. After reflecting on their experiences, reasons of why staff members stayed at institutions stemmed from the need of basic survival for themselves and family members and the need to support minoritized students on campus. When discussing institutional benefits, a majority of participants reflected on the benefits they received from employment, financially, and in terms of educational opportunities, as reasons to why they stay in their current positions. Dependent upon their amount of student interaction, other factors participants mentioned were student support and the chance to still evoke change within the institution. As a part of the unspoken expectations of their positions, constantly supporting students and their needs encouraged them to continue to strive to be change agents at the institution.

After reflecting on the reasons for staying at the institution, participants explored possible options that could influence them to leave their current institution. There were a wide variety of responses to the interview question from participants, however, the most common answers consisted of higher salaries and the chance of being disrespected or devalued in their roles. Other factors expressed by participants that influence leaving an institution included no chance

for promotion, no support, more money offered in salary, and a lack of connection to the institution. Each of these hypothetical issues participants expressed stem from institutional factors and the negativity of the environment. The institution currently faces issues with a lack of representation. Not addressing this issue by being intentional in hiring and upward mobility of people of color will cause the institution to lose more staff members of color. The possibility of losing support was discussed as hypothetically losing current support from supervisory staff and senior level administration. When considering the support, or lack thereof that minoritized staff members expressed, the support they received was from mostly supervisors which whom they had positive relationships with. Some participants did, however, address that these supervisory relationships are not the same for everyone at the institution. Therefore, the possibility of losing this support would be detrimental to their work experience and professional growth, ultimately encouraging them to leave the institution.

The final questions in regards to ways that the institution could better support its minoritized staff members were also answered in a variety of ways. The responses to this question consisted of overall institutional change in the form of (1) staff input, (2) increase in representation, (3) provide general support, (4) provide more ways to build connections, (5) mentoring, (6) more training for supervisors, (7) creating more safe spaces for professionals of color, and (8) dealing with racism on campus. These suggestions provided by participants will be discussed in the recommendations section of this chapter more thoroughly included with other findings of the study.

## **Discussion**

Critical race theory (CRT) was used as a framework to inform the study and the interpretation of the findings. As mentioned in chapter two, “CRT analyzes the role of race and

racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups” (Hilrado, 2010, p. 54). Within this study, participants who self-identified as minoritized staff members were given the opportunity to name the disparities they currently face at a Midwestern predominantly White institution. Of the topics discussed, participants noted high levels of inequity in regards to hiring and work expectations but also negative campus and work environments that impacted their performance more so than the performance of their White counterparts. The themes that emerged from the findings in conjunction with participant narratives implied that there was significance between racial/ethnic identity and these disparities. The voice of the White staff members was also described as more powerful when participants shared the lack of influence they have on campus to make change or directly affect decisions made that impact students, especially students of color. When minoritized staff members are not involved in discussions to make change within the institution, the institution usually falls short in addressing issues of concern for minoritized populations.

The tenet of counterstorytelling was used to inform the ways in which the findings of the study were presented. The findings of this study represent the everyday lived experiences that may not be popularly shared within the institution. As shown in the tips provided by minoritized staff members to navigating the institution, there was a consistency in the need of remaining cautious and sometimes silent while working. In this silence, the narratives and impactful experiences of staff members are lost and never fully addressed by the institution. Through the findings, minoritized staff members were given the opportunity to express ways in which the institution could improve to ensure inclusivity amongst all individuals and not just the majority as it currently does.

Participants also discussed ways in which supervisors can create or negate the possibility of having an inclusive work environment. As mentioned by Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) valuing diversity in the workplace consist of creating spaces that respect and are inclusive of difference. Supervisors create the culture of their departments while also impacting the experience of each individual employee. According to Marcus (2000), the level of satisfaction within the workplace for staff members of color was based on the quality of supervision. The work environments for most participants in the study were created by genuine care and support. Participants with positive supervisory relationships stated feeling more valued within their offices and also feeling more invested in because of professional development opportunities. Although supervisors created a positive experience for most participants, some participants still mentioned unfulfilled institutional duties that could aid in minoritized staff members feeling fully accepted and welcomed at their current institution.

In comparison to the literature presented in chapter two, the findings of this study are supported by much of the literature but also expand upon the literature by focusing specifically on the experience of minoritized staff members. When participants described the campus climate of their institution, most of the responses consisted of negative characteristics that affect both the minoritized staff and student experience. As mentioned by Mayhew et al. (2006), staff members of color usually perceive that institutions have major difficulties with increasing diversity on campus and these staff members have negative experiences with offensive behaviors against people of color. The findings from this study supported research in this area as a majority of participants expressing constantly experiencing microaggressions while performing their daily work duties. When considering other difficulties faced while working, the findings of this study were similar to current literature but expanded what we know by focusing on institutional

difficulties experienced by staff members rather than focusing on the difficulties of the classroom setting for faculty members of color. Participants in this study expressed having difficulties more with colleagues rather than students because their student relationships focused on supporting students or their roles provided them with less interaction with students.

Experiences of tokenism and invisibility were discussed by participants and align with existing literature surrounding minoritized faculty. Faculty members of color described their presence as tokenized in their field because of underrepresentation and others being welcoming (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). This relates to the findings of this study in regards to staff members being tokenized in their departments as the sole representation of diversity or a spokesperson for all minoritized individuals. This tokenism also presented participants with extra tasks outside of their work duties in the form of committee work and mentoring students of color; similar tasks were highlighted by Stanley (2006) when exploring extra duties faculty members of color gain beyond their primary roles at the institution. Participants expressed that they felt their duty to students was more of an obligation because it is the essence of the student affairs profession, supporting students.

Participants also shared there is a lack of mentorship available at the institution for people of color. Marcus (2000) found that professionals of color rarely experience mentoring relationships. Participants attributed the lack of mentorship available to a lack of representation amongst senior-level administrative staff. Mentorship is described as a successful intervention to retain staff members when focused on personal and professional development (Turner et al., 1999). The findings highlight that staff members of color received most of their professional development opportunities from their supervisors; however, these opportunities would only present themselves if the relationships with their supervisors were positive. Marcus (2000) found

that faculty and staff of color were unsatisfied with their positions due to the quality of supervision and socioemotional issues. Some of the participants explained how good supervisors supported them emotionally by actively listening to their concerns and affirming their experiences. Although most of the participants referred to their supervisors positively, they were still aware that this was not the reality of all minoritized staff members.

The findings of the study not only mirror topics in the literature such as the affects of campus climate, lack of mentorship, extra work and isolation, but also expanded these ideas by documenting the experiences of minoritized staff members. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are offered to share ways minoritized staff members believe an institution can retain more staff members of color.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Participants suggested several ways for the institution to better retain its staff members of color. From the findings, it was clear that all participants were pleased with financial and educational benefits at their disposal; however, more intentional effort put forth towards their development was discussed. First, some participants expressed the lack of representation in senior administrative roles and the importance of mentorship. An institution-wide mentoring program for incoming staff members of color could help address both of these issues. Some potential parameters for the mentorship program could include entry-level staff being paired with senior-level administrative staff, being paired with someone of the same racial/ethnic identity to help with representation issues, or pairings based on future career plans of the entry-level employee. Participants thought mentoring would provide meaningful exposure to positions they would like to pursue in the future and also provide them with more access to develop professionally.

Second, participants wanted to see an increase in professional development efforts within their departments that helps push them towards upward mobility. Chances to learn more in their roles and gain more responsibility with the intention of future promotion were both discussed as necessary yet lacking currently in the work lives of participants. Intentional upward mobility could be implemented in each department through employee evaluations and goal setting. The supervisor and staff member could outline promotion goals for their futures and create a plan that highlights certain responsibilities, task, and outside opportunities that will prepare them to reach this goal. Whether this development prepares the staff member to be promoted within the department or to receive opportunities elsewhere, the overall possibility of moving out of an entry-level position could be achieved because the staff member's path during employment was intentionally planned with needed experiences for growth.

Third, since these professional development opportunities usually stem from the leadership of their department, some participants discussed the need for intentional training for supervisors on how to develop professionals, particularly professionals of color. The idea of the training is to help ensure that all supervisors are providing employees with equitable opportunities across campus. The training of supervisory staff, both those who supervise professionals and students, needs to focus on how to lead and develop those you oversee. In this training, highlighting effective supervisory styles and the importance of meeting the needs of employees should be addressed. Also, more tools should be presented and explained to ensure that supervisors have the capabilities to develop their staff members effectively. Finally, an emphasis should be placed on the importance of intercultural competence of supervisors in regards to working with staff members of different backgrounds to help address and assess any current bias that supervisors may hold.

Although, the improvements can be made internally within departments to better the experiences of minoritized staff, there are also institutional duties that need to be addressed. Participants suggested that more accountability must be placed on the institution. Current practices have been perceived as more of “lip service” rather than actual action. Instruments to measure the impact of campus initiatives and how they help campus progress need to be created, used and shared in order to hold the university accountable for the actions promised in strategic plans and institutional missions. Where there is accountability, there is a possible development of trust and this was an area lacking in the relationship between minoritized staff members and the institution. In order to develop trust amongst its employees, the university must create a culture of “follow through” and proactivity when addressing issues that impact staff members both professionally and personally in the workplace.

Finally, the institution must increase their recruitment and retention efforts of staff members of color. Participants mentioned multiple factors that affect the potential of having more staff members of color and lack of recruitment was one of those factors. Although, minority candidates may be less attracted to the surrounding area, the institution must put forth the effort to seek out those individuals and recruit them to the institution. In doing so, the institution should take advantage of all avenues available to reach minoritized populations when advertising openings within the institution. This also calls for a more in-depth look into the internal hiring practices of the institution and if these practices are being abused and creating exclusivity within departments.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are still areas for future research on the issue of retaining staff members of color. Future studies exploring minoritized staff member experiences should be expanded to have more

participants in order to hopefully increase the representation amongst the racial/ethnic identity groups. Since the study's participants are majority Black, the sample of participants does not exactly reflect the population of minoritized staff members at predominantly White institutions. The study should also be replicated in other regions of the country that may be more diverse in population. More diverse community populations may alter campus climates in which impact the experience of minoritized staff.

Along with differing campus climates, the study should be conducted at institutions of a different institutional types, such as historically Black colleges and universities or Hispanic serving institutions. These types of institutions may have different campus climates in comparison to predominantly White institutions aiding in a different experience for staff members of color as they may also now be considered in the majority population on their campus. In addition, more research should be conducted on international staff members of color, as their views on race and ethnicity may be different than the westernized understanding of the definition and significance of racial/ethnic identities.

The majority of participants of this study identified as Black and female. The narratives they shared seemed to be filled with more difficulties experienced on predominantly White campuses. This leads me to wonder if having two marginalized identities, Black and female, had an impact on their experience and altered their reasons for staying, leaving or being retained at an institution. Differences in race, sex, and the intersection between the two should be explored.

Finally, ways to actively recruit new staff members of color to predominantly White institutions should be explored. Although the study focused on retaining staff members of color, some participants attributed their employment at the institution to happenstance or being feasible based on their personal situations at the time. Despite those facts, participants did not seem to

mention being attracted to employment at the institution based positive characteristics such as what the institution offers its students, employees and community, its reputation, or personal alignment in the work of the institution. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted in order to explore in what ways can institutions attract more professionals of color. Addressing initial recruitment factors can help with representation for both employees and students and also positively affect the retention of professionals of color if there is strong support system and network for themselves within the institution.

Although minoritized staff members are currently a small population at predominantly White campuses, they influence institutions and the lives of students. By bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to their work, staff members of color often persevere through institutional barriers set against them while supporting minoritized students through similar issues. Remaining resilient and effortful in their work was displayed through participants who created their own ways to cope with institutional stress in order to remain at an institution. With a hope to be provided with the opportunity to make change to an institutional culture, staff members need to be invested in by their institutions. The importance of retaining staff members of color echoes the importance of supporting the growing, diverse college student population. As student populations change, institutions must change with them to remain relevant and effective, however, this change begins by fully supporting and valuing *all* who make the institution function.

## Appendix A

<i><b>Final Themes</b></i> <i><b>N=7</b></i>	<i><b>Concepts</b></i> <i><b>N=20</b></i>	<i><b>Codes</b></i> <i><b>N=48</b></i>
Institutional Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unfair Hiring</li> <li>2. Location of Institution</li> <li>3. Institutional Responsibility</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reoccurring issue</li> <li>2. Always at the bottom</li> <li>3. No equity in hiring</li> <li>4. Power and privilege</li> <li>5. “Why can we have equity?”</li> <li>6. New chances to grow</li> </ol>
‘The Invisible Employee’	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Representation on campus</li> <li>5. “I’m not valued”</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Not fair representation</li> <li>8. Institution doesn’t care</li> <li>9. Making my voice heard</li> <li>10. No diversity</li> <li>11. No voice</li> </ol>
Support, or the Lack Thereof	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Importance of supervision</li> <li>7. Structures Institutional Support</li> <li>8. Importance of Mentorship</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Community</li> <li>13. Importance of allyship</li> <li>14. Support from supervisor</li> <li>15. Human Resources</li> <li>16. Professional Development</li> <li>17. Sharing one’s experience</li> <li>18. The presence of resources</li> <li>19. Support for others of color</li> <li>20. Mentoring</li> </ol>
Unspoken Expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Students of Color obligation</li> <li>10. Extra Work</li> <li>11. Unfair Expectations</li> <li>12. Work-related Stress</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Providing Comfort</li> <li>22. Committed to students</li> <li>23. Helping students of color</li> <li>24. Must do everything perfectly</li> <li>25. Differential treatment</li> </ol>
Negativity of the Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Covert Instances of Racism</li> <li>14. Difficulties in Work Environment</li> <li>15. Being the Only One</li> <li>16. “They want me to assimilate”</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Create diverse environment</li> <li>27. Visual reminders of history</li> <li>28. No overt situations</li> <li>29. Assimilation</li> <li>30. Ignoring Discrimination</li> <li>31. Uncomfortable environment</li> <li>32. Environment determines comfort</li> <li>33. Committing Stereotypes</li> <li>34. Isolation from groups</li> <li>35. Lack of connections</li> <li>36. Not welcoming</li> <li>37. Microaggressions</li> </ol>

Institutional  
Benefits

17. Financial Benefits  
18. Educational Benefits

38. Survival  
39. Family Obligations  
40. Money  
41. Education

Navigating the  
Institution

19. Working Cautiously  
20. "It's not always about  
race"

42. Navigating Politics  
43. Choose your battles wisely  
44. Being knowledgeable  
45. Being suspicious  
46. No use to speaking up  
47. Difference in mentality  
48. Always on guard

## Appendix B

### Study Email Invitation

Dear Staff Member:

I have identified your institution as an institution where I would like to gather findings for my graduate thesis study. This email is a request for you to be involved in the study. The title of the study is, **“Retaining Staff Members of Color at a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution.”**

You are being asked to reflect on your experience as a professional staff member of color at a predominantly White institution. You are being asked to reflect on the reasons that influence you to stay at an institution and the reasons that influence you to leave an institution so that I may learn more about your experience and how your institution can better support you as a staff member of color.

If you are willing to participate in the study, I would like to forward you the informed consent document, explaining your involvement and the study in further detail. I would also like to speak with you about scheduling a time when we could meet. You may contact me at [steelet@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:steelet@mail.gvsu.edu) or (313) 212-1345 if you need any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Steele  
Graduate Assistant  
College Student Affairs Leadership  
Grand Valley State University

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

Project Title: **Retaining Staff Members of Color at a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution**

Principal Investigator: **Tiffany Steele, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Graduate Student, College of Education**

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to explore your experience as an professional staff member of color at a predominantly White institution. You are being asked to reflect on the reasons that influence you to stay at an institution, the reasons that influence you to leave an institution, and how a predominantly White institution can better support you as a staff member of color.

#### PURPOSE OF CONSENT FORM

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. If you choose to participate, I will need verbal consent.

#### PROCEDURES

I will meet with you one time during the school year. I will meet at a location that is convenient for you and allows for privacy during the interview. The interview will last about 45-60 minutes.

#### RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the study include: emotional or psychological discomfort. All of the interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, the interview questions do ask for you to be reflective of your experiences and that may be uncomfortable. If you feel like talking about your experience is too much, I will stop the interview. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate in the study, you can leave the study. I believe the risk of emotional or psychological distress is very minimal. I do not know if there are any benefits from you being in this study. However, I hope that I will learn from your experiences. If you are interested in the results of the study, I will be happy to share them with you.

#### PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential. Your demographic data, and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. Your name will not be on any of the data. All of the data will be locked in a file cabinet or protected digital folders. Results will be reported in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Additionally, one aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of the interviews. This will help me as I go through and analyze the information I receive from all of the participants. After each interview I will have the data transcribed, double check the transcription against the

audiotape, and then destroy the audiotape. I will transcribe each interview and I will be the only person with access to the audiotapes. Anything you say to me, or that I have on record, is between you and me and completely confidential.

#### VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You also have the option of skipping any question that you do not want to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, I may keep information about you and this information may be included in study reports, or you can elect to withdraw your information from the study.

#### CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

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

Tiffany Steele           (313) 212-1345           [steeltif@gvsu.edu](mailto:steeltif@gvsu.edu)

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

- 1) Tell me about yourself.
- 2) How, or why, did you pick current institution for employment?
- 3) What expectations did you have upon arrival into your position at your current institution?
  - a. What influenced these expectations?
- 4) Tell me about your experience as a staff member of color at your current institution?
- 5) Was this experience the same or different at your past institutions of employment?
  - a. Why or why not?
- 6) Have ever been discriminated against on your current institutions campus because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. If yes, give me an example.
  - b. How did it make you feel?
- 7) How would you describe the campus climate of your current institution?
  - a. Do you always feel comfortable here?
  - b. How does this campus climate compare to your experiences at other institutions, if any?
- 8) What factors influenced you to continue employment at your current institution?
  - a. Why?
- 9) What factors could influence (or have influenced) you to leave your current institution?
  - a. If you have left a past institution, what influenced you to leave?
- 10) What methods of support have you received at your current institution?
  - a. From who or where was this support received?
  - b. Is there a need for more support at your current institution for staff members of color?
    - i. If so, what more could be done by your current institution?
- 11) What, if any, meaningful advice has been shared with you to aid in your experience as a staff member of color?
- 12) What advice have you shared with other staff members of color at your current institution?
- 13) Is there anything else you want to add about your experience at your current institution?

**Appendix E**

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Pseudonym** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Race/Ethnicity** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current or past employee?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did you get involved in higher education? (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_

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